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Peace Education and Poetry:
Dialoguing Toward Transformation
With Women Poets of the South

by

Sylvia Noreen Bell 

A Thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

International/Intercultural Education

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Dr. Toh Swee-Hin, Supervisor

.....

Dr. H. Hodysh

September 30, 1999

.....

Dr. T. Carson

Poems are eternal rebels against social relations since these must be contractual arrangements of power which are always to the advantage of some elite and therefore, causing misery in the hearts of the people (the home of poems). . . . They are considered inconsequential, but they have brought down governments (starting with the ones in our heads). (Peacocke; as cited in Espinet, 1990, preface)

Peace can only be brought about through spiritual ways, through kindness, understanding, gentleness and love. Only through these spiritual ways can we put aside the wrong actions of the past and repair the damage done to Mother Earth and the people of the Earth. (Hopi prophecy)

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the centre of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that this centre is really everywhere; it is within each of us. (Black Elk)

For

Andrea and Carolyn

Abstract

This thesis is about personal transformation and therefore transformation of the world. Using poetry as the transformative medium based upon the peace education principles of holism, values formation, dialogue, and conscientisation, the author dialogued with three women poets of the South: Mila Aguilar, the Philippines; Rita Joe, First Nations; and Catherine Obianuju Acholuno, Igbo of Nigeria. Through the dialogic, self-knowledge and knowledge of others was confronted and processed through hermeneutic interpretation informed by First Nations and feminist perspectives. The themes that emerged were critically analysed within the context of the holistic framework of peace education. The practical implications of poetry as part of a peace education pedagogy are explored in the concluding chapter.

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Peace.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> **Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that we have to erect the ramparts of peace.** (UNESCO Charter)

In November 1996, Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Nigerian men were hanged as part of the military government's response to their actions as agents of social change, and, in Mr. Saro Wiwa's case, as an inspiration for the Ogoni people who were being ravaged by the government. The government was, and, at the time of this writing, is supporting the exploitation of Ogoni land by the transnational corporation Dutch Shell Oil. I was led to read more about Mr. Saro Wiwa and the travesty of his death. Through his writing, a man of vision, a man of hope and compassion, and a man of words was revealed to me. In a letter to William Boyd during his incarceration in 1995, he wrote:

> There's no doubt that my idea will succeed in time but I'll have to bear the pain of the moment. . . . The most important thing for me is that I've used my talents as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors. I was not able to do this as a politician or a businessman. My writing did it. And it sure makes me feel good! I'm mentally prepared for the worst, but hopeful for the best. I think I have the moral victory (Saro Wiwa, 1995, p. xv).

Who is this man? Is he a writer who happens to be involved in the quest for social change? Or is he first and foremost an activist who writes for social change? Did he write only for others or for his own personal and psychological survival? And if so, did this affect others enough to engage them in working toward change and also enhance their individual emotional and psychological well-being?

On the oil fields of Ogoni
laughter lies buried in blow-outs,
death romps to the drums of greed
in thick shells of earth's riches.
On the oil fields of Ogoni
exploring black gold efficiently
is the maxim of the mad mogul

and human life but cold obstacle
in the frenzied path of a search
guided by blood and flow charts,
margins, murder, rigs and leases
and out of season Christmas trees.
(Saro Wiwa, 1985)

The ritual of writing engages the body and has a potent effect. In this process, there is the potential for self-imposed and socially constructed restrictions to fall away and a new appreciation of others and self to emerge. In the connection to others, there is also a recognition of one's uniqueness. As Ketho (Guin, 1975) said in *The Dispossessed*: "They say there is nothing new under any sun. But if each life is not new, each single life, then why are we born?" (p. 310).

Poets are always making waves, the ideal society cannot tolerate the poet. It is not that they mutter and criticise; it is that the poet does not accept the perfect (i.e., the well running). Poets chafe at the arrogance. The poet does not complain only at the level of sociology, the poet criticises or complains about the discontent that lies at the heart of the human condition and how that can be redeemed. The poet has an awareness that the heart is not satisfied simply by material things. Words choose the poet (Edmond Jabes; as cited in Derrida, 1978, p. 65).[1]

There is a history of poetry of witness, revolution, resistance, and social awareness that has led up to the works of women of the South found herein. As the "canon" has informed all contemporary poets, so has this history of "poets of extremity" (Forche, 1993, p. 30). Who are these poets? To explore this question thoroughly here is impossible; however, an excellent source for a beginning is Forche's book *Against Forgetting,* where

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[1] Edmond Jabes was born into a French speaking community of Jews living in Egypt. He lived from 1912 to 1991. Forced by the Suez crisis to leave Egypt, he emigrated to France. His writing changed gradually and began to reflect the Jewish tradition of Biblical and legal commentary. (Forche, 1993, pp. 532-533). To develop a discussion on power and violence in Western philosophy is tantalising but too broad for the purposes of this paper. It shall, however, be a thread that runs throughout. To examine in detail the scope of violence in society is beyond the parameters of this work; nonetheless, it is the genesis of it.

she began with the Armenian Genocide (1909-1918) and concluded with revolutions and the struggle for democracy in China (1911-1991), covering 81 years of poems written from different parts of the world and different social-historical positions. Men and women are included in this anthology.

One of the most prominent of these poets of resistance and revolution was Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), who was born and raised in Chile and is likely the most familiar name to North Americans as a "poet of the people" because of the film *Il Postino*. His commitment to leftist politics and the Republican cause lost him his social place as consular; and, ultimately, in 1947, because of his commitment to the Communist Party, he was forced to go into hiding after being labelled a "traitor."

He returned to Chile in 1950, named as ambassador to France by Salvador Allende, but as his health deteriorated, he returned to Chile in 1972 where he died two weeks after the military coup against Allende. Neruda is considered a true poet of the people.

> *The weeping cannot be seen, like a plant*
> *whose seeds fall endlessly on the earth,*
> *whose large blind leaves grow even without light.*
> *Hatred has grown scale on scale,*
> *blow on blow, in the ghastly water of the swamp,*
> *with a snout full of ooze and silence.*
> *(The Dictators)*

In Nicaragua the Nicaraguan Literary Vanguard, a movement dedicated to renewing the country's writing, was inaugurated in 1927 by Jose Coronel Urtecho, and included Pablo Antonio Cuadra and Joaquin Pasos. They were all alike in the wish to create a literature free from European domination, which was to be an aesthetic counterpart of the political desire to liberate Nicaragua from foreign intervention (White, 1982 p. ii). It must be kept in mind that poetry, the writing or the reading of it, does not guarantee a human world view, nor a sense of justice.

> We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning. To say that he has read them without understanding or that his ear is gross, is cant. (Steiner, 1982, p. ix).[2]

If, as Ken Saro Wiwa said, writing has more impact than business or politics and poets, specifically, have the ability to alter the course of events so much that the poets were expelled from ancient Greece, Neruda fled his homeland, and Saro Wiwa was hanged, I am curious about the impact that reading poets from the South may have upon me personally and how that experience may be translated into a pedagogical approach within the context of peace education. In particular, drawing on my own experience and concern with issues of gender and social transformation, I will engage with women poets in selected "south" contexts, where *south* means the poor, underdeveloped, exploited, and oppressed nations often referred to as Third World or Developing Nations.

The work is restricted, I believe, by the need to work only in English. Translation is, as Octavio Armand (1982) said, "a plagiarism authorized by the perversity of the text, which has been written on the blank page as if on a mirror" (pp. 9-10). Yes, in a mirror there are distortions, reversals, and limitations; but also reflection and light. Holding this paradox carefully, I will attempt to dialogue with the poets. My overarching hope is that students may be empowered to recognise their innate ability to discover their own answers, through relationship, dialogue, and reflective critical thought. Poetry is a springboard for this process.

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[2] It is important to recognise the poets of the Holocaust and of the two great wars. They are poets of resistance, and witness in different contexts than do those being explored within this project. It is not explicitly stated that there are gay and lesbian poets included in this anthology; however, I feel that this must be mentioned. The marginalisation of gay and lesbian individuals is a fact of systemic oppression, albeit more writers are speaking out their truth vis-à-vis sexual orientation, which confirms that writers and poets are again the first to break through systemic oppression into social awareness and transformation of themselves and the world.

Born in '45

October 1, 1963
the record high temperature
announced over the radio
sweat-drenched shirts
sticking to the men
as they carry pieces of our lives
up three flights of stairs
the piano
an old upright
almost pushes them to collapse
an unusual fall
prairie dust filling the air
streaking my mother's tear-stained face
hot blasted on my memory
along with Hiroshima's cloud

Locating Myself I

> There are two ways of walking through a wood. The first is to try one or several routes (so as to get out of the wood as fast as possible . . .); the second is to walk so as to discover what the wood is like and find out why some paths are accessible and others are not. (Umberto Eco, 1994)

I think that the latter method is how I have lived the life given to me; and although, at times, it seems quite inefficient and exhausting, at different times there is a clear recognition that no other way is open to me. In that recognition lies a wealth of possibility.

From childhood, I have had a fascination with words. My parents owned a large (not as large to this adult as it was to the six-year-old) dictionary that I would read, touch, and smell. It was a world that I could enter when nothing else made sense. There were colour illustrations that took me to other places which expanded my horizons beyond the prairie village of my childhood. So started my love of language and the art of visualising.

The other "word" that formed me was *God.* And my quest for peace, a personal understanding of what that might actually mean, emerged from the creamsicle-coloured stucco church in a very small prairie village, a microcosm of the world, it turns out. I have left the village, the church, but carried the dictionary to adult life.

I am the first in my family of origin to gain any academic credentials; although that may not seem important to the reader, it is, in fact, one of the crucial signposts on this journey. As a young woman, it was expected that I would marry and be "looked after" for the rest of my life. It was also expected that I would live close to my roots and carry on the female tradition of caregiver. Neither of these expectations has been realised. One might say that I have lived through an historical time—a time of transformation for women of the North, that has alternatively left me confused and empowered.

I have lived my whole life as a North American White woman. And if labels are essential for positioning oneself in the context of the now, then those of daughter, mother, housewife, student, worker, volunteer, feminist, activist, educator, and poet may all be

applied to me at different points of the journey. My first poem was written when I was 16, and it is memorable only to me. I did not show anyone else, nor did I think of it other than an important moment encapsulated in words, and it felt very good to write it. I kept it hidden away for years; finally, after one household move, it disappeared.

The major move of my life was from Manitoba to Alberta in the 1970s. As my daughters grew and my marriage did not, I discovered other ways of being. It seemed appropriate that I worked in a library for 13 years surrounded by millions of words, and during that time my consciousness changed. I left the marriage and the library to work with a feminist organisation on specifically "the feminisation of poverty." During this period of time I was pursuing a degree and was a member of the first Women's Studies class held at the University of Alberta, which also marked by introduction to "radical writing." After various side trips, I found myself finishing my degree in Native Studies—a serendipitous coming home.

I tell you all of this, in part, to explain why and how I am now writing about women poets of the South vis-à-vis peace education. I have meandered through life like a river but there has been a purpose to it all. As with a river that seems endless, the unexpected often occurs. Initially, my desire was to travel the world and work on the front lines of poverty, sexism, and peace; however, as wars rage around the world, one also goes on in my body. The message received? Sit down and write.

It seems that my love of words, my search for peace and justice, my love of women and passion about women's issues (as they are called), as well as a feminist/holistic world view have all brought me to this place—this writing of women poets of the South transforming the world.

Her work, I really think her work
is finding what her real work is
and doing it
her work, her own work
her being human,
her being in the world.
(Le Guin; as cited in Sternberg, 1991)

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Peace Education

Participatory
Equitable
Appropriate
Conscientizing
Ecological[3]

Peace education has emerged as a movement worldwide to develop awareness of and commitment to building a peaceful, just, sustainable world. Key issues to be recognised by Peace Educators are structural violence, militarisation, and abuse of human rights. It encourages cultural solidarity, environmental care, and personal peace. The terminology *peace/global education* is interchangeable; however, the premise is the same. A shift to awareness of "root causes of conflicts, violence, and peacelessness at the global, national, regional, community, and interpersonal levels" while cultivating values and attitudes which will encourage individual and social action "for building more peaceful communities, societies, and ultimately a more peaceful world" (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 2). Inherent in this shift is looking within to work toward a personal peace, for without that, to be in a state of alienation and conflict, we are disconnected and neglectful of our social responsibility.

> If learning is viewed as a way to increase our understanding of the world, our selves, and others, . . . cognition will become a means for personal fulfillment and community enrichment rather than a mechanism to control the environment and others. (Reardon, 1988, p. 1)

According to educators in many countries, peace education needs to be integrated into all areas of the curriculum (Hicks, 1993; Selby, 1993). The principles of holism,

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[3] This acronym was birthed as a response to the exploitative methods of development, the expansion mentality that has affected cultures and populations in terms of structural violence and human rights.

dialogue, and critical empowerment are also key principles underpinning education for peace (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987). Many pedagogical approaches are suggested, some of which are not new, but most are creative, making use of audio-visual aids, photographs, videotape recordings, radio, TV, games and simulation, music, art, drama, and personal experience through reflective journals. Field work, debate, role plays, and research help develop critical-thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Hicks, 1988, 1993; Reardon, 1988; Reardon & Nordlund, 1994; Selby, 1993; Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, 1990). A portion of this thesis will be devoted to how poetry (both writing and reading) can be integrated into peace education pedagogies. Peace education "also plays a crucial role in questioning values of violence or militarism in homes, schools, classrooms, and communities" (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 9). As well as nurturing an understand of the macro—world-wide, global—levels of the issues, the micro—local and individual—levels are also viewed, as are the connections between the two.

A great many of the concepts within peace education impact on all students (North and South), such as issues of human rights, economics, nuclear power, militarisation, conflict resolution, the environment, gender and sexism, race and racism, cultures, etc. (Hicks, 1988). Educators require a deep understanding of how these issues impact them as persons as well as educators. As Krishnamurti (1953) said, "We as educators must understand ourselves," because that is the "beginning and the end of education" (p. 14).

> A pedagogy for peace necessarily fosters the growth of democratic people's power; a deep sense of compassion and justice for the poor and oppressed; and mutual respect and solidarity with the rich diversity of traditions and cultures. But it must also embrace methods which are in themselves compassionate, just and empower and non-violent. (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 34)

Before we can practice a pedagogy of peace, we must understand the root causes of conflict and violence and the systemic injustices that are visited upon peoples on a daily basis—"the daily little deaths" (Karstad, 1989).

Walking the precarious line between critical reflection and critical action, I think placing ideals on paper is insufficient. From this "fine balance," creative ways of teaching/learning the pedagogy of peace emerge: role playing, life maps, music, song, drama, story telling, drawing, dancing, journalising, prose, and poetry. These creative media tap into the underused, and possibly undernourished, right side of the brain. They are explorations in alternative expressions that enable us to learn differently and teach differently—by visually and orally opening participants up to new ways (actually, old ways) of teaching/learning. Situating knowledge within the context of lived experience,

> *knowing better than the poem*
> *she reads*
> *knowing through the poem.*
> (Rich, 1981),

we can better understand events.

This pedagogical approach connects well to the principles of First Nations traditions, as outlined in the Four Worlds Project.[4] These principles include the concept of *wholeness* and the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all things; how "all creation is in the process of constant"; and how "human beings have the capacity to create further potentiality through the cumulative effects of learning and culture," to name but a few. If, as stated, this distillation appears to be somewhat reductionistic, "it is only because great universal concepts such as these cannot be truly understood except in their application" (Bopp, 1985, p. 311). Toh (1990) said that an articulation of the main assumptions of peace education is that "both individual lives and the directions of society are the consequence of choices, of particular roads taken at crucial forks" (p. v). Peace education

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[4] The Four Worlds Project was the result of the work and wisdom of many people. Direction for this project was set at a conference held in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, in December 1982. Participants included Native elders, spiritual leaders, and professionals of various Native communities in North America. For further reading see *The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality* (1984) and Bopp (1985).

is an education for humanness—experiential and reflective. It is an education that embodies hope for transformation, as well as a source for working toward transformation. Inherent in peace education are the differences and similarities among all the participants. Encompassing a holistic perspective, positive recognition of these differences and similarities may lead to a subsequent strengthening of the individuals and thus the whole; that is, the world. This holistic approach to education is pictured in the paradigmatic web (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987) of environmental care, militarisation, cultural solidarity, human rights, structural violence, and personal peace. The P.E.A.C.E. paradigm therefore is a holistic approach that builds on traditional ways. It is impossible to view education as isolated from other social structures and economic issues. There is a need to change the infrastructures that maintain the status quo and widen the gap between rich and poor, educated and so-called noneducated, North and South. The modernisation paradigm reproduces social inequalities. It is based upon the assumption that education is carried out to improve or enhance the work force to support the capitalist culture, in most cases multinationals. The idea of meritocracy falls short because it serves to rationalise the position of the elites or of those in power, as well as the social structure as it exists. There is a magnification of internal colonialism. The North within the South dominates and receives the best education and the best jobs. Consequently, to see education through the P.E.A.C.E. paradigm would reveal (both formal and nonformal) education's potential to be transformative rather than a vehicle through which the existing power dynamics can be maintained. Using the four pedagogical principles of peace education—holism, values formation, dialogue, and conscientisation—personal and social transformation can be realised. Using this paradigm emerges from and results in an attitude of care, compassion, and collaboration.

Peacelessness and Violence

I will try to be non-violent
one more day
this morning, waking the world away
in the violent day
(Rukeyser; as cited in Daniels, 1994)

There are random violence and well-planned violence; individual and group violence; and, of course, self-inflicted violence. To position myself as feminist within the context of my life is to be forced to address the particular issue of violence against women. However, violence against women is only a portion of the problem that has roots which run much deeper than the social construction of gender. I believe that violence permeates the air we breathe and the sounds we hear. It walks with us every moment of our lives (see also Kappeler, 1995). Derrida's (as cited in Flax, 1990) primary criticism of Western philosophy is its incapacity to "respect the Being and meaning of the other"; and Western philosophies are, in his view, "philosophies of violence or philosophies of power" (p. 196).

> 'We make the war possible, we allow it to happen,' says Drakulic. 'We have only one weak protection against it, our consciousness. There are no them and us, there are no grand categories, abstract numbers, black and white truths, simple facts, there is only us—and, yes, we are responsible for each other.' (Kappeler, 1995, p. 19)

Violence by any other name is still violence. There are, as in any discussion, categories, gradations, and different perspectives. "There is no difference between being raped / and being bitten on the ankle by a rattlesnake / except that people ask / if your skirt was short and / why you were out alone anyhow" (Marge Piercy, 1976, p. 15).

I concur with Kappeler (1995) and others that violence has tendrils both inside and outside of ourselves; we are all of us capable of violence:

> What is striking is that the violence which is talked about is always the violence committed by someone else: women talk about the violence of men, adults about the violence of young people; the left, liberals and the centre about the violence of

> the right extremists; the leftist extremists; political activists talk about structural violence, police and politicians talk about violence in the 'street,' and all together about the violence in the Balkans, Western citizens together with their generals talk about the violence of the Serbian army. (p. 1)

Is violence a social construction? There can be no argument that violence often emerges out of unequal power relations, but are these power relations the root cause? The personal alienation, a product of expansionism and industrialisation, can be manifested in violent action, toward self or others. When one feels threatened, unloved (unvalued) and/or manipulated, it is impossible to feel compassion for self or others—there is no room for it, it is easier to lash out. Violence is violation and is usually measured by that which can be seen, the amount of blood shed, the number of dead or wounded, the visible scars. It is "recognized by its visible effects" (Kappeler, 1995, p. 2). But what about tacit violence—the systemic violence that, although invisible to the naked eye, exists within each of us?

> Violence is perceived as a phenomenon for science to research and for politics to get a grip on. But violence is not a phenomenon: it is the behaviour of people, human action which may be analyzed. What is missing is an analysis of violence as action—not just as acts of violence, or the cause of its effects, but as the actions of people in relation to other people and beings or things. (p. 2)

Structural violence supports making the "other" relinquish what she/he is, what she/he believes, and forces the abdication of traditions in favour of the dominant ideology. Indigenous peoples and women know this as "'living corpses,' 'shadows' of human beings, hopeless men, women, and children victimized by an endless 'invisible war'" (Freire, 1990, p. 172).

Global and national inequalities reflect this structural violence (Brock-Utne, 1985; Reardon, 1993; Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987); as Reardon called it, "negative peace":

> Few members of the human family in our time are insulated from the voluminous forms of violence that have characterized our century. . . . [Violence] as institutional violence means to maintain privilege and hierarchy, so physical violence is used to demonstrate power or superiority. It is also sued as a reaction

> to the imposition of power or superiority. . . . No matter what the form, violence represents a failure of humanity, be it an individual or a group. (p. 41)

To respond to violence with hatred and more violence is counterproductive. Hatred is a "poisonous waste product of patriarchy" (Ostriker, 1987, p. 143). To be nonviolent, peaceful, but not passive is a choice we have. We can choose where to apply our energies, where to act, and what form of the political and the personal we embody. But choices are unavailable to those who feel powerless, other than "the desire to die and the desire to kill," which, according to Ostriker, come from a "conviction of powerlessness" (p. 143):

> On the reserve he had already raped
> two women, the numbers didn't matter.
> Sister Superior was being punished. It was
> Father who said it was woman's fault
> and that he would go to hell. (Halfe, 1994, p. 75)

Silence

> The "culture of silence" is a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Alienated and oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by the oppressed through the control of schools and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created and imposed by the oppressor) and feel incapable of self-governance. *Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions.* (Heaney, 1996, p. 10; emphasis mine)

Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions; . . . perhaps, but poetry is not! At great personal risk poets write what cannot be said. Czeslaw Milosz (as cited in Hirsch, 1996) spoke of poetry as "witness" when he said that

> the best Polish poets have been determined to speak in their own voices, from their own perspectives, and yet they have found it virtually impossible to ignore the catastrophic history of their country. They have been involuntary witnesses to [the second Great War], the Holocaust, a Russian occupation and Stalinism, the

> imposition of martial law in 1981. No writer safely ignores the trampling of his or her own country. (p. 49)

Clarabel Alegria (as cited in Moyers, 1995) spoke away the silence in plain language; no couching in metaphor, piety, or symbols—just plain language. There is no hint of her hiding her passion for her country under obedience and modesty (Ostriker, 1987, p. 6):

A is for alcoholism,
B is for battalions,
C is for corruption,
D is for dictatorship,
E is for exploitation,
F is for feudal power,
of fourteen families
and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.
My et cetera country,
my wounded country.
my child my tears,
my obsession

(Moyers, 1995, p. 11)

Poetry, the poem, the writing of the poem are not ends in themselves, but rather what Rukeyser (1996) called "a ritual moment, a moment of proof" (p. 8). Alegria's "moment" clearly states her resistance to what is, and her anger is not hidden albeit contained and stated clearly. She said that

> it is very difficult to reconcile art and reality, but I never thought that the poet had to be in an ivory tower just thinking beautiful thoughts. When there is so much horror around you, I think you have to look at it. You have to feel it and suffer with it and make that suffering yours. (Moyers, 1995, p. 11)

If poets are not separate from the society in which they live, then there has to be the acknowledgement that poets are not above the human frailties. Writing opens one up to the group. In fact, one cannot write unless that openness exists, that connection. The writer, in turn, may then become a beacon in a sea of adversity and diversity. The writer is the first, however, to go into the abyss: "To see [the] danger and point it out, there must be mortals who reach sooner into the abyss. These mortals are, of course, the poets"

(Kearney, 1995, p. 56). Their words may give the group something to catch on to and carry in their own hearts. The connection between the writer and reader cannot be underestimated:

> We must remember that all poetry is marginal in relation to the material preoccupations of society; that all poetry is potentially disruptive to rulers and institutions; and that all poetry depends for its survival not on literary fashions but on the interior needs of readers who for their own reason respond with pleasure to it. (Ostriker, 1987, p. 239)

One may question the idea of pleasure in reading some of the poetry included herein; however, taking *pleasure* to mean satisfaction, there is a certain satisfaction in having your feelings spoken, especially if one is too fearful or oppressed to speak them oneself. Some choose not to speak. M. Nourbese Philip called this the *missing text* and asked:

> Is it the silence that shapes the words of the 'missing' text, or do the words shape the silence? When the missing text is silence, what is the language with which you read the silence? What is the grammar of silence? Start with a word. The poem. The text. To deal in silence one must learn a new language. (p. 295)

A full discussion of the role and sociopolitical and psychological implications of silence will not be included here. However, despite the obvious focus here on words, language, and the crafting of the two, silence remains an integral part. I shall draw on but not elaborate Sultana's (as cited in Philips, 1986) work, in which he talks about the "politics of silence pointing toward new ways of making that silence speak in favour of a more just and humane world" (p. 116): "Each poem has its own silence. Technique but the discerning of that silence. And composition—how you shape the words around the silence. To understand one's own silence is, therefore, to understand one's own words" (p. 295).

Women and Self-Creativity

> Begin with the human being: with the capacities and needs that join all humans across barriers of gender and class and race and nation. To all persons concerned with the equality and dignity of women, this advice should appear in one way promising. For it instructs us to focus on what all human beings share, rather than on the privileges and achievements of a dominant group, and on needs and basic functions, rather than power and status. Women have rarely been kings, or nobles, or courtiers, or rich. They have, on the other hand, been poor and sick and dead. (Nussbaum & Glover, 1995, p. 62)

I think it may be safe to say here that women of the South and women of the South in the North have the edge on the latter categories when compared with women of the North in either hemisphere.

Women are not necessarily passive victims in the process of development. For women throughout the world, action means rewriting, indeed rethinking, all aspects of development to ensure justice and fairness for all—working toward positive change:

> In Latin America . . . [women are] organizing collective meals, health cooperatives, mothers' clubs, neighbourhood water-rights groups, or their own textile and craft collectives, which produce goods both for street vending and for international markets. (Acosta-Belen & Bose, 1990, p. 312)

Flax (1990) said that we need to avoid seeing women as "totally innocent, acted upon beings." This objectifying view is itself restrictive and demeaning and a result of a social construction. It "prevents us from seeing that the areas in life in which women have had an effect, are not totally determined by the will of the other" (pp. 181-182). There are movements emerging in the South; and, as Acosta-Belen and Bose (1990) stated, the women's movement in these countries "might skip the 'practical gender interests' stage and move directly to challenging both corporate owners and the state" (p. 314). They said that the women of the South have 'compound layers of oppression," and although feminists everywhere struggle against gender subordination, the women of the South will "continue to generate a wide diversity of feminist and women's movements" (p. 318). Historically, the women's movement in the West can be traced back to 1792 with the

publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Humm (1992) saw it as an international movement and as "woven together with the history of nationalist movements which are demanding equality and free government" (p. 6). There was a surge of social movements in the 1980s that reflected the desire for justice and agency; the conscientisation that shifts the paradigm. These movements were emancipatory processes that moved the participants from dependency to empowerment and, as always,

> what [was] at stake . . . [was] the permanent invention of new possibilities and the realization of possible futures. [It is] not 'the' power but empowerment: the capacity of people to intervene directly in problems they are concerned with and to 'control' the choices of their futures; that is, to decide their collective and individual destiny or, simply, the choices concerning different aspects of their own lives. (Hegedus, 1989, p. 32)

This concept moves away from dependency into autonomy and the possibility for "self-creativity."

Empowerment

Where does empowerment fit within the context of writing and education? Can it be defined? Brodsky and Fine (as cited in Giroux, 1997), speaking about women students in a male-driven academy, said that "we are presumably most attracted to discourses that promise to represent us to ourselves and others as empowered subjects—as agents who speak the discourse rather than the objectified subjects of which it speaks" (p. 105).

I believe that to be empowered is to have made meaning of our existence, our lives, and our relationship to the world. Implicit in this definition for me is the integrity of the individual; to have integrity is to have understanding; and to have understanding of self and others, there must be dialogue. There is always the danger of the misrepresentation of power, and critical and feminist discourses might serve as instruments of domination despite the intentions of their creators (Sawicki; as cited in Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 54).

The idea of empowerment as a "giving to" or "conferring upon" another does not sit comfortably in me, and I am afraid that disclaimers will be construed as protesting too much. However, I must emphasise that within this dialogic process, I am an advocate of every one of us realising our full potential and power to be acted out in a positive manner so that we all benefit.

> It is white women's paradoxical advantage that in the past few hundred years and in the nineteenth century in particular they have been 'relegated' to the realm of the so-called personal, put in charge of emotions, the ethical. It is white women's further advantage that twenty years of feminism have made them question everything radically, and primarily themselves. *For white women who care to think, the idea of crisis is very much alive.* The way the world is going, as well as the new awareness of the limitations of their so bizarrely called whiteness, ensures that it will remain alive. We have not lost touch with ourselves, or not so radically that we cannot think in the full sense of the word. (Ward Jouve, 1991, p. 12; emphasis mine)

If a 'free action' is one by which one changes oneself and the world (Freire & Shor, 1987), then the "revolutionary process is eminently educational in character" (p. 133).

Poet as Revolutionary

The role of poet as revolutionary is not new. Octavio Paz, the 1990 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature and esteemed Mexican writer, in summarising the history of poetry said:

> Throughout history, and under the most diverse circumstances, poets have participated in political life. I am not referring to poetry as an art in the service of the state, a church, or an ideology. We already know that this concept of poetry, as old as political and ideological power, has invariably produced the same results: states fall, churches break apart or petrify, ideologies vanish—but poetry remains. No, I am referring to the participation of the poet in civic life. Even in societies that did not know political freedom—ancient China, for instance—not a few poets contributed to the administration of public affairs. Many among them did not hesitate to censure the abuses of the Son of Heaven, and they suffered imprisonment, exile, and other punishments for their opinions. In the West, this

> tradition has been extremely vital and long-lived: I need hardly to invoke the memory of the poets of Greece and Rome. (pp. 62-63)

He went on to say that the poets of both ancient China and the West of the time period of which he spoke belonged either to the imperial bureaucracy or theology. In the Modern Age there is a distinctive difference—"the idea of Revolution" (p. 63). According to Paz (1969), the concept of revolution in the West means not only to change the system, but also to alter human nature (p. 121).

The history of poets varies from culture to culture, but often they are highly revered and viewed as prophets. The poet spoke of things that cannot be said, which relates to Freire, who talked about the culture of silence: "Her words are written in the presence of prohibition; the prohibition is supported by a bureaucracy of prelates and judges. . . . Her speech leads us to what cannot be said, what cannot be said to an orthodoxy" (Paz, 1969, p. 6). "Poetry and the other arts—music and dance—represent an intermediate kingdom in which the reflections of the orders of the universe and society are interwoven" (p. 189).

Contrary to the common belief that "male poets engage in quests, [while] women poets run errands" (Bloom; as cited in Ostriker, 1986, p. 5), the women poets speaking within these pages do anything but! So when I speak of poets as revolutionaries, I refer to those who write toward political and social change, those who write about the unequal power relations manifest in society, and those who write about their love for humanity, for Mother Earth, and for the universe.

To transcend the culture of silence means to introduce the idea of literacy in the social/political sense and to transcend the culture of literacy beyond the ability to read and write. The definition of literacy is the condition of being literate—the "ability to read and write." Peace education calls into question that conceptualisation of "literacy," and recognises other forms. However, to be a poet it is considered crucial to be able to read and write. On the other hand, there is a strong tradition of oral poetry in many cultures, as

well as contemporary versions such as North American street poetry called *rap*. "In contemporary black popular culture, rap music has become one of the spaces where black vernacular speech is used in a manner that invites dominant mainstream culture to listen—to hear—and to some extent, be transformed" (hooks, 1994, p. 171). These forms of expression did not emerge from the logos. They emerged from a need for people to communicate; to dialogue if you will; to express some feeling or thought. Also, they emerged from a need to somehow create a change, and by uttering the words, change happens. This uttering evokes their subjectivity or agency. Their uttering brings something to a conscious level and speaks it out, breaking the silence. These utterings are a form of critical thinking and are a manifestation of a form of freedom/liberation—to let the words roll out and pour over others (albeit others have their own engagement with those same words, but it works if the particular strikes the collective chord). Truth has many shapes and sounds. "As much of what we say when we embrace we say to release our sighs and our sobs into the rains and the seas" (Lingis, 1994, p. 105).

Winterson (1996) said that the writer is an instrument of transformation. In her view, the writer pushes the reader to new boundaries; and, although the writing reflects what already exists, there is another dimension through which the reader is perhaps challenged, pushed to further explorations. Strong texts, she said, become part of what exists. "Art is conscious and its effect on its audience is to stimulate consciousness" (p. 26). Robert Marquez (1974) stated:

> Latin American poets in this century have been steadily abandoning the strictly hermetic narcissism of the ivory tower tradition whose largest debt is to the nineteenth century romantics, and are turning with increasing insistence to an exploration of poetry's sources in the reality of an ethos, in the commonplace, the 'anti-poetic' and rhetorically unadorned. Simultaneously they are turning to a progressively more unambiguous denunciation of the continent's neocolonial status. . . . [The anthology] is a testimony to the artists' growing commitment to the larger struggle for national liberation whose first major victory was the Cuban Revolution. (p. 25)

Revolutionary poetry is very different from both poems of wartimes and from poems advocating peace, but all of them reflect the reality of the world. This is not to say that metaphor and image are disregarded; however, perhaps it is the purpose of the poetry that is essentially different.

In a very real way, one enters into dialogue with the poet or poem. Poetry is a form of discourse or dialogue. Lingis (1994) said that

> true discourse is discourse which is based on bodily sensations; it records what individuals have seen and heard, what their body powers can vouch for. . . . The individual who is subjected to the institutional imperative to say what he sees and experiences must say it in statements subjected to the contestation and verification of others in the community. (p. 137)

He went on:

> He must formulate his living insights and experiences in the established concepts of language—in forms that are not his own, but are the forms of anyone. His most intimate and living impulses and insights lose their individuality in being formulated; his thoughts are put in coffers of words that preserve them like tombs preserve, such that later, when he hears or reads his own thoughts, he finds in the words only what anyone else finds; he no longer finds the lithe and virgin fires of his own inner life. (p. 138)

This speaks to the way in which a poem may be written; that is, it emerges from a very personal insight or experience, and I believe it is a universal thought particularised to a single person's experience or emotion.

Poetry is a type of discourse which achieves its effect by rhythm, sound patterns, and imagery. Characteristically, the poetic form evokes emotions or sensations, but it may also serve to convey a loftiness of tone or to lend force to ideas. Poetry is a type of praxis; it is action and reflection; it is transformative (to the writer and the reader or listener). It is not simply verbalism or activism. Poetry does not fall into the category of slogans and prescription because there is no sense of domination in the writing of poetry and the sharing of it. There is always the possibility of poets becoming part of the system they are criticising and of being co-opted by the dominants.

Of course, there is in history poetry that has been in the service of the state, a church or an ideology. . . . We already know that this concept of poetry, as old as political and ideological power, has invariably produced the same results: states fall, churches break apart or petrify, ideologies vanish. (Paz, 1990, p. 62)

> Resistance is that struggle we can most easily grasp. Even the most subjected person has moments of rage and resentment so intense that they respond, they act against. There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion, however short lived. It may only be momentary but it takes place. *That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains.* It is different to talk about becoming subjects. That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new alternative habits of being and resists from that marginal space inwardly defined. (hooks, 1990, p. 15; emphasis mine).

The poetry comes from that "space within oneself where resistance is possible" and is manifested in a nonviolent way. If thoughts can change the world, imagine what our carefully thought out, beautifully crafted written words can do.

Colonisation and Resistance

> Resistance to violence, however, cannot consist of violence. Violence may change the direction of violence, invert the roles of violator and victim, but it necessarily affirms the principles of violence, whatever else it may achieve. And it adds new victims to the world—victims of our own making, not to mention more violent perpetrators whose ranks we have decided to join. While in extremity and under the threat of our lives, we may not have any means other than violence to secure survival, most of us most the time are not in such situations, though we glibly speak of 'survival.' Instead, we would have ample opportunity in situations of no threat to challenge the legitimacy of violence and to practice alternatives—above all, by deciding not to use violence ourselves. (Kappeler, 1995, p. 258)

Within the South, the coloniser has evolved into an enemy that is difficult to identify or to fight. The idea of Western education as a plausible solution or in some cases as the only solution for the future of the countries on the periphery has been so deeply entrenched in the collective psyche of those countries (much like the idea that a bottle of

Coca Cola is better than clean water), that anyone placed in such a position is unable to fight the enemy within his/her head.[5]

The emphasis on *Western capitalist development*[6] of a country neglects the human component in favour of production. Those who are viewed as inferior—women, ethnic minorities—are blamed for their "inferiority" because they have not invested in the status quo or are different.

Voice, Silence, and Revolution

To contain the concept of voice is difficult, as one individual may possess a number of voices and the voice(s) may not only be gendered, but also socially constructed. How could it/they not be? If we, in fact, attribute certain characteristics to the female/feminine then the "voice" we expect to hear from women will coincide with those attributions. As a child, to hear the admonishment "Little girls should be seen and not heard" reduces the possibility of voice to one of silence. The voices of men were what made sense, had power, and created the reality of those considered less sensible, less powerful around them. Post-modernists revolt against a "unifying authoritative voice" (Flax, 1990, p. 191), although there is an apparent tendency on the part of some (particularly the academic) post-modern writers to make their voices inaccessible, thereby implementing yet another type of elitism which I can only touch upon here.[7] As Flax said of postmodernist philosophers,

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[5] For a detailed discussion see Udayagiri (as cited in Marchand & Parpart, 1995).

[6] "The word *development* is used in so many conflicting and contradictory ways, to describe so many utterly heterogeneous and often opposed trends that it has become one of the most meaningless terms of contemporary vocabulary" (Praderrand; as cited in Anchan, 1993, p. 49).

[7] See, for example, Freire (1990), Giroux (1997), and others for a more detailed analysis of the role of silence within the context of social change.

> They are not free of a will to power whose effects they trace elsewhere. A cooptation of the others and an effacement of the traces of these maneuvers frequently result. This double erasing may account for some of the obscurity in the writing of post-modernism; tracks have to be erased or effaced as they are made. (p. 192)

For the purpose of this work, I would like to concentrate on what is called *textual agency*, wherein the poetry presented does not lose its voice, nor do I impose or lose mine, a commitment that facilitates "greater textual reflexivity" (Mulkay, 1985, p. 76). Although Mulkay was researching through the creative exchange of letters,[8] my concern is the creative reading/listening of poetry. And, as the poems speak, there are pauses—spaces in between—where the reader may fully engage in his/her own experience.

The limitations are obvious, words simply placed on the page, the apparent single dimension of the written word. The women herein speak from around the world and from this country. They call out from different contexts and experiences that will perhaps resonate within you, the reader. The "writerly text" (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993) leaves the reader space for reflection, not seeking closure but, rather, an ever-evolving understanding: "Yet here in the midst of sameness, were we to shift our point of view just slightly, a kind of shimmer begins to appear, changing alternately from dark to light, from similarity to difference again" (pp. 210-211).

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[8] Mulkay's (1985) research through discourse analysis was a departure from the conventions of sociological texts and an attempt to explore the opportunities afforded by new textual forms.

Transformation[9]

> The work that a poem does is a transfer of human energy from the poet through the poem to the fully responsible and responsive witness/reader. . . . I think human energy may be defined as consciousness, the capacity to make change in existing conditions. (Rukeyser, 1996, p. xxv)

Poets can be instruments of transformation, and I shall explore poetry as a form of praxis that offers potential for individual and social transformation. Transformation, or to be transformative, is best explicated for me by Jane Flax (1990) when she said that the implication of these words is not "meant to imply that changes . . . are moving us in any particular preset (much less progressive) direction" (p. 5). It would be inauthentic for me to dismiss the spiritual element of transformation. In Muriel Rukeyser's view, the primary issue in life, as well as in art, is always the possibility of transformation (Daniels, 1994, p. xvi). Giroux (1997) saw a connection between hope and transformation and said: "The struggle against racism, class structures, and sexism needs to move away from being simply a language of critique, and redefine itself as part of a language of transformation and hope" (p. 227). For me, transformation means change at the cognitive, psychological, physiological, and spiritual levels. As Bohm (1987) pointed out, a change of meaning is a change of being, and any change of being is a change of meaning. This reciprocal nature of transformation alters how we understand, how we know.

Within the constructed boundaries of this exploration, I will focus upon women poets in the South and First Nations women poets who, with their word, have the potential to "transform." They make up, in part, Foucault's "subjugated discourse" which

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[9] Transformation indicates a change or alteration. For the purposes of this paper it reflects a dramatic change and one that improves upon the original form (see Freire, Krishnamurti). The concepts of rebirth and being reborn for me do not meet the criteria for transformation because of the totality implicit in the transformative. It is not simply a rearrangement of what is; it is entirely new.

includes women and people of colours whose "voices have enunciated a 'great refusal' on a scale not even Marcuse dared to dream" (Flax, 1990, p. 191).

Cixous' (as cited in Stimpson, 1988, p. 94) *écriture feminine* emerged from the search to discover what community of discourse, women, freely writing as women, might build. The praxis of boldly linguistic woman will mutate politics: Because the 'economy' of her drives is prodigious, she cannot fail in seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly all systems of exchange based on masculine thrift (p. 95). How the female poet interacts with the land, the countryside, or the urbanscape—with the outer space in all its variety, or place, in the most physical of senses—is significantly affected by gender (Philips, 1986, p. 288). There is an inherent connection between our capacity as Métis women to remember our histories and our identities. Emma LaRocque (1986) said:

> Our contemporary identity is forged by the complex combination of a number of 'ethnic factors,' such as language, religion, aboriginality, land, values about hard work, respect for individuality, generosity and family, music, arts, folklore, history and so on. When people change they do not necessarily lose their identities. People are flexible, adaptive and creative. Culture is what people do together. It is a living and re-creative process. (pp. 23-24)

As Rukeyser (as cited in Daniels, 1994) asked: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The World would split open" (p. 132). In breaking the silence, she gives to others a vision of a just, compassionate, and humane world to carry forward in our minds and hearts, as in a relay (Ward Jouve, 1991).

Poetry and "The Personal as Political"

Implicit in this work is the knowledge that hegemony and racism are feminist issues, but ought not be limited to that sphere. To think otherwise is not thinking. Barbara Smith (as cited in Trinh, 1989) defined feminism as "the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women. . . . Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (p. 86).

There is a need to transcend the labels and categories that we apply to one another so as to speak *with* rather than over, through, above, or around: "It burns me up to be treated like shit by white women who are busy getting their academic recognition, promotions, more money, et cetera, doing 'great' work on the topic of race" (hooks, 1994, p. 104).

The poets cited herein would be considered the elite in their countries because they have been formally educated and are in a position of enough power to have achieved publication. However, these women all write of themselves, as well as toward social change; and they say what cannot be said, breaking the culture of silence as Ken Saro Wiwa did.

By separating poetry into the "personal" and the "political," we run the risk of doing to poetry what all labelling does—serve upon it a reductionist perception that then limits readership and potential. By categorising, we can either limit or aggrandise. Forche (1993) spoke of the possibility of a third term for that "space between." Could it be a flow of energy, a movement in which apparent boundaries dissolve full of the potential for transformation—"poem as trace, poem as evidence?" (pp. 32-32).

Is it possible that this thesis is what Forche (1993) would call *a celebration of solidarity*? The women poets herein live in circumstances many of us have never known and perhaps never will know other than through books, story, and the media. It is difficult to grasp that some people live where "love of one's language is a crime against the state" (Adilman, 1989, n.p.), and yet looking back into Canada's short history, where Native children were punished for speaking their own language to become assimilated "for their own good," it is not that far removed.

> Ruby Dunstan's parents were told they would be jailed if they refused to force their child to attend [school]. At the school, the Indian children were whipped if they tried to speak their own language, their clothing was taken away and replaced by uniforms, and they were not allowed to see their parents except under strict regulations. "You were told you shouldn't be an Indian." (York, 1992, p. xii)

Some poems are painful to read. We have the choice of participating in their worlds. We enter a poem by our free will; in relationship with it, emotions surface:

> Unlike an aerial attack, a poem does not come at one unexpectedly. One has to read or listen, one has to be willing to accept the trauma. So, if a poem is an event and the trace of an event, it has, by definition, to belong to a different order of being from the trauma that marked its language in the first place (Forche, 1993, p. 33)

Poetry is word as art and is limited by the concept of logos, but unlimited in scope and breadth of experience. Every poem has its own particular voice and truth (Linthwaite, 1988). What is the contribution of poetry in the creation of a new political theory? "Not new ideas, but something more precious and fragile: *memory*" (Paz, 1990, p. 74). Poetry has the great capacity to survive, often written in memory; "it is passed from hand to hand like rat scraps in prison, until it is finally dropped outside the walls and published in 'padlock editions.'" It merges from "where the cry of the poets soul resonates" and "their poetic vision transcends barbwire and psychiatric prisons" (Adilman, 1989, preface). In so-called police states poets are a primary target for attack because they are considered a perennial danger to the status quo. The poets sing of justice, freedom, and compassion, thus alienating governments that abuse justice, freedom, and compassion.

Matthew Fox (1979) said, "Compassion is not anti-intellectual, but seeks to know and understand the interconnectedness of all things" (p. 23). I feel that it is very important to look at compassion in the context of peace education, because to be in peace education demands a clear understanding of the issues; however, to understand them without compassion makes it like the "clashing of cymbals." Compassion, as I see it, is not pity; but I believe it is akin to, if not actually, love (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 210).

THE LAST WOLF

the last wolf hurried toward me
through the ruined city
and I heard his baying echoes
down the steep smashed warrens

of Montgomery Street and past
the few ruby-crowned highrises
left standing
their lighted elevators useless

. . . . . .

in my narrow bed looking west, waiting
I heard him snuffle at the door and
I watched
he trotted across the floor

he laid his long gray muzzle
on the spare white spread
and his eyes burned yellow
his small dotted eyebrows quivered

Yes, I said.
I know what they have done.
(TallMountain; as cited in Moyers, 1995, p. 409)

Simply by virtue of geographical/physical distance, we seem able to put psychological distance between ourselves and the other—that "facing other" who "awakens [us] to responsibility: an infinite responsibility for the other, who is in need of everything that is necessary for a human life" (Peperzak; as cited in Dallery & Scott, 1989, p. 17; see also Levinas, 1985). However, poetry is a voice—a wake-up call—and it can cross great geographical/physical and psychological spaces. It is easy to see the other as enemy if we cannot hear them or if we choose not to listen. It is easy to participate in tribalism (i.e., charity begins at home, look after our own); but truly to hear an "other," one is compelled to reach out. This relationship of intersubjectivity is characterised by Merleau-Ponty (1964) as 'double touching'; that is, "one hand touching the other, in which each hand touches and is touched, feels and is felt" (p. 167).

> Through the mouth of the poet there speaks—I emphasize speaks, not writes—the other voice. It is the voice of the tragic poet and the buffoon, the voice of solitary melancholy and merrymaking, of laughter and sighs, the voice of the lovers' embrace and of Hamlet's contemplation of the skull, the voice of silence and tumult, mad wisdom and wise madness, the intimate whispers of the bedroom and

> the uproar of the crowd in the square. To hear that voice is to hear time itself, the time that passes but comes back, transformed into a few crystalline syllables. (Paz, 1990, p. 74)

Its survival, however, rests upon the ability of readers to relate to it; our survival rests upon our ability to relate to one another.

> the other voices speak
> and they are mine
> and they are not mine
> and I hear them
> and I don't
> and even police can't stop the
> earth telling.
>
> (Linda Hogan; as cited in Keller & Miller 1994, pp. 175-176)

Women of Poetry

Trinh (1989) said that the "specialness accorded to Third World Women is to say the least, diminishing":

> Have you read some of the grievances some of our sisters express on being among the few women chosen for a 'Special Third World Women's Issue' or on being the only Third World Woman at readings, workshops and meetings? It is as if everywhere we go we become someone's private zoo. (p. 82)

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women World Conference in 1985 marked the culmination of the UN Decade of Women (1976-1985) that had its beginnings in Mexico in 1975. Out of these events emerged the realisation that the achievement of "the establishment of interrelationships between development processes and the position of women" (Pietila & Vickers, 1990, p. v) was of primary importance. One of development's primary objectives is, according to Fraser (1987), "to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and of society and to bestow benefits on all. Development should be seen as the most important means for furthering equality and the maintenance of peace" (p. 36). The symptoms of global underdevelopment manifest as mass poverty, hunger, malnutrition, famines, disease,

homelessness, unemployment, urban slums, illiteracy, economic inequalities, and the ever-increasing gap between rich industrialised nations (the North) and poor, underdeveloped nations (the South). There are numerous development paradigms posited by governments, bureaucrats, social scientists, experts, organisations, and individual citizens or communities. These paradigms are often contradictory and based upon assumptions, values, and principles that create a kind of chaos resulting in merely an illusion of positive change, or worse, no change at all.

Throughout the 1970s, redefinitions of the term *development* occurred; these definitions addressed issues such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment and spoke to the improvement of the "entire social system" (Fraser, 1987, p. 36). If one defined development holistically, however, as

> that change through which a society evolves the values, political leadership and other forms of social organization necessary to mobilize and utilize resources in such a way as to maximize the opportunities available to the majority of its members, *for the realization to the fullest possible extent of the potential of human beings*. (Muego, 1988, p. 170),

one wonders whether protracted regimentation is desirable This concept would enable all to have a decent life and help "men *[sic]* live and have life more abundantly" (Miller; as cited in Merchant, 1992, p. 7). According to the United Nations (1990) *Human Development Report*, development cannot adequately be measured by income alone but, rather, must reflect "life expectancy, literacy, and command over the resources to enjoy a decent standard of living" (p. 1). Accessing these criteria is only part of the process of development; there has to be the opportunity to use them.

The inherent problem in available analysis is that they are genderless. This lack of gender-specific data (with the exception of statistics on life expectancy) is significant in that it "may conceal distressingly large gender disparities" (United Nations, 1990, p. 110; also Pietila & Vickers, 1990). Women everywhere are colonised within the context of their own lives:

> The conceptualization of women as a last colony . . . has provided a valuable interpretive model . . . [that] underscores the interactions of race, class, and gender without fragmenting these issues and recognizes one complex but coherent system of oppression. (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, & Werlhof; as cited in Acosta-Belen & Bose, 1990, p. 310)

Women in "industrialised" nations, and colonised men and women, share a social structural position: They are appropriated, controlled and placed in subordinate positions of dependency by those who own the means of production and dominate access to capital (Acosta-Belen & Bose, 1990, p. 300).

In traditional cultures, the strength of woman is manifested in her creative power, her ability to protect, work hard, and feed and clothe her family; and the human female was regarded as a prodigious source of wisdom and power (Achterberg, 1990, p. 9). Acosta-Belen and Bose (1990) agreed on seeing women's position (and their position in productive activities) in precolonial societies as parallel to men's, rather than as subservient (p. 306).

This analysis recognises that there were forms of patriarchal oppression within some traditions; for example, Africa, where early depictions of a woman of the Sahara show her with a heavy load on her back, a baby straddled on top, and hands left free to weave a Kiondo or shell maize as she walks. Her back is bent over (Waruhiu; as cited in Ashworth, 1995, p. 136). This scene was repeated across traditions; however, some traditions were matrilineal, and, for example, some were equality based.

> In Yorùbáland, the transformation of obinrin [anafemale][10] into women and then "into women of no account" was at the essence of the colonial impact as a gendered process. Colonization, besides being a racist process, was also a process by which male hegemony was instituted and legitimized. . . . Its ultimate manifestation was the patriarchal state. (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 156)

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[10] The family operated as a group: Obinrin [anafemale] and okùnrin [anamale] were different members of it, respectively viewed as equal (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 143).

The Universal Declaration of Rights and Freedoms proclaims that everyone has the right to adequate food, shelter, education, and freedom from exploitation and repression. Human rights and freedoms are sanctioned internationally but are widely abused and/or ignored daily. Upwards of 3 million persons are subject, systemically and casually, to a wide range of violations because they are female. The disparity between what was declared as right action and women's lives gave birth to the UN Decade of Women (1975-1985), and despite opposition by particular power brokers, to "equality, development, and peace" (Ashworth, 1995, p. 5), the United Nations (1985) *Forward Looking Strategies* and the United Nations (1979) International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), followed by the International Declaration on Violence Against Women (Canada, 1993).

These aims and working documents are tied closely to Peace education, which includes human rights as a primary issue: "A further dimension of human rights, now recognized as much neglected, is the issue of 'gender.' Worldwide, women are vital coproducers of national wealth from the land, in factories and at home" (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 19).

Economic expansionism and exploitation, hypocrisy and ignorance, and gender privilege serve to support the inadequacies at the micro and macro levels. Peace education and international, boundary-crossing feminism both reflect rising alternative awareness of the ways in which global issues affect women's lives, emphasising the "unequal economic relations between countries," and stress the understanding that economic development (in the North and the South) does not automatically benefit women (Ashworth, 1995; Brock-Utne, 1985; United Nations, 1979; United Nations, 1985; International Women's Tribune Centre, 1989; Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987).

The basic assumptions that inequalities exist within a society and that inequality between men and women is the norm prompt the question: How, then, can any society function to its fullest potential when a large percentage of the population, by virtue of a

power dynamic, is colonised from within? And, then, how do women in any society achieve equality when they are fighting an enemy who "has outposts in their head[s]"? (Kempton; as cited in Partnow, 1977, p. 455). Feminists in the North have the temptation to view feminisms in the South as the same.

> To acknowledge the plurality and particularity of third world women's experiences but then distance ourselves from them because they don't fit first world feminist frameworks results in exclusion and devaluation. Before [we] assume to be representative, feminisms in the first world must engage with theoretical positions arrived at through the praxis of women's movements like that in the Philippines. (Hilsdon, 1995, p. 185)

There is much to be learned from women of the South, and one way of learning is through their poetry. As Cruikshank (1971) said about North American Native women, "Indian women are in a position to teach non-Indians a good deal about human adaptability and human relations" (p. 7).

Sylvia Van Kirk (1987), in her paper investigating how women's history and Native history intersect, addressed the issue of White feminists interfering with Native concerns and said that feminism was a foreign import of which Native women should beware. She went on to say that white society's dominance over Indian people in the last several hundred years has resulted in the subversion of the active and integral socioeconomic role that Indian women once played in their societies (p. 387). It would seem that many Native women are reclaiming their individual power through writing, thereby empowering the group. "Native women are going to raise the roof and decry the dirty house which patriarchy and racism have built on our backs" (Maracle, 1996, p. 22).

Language and Praxis of Poetry

The language of poetry can disturb and unsettle and at times be a destructive force. These tensions are violin-string vibrations that cannot stop and do not stop. At once we are stymied and full of possibilities. In the words of Gajo Petrovic (1965):

> As free action can only be one by which a [person] changes his world and himself. . . . A positive condition of freedom is the knowledge of the limits of necessity, the awareness of human creative possibilities. . . . The struggle for a free society is not a struggle for a free society unless through it an even greater degree of individual freedom is created. (pp. 274-276)

Betty William (as cited in Sternburg, 1991), a Northern Ireland co-winner of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, "used language to begin the process of peace" (p. 80). The process of peace herein is in the form of a dialogue made up of language which embodies "a profound love for the world and for [the women]" (Freire, 1990, p. 77). We are a group which, despite the geographical and cultural distances that separate us, have come together in what I hope is a harmonious coherence. They are not silent; nor am I; and there is a free-flowing "movement of meaning" (Bohm, 1987, p. 5).

In our dialogue and the seemingly empty space that exists between us and between our printed words is actually a "meaning filled energy field" (Bohm, 1987, p. 5). This "realm of the 'between,'" as Buber (1970) called it, leaves room for fear to shine brightly; however, beauty is often an unexpected guest. "The space of the middle, where self and other are embraced may bind them, but like the embrace of love, it need not pinion them" (Desmond, 1987, pp. 169-170). The "being together" is the essence of this process, and layer by layer themes or a "flow of shared meaning" may emerge, but that is not the goal; being together in solidarity is. Simply wanting something, though, does not make it happen. As Gadamer (as cited in Bernstein, 1992) said, "Practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity" (pp. 295-296).

Poetry is another way of making the world visible. According to Carolyn Forche (as cited in Moyers, 1995), it allows the human soul to speak; Gerald Stern commented

that it is the poet's job to remember. Adrienne Rich observed that poetry can bring together those parts of us which exist in dread and those which have the surviving sense of possible happiness, collectivity, community, a loss of isolation. Naomi Shihab Nye said that poetry is a conversation with the world and a conversation with yourself; Sharon Olds remarked that poets are like steam valves, where the ordinary feelings of ordinary people can escape and be shown; and Michael S. Harper noted that the job of the poet is to tell the truth no matter what.

thought woman
is sitting in her room
and whatever she thinks about
appears
She thought of her sisters. (Leslie Marmon Silko, 1977)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

My choice of poetry as the research medium resulted from my personal interest in poetry and the fact that I write poetry, combined with hearing about and reading Ken Saro Wiwa, as mentioned earlier. My belief that poetry is transformative by reaching one at a deep level impacted the decision as well. As Muriel Rukeyser (1996) said, "A poem invites you to feel. More than that: it invites you to respond" (p. 11). If poetry is memory (Adilman, 1989; Paz, 1990; Rukeyser, 1996), it is a collective and complex memory and speaks to the survival of humankind. I have long been interested in creativity and imagination and believe that those things are at the roots of our survival in the future. "The universe of poetry is the universe of emotional truth" (Rukeyser, 1996, p. 23), and it is a form of nonviolent resistance. Poetry is a form of witness (Adilman, 1989; Forche, 1993; Rich, 1981; Rukeyser, 1996), and as mentioned earlier, poetry can be lofty or grounded in the real. Although I have called myself "poet" for only a short time, I have seen over this time a progression from the lofty to the grounded that paralleled my personal experience and academic explorations. Indeed, the poets' circle to which I belonged could not respond to some of my work because it did not fit any longer. Poetry is action as well, in that there is an active relationship created between the poet, the poem, and the reader. The word *witness* denotes responsibility (Rukeyser, 1996), and that overtone makes for a "climate of excitement and revelation . . . announcing with the poem that we are about to change, that work is being done on the self'(p. 175). Poetry is not a static collection of words but may be a moment of revelation or revolution. Therefore I think that poetry is praxis in that it combines thought and action.

Because of the nature of global education and the web of peace education, the question of what methodology fits vis-à-vis this particular work has been a necessary albeit problematic part of this thesis. My perception of research is that the research

question and research method reflect the researcher's values and beliefs. As Jan Montefiore (1987) said,

> The tendency to privilege the notion of female experience, and to think of women's poetry as a magically powerful collective consciousness, can make for a too easy and uncritical assumption that has in political practice recently been challenged by the articulate anger of Black women who have found white feminists unable or unwilling to acknowledge their experience of racist oppression as relevant to their experience as women. I want to bring home this point with a quotation from the poem 'White Women, Hey' by Carmen Williams . . . denouncing a white feminist for her failure to recognise Black women's experience of racist oppression, and for her generally patronizing attitudes. However, permission to print was refused as the author did not want her poem printed in a context of white literary criticism, however feminist: an impasse which certainly illustrates the crucially differing experiences and viewpoints of women of opposed cultures, races and educations with particular clarity. Where women's experiences do not match there can still, of course, be communication—both sides can listen and speak—but this is not likely to be easy; nor does it help to gloss the problem over by assertions of the unity of female experience. (pp. 12-13)

It is my belief that the essence of our being is not a fixed entity in time and space, but rather how we see ourselves, and others, in a particular time and space; and it is, therefore, changeable and never static. We need to explore and describe our experiences with an eye to historicity in order to enhance our understanding. There is no one correct interpretation, and through an historical process we reach the interpretation that speaks to the participants. This is not, however, a stance of relativism. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this work to enter the labyrinth of relativism versus absolutist debate; however, how the relativist notion relates to Peace Education must be addressed. Selby (1993) said:

> We speak of 'perspective' consciousness, i.e., of creating awareness of and valuing other cultural perspectives, which seems to some extent to be predicated upon the notion of cultural relativism; . . . yet we embrace and promote transcultural yardsticks such as universal human rights, gender equality and so on. (p. 5)

It is essential to recognise that within any one culture there are numerous perspectives and that a culture itself is never static, and "cultures will internalize, and, hence, manifest universal values in qualitatively different ways" (Selby, 1993, p. 5). Therefore, for the

purposes of this work we will apply the term *relational holism,* wherein "the outward journey is the inward journey" (p. 6).

Understanding is not repetition of the past—that is, the same story happening over and over—but rather a participation in present meaning (Hoy, 1978, p. 52). The acts of researching and subsequent reflection bring us face to face with meanings that make sense to us. We come to have a greater knowing, not as an end in itself, but in being open to yet more experience. So part of this thesis-writing process became the search for a methodology which fits the focus, the academic requirements, and the researcher.

The search for the "right" and most useful research model took on unexpected proportions that actually threatened to become the focus of the thesis. To my relief, I discovered in talking to other qualitative researchers that this dilemma is not unusual; nor am I unique in this struggle. My particular problem stemmed from and was clouded by my multidisciplinary attitudes, which by the less kind was referred to as *an inability to focus.* From my confusion what slowly emerged was a clarity of sorts, and in a moment of introspective reflection it struck me that this whole process—studying, researching, and writing—was about my personal search for Voice.

Within the "search" process I used several methodological facets. It is important to know what motivates our passion, what one carries around as "conceptual baggage," and to bring it out into the open for examination, to reveal one's Self in the process. In the self-disclosure, however, no answers lie neatly packaged; there is no little nugget of truth to set upon the mantle. Within my research paradigm exists a web of research methodologies informing each other. Of course, each could stand on its own, but for the purpose of this work I have drawn from all of them to enrich the process. Under this lie philosophical hermeneutics, First Nations, feminist and postmodern perspectives, as well as the dialogic and narrative (which, in fact, is part of all the aforementioned). It is beyond the scope of this work to elaborate each of these fully; however, it is hoped that the following pages will clarify their connection to the process and how each of them helps

unearth the richness of the subjects, their social worlds, and the transformative nature of their poetry.

Narrative

> How do we explore our own reasons for doing the research without putting ourselves back at the center? The writer is always in the text, 'one among others creating meaning' (Gitlein et al, 198:26), but how does the writer speak from a 'decentered position of acknowledged, vested interest' which strips the authority of one's own discourse in order to 'interrupt dominant and alternative academic discourses that serve Eurocentric, sexist, racist and classist power relations?' (Lather, 1991, p. 91)

Susan Bernstein (1992; as cited in Yamagishi, 1997) noted, "First person theorizing has been crucial in feminist epistemologies that seek to broaden and contextualize the location and construction of knowledge" (p. 121). The confessional mode "imposes self-vigilance on the process of subject positioning both in language and discourse and at a specific historical moment or a particular cultural space." Bernstein saw the use of I (the individual as opposed to the universal) as "a textual moment that carries the capacity to accentuate and overturn conventions of authority, particularly the *pretense* of objectivity as an ideological cover for masculine privilege" (pp. 124-125; emphasis mine).

There is potential to subvert patriarchal norms; and, as Retallack, (as cited in Keller & Miller, 1994) said, we must question whether "the feminine shouldn't be associated with experimental or innovative uses of language rather than with sub-text, images subversive to existing patriarchal norms, or other particulars of content" (p. 12).

> Our lives are at once ordinary and mythical. . . . We are important and our lives are important, magnificent really, and their details are worthy to be recorded. . . . We are here, we are human beings; this is how we lived. Let it be known, the earth passed before us. Our details are important. Otherwise, if they are not, we can drop a bomb and it doesn't matter. (Goldberg, 1986, p. 43)

Ward Jouve (1991) talked about the use of 'I' in the sense that the authorial voice is not used to splash one's ego "all over the page; however, in the writing, the self will be revealed whether I is used or not" (p. 8). But the question begs to be asked: "Who speaks for whom?" (Lather, 1991, p. 91). In my view, the research process must involve critical reflection:

> Without reflection and analysis of the social context, research remains merely functional, enabling people to function within the status quo rather than to interact with and change social relations. Critical reflection involves an examination of the social reality in which people exist. (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 34)

Within this work I have connected with poets on the level of soul. Without an understanding brought about by reflection and critical analysis of the very tangible, real world issues of their lives, the process would have had a one-dimensional, flat result. Nor would I have been drawn to look more deeply, as in the poetic dialogue, without the awareness and critical reflection upon the poets' social realities.

This illuminates for me the potential of poetry and peace education as practice and theory—praxis. The dialogic nature of this relationship (as well as the accompanying tensions) are evident: "Knowledge is not objectified or commoditized; . . . the stress is not on the text or its author as agent, but on the interpreter as agent in collaboration with those concerned" (Hobart, 1995, p. 239).

For the purposes of this work, the poets are the "animators or agents of change"; and they are sometimes internal, sometimes external to the exploitation (Fals-Borda, 1988, p. 4). Where does the researcher from the North fit, if at all? All of us "are unified in one sole purpose—that of achieving the shared goals of social transformation" (p. 4).

> Thus a dialectic tension is created between them which can be resolved only through practical commitment, that is, through a form of praxis. The sum of knowledge from both types of agents, however, makes it possible to acquire a much more accurate and correct picture of the reality that is being transformed. Therefore, academic knowledge combined with popular knowledge and wisdom may result in total scientific knowledge of a revolutionary nature which destroys the previous unjust class monopoly. (p. 4)

Philosophical Hermeneutics: The Science of Interpretation

The root of the word *hermeneutics* lies in the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which means "to interpret." Hermes, the wing-footed messenger-god, brought "to human understanding that which was beyond the grasp of human intelligence" (Bain, 1986, p. 25). In the 17th century, hermeneutics referred to the principles of biblical interpretation and has evolved into a philosophical exploration of the nature of understanding.

Western thought generally searches for objective reason and meaning in experiences. The hermeneutic approach says that the lived experience itself is the meaning, and through the experience we find the Self. Hermeneutics is seen as reflection on lived experience in an attempt to grasp the meaning of something. The meaning is never simple or one-dimensional but, rather, multifaceted. The process is temporal and cumulative. Each time, along with new questions come new understandings. "The fusion of horizons concept carries the double, or dual, vision and dialectical notions a step further . . . [and] indicates a transcendent . . . new view, or synthesis" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 29). The hermeneutical encounter is a dialogue in which language (text, visual art, and so on) is a crucial ingredient. There is an exciting and challenging by-product of hermeneutic enquiry; the (re)searcher cannot help but be transformed during the process of enquiry and, I would add, during the writing of the research:

> The conversational quality of hermeneutic truth points to the requirement that any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report of the researcher's own transformations undergone in the process of inquiry; a showing of the dialogical journey. . . . Underscored here is a profoundly ethical aspect to hermeneutic inquiry in a life-world sense; namely, a requirement that a research be prepared to deepen her or his own self-understanding in the course of the research. (Smith, 1994, p. 120)

This re-search process draws on hermeneutics in the form of dialogue between poems and reader of the poems. From this relationship a third entity emerges, for within the interpretation, which in this case is very personal, transformation of the researcher occurs. For that to happen, an openness is required. Therefore, I approached the poems as openly

as possible given all my preconceived notions based upon personal experience. The text, in turn, lay open for interpretation. Gadamer (as cited in Hoy, 1978) did not view this "dialogue" as a "mysterious communion" but more as a "shared meaning" in the "present moment" (p. 42).

How do I represent the text? This is neither literary criticism nor analysis. It is an exercise in "connection"—women poets, the peace education paradigm, and the reader. Poetry is a nonviolent act of resistance and revolution, with the potential for social change and transformation. The complexities of representation exist within any relationship. My intention is not to speak for the poets nor critically analyse their work, but rather to facilitate the interaction of their works—one form of which is referred to as the *dialogic* (see Bahktin, 1981; hooks, 1994; Trinh, 1989; and others).

This work explores the poetry/stories of the women, but it is the story/poetry of my journey beside them, coming from a different level of marginality and conducting distance enquiry. How does one share the experience of others? We can look at the lives of others, but to what depth can we "know" them? Hermeneutic interpretation is a qualitative research method that fits with feminist, peace, and First Nations perspectives in that it places in the open a topic; and through collaborative discussion and reflection, meaning is attained, a synthesis occurs, and praxis emerges. It is another circle, one of understanding, interpretation: Part and whole are related in a circular way: in order to understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts, while to understand the parts, it is necessary to have some comprehension of the whole.

First Nations Perspective

Skanagoah, according to Pam Colorado (1988), means "great peace" or "balance" that is "at the heart of the universe and is the spirit of Native Science" (p. 52). Deloria (as cited in Colorado) added to this concept by explaining that a Native talking to a tree does not present a "message of mental stability" by Western standards but is, in fact, "a scientist

doing research" (p. 52). The key to this question lies not in the person and the tree, but in the exchange between them; the dialogue, if you will. There is no researcher/subject dynamic, but a cooperative effort. As Freire (as cited in Colorado) said, "A research project in which, together in dialogue, we will come to know each other better and the reality in which we find ourselves" (p. 62).

Native science is generally holistic with its roots in the "mental, physical, social and cultural/historical realms. . . . The tree as symbol of Native science has its roots in the history, body and blood of the land" (Colorado, 1988, p. 50). This traditional science is interwoven with life; that is, it is not objective nor disinterested. This interweaving reflects my process, and my process reflects this interweaving. I bring my passion for the subject into it; as Kirby and McKenna (1989) noted, "We bring our Self as a resource to our researching" (p. 19).

Colorado (1988) also saw the spiritual energy of the tree as a life force that is felt, "not transmitted directly"; and honour and respect of the other is implicit within the process. Self-reflection, historicity and catalysts (co-researchers) all contribute to the process.

The Medicine Wheel is the ancient symbol of holism used by almost all Indigenous peoples of the North and South. When any part of the circle is not acknowledged or reflected, the balance is thrown off, the circle may break, and a conflict may occur. American Indians speak of the "Great Hoop" within which all people were protected. When the hoop was broken, people lost their "knowingness" (Levine, 1979, p. 159). In the research process, this delicate balance must be honoured; and there is no conclusion, no absolute stopping point. It is, rather, a process through which experiential knowledge is gained and understood and passed on or given back.

Feminist Perspectives

According to Mohanty (1988), the relationship between Woman—a cultural and ideological composite others constructed through diverse representational discourse (scientific, literary, linguistic, cinematic, etc.)—and women—real, material subjects of their collective histories—is one of the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address. This connection between women as historical subjects and the representation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, nor a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up in particular cultural and historical contexts. Western feminist scholarship cannot avoid the challenge of situating itself and examining its role in such a global economic and political framework. To do any less would be to ignore the complex interconnections between First and Third World economies and the profound effect of this on the lives of women in all countries (pp. 62-64). See also Trinh (1989).

One often hears phrases such as "He/she speaks in a voice that transcends boundaries, ethnicity, race and religion, a universal voice," but we need to walk cautiously here, for, as Audre Lorde (1984) stated:

> Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of black and third world women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. (p. 100)

The womanist movement has its roots in the Black feminist movement, or the feminists of colour, coming from "wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one" (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985, p. 495). In 1915 Alice Duer Miller wrote:

"Mother, what is a feminist?"
"A feminist my daughter,
Is any woman now who cares
To think about her own affairs
As men don't think she oughter."

I do not intend to imply that we are the same, for to be so means, by definition, that we are identical, alike in kind, quantity, and amount; the same person; synonyms, duplicates, indistinguishable, without difference; without distinction. To lump women into a homogeneous group is another patriarchal form of dismissing women's power and intelligence as well as restricting our potential interrelationships with one another.

Implicit in feminist research is the view that nothing can be addressed without considering context. In terms of this work, the sociopolitical realities of the poets will be evident. As well, within the feminist research process, we must first recognise and acknowledge our preconceptions or biases—what Kirby and McKenna (1989) referred to as our "conceptual baggage" (p. 32). For me, this includes struggling with my position of privilege and the potential risk of using another to further my own ends. Within this context, I must constantly examine my motives and my methods and rely on those who are working with me to call me on my blind spots and to challenge me to think more critically, beginning with bell hooks (1994; above), who added: "Perhaps we need to examine the degree to which white women (and all women) who assume powerful positions rely on conventional paradigms of domination to reinforce and maintain power" (p. 105).

For the purposes of this work, I use the term *feminism* to mean "to empower," a concept that will be elaborated upon later. My intention is not to fit into any particular political position prescribed by the various schools of feminism. This factionalism creates restrictions and obstacles, and thwarts the work that is required. Oyěwùmí (1997) questioned the ideas embedded in Western feminist writings:

1. Gender categories are universal and timeless and have been present in every society at all times. This idea is often expressed in a biblical tone, as if to suggest "in the beginning there was gender."

2. Gender is a fundamental organizing principle in all societies and is therefore always salient. In any given society, gender is everywhere.
3. There is an essential, universal category "woman" that is characterized by the social uniformity of its members.
4. The subordination of women is universal.
5. The category "woman" is precultural, fixed in historical time and cultural space in antithesis to another category, "man." (p. xii)

Audre Lorde (as cited in Trinh, 1989) responded to Mary Daly, who insisted "on universalizing women's oppression" (p. 101), saying:

> I feel you do celebrate differences between white women as a creative force towards change, rather than a reason for misunderstanding and separation. But you fail to recognize that, as women, those differences expose all women to various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share, some of which we do not. . . . The oppression of women knows no ethic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those boundaries. . . . To imply that all women suffer the same oppression because we are women, is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. (p. 101)

This is an important clause, one that must be maintained in the mind of the researcher throughout the process, particularly because I am dialoguing with text, not live participants who might take my assumptions to task or call me on my blind spots. For inasmuch as we share commonalities, the ways in which we are different cannot, must not be overshadowed by my desire for John Lennon's utopian concept in "Imagine," however well intended.

Conclusions/Beginnings

The complexities of human beings and their endeavours place us in an ongoing position of questioning our motivations. It is my intention that this research process be an action of solidarity with the women poets within it—a solidarity that "expresses [a] spirit of inter-cultural trust and understanding" (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 21). Pattai (1991) questioned whether ethical research is possible when enacted between the North and the South. This work cannot be written without mentioning that there are groups of women who would not be pleased that a North American White woman is using their

works to further her own cause. These women want to tell their own stories in their own words, and as Barbara Cameron (as cited in Anzaldua & Moraga, 1983) asserted: "I am not interested in pursuing a society that uses analysis, research and experimentation to concretize their vision of cruel destinies for those bastards of the pilgrims; a society with arrogance rising, moon in oppression, and sun in destruction" (p. 23). The fact that the poetry is written in English is something that requires a sensitivity. "This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you" (Rich, 1971, p. 16). The idea that women writers have been imprisoned in an "oppressor's language" which denies them access to authoritative expression is an issue common to all women writers; however, in my view, it is exacerbated for women whose mother tongue is not English (see also Trinh, 1989). They often write in their language of origin and then have to trust that in translation their meaning will not be lost. This thesis can include only those poets who have written in or been translated into English, thereby omitting many poets whose work has not been translated, and this creates a limitation.

> When I find myself thinking about language now, these words are there. . . . They startle me, shaking me into awareness of the link between languages and domination. Reflecting on Adrienne Rich's words, I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize. (hooks, 1994, p. 168)

My hope is to act in solidarity with women of other nations, bring their poems to the attention of educators and students in an attempt to enhance understanding—transform thought. Jacques Rabemananjara (as cited in Trinh, 1989) has criticised Occidental poets for "spending their existence indulging in aesthetic refinements and subtleties that bear no relation to their people's concerns and aspirations, that are merely intellectual delights" (p. 13). Aguilar, Joe, and Acholuno wrote their poems grounded "in their people's concerns and aspirations"; and although their poetry can be personal, it is

usually the personal intertwined with a political or social issue, a response to or criticism of.

The poet is called *inspirer*, inspired by the people, and is expected to be "the torch lighting the way" and "loyal interpreter" (Trinh, 1989, p. 13). The poet is more than their "spokes[person]: the poet is their voice" (p. 13). Within the constructs of this work, I attempt to read by the light that poems themselves emit, rather than by a fixed beam of one or another theory which might shine where the poem is not and leave in darkness the place where it is (Ostriker, 1987, p. 13).

It is praxis, a process, not a static thing. We can look at the lives of others, but to what depth can we know them? I recognise what Joyce Carlson (as cited in Culleton, 1983) emphasised: "The danger inherent in generalizing about a people cannot be ignored" (p. vii). This thesis will speak to the experience of women of the South and will not make general statements. I come to this "site in life" with my own experience, my own prejudices, my own perspectives which will shape and define my interpretation of their words. The authenticity of our relationship, or the authenticity of any relationship, is tied to our self-concepts, builds upon these concepts, and recreates the energy. This relationship of being together in learning/teaching and researching is a form of reciprocity, and who we are is unknown but is being revealed in every moment.

This thesis has two parts, the contextual/theoretical framework and the dialogues. The latter are, I believe, an example of what Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1993) called a "writerly text" (p. 390), including texts and sub-texts acting intertextually. According to Sumara and Luce-Kapler, the writerly text is "open, unpredictable and ambiguous"; it does not "seek closure . . . but rather an ever-evolving understanding" (p. 3). This echoes Gadamer's (1986) reflections upon the horizons of understanding. The hermeneutic encounter is a potentially never-ending circle of understanding and questioning:

> We enter the circle with a question born of experience, the knowledge of not knowing, and certain pre-understandings that will direct the subsequent conversation. We proceed with openness to engage in conversation . . . at the risk of these pre-understandings. This hermeneutic encounter . . . leads us to further questioning, interpretation and new understandings of the topic. However, that understanding is open to further questioning which may lead us back into the circle at another time. (Holmgren, 1987, p. 42)

If we have any interest in listening to someone speak so that we can hear precisely their silence, what they are not saying, we naturally have to keep our ears open (Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p. 51). And where then does the ethics of listening or hearing arise? To adhere to Gadamer, I want to read the text and make meaning of it—my interpretation, my interaction with it: "Clearly, Gadamer's hermeneutics does insist on deciding the question of meaning [as something to be discovered]" (Simon; as cited in Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p. 178). After Derrida (1978), however, I allow it to stand on its own. The tension exists and is embraced. The fundamental difference between the two is that Gadamer's (as cited in Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989) interpretation is based on logocentrism, whereas Derrida spoke out against it:

> From Truth and Method on, Gadamer has recognized only two ways of speaking to the other: an unjust, sophistic way, where one's interest lies in winning an argument, and a just way where one attempts to strengthen the viewpoint of the other, speaking for the other and thus throwing oneself open to the possibility that the other might be right and one might be wrong. The 'something like ethical responsibility' in Derrida, it seems to me, opens up another positive alternative, in that it is directed toward letting the other speak. In Gadamer, one has to make a choice—either monologue or dialogue—but in Derrida, there is an alternative way of responding to the other that cuts through this either-or. (p. 53).

Derrida's "ethic of the ear" has impacted this research process and subsequent reflection.

The research process is "to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically than one usually does in everyday life, and to use the relationships between these moments in the process as a source of both improvement and knowledge" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 10). This reflective research process is "open to the complexity of experience and the layered quality of understanding" (Smits, 1994, [n.p.]), and within the

process there were moments "provoked by crisis and negativity" on the part of the facilitator. I do not offer any conclusions; however, an observation is appropriate: Finding one truth is a difficult, if not impossible, task.

Dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for [people] (Freire, 1990, p. 77). According to David Bohm (1987), in group dialogue there is a harmony of the individual and the collective in which the whole constantly moves toward coherence. The apparent boundaries between self and other or between self and meaning dissolve, and there is a free-flowing movement of meaning; all the parts move as one. This is in direct contrast to the dominant Cartesian (Western scientific) model, which sees all of reality as reducible to a set of basic elements that are, by nature, external to each other. The latter, mechanistic, view is an ontology of primary separation which sees the space between things as empty. On the other hand, in a world view in which connection is primary, the universe is understood as an "unbroken wholeness in flowing movement" (p. 5). What is generally perceived by the naked eye as 'empty space' is more accurately understood as a meaning-filled energy field with a potential far beyond that which comprises sense-perceptible matter. In other word, space is not empty at all; it is, rather, the realm of "between" to which Buber (1970) referred.

For Martin Buber (1970), this is an experience of the "between"; and at its most powerful, the dialogic process is "on the narrow ridge" where I and Thou meet; there is the realm of 'between.' Desmond (1987) referred to the sublime as being "in the middle," and Smith (1994) spoke of the "space in-between," in which there is room for something to happen or evolve, "an invitation for change" dependent upon the openness of those involved. Fear can shine the most brilliantly in that space in between; however, beauty is often an unexpected guest. The space of the middle wherein self and other are embraced may bound them, but like the embrace of love, it need not pinion them (Desmond, pp. 169-170). At any point in the dialogic process there may be a synthesis as layer by layer the dialogue goes deeper until it reaches the "flow of shared meaning." At that time

the group energy coheres. "It is before the face of another that our enjoyment becomes our own. Our own to give." (Lingis, 1994, p. 127). At other times there can be a resurfacing for safety. There may be resistance when discomfort exists. In any event, the "flow" is disturbed. Both scenarios are part of "what is." *One enters into conversation in order to become an Other for the Other.*

In the hermeneutic encounter, the relationship between seer and seen, reader and text—resulting in interpretation of, in this case, the reader and, as mentioned earlier, her transformation. There were times I wanted to turn away, to end the dialogue because of the pain and challenge. There were also times that such a closeness and deep understanding occurred that my emotions overcame me.

I draw also from Catherine M. O'Neill (1994) and her work, *Remaking the World: The Politics of Imagination in Women's Creative Expression,* where she, in her psychological approach to women's creativity, saw authentic creative expression as playing a "cutting edge cultural and political role as [women's] work enters the public world and encounters its reactions, transforming the world and themselves" (p. 15). O'Neill spoke with creative women, and through interviews, "hoped to explore the depths and edges and contours of their creative work and relational lives" (p. 15). I am unable to conduct interviews with the poets involved; however, I have followed O'Neill's process with the written word. Using the "Listener's Guide" (O'Neill, 1994), I did multiple readings of the same text, listening for the (sometimes simultaneous) presence of different themes and voices. The first reading was to hear the words, to capture some sense of the context of the writing, and simply to familiarise myself with the work. The second reading took me to a deeper level and a more intimate connection, and subsequent readings enriched my understanding of the woman and her writing, and myself.

> Resonance . . . demands something of both parties to communication, of both reader and author: an effort at feeling-thought; a willingness to engage in another world, life or idea; and ability to use one's experience . . . to try to grasp, or convey, meanings that reside neither in words, "facts," nor text but are evoked in

> the meeting of one's experiencing subject with another or with a text. (Wikan, 1992, p. 463)

And as I grapple with the question placed within academic exercise, I become frustrated. The levels operating as you read this are, at once, the thesis text and a reader and the poets' text, and me as reader. As Wikan (1992) commented, "I must create resonance between *(negleh keneh)* the reader and my text. But first, . . . I must create resonance in myself with the people and the problems I seek to understand" (p. 463). The words *negleh keneh* mean a sense of rhythm, balance, reasonableness. Wikan took this from a dialogue with members of an association in Bali devoted to the study of sacred scriptures. One was a philosopher-priest, another a professor and poet, and another a medical doctor. In this instance, I am seeking an understanding of the poets and their lives, rather than identifying a problem. I do not want to somehow pathologise another's life. To name something a *problem* might do that; and in doing so, I believe there may be a tendency to objectify and/or limit any potential. In a sense, we may be perpetuating what may be seen as a problem from the Western point of view. A professor-poet who spoke with Wikan explained resonance as that which "fosters empathy or compassion. Without resonance there can be no understanding, no appreciation. But resonance requires you to apply feeling as well as thought. Indeed, feeling is the more essential, for without feeling we'll remain entangled in illusions" (p. 463).

If I held expectations for the process and the realisation of the process in terms of this thesis, they were soon disrupted and discarded; for, as I read, my reality was altered. There is no precise manner in which to explain this, although, perhaps from exposing the process, some precision will be revealed. It became obvious to me that in order to continue, there had to be an immersion of myself in the women, their lives and work—not an immersion in the sense of losing myself, but in the sense of "being with." I anticipated a straightforward research process where I could "objectively" link the poetry to the multiple issues of peacelessness and violence. What I did not anticipate was the powerful

impact and the scattering of everything I had imagined and anticipated. As I was constructing a plan and reading the poetry, my preconceived notions of neatness and simplicity became de-constructed, and the thesis changed. And that is when the feeling began. At this juncture it is crucial to remind myself and the reader that I am building upon traditional teachings within academia. The *keneh*, which is translated by Wikan (1992) as "feeling-thought," is borrowed from the Balinese, who do not split feeling from thought, but regard both as one process:

> While they recognize in themselves feelings as distinguished from thoughts, and have concepts to differentiate the two, [they are connected]. They also suspect Westerners see it differently; that we think we can think only with our thoughts and yet arrive at some genuine insight. To Balinese, this is like 'reaching for the sky with a short string,' basing one's search for knowledge on a self-eroding foundation. Without feeling it is impossible to appreciate any situation. (p. 463)

This all echoes the North American First Nations concept of the "journey from the head to the heart," implying a need for the connection between the two, as well as personal observation. When tutoring Korean students, I saw them place their hand over their hearts when prefacing a comment with "I think . . . ." What is our shared space? How can I make this work spring alive and speak beyond illusion? Have I set for myself an impossible task?

Rather than searching the poems for messages, it became obvious that I needed only to listen, to be still and listen and experience, in Tibetan Buddhist terms, "the opening of the third ear" (Surya Das, 1997, p. 181). O'Neill (1994), when they spoke of "listening for voice," said:

> Like Rich (1979), who describes her own process of coming to know the work of Emily Dickinson, she encounters not simply a text but rather the 'heart and mind' of another; 'she comes in close contact with an interiority—a power, a creativity, a suffering, a vision—that is not identical to her own' (Schweikart, 1986, p. 52). As the narrator's words enter the listener's psyche, a process of connection begins between the narrator's thoughts and feelings and the listener's thoughts and feelings in response, so that the narrator affects the listener, who begins to learn from the narrator—about the narrator, about herself and about the world they share in common. . . . Once the listener allows the voice of another to enter her psyche, she can no longer claim a detached of 'objective' position. She is affected

> by the narrator, whose words may lead her to think a variety of things and to feel sad, or happy, or jealous or angry, or bored, or frustrated, or comforted, or hopeful. But by allowing the narrator's words to enter her psyche, the listener gains a sense of entry, an opening, a way into the story in the narrator's terms. Thus, relationship or connection, rather than blurring perspectives or diminishing judgment, signifies an opening of self to other, creating a channel for information, an avenue to knowledge. (pp. 46-47)

And through that knowledge comes the potential for transformation. I see myself as a "resisting listener" (O'Neill, 1994) in that I try to identify the voices that speak about love (care) and justice (equality/fairness):

> The resisting listener identifies the vulnerabilities inherent in conventional notions of love and justice; . . . a resisting listener attempts to extricate herself from patriarchal/androcentric logic, to create space for her struggle to redefine or 'revision' both self and relationship. (p. 48)

The development of the "third ear" is accomplished through meditation and mindfulness. An awareness of Self is cultivated through those practices that enable a genuine ability to listen. It is a paradox, because as we become more aware of self through practice, we become less "full of ourselves," and there is more room for others; the ability to be still and hear between the lines (Surya Das, 1997, pp. 180-181).

What the poet does is conceptualise or structure words/verbal symbols, perhaps motivated by an external moment that is integrated and comes from within—that poet's perspective on an issue, a subject, an event. This is a moment of aliveness as in a meditation when the words flow. How it all relates to being in that particular time and space is the creative process. Just as a painting is not to be explained, but rather viewed and dialogued with, so too the poem stands waiting for the reading/dialoguing. Through dialogue, understanding and meaning emerge.

My hope is that there be the mingling of words, themes, contexts, and writers' intentions; however, there will be, less tangible but equally important, the soul and spirit. As the work proceeded, it took on its own identity, albeit a constructed one to some

extent, that will live without support and ultimately stands on its own. The reader is essential to this work, for without a reader it is meaningless.

The multivoiced dialogue may serve to raise critical consciousness that empowers each of us to transform our realities, thereby transforming the world. The subjectivity embodied within the work/words is pluralistic and dynamic. And the most important question to date: How does this all connect to the idea of transformation? A common element is colonisation—experienced by all the poets, yet different for each. Another commonality is gender, which will encompass differences too as they emerge from different sociopolitical contexts.

There are numerous voices within this work: the voices of research, voices of poetry, social voices, individual and collective voices. What appears to have one voice actually has many. When I say that this whole endeavour has been a search for my voice, I then have to self-correct and say that I have discovered my many voices, as do the other poets, because different levels of us respond to the various levels of experience—as Bakhtin (as cited in Vice, 1997) called it, "dialogized heteroglossia" (pp. 49-55). The concept of *heteroglossia* is "the dialogue that is formed both within, without and between utterances, and is coloured by many voices from many places" (p. 49). The histories, cultures, social constructions, hopes, and expectations of all those involved are part of the dialogue. The poets Mila Aguilar, Rita Joe, and Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, and myself are heard within the holistic framework for peace education, combined with the four pedagogical principles intrinsic to that framework through the dialogic research process, which are holism, values formation, dialogue, and conscientisation (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, pp. 13-15).

I believe that this paradigm fits with the First Nations Medicine Wheel, which will be elaborated later. Also, the First Nations ethic of noninterference, a principle that means "an Indian will never interfere in any way with the rights, privileges and activities of another person" (Brant; as cited in Ross, 1992, p. 12), informs this research process. This

ethic is echoed in the Buddhist tradition of nonjudgement; that is, where "the tightness of judgement doesn't allow for the spaciousness . . . [that] bids nothing come and bids nothing stay" (Levine, 1979, p. 46), allowing the natural flow of things.

It is re-echoed in the words of Christ: "Judge not lest ye be judged." In other terms, it may be simply called "letting go." This does not imply a lack of care, compassion, or precision; but it does imply a releasing of control; and rather than attempting to improve on ourselves and others or alleviate the pain in ourselves and others, we gently release our "small minds," our fixated, limiting views, which leads to openness and expansion beyond our own angry, passionate, worried, or limiting thoughts. This openness connects to Gadamer's "being open" in the hermeneutic process and the dialogic openness advocated by Bohm, Gadamer, Buber, Desmond, and others, not the least of whom Freire, who saw this happening in the presence of love (see p. 52) for the sake of humanity and the earth. The poems stand on their own.

A certain picture is developing, one of particular shades and hues, shadow and light; the WEB of Peace Education, the web of personal experience and the web of poets; webs strung with circles (modules of meaning) that intersect, float, and entwine at different times in the process. There is the Woman's Circle, the Healing Circle, the Circle of Life, the Hermeneutic Circle. The World is a circle and each of us a grain of sand.

The significance of the circle (see Figure 1) is found across cultures and throughout the natural world, "one of the oldest mystical life metaphors" (Simpson, 1970, p. 1).

> The circle is the form of nature. In nature all things move in cycles. There are seasons, day, night, life and death, . . . the orbiting of the planets, the cycling of electrons around the nucleus of the atom. (Levine, 1979, p. 159)

As in the hermeneutic circle, the cycle "of understanding and questioning" continues, fluctuates, and flows:

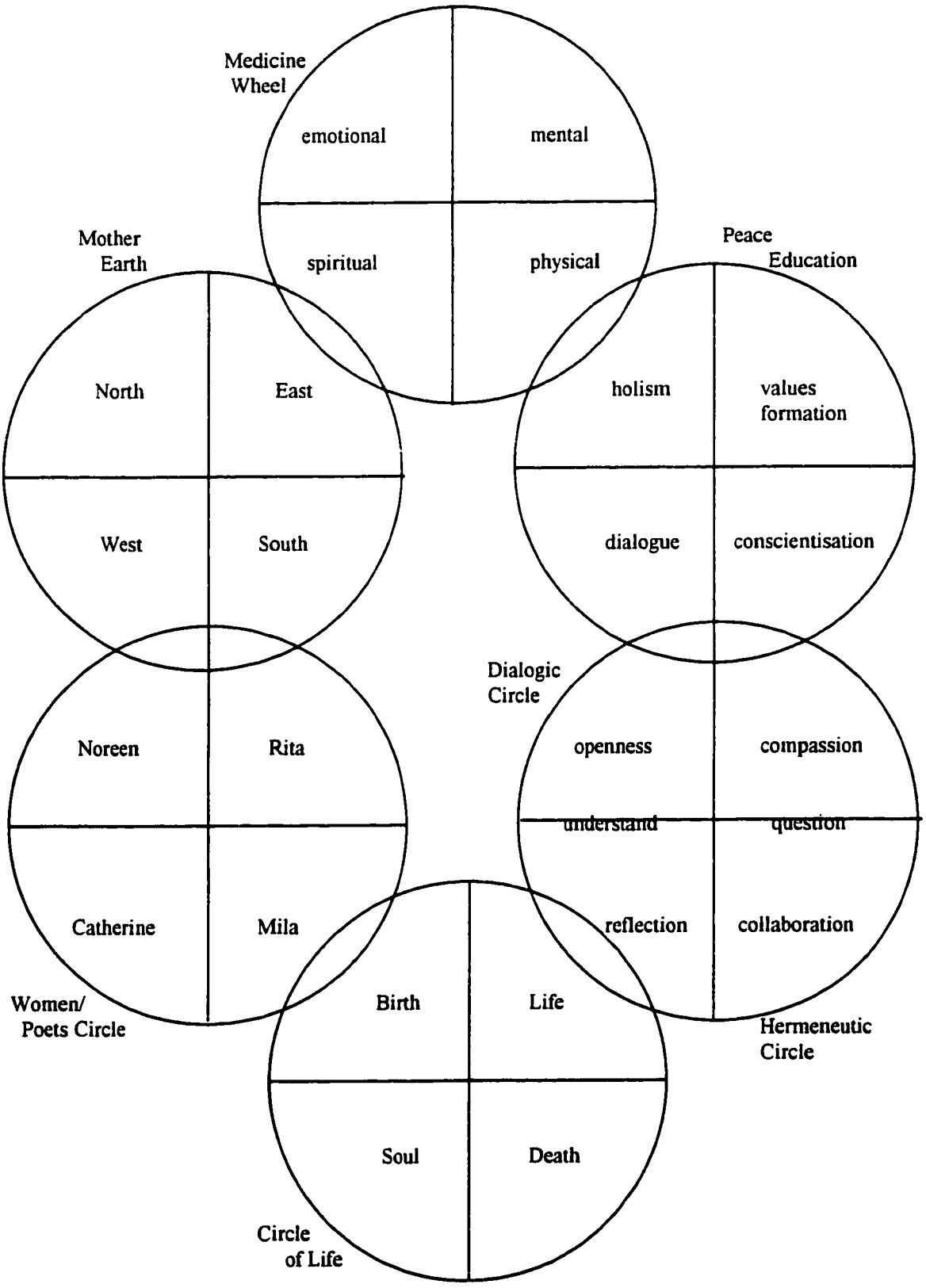

Figure 1. Intersecting circles of the research process.

> Each moment is a perfect circle. When we penetrate into the totality of the moment, we see that no point on that circle has any better vantage for seeing the rest of the circle than any other point. We see that each moment is the perfect outcome of all that has come before, the perfect predecessor of all that will follow. . . . Surrender is perfect participation in the circle. Letting go allows us to flow, to become the whole circle. (Levine, 1979, p. 160)

So the drum is a circle, the round dance, the sun, the moon, and Mother Earth.

CHAPTER IV

LOCATING THE POETS

The Philippines: Mila D. Aguilar

> The first woman in the world, Filipino indigenes believe, was born simultaneously with the first man. She emerged from nodes of the bamboo as 'Babaye' [woman], a whole person, separate from, yet born with 'Lalake' [man]. (Santiago, 1995, p. 110)

The Philippines is 300,439 square km of land and the world's second largest archipelago, with 7,107 islands scattered across 1,295,000 sq. km. The islands are clustered into three main areas—Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao- -and because of its strategic location, the Philippines has historically been a regional trading centre and cultural meeting point of the East and West. This positioning has also placed them in the position of being invaded and colonised. Over the years, Filipino peoples have been prisoners in their own land, exploited and coerced, and the "techniques and strategies used by most First World countries in their contemporary relations with the Philippines and Filipinos demonstrate that post coloniality is not yet a reality" (Hilsdon, 1995, p. 184). "A majority of Filipinos remain economically marginalized as plantation workers, fishers, farmers, and workers in the informal economy" (Santiago, 1995, p. 113). Workers are paid subsistence wages, and social safety nets are unknown. In metro Manila, millions of people live in slums. With the US support of the Marcos government, which began in 1965 and lasted for 20 years, and the physical US presence of military bases until 1992, US imperialism has been a focus for protest by Philippine nationalists.

In 1994 the population was 64.2 million people, primarily of Indo-Malay, Chinese, and Spanish descent. This population is concentrated mainly in the larger cities and the climatically favoured areas of the country. Manila is the highest in human congestion, with 14% of the population living there (Miron, 1997, p. 37). The culture is a multiplicity of ethnic groups, with more than 100 recognised. The majority of Filipinos are Christian,

primarily Roman Catholic, with the largest minority group being Muslim and hill tribes. The social stratification in the Philippines is so sharp that, rather than the lines of delineation falling along the three usual—upper, middle, lower—classifications, there are simply two categories: rich and poor. Although women comprise 51% (Miron, 1997, p. 38) of the population, this does not mean than they have power within the context of their country with access to power and resources than men (Miron, 1997).

I attended a feminist meeting on the east coast of Canada a few years ago and heard a young Filipino woman's story. She quietly told us about her mother, still in the small fishing village in the Philippines. The fisher folk have been left destitute and hopeless by transnational exploitation; therefore, this young woman's mother "ordered" her to leave. She was willing to sacrifice the possibility of ever seeing her daughter again to save her from what would have surely been a life of prostitution to survive. As Goodno (1991) observed, "The scene varies from place to place, but has two common denominators—poverty and oppression" (p. 1). My daughter Carolyn travelled to the Philippines during her studies in global education. When she returned she was changed and shared her stories with me, not all at once, but piecemeal; but I managed to get this picture: As they jiggled along in the *jeepnee* toward their destination, they talked and laughed. Gradually, they became aware of a smell, a slight odour in the air, and as they continued it became stronger and stronger until it was difficult to inhale for fear of inhaling the stench it had become. They were visiting Smoky Mountain on the outskirts of Manila. When she telephoned prior to this visit, the voice was blasé. Not after. And I in my ignorance thought that Smoky Mountain was some sort of resort (why do we go to the mountains in Canada?). The stench revealed itself as a mountain of smoking garbage, edged by shanties and covered with children and adults fighting the bulldozers for scraps that might be usable as food or trade. While visiting Smoky Mountain, she was invited into a home that was simply boards and dirt. She was offered, with smiles of generosity, a Coca Cola and heard the strains of Ian Tyson singing "Four Strong Winds" over a radio. In other places

she saw children layered against the wall of a "house" trying to catch a glimpse of the television that lived there. The urine and feces ran in rivulets down the drains between houses. I saw it too; she brought pictures. And what moved me the most were the children, smiling, happy, and dirty, immersed in a poverty beyond my imagination. I know this may sound patronising or condescending, but I am always amazed at the children's spirit no matter the situation. She brought back a little basket, woven from scraps of paper found on the "mountain," which had been sold for almost nothing in an attempt to make a living. She told me of visiting other homes where chauffeur-driven cars were the norm and the children went to private posh schools. I think it was the discrepancies that struck her the most, and her anger was big. I remember most the poor children, but also how the wealthy children were also losing out on their potential to contribute to a just society. I decided then that I had to visit the Philippines, to focus my research on some facet of that country, but it did not happen.

Mila D. Aguilar refused to be bought or silenced during the Marcos era, and her poetry emerges from this complex, confused, beautiful country which embodies all of the human frailties and strengths of her poetry. She began writing poetry at the age of nine and taught until her arrest. She was charged before three courts, one for "rebellion," one for "subversion," and another for "illegal possession of subversive documents" over the time span of 1982-1986. She was imprisoned in August 1984 and detailed until February 27, 1986, when President Corazon Aquino ordered the release of 39 political prisoners.

Audre Lorde (1984), in the Introduction to *A Comrade Is as Precious as a Rice Seedling*, noted that she did "not expect to be caught so personally and so directly in the week of [Mila's] passion" and that she became "literally entwined in the struggle of the Filipino people" (preface). These struggles include peacelessness in the form of militarisation and structural violence, "the export-oriented policy of allowing transnational corporations easy and cheap access to Filipino land, mineral, forest or sea resources" (Toh

& Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 13). Men and women are forced to seek work outside the Philippines, adding humanity as an export in an export-driven economy. The issues of human rights (including women's rights) demand a "political literacy" not only to empower individuals, but also to make clear that respect of others who are weaker actually strengthens a country, therefore cultivating a cultural solidarity and a stronger future: "Militarism, political oppression, exploitative economic arrangements and a range of other aggressive acts have been traced to defensive psychological reactions stemming from deep-seated fear and self-loathing" (Spretnak, 1993, p. 46). These varied forms of peacelessness reinforce the need for personal peace and the subsequent development of "harmony with people and harmony with nature" (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 28).

Rita Joe

There are roles of conduct that stir the mind
And people sleeping a long time.
Why do they awaken?
They see the way:
Their thoughts breathe
Their words dance on the page
Their power to ease the heart
In lifting the soul to help
Across this country, this age.
(Rita Joe, 1996, p. 125)

Canada's First Nations peoples are varied and defy and survive the classification system that has been imposed upon them post-contact. As Olive Dickason (1993) commented, the problem arises in the interpretation of peoples by the European colonisers. Labels such as *Cree, Huron, Beaver*, and *Haida*, were imposed by Europeans and do not represent how the people termed themselves, at least aboriginally (p. 15). It is certainly beyond the scope of this work to present a complete First Nation's History; however, to understand others, it is crucial to know their personal and collective narratives.

The Mi'kmaq of the Canadian eastern coast were once agricultural peoples, but by the 16th century they were "hunters and gatherers on the land and sea" (Dickason, 1993, p. 47). The cosmology of the people strongly held the belief of the interconnectedness of all living things, which led to the very important belief in hospitality. These basic beliefs were frowned upon by the European colonisers, who viewed the "Indian" as *l'homme sauvage* who had to be "civilised" and "conquered." They were all that stood between the Europeans and all that beautiful land after which they lusted. These two belief systems could not communicate through speech; therefore many misconceptions arose on both sides which, as we know, ultimately led to the near destruction, and in some cases the genocide, of peoples. The lack of communications still exists in the form of racism and anger.

Rita Joe (1996) said it succinctly in the preface of one of her "sung poems":

> I am a Native person struggling with the thought of the
> so-called "discovery" of my people, and I envision the
> event differently from the non-native. Our reception of the
> the non-natives was in good faith. We still feel the effects of
> our offer of the land, and the humiliation of Aboriginals continues
> today, just as it has at any given time of contact with non-natives.
> Five hundred years is a long time for us to bend to your wishes.
> . . . Five hundred years is a long time to take to learn that we are
> not the bad ones in this story. (p. 176)

Marcia Crosby (1994) told us that

> the legal definition of the term 'Indian' was first defined 'by statute of May 2, 1874' through 'an act providing for the organization of the Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, and for the management of the Indian and Ordinance lands, S.C.'" (p. 108)

This action eventually evolved into the Indian Act.

> The Indian First Nations people viewed as a homogenous whole wedges us into historical setting and geographical place—reserves. The laws pertaining to the many nations contained within the large singular Indian. Yet, despite our national differences, we are bonded together in a shared resistance to colonial hegemony. Michael Asch draws attention to one of the ways in which the breadth of diversity of Native Cultures is signalled vis-à-vis international one. The National Indian

> Brotherhood was changed to the Assembly of First Nations, symbolizing a confederation of distinct national entities, to counter the legislative language of the Indian Act. However, I recognise the accepted usage of the term "Indian" by many First Nations people and respect the right of self-definition. (p. 109)

Rita Joe is a Mi'kmaq born in 1931 on the Whycocomagh Reserve in Nova Scotia. Mi'kmaq is her first language, but she has written poetry and prose in both Mi'kmaq and English. Her motivation for writing emerged from being a mother who had concerns about her children and about the experiences of Native people in mainstream society. One day her daughter came home from school and told Rita Joe that she was quitting, despite her family's pride in her achievements. That day a teacher had asked the young woman, "Since you are a Mi'kmaq, will you please explain why your people, in this case, practiced cannibalism?" Rita Joe (1978) wrote that day:

> *But let the words die, that were written*
> *So my children may see*
> *The glories of their forefathers,*
> *And share the pride of history*
> *That they may learn*
> *The way of their ancestors,*
> *And nourish the quiet way.* (p. 21)

I was a little girl when I first saw Indians on the street of Kenora, Ontario—different—and I saw them through my mother's White adult eyes. Even then I knew something was very wrong. I see them still, in memory and on streets in other cities, and here where I live now. *Kelowna* means Bear in the Okanagan tongue. As it was in Kenora, the racial boundaries are clear here. And under the facade, there is a murmur that occasionally bursts into full voice. For example, a service man who was standing in my house after making a delivery stated very clearly that "he had never met a decent Indian." It is not my intention to cast Kelowna as a racist town. There is plenty of evidence available; I do not need to do that. This is an example, I believe, of the type of racial undertow that First Nations' peoples across Canada have to endure.

I know now that the First Nations people of Kenora are Ojibway. In Rupert Ross' (1992) book *Dancing with a Ghost*, he told of a workshop that was organised on a northern reserve to discuss the sexual abuse of children. One of the participants, a woman from another Ojibway community, came forward to speak, indicating that she chose to speak in Ojibway, not English, for two reasons:

> 1) so that the Elders present would be able to understand what she said; 2) because Ojibway is a "softer language." First Nations' languages are not noun-oriented, but verb-oriented and as such do not "freeze a person within a certain classification for the rest of his life," as every person is a "thing-which-is-becoming" not a "thing-which-is." "From this perspective, no one can be written off because of what they did at a particular moment in time. Instead, since each person is always 'some-in-the-making,' it becomes everyone's duty to assist in that process." (pp. 163-164)

Rita Joe (1996) experienced harsh personal beginnings. She was "orphaned at age 5, [grew] up in a series of bleak foster homes, [survived] the years at residential school and a difficult marriage" (p. 9). Her way of dealing with these realities is to write:

> *I wrote in verse what bothered me*
> *the lies recorded in history*
> *And beautiful words became my tool.* (Rita Joe, 1991, p. 28)

And, as she said, writing is her way of healing the past; otherwise it will overshadow us "like a bird of prey." Rita Joe continued to write her life to heal herself and her people. As Penny Petrone (1990) commented, Rita Joe wrote "always with children in mind, and for others to understand the rights of her people to education and dignity. . . . [Her] reflections on her life and the changes experienced by a once-proud and self-sufficient people reveal thoughtful sensitivity" (p. 133).

There are many First Nations writers of poetry and prose who could be mentioned here. I have read many Aboriginal women poets and have had a difficult time connecting to any particular one's work. In frustration, I decided to set the decision aside for a time until I could be more rational and reasonable about the process. Shortly after setting the question aside, Rita Joe's autobiography was given to me.

Rita,
you were given to me
by a friend
our hearts beat in time
despite our different blood.

Rita Joe was born, as mentioned earlier, in 1931 on the Whycocomagh Reserve in Nova Scotia. Her mother died when she was five years old, which precipitated Rita's placement in a series of foster homes. She experienced physical and sexual abuse in some of these homes, and at the age of 12 she decided to attend the Shubenacadie Residential School run by the Roman Catholic Church, a decision she does not regret despite some of her experiences while there.

I lost my talk
The talk you took away
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie School. (Rita Joe, 1996, p. 55)

Perhaps it is this quality that I admire most in Rita Joe, her ability to find something good in virtually every situation:

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me. (Rita Joe, 1996, p. 55)

She was married at 21 years of age and raised four sons and six daughters during her 36-year marriage. She received the Order of Canada in 1990, and everywhere she travels, she encourages the children she meets to write down their feelings. Her life was translated onto the stage in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* by George Ryga:

> Ecstasy of Rita Joe was commissioned by the Vancouver Playhouse for Canada's Centennial Year, and was the first play performed in the new National Arts Centre in Ottawa in 1969 before an audience which included Prime Minister Trudeau and the assembled provincial premiers. It has been broadcast and televised by the CBC. Commissioned by the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood to mark the centenary of the signing of Indian Treaties 1 and 2, a ballet version of Rita Joe was presented by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet at the Centre's Opera House in 1971. Since its debut, this outstanding Canadian play has been frequently produced both abroad and across Canada and always to acclaim. Furthermore, it has achieved the remarkable

distinction of crossing the Canadian cultural barrier, having been translated into French by Gratien Gelinas. (*Rita Joe*, 1999)

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu

we all await our turns
in the journey into
apocalypse
(In This Concentration Camp)

Catherine was born in 1951 in Tmo State and educated in Nigeria and Düsseldorf. She is a novelist, playwright, poet, and teacher. She has lived and taught in the United States, as well as being principal lecturer in the English Department at Alvin Ikoku College of Education in Owerri, Nigeria. She names herself "feminist" but is clear in saying,

> I am of the opinion that the presentation of the African woman as oppressed, suppressed, by a male dominated system in which she has no rights, no respect and a status subordinate to that of the man is a dangerous misrepresentation of the true state of affairs, a negation of the diversity and variety of issues surrounding her position and experience in the different cultures in which she finds herself. Again, by and large, anthropological evidence and evidence from literature has tended to show that the African woman enjoyed and, in some cases, still enjoys a privileged position in her society, hardly to be conceived by her Western counterparts. (Acholonu, 1991, p. 2)

However, her poetry reflects the violence that her country has endured; and when she writes of rape, "another form of slaughter"(African National Congress, 1995, p. 37), it is not difficult to see it as metaphor for what Nigeria has experienced:

when innocent virgins
basking in the sun
suddenly wake up to
greedy eyes
lecherous tongues
and devouring breath . . .

but heavy boots
are at their heels
heaving chests pin
them down
then greedy hands
rummaging . . .

unfolding a lustful era
of anarchic bestiality.

(*Other Forms of Slaughter;* as cited in Chipasula & Chipasula, 1995, pp. 66-67)

This research began with the Ogoni (and Ken Saro Wiwa), just one of the hundreds of marginalised communities around the world. Catherine is Igbo. Nigeria is composed of 250 different ethnic groups.

> The Islamic religious philosophy and the Arab culture were greatly at variance with African religious and cultural philosophy. . . . Whatever the intentions of the prophet [Mohammed] may have been, the fact remains that this form of religious colonialism has left the African woman worse off than she would ever have dreamed is possible. (Acholonu, 1991, p. 30)

Christianity and African cultures have co-existed, but less than ideally:

> For example, while the church was preaching and demanding nonattachment to 'idols' of traditional religions, the colonialists and the missionaries were carting off these same 'worthless' idols to their home museums and personal galleries as valuable artifacts. (Acholonu, 1991, p. 33)

While Muslims dominate the north and Christians the south of Nigeria (a division reversed but replicated in the Philippines), tensions have always existed. Great Britain, the first coloniser, granted Nigeria her independence in 1960, which was followed by the Biafran War, 1967-1970. The next coloniser was transnational corporations intent on bleeding Nigeria's oil-rich lands. The governments of Nigeria over time have allowed Royal/Dutch Shell (the primary exploiter of the nation) to get away with "cost-cutting manoeuvres that would be illegal" (Sachs, 1996, p. 16) in most countries. In fact, the transnationals have replaced the British by controlling the government in power with the promise of personal wealth, both oblivious to the needs and human rights of Nigerian citizens. Nigeria has

spent 25 of its 36 years since independence under military governments. In 1993 the victory of Chief Moshood Abiola was annulled, and the government was taken over by General Sani Abacha, who banned all elected bodies and all political activity.

It seems appropriate to me that Catherine Obianuju Acholonu is the third poet included since the project began with Ken Saro Wiwa. As Acholonu (1991) said, "The world has much to learn from the mother (elder) continent. . . . Africa holds the missing link to the threat of global extinction brought upon us by Western synthetic and materialistic epistemology" (pp. 42-43).

CHAPTER V

THE EMERGENT DIALOGUE

Introduction

The dialogue that follows is a process embedded in the personal and the political. I would have preferred to include complete poems; however, the constraints of copyright mean that I have included only portions of poems that resonated. Adrienne Rich (1974), on poetry, said that there are many things that happen in a good poem.

> There's sound and rhythm and language used in an original way. . . . A really good poem opens up a possibility for other poems rather than being the end of a succession of things. Instead of wrapping something up, it explodes the possibilities. (p. 117)

The poems included in the following dialogue did that; their words seemed to explode within me and more words emerged from me. It might have continued to evolve if not for time limitations, for each time I revisited the dialogue things changed until I finally had to not look at it any more. What is included is merely a tiny morsel of the potential. As mentioned earlier, I have read many poets and books on poetry and language; however, these three poets were the ones who became part of the process. After I read the poems many times, the images that impacted on me the most were the ones to which I responded. Perhaps in a different time and space other works would speak more clearly to me, and my response might be very different. My poetry, of course, is informed by my personal experience, as is theirs. The dialogue is a result of a creative process in conjunction with a critical awareness, for without this awareness I would not have been able to respond either. I would not have begun this journey if not for my belief in peace education. The textual relationship was deepened by discoveries of differences and commonalities. I wanted this dialogue to be an example of the transformative paradigm and the power of poetry. It seems appropriate to me that the poets come from the Philippines, First Nations, and Nigeria, because those nations have been where my interest for social change and

political awareness has been the most deeply connected and my intent the clearest. As for me, I am the North trying to connect with the South. The themes that emerged are addressed postdialogue.

Mila Aguilar

there is a certain
order in the universe
that you can only push
so much.

And so waiting
for the rising sun

they mess up lives
and in the process
blind themselves.
(Machismo)

Excuse me, there's been a serious mistake
mother always said
"heap burning coals upon their heads"
but forgot to mention
no sense, no feeling
so coal after coal after coal
changes nothing
we are placed
where the sun don't shine
or
buried with kindness
the type bestowed upon beasts
appreciate it!!
oh we try and try and try
dipped in treacle
swabbed in fragrant oils
we paint unknown women upon our faces
to face the facts

But hands must hold
gun
then pen,
then gun again,
cupping in another way
harder goals.
(Someone There Is)

I became repoliticized
when she said
John wouldn't let me have the
car tonight, at the last minute
and her soft voice hung
uncertainly in the kitchen
where we gathered to celebrate
another woman friend's birthday which had been dampened
because she was upset by her ex-husband
taking the kids away whenever he wants
to create a family with his new wife
and we sit
with the crumbs of the cake surrounding us.

I become repoliticized when hearing the
phrase
that fat fuck
and how he breaks her glasses so she cannot
leave the house
and if she could leave
she could not communicate with anyone
stupid woman you know
and hearing a young man yelling from his car
get in here now BITCH
and another woman's tears as incestuous memories
wash over her
we are sitting among the crumbs of cake.

I become repoliticized when the women
turned up at the polls
and los Madres de Plaza de Mayo held weekly vigils
despite the danger
And Rigoberta Menchu won the Nobel Peace Prize
and when you reached into my soul
like Shakespeare's sister

reminding me
that we all
sit among the cake crumbs.

Over here we are able to laugh
because we can see not only the good side
but the sad.
Just plain dialectical materialism.
No idealism,
no romance.
(Orientation: No Romance)

can we talk
or will heaven and earth
crumble
evaporate from our truths
time we need time
and mercy shall follow?
or will it?
cups runneth over
trees splinter
crash into rivers
stones melt
mountains flatten
as we search for a better
resting place

Manila: metropolis mushrooming
Not out of any dream
But the sweat of millions
On hot steel machines
And the toil of millions more
On placid-fertile greens.
(Pall Hanging over Manila)

whose body is remembered
in these words
so strung together
on an invisible cord
cat gut strong
this is an old story
exhausted with repetition
worn out through the telling
human driven weapons
stop our breath

take this bread
eat in memory of me
and this blood drink
remember
redemption is not an option

do not give your strength to women
subdue your qualms about killing
choke them with your deaf ears.

A dialectics is
cherishing the work
that has yet to be done
prizing each and every comrade 's life
(Dialectics)

It was on a farm during the fall. The land turning colour and the sky so big everything seemed possible. The only time a gun has been in my hands, the butt of it heavy against my shoulder. The breeze off the lake, fresh. The geese honking in the distance; the reason the guns were out. My brothers used to shoot rabbits; mesmerize them with the car headlights and blow them into bits of flesh and matter against the prairie snow. I couldn't sleep those nights. My quarry on this fall day was a tin can sitting neatly upon a stump. Pull the trigger. It fought against my finger and once fired, the butt of the rifle kicked back against my shoulder, knocked me to the ground to shouts of hilarity from the observers. My body hurt for five days, four days more than the ringing in my ears lasted. So I wonder, how can you, small woman of great stature, wield the weapons in your fight for freedom, and does the goal, that is seriousness of the battle, imbue you with some strength I could not dredge up for a tin can, for the fun of trying it, for the need to belong?

One chooses
what to hear
and then again
what one hears
one can silence
because
one has chosen
(Understanding)

your words opened a few windows
pressured and prodded
released my violence into
a puff of smoke
memory as genesis
a minor voice says

your enemies are your teachers
take an experience
hide it
only to be looked at
touched
on special occasions
when the knowledge
will not shatter you

Funny how
little things
Sometimes amuse us,
though they carry
meanings bigger
than we thought
(The Chicken and the Coop)

Remember
that some things
    hurt
more after you notice them.

Sometimes it seems
the only defence left
is to return to the silence
of a mother's womb
(Haikus in Solitary Confinement)

if silence could be written
how to pen
    falling snow
    a tear
the space between
    drum and baton or
the moment just before:
    a note
    a hand strikes
    a bomb hits
    a decision to resist
    silence is supplication
        medication
        abdication
a rock
a tomb
the womb

or simply the absence of noise
then
is peace only the absence of war?

When the heart hardens
the face hardens with it;
the bones stick out, poised to strike . . .
and that is how beauty is wasted.

But how I love you still
(To a woman province mate)

I have no time for the tropics now
no need to feel the equator sun
looking into her face hard
her eyes ask softly
Why?
we have no voices to
fight the spectre of the future
and her silencer walks
unknown to me
half a world away
proving Gluck's theory
if a butterfly flaps its wings
if a man rapes a woman
in one part of the world
its effects are felt
in another.

Have I touched your life,
has the wind from the mountain of my soul
rustled through your leaves
like mayas on a ledge
moving like rhythmical mannequins,
have I rested your tired eyes?
(The People 's Poem)

I try to hide in the house
away from the whispering
your words squeeze through the cracks
gently push in the windows
to sit upon the mantle
closer to the truth than one might imagine
they arrange themselves
quietly beside the ornaments of middle class

I try to escape into the shower
where syllables bounce off white porcelain
pour over me from the nozzle
different from Auschwitz-Birkenau
but forced to die
I open my eyes to greet you
looking back at me
through the mirror fog

After the first torrent
amidst a sky foreboding further
ill,
has my chirping chipped the stillness
tell me have I given?
(The People 's Poem)

You have rested my tired eyes
You have given of your strength
your self, to the point of sacrifice
isolation and imprisonment in free verse.
please let me place a bandage
where it hurts the most
perhaps to forget
wrap ourselves in the
velvet cloak of language
no matter what it means
not measured by
the yardstick of others
the clock keeps ticking
we find solace in one another.

Dialectics is
surmounting every difficulty
be the difficulty
desire or need.
(Dialectics)

Are there words to describe
you who have lived the fire heart rage,
against your stolen sweat?
If there are, I will speak them,
but I find myself speechless.
Sing on,
repeat yourself

until you are heard.
My eyes and ears are
open to your cadence.

You are a foreigner indeed,
foreign to the rhythm of our struggle.
In the face of class murder
how can we be lyrical?
(To a Foreigner)

the layers dissolved
by your words
my discomfort with hypocrisy
wraps its tentacles
around my tongue
numbs my hyperbole
metaphor rendered useless
only shame remains

in my white nightgown
bodice of seed pearls
I lie upon a snow white bed
with lace edged coverlet
and pillows to match and
wallow in privilege

The point is
to transform the world
not to escape it
(Dialectics)

It's gone time
full of unchangeable things
that moved us through
what appeared to be real
and proved to be only
a shadow of what might
have been
It's gone time
tears long dried
crystalize
the world within
making rainbows

Rita Joe

Now we have maskwi and kowi[11]
to make quillboxes
the art of my people standing the ages
the skill like no other
(The Art of Making Quillboxes)

the quill box tucked away in a drawer,
moved from place to place,
with a vague promise of repair.
has a disengaged lid,
detached
broken
its true function lost.
Tucked away its beauty lost,
going to waste to itself and to the world.
go! find it!
feel the maskwi against your skin
run your fingers over the Kowi leaf and berry
the Braille of history
makes me weep

There is a way to hold rake, wrist in motion
Or to bend your back, legs wide moving forward
Spacing your wind, going easy, your spirit cool
In spite of the sun on back, riding your shadow.
(Migration Indian)

my mother's anger
drives me out to the garden
stuffs up my nose
blurs my eyesight obscuring
the beauty
while I automatically
pick green peas
pull weeds
cut flowers
oblivious to the
sun on my back.

---

[11] *Maskwi* and *kowi* are Micmac for birchbark and quills.

. . . the picture will stay in everybody's mind
Providing our identity
Like the signature of a wigwam
Resting at the edge of the wood.
(Indian Sketch)

in her moccasins
She walked over the rock
through the woods gently
and into my life

we walk along
a walkway lined with cedar trees
between settlements
passing through it I know I can die content.

the revelation at the lake does
not strike like a thunder bolt
but like a dream or a vision.
Although not searching for anything, I see what is needed.
And when I attempt to hold the idea tightly,
it vanishes
but like an internal drum that beats out the message:
Siknoqkwa tasi.[12]

I do not teach hate
The solid part of one's identity
Is communication
Exchanging words or touch
(A Solid Part of One's Identity)

You sing
of ancestors
they speak from
the trees, the rocks
sky and earth talk
in rhythms
listen

[12] Micmac, meaning "I am tired of hearing myself."

She has immediate ideas of the poor Indian
the stereotype in progress
She does not know I sense ill will
So gently I turn around and walk out
(Prejudice is something we can do without)

If I were to speak about the delicacy of the human spirit
loud voices might make testimonies to its strength
I could not argue
a paper butterfly arrived today
one dimensional wrapped in newsprint
this monarch appeared
artificial orange
captivating imagination
survivor from the cold
a messenger of mutual funds
what language does white speak?
this is not a myth
did you know that
there are places in this world we say we love
where poets receive sulphur injections
to keep their lips from moving?
can this be true?
silently they write until
their writing tools are taken
without their hands they no longer transform the blank pages
but only think until they disappear completely vapour vapour
snow: noun: frozen particles of water that fall in the form of white flakes
[slang] to deceive or mislead
power brokers co-opt nature to sell
themselves in flashy brochures
with examples of flexibility and
environmental adaptability; to survive you
adapt with determination and resourcefulness
you too can flourish if you invest your dollars in the future
this is not a myth
not long ago not far away
when speaking Cree
was considered a crime against the state
children were subjected to the powers of
persuasion in the form of needles
through their tongues
now their children nail kittens to trees just outside of town
where I walk through the whiteness
under the sun flanked by sun dogs

like Jesus and his malefactors
in the hoar frost drifting off the trees
momentary diamonds
crystals without a future
If I were to speak about the delicacy of the human spirit
loud voices might cry out testimonies to its strength
I could not argue

My daughter says she didn't have it hard
But again only one person did her wrong
And upon seeing her in later years
this person hugged and cried
My daughter knew the healing song.
(Indian Residential Schools)

you have joined the many
and what of other mothers/daughters/sisters
who only have memories
where I still have your voice;
even though your laugh is stilled.
for nine months we shared a heartbeat
now we share a silent weeping
to survive
or not:
there is a certain liberation in that too.
you have no laughter
i have no voice
so carefully i
tuck books filled with other
women's words under my pillow
and disregard the murmurs
this won't help your dreams
i lie staring at the maps on the ceiling
oh god! if there is one
the winter sky must have influenced Vermeer
the pine trees are crying tonight
there must be something for us
the next morning i awake to
a gift from the big tabby
who sits smugly smiling just beyond
the tiny mice form perfect in every way
only worried to death

Lay on the grass
Mold your body to it, relaxing,
the spiritual in effect
And look at the sky,
the lazy roll of a cloud passing by
with pictures of dreams your mind wills
the reward of nature
Gives you high high.
(Learning the Language)

the day hangs over the evergreen hills
the wind sharpens the lake
and Mother Earth waits
for one thread pulled
unravels everything
looking back on some days
i become a steel rod
unable to think beyond the rage
of the giver to get
who never gets enough
the metal of those days
leaves the world less
you cannot hurt steel
only melt it
under extreme temperatures
on other days
looking back is only a device
to get through
there is no reward
at the end of
every backward glance
the truth is less revealed
salt cakes at the corners of my mouth
so i try to walk looking straight ahead
while the hills still
embrace the lake behind me
waves dissolve the sand castles
under the ponderosa pines
high! high!

And being closer to the stars at night
And reading dreams
On interpretation, on what is right.
(On Being Original)

last night in a dream
I saw the oldest poem
the world has ever heard
copper coloured stone
tablets neatly rowed
across and down
weathered against the universe
at once
memorials of Moses and
worlds on the heads of pins
sappho like fragments

I've caught up with myself
That is why I am here
Poetry is my tool
I create as I go
(Kiskmsi' Ahead of Myself)

the big pine
teaches me
four directions
sing on the winds
laugh from blades of grass
chant in the tears of a friend
the fog surges forward
hiding my impatience for the sun

The battered women in all walks of life are there
. . . we women, by association
Always stand together.
(Battered Women)

born out of sun
solitude
and darkness
a peaceful one
is birthed by your words
and freedom explodes
from within.

I know the cultured spirits in our country
Move like the wind, unseen but felt
A gentle caress moving mountains,
into another century.
(Oka)

we share the same beginnings
locked in our skulls no matter
        where we live
the earth under our bare feet
the sun at its zenith
heats up the rocks
fills the air with
grass and sea
everything oozes
Daliesque,
blurring our edges
        cowling our tongues
This is where the world
        began for us
        not a dull genesis
after sunset
we inhale the sweetness
and hear the spirits sing

I join the dance, sometimes closing my eyes
Dancing the elderly woman dance
My feet flat, close to the earth
The song takes a long time to end
And we dance

the drummers drum
        as I join
the round dance
bare feet moving slowly
        rhythmically
on cool green earth
and the spirit moves
from the bottoms
        of my feet
weaving
my blood vessels
growing flowers on the pain
they reach my heart
and lovingly create
a shroud of greenery
to keep it from
shattering.

When I walk away from the floor
My feet are light, I walk on air
and I feel fear
I explain this feeling to a medicine man
"You have been in a ceremonial healing dance"
he says, "Sit the next one out"
(The Pow-Wow in Shubenacadie)

sitting on the edge of the waveless lake
the only sound, ducks breaking the surface
diving for food.
The hills a hazy interruption between the lake and sky.
"Why am I here?"
to breathe in the anguish of the world,
the wars, the pain,
the corruption and struggle.
filled to overflowing—
I exhale love and peace into the universe.
and become light

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu

and shall we
twenty years from now
have learned from this
or simply forget the pain
when the wound is closed

there are wounds
that never heal you know
(Biafra Days)

Your souvenir is carried
contraband in
your heart slow pumping
blood through stiffening veins
slurring your speech
then you set it on the table
mixed with cigarette smoke and
steam from our coffee
a memento mori
making me gasp for air
and what are poets for in a destitute time
when by default all gods have fled?

punctuated by recognition
your souvenir opens
my old wound.

now the man is without a tongue
only a dripping stump of a tongue
slit off
for wagging too loud
blood and saliva
effervesce into corrosive foam
and a mouth is twisting
in a desperate bid to make a sound
(The man died tomorrow)

with a soft determined pressure
I am submerged and
panic quivers slightly
in the paleness and
greenness of the
watery silence
a few bubbles dream toward the surface
breathing my way to death.

my sealed lips break open
and I hear as from miles away
the song of water woman
now the rumbling of thunder
causes the waters to open
(Water Woman)

your god
my god
he/she
yin/yang
solid as the earth
elusive as air
speaking in trees
humming from rocks
ringing with sounds
from the burnt edges of time

listen to the trees in the forest
and remember what they say
(thus says afa)

in my father's house are many mansions
malingering in every corner
plaster of paris symbols of
a solid white substance made with
powder and water and time
beware of icons with their
innocent smiles that entice you
unheeding your penitent cries
for salvation

oh God of all creation
grant us this one request
help us to be a nation
where no one man is oppressed
and so with peace and plenty
nigeria may be blessed
(The man died tomorrow)

nothing can touch the slime inside
that edges toward the surface
sludge trickles down limbs
clogging
sealing any opportunity
pain lodged forever
caresses like branding irons
raises a putrid steam
in a windowless room
splayed against
the flesh digging brick wall
reptilian hands claw for an opening

there are other forms
of slaughter
you know

when hands of sandpaper
jar at tender tendons
of daughter drums
(Other forms of slaughter)

the travel guide
is filled with facts
about currency, food
and
where to sleep

do not go to isolated places alone

the tropical illustrations
of foliage and markets
pests and annoyances
and the masks
all eyes and teeth not one
ingratiating smile
under the canopy of sun
above the steamy earth
mystery for tourist walls

strangulation is the slow weapon of sadism
a folk is being annihilated
and the world looks on
(In this concentration camp)

do not give your strength to women
subdue your qualms
about killing only
make them choke on your power

The old woman
I asked to watch
my child for me
is busy counting her teeth
did I ask her to eat it
I must take back my child
before she bites off his head
(Do you stop to ask—why?)

a good mother is not afraid
she is clothed in scarlet
fine purple linen
and knows the emperor has no clothes
a questionable wisdom when
world sites watch the unborn
ripped from their mother's bellies
babies burned as garbage
all the jewels precious jewels
his loved and his own[13]

Something is taking its course
wailing echoes
and re-echoes
through long corridors
of life and death
where four roads meet
where two roads cross
where four roads meet
there is coming
and there is going[14]
(Harvest of War)

the boy
looking out at me
from the newspaper
his arms crossed
eyes compelling
me to notice his clothes
hanging in rags around
his slim frame

he stands firm
upon the soil hot
on the bottoms of his feet
feels the sun that
governs his day and warms
that place between shoulder blades
tired
drenched in the solar air

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[13] Words taken from a hymn of my childhood called *When He Cometh.*

[14] Cannot ignore the connection with the four roads of First Nations tradition.

that erupts from the dust
and drips from the sky
to living earth

listen and hear
nothing
nothing but the clatter
of hurrying footsteps
behind you
echoing though the night
(Man Alone)

The snow falls so heavy and so fast
i cannot see where i am going
or where i have been
upon this cold desert
they appear
heads bowed
backs bent
one man leaves a legless trail
the eyes of the children
burn bright with hunger or
fear
women balance belongings on their heads
walk straight through the cold grasp of time
they silently move around me
standing in this dusky city where
curtains are drawn against the night
and the skies give forth a sound

singing of beauty
this day and age
is like
dancing to a dead tune
(Song of Beauty)

the juice from the orange
slips out the corners of my mouth
and candle flames flicker as
my fingers try to catch each drop
while the tide of humanity
drifts across the plains and
through the trees
burnt images on the insides of my eyes

figures shadow dance around the table
crucified against the African sky
blood irrigates the land
where some lay motionless
as if asleep
tiny bodies with perfect little heads turned
as if waiting to be touched

I see a rose
blossom
by a dung heap
I see a rose

and I hear
the song of
ajo anumu
the song of death
(Song of Beauty)

i walk into
what feels like nuclear ash
falling from a distant agony
toward strips of blue
mounting the horizon
and hear the wire buggy
AWOL from the neighbourhood Safeway
as it grinds toward me
his gaze unwavering
mocks my middle class
over green garbage bags

that night i dream
of vats of blood and
dive and surface
in their reflection
to hear the grocery cart
beneath my window
tears of fear cleave my flesh
my skull vibrates
bone against scream

times were
I measured my words
in wavelengths
my thoughts in light years
and my life was timeless
(times were)

air hangs
in strange configurations
dust covers every surface
somewhere between your words and my eyes
time punches
me into inhaling
huge gulps of air
pain rumbles inside me
but cannot escape
the dog stands phosphorous
on moon lit snow
head tilted
she points her caramel eyes
in my direction
moves toward me
loping puppy style
at night she lays
her canine weight
against my legs
and we sleep the sleep
of missing you.

but they too need to be cured
a glimpse of the unfathomable thing
in the river
and even they shall find peace
(The lunatic)

an uncharted expanse holds
snow and bare limbed trees
hopes upon the emptiness
I do not know how to navigate
angels do not affect me as they once did
inconsistent as they are these days

and knowing no other companion
but the voice of the water
licking the smooth rocks
she glides slowly along
(The Lunatic)

the snow lies on the edge
of the water
a semiprecious frame
woven among the
wood and stones
bear paws of ice
manicured by the waves
this mother lake as nourisher
soul-mate sister as blood
lover

who told you my ears
had refused to hear
you thought
you had taken the words
from my dry lips
the man died in your hands
you thought you had killed the future too
but you forgot he has a past
and one day will come to live
by his yesterdays
(The Rainmaker)

we are not a crucial time in history
other than our short span of walking
this earth
each in a different way
our shadows filled with yesterdays

give ear to the
eternal melody
of
perpetual silence
the silent voice
of
the eternal sea
(sehnsucht)[15]

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[15] A German word meaning yearning or longing.

a voice whispers
how is it on your sea?
i say:
not placid and no clarity
my boat is so small

few years after
I dreamed a vision
of you and the Word
at work
(the word)

ebony mother mystic
wanders among us
sprinkling our souls with
story and myth of
shamans and sacred spaces
speaking of spirits while
navigating the sun
she speaks gently:
here child
take this gift
put it under your skin
I accept
but do not know which
skin to put it
under

a molecule of dust
fluttering in the wind
like myriads of others
I pined for a chance
just to be of use
(The Message)

Searching
for
inaccurate words
pinpoints of light are required
my body unable to translate the feeling
or worse distort
where the music might be
lives suffering
fraudulent tears

disquieting laughter
it must be tragedy
it sells better

dreams come strong
but hopeless
path searching
that leads back to blossoms
floating on water
rocks breathing life
surrounded by strong slender
trees that sing
as though it matters

everything is in
a secret language
of grief and eros
a part of me has gone missing
removed in secret ritual
by those who proclaim love
foolish woman!
art may be the only hope for
transcending disappointment
or dismemberment

my screams are held inside
where sadness intersects with
the quest for passion
wrapped tightly in longing
divided and haunted by
thought after poem
consummation denied
smothered utterance

I have gathered my tears
in flesh calabashes
I have gathered my pain
in green leaves
(the dying godhead)

the cedar tree
her earth devoted roots
stands swaying slightly
in the wind
I inhale her perfume

touch her sienna bark
stand beneath her
verdant shroud
she
lives quietly
at the edge of a lake
with sun as lover
moon as guide
testament to the mothers

know this
go with thyself
to the All self
that is the meaning
of the Word
(the word)

this day of
sombre skies
weeping has been
set aside to read
your words aloud
to hear them bounce
off bare white walls

then you took me
by the hand
and you showed me your light
and you said

h-OM-e
it is the All
it is the yoU
it is the Me
(the word)

the mysterious message in those words
eludes me but
at this moment in time
they call to me

but who knows
fear
knows no freedom
(sehnsucht)

Still I wander
while tear drenched tremors
seize me
pain pulsing points
freeze into forgetfulness
I cry out for
women of other times
other places
etching patterns on this earth
scenting the air
dampness and decomposition
within and without
the agony is diffused
and their joyous voices
soundlessly
fill the space

I will show you
the peace
that passeth
all understanding
(sehnsucht)

OM

AUM

CHAPTER VI

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

I was fortunate, while writing, to be living a life of almost complete solitude, albeit not an enforced imprisonment like Aguilar's. It is noticeable in Aguilar's work that there is an obvious richness to her works that emerged from the time of solitude. This speaks to the creative process and is in no way intended to advocate political imprisonment of anyone. It is, however, a testament to the strength and creativity that is released under such circumstances. As Mila said, "Being a jailbird is no laughing matter, especially with a growing son and an aging mother to worry about." What became evident through this time was that our primary points of connection are those of "poet" and "woman"; also, we are mothers and daughters. I wonder where the poets would place these "designations" on their list of importance. Another point of connection is our recognition of the need for social action and social change and a deeply felt need for solidarity in opposition to oppressions. There is no hierarchy of such things because they co-exist, or live simultaneously, within us.

As I read their poetry, I felt myself responding to some pieces more intensely than others. I became "entwined" with the poets. In order that I could be with them, I hung pictures over my desk. I read and reread their poetry. The "allure of context" (Wikan, 1992, p. 467) held me captive for some days until I began to suspect that by focusing on the context, I was hiding again from what I might discover about them and myself. Returning to Wikan, I felt a resonance when she said that perhaps contextualisation is an analytical convenience and that by contextualisation, we as researchers tend to ignore the continual change that happens, or, as she put it, "in real life context is continually shifting" (p. 467).

Perhaps, as Wikan (1992) further suggested, we need to "refine our ways of attending, thus better to grasp what people are up to, their multiple, compelling concerns, and what is at stake for them, against a backdrop for the social relations in which they are engaged, and the resistance life offers to them" (p. 467).

I felt nervous at the beginning of each dialogue and needed to question the tightness, the hesitation on my part to engage fully with the words. Perhaps when there is a feeling of intimacy with a partner in conversation, the dangers of saying the "wrong" thing settle more heavily. Perhaps if I did not feel a spiritual connection to traditional ways, know personally, and respect Indigenous people—call them friends—the words would flow without thinking. Perhaps if I did not carry the collective "white guilt" in my cells like little pieces of lead shot that sit inert for a time and then, without warning, are pressed into pain by some news article, a Native man in a blue jacket asking for spare change, an Okanagan woman fidgeting on the bus, one of my closest friends giving me kind, supportive love. Celia Haig-Brown (1990), in *Border Work*, remembered Verna Kirkness, the Director of UBC's First Nations House of Learning, saying, "Every time a white person talks about Indians I get knots in my stomach" (p. 229). I wanted to approach these conversations with a sense of equality and good intention, but I feel the fear in the pit of my stomach. "The road of tears must end somewhere. Honour lies just beyond reach; accept me as I am, not as you want me to be" (Rita Joe, 1996, p. 176); and the shared experience emerged.

I may have asked too much of the women to wake me into meaning, using their lives to enhance my well-intentioned but contrived results, carrying them into print to impress the academic world and fulfil academic aspirations and expectations. What often happened is that my tears of uselessness fell into emptiness. The world looked more bleak as I failed to really touch them—and only grasped at the symbols projected. They are real, their words are real, but somehow I slipped between the lines and came up silenced by my own inadequacies. We all desperately want our lives to have some meaning, to count, to

feel that we may have changed something or even changed ourselves. After I moved away from my fear and hesitation, their gifts of words were the right ones at the right time. Hearing their words was a requirement to open my self to the process and the revealing that might take place; so challenged, I moved into a new critical awareness and renewed hope. When Aguilar asked, *Have I touched your life?* it is obvious to me the response is a resounding *Yes*. There were moments of despair, of course, because I felt so far removed from their realities, but with time the connections became stronger and somehow I became clearer and stronger. Many times during the dialogue I was unable to find a point of connection, and when I did find one, it was a stunning experience. Often when I read the words, the resonance was so deafening I could not speak. Common ground eluded me and beckoned me simultaneously. Dialoguing with text demands a close listening—more attentiveness to metaphor because there is no human interaction, other than the reader with the text. The real challenge was to hear the silences. Many times I wished that we could all sit in a room together, or touch hands. But always, in a deep place within, I knew that an understanding existed and would emerge.

I have always had difficulty with the concept of "giving voice" to another, and that was not my purpose. But what the dialogue did was open up a space for all of our voices to be heard: a space to listen, speak, and reflect. A space for peace. In this regard, as earlier discussed, peace can no longer be limited to the absence of war. Rather, it is a multidimensional concept, as reflected in UNESCO's (1995) statement that

> a culture of peace consists of values, attitudes, behaviours, and ways of life based on nonviolence, respect for human rights, intercultural understanding, tolerance and solidarity, sharing and free flow of information, and the full participation and empowerment of women. (p. 17)

After dialoguing with the poets, I returned to the dialogue and codified (Freire) or, as in hermeneutics, found certain themes revealing themselves. I then connected these

themes with the Peace Education Web (Figure 2). I placed gender and racism within the "human rights" module for the sake of this process.

Structural Violence

The point is to transform the word / not to escape it. (Aguilar)

The concept of structural violence must run consistently through any analysis of research within the context of peace education and is closely tied to humans rights issues. Rural underdevelopment, world hunger, overpopulation, and agricultural issues of modernisation as a result of foreign intervention, transnational corporations exploitation, foreign aid, and global debt fall under this rubric.

Structural violence came through clearly in Aguilar's (1984b) poetry: "They mess up lives / and in the process / blind themselves" (p. 5) seems to evoke for me the concept of an authoritarian regime based upon the Western capitalist paradigm. Structural violence in the Philippines is one of the legacies of colonisation. Throughout the 1960s, because the Philippine economy "experienced deepening external dependency and increasing unemployment, . . . the high level of structural violence continue[d] to be sustained by an equally high level of militarisation and human rights violations" (Floresca-Cawagas & Toh, 1994, pp. 41-45).

In the short term, the problem of "too many mouths" in a hungry world is only one way of looking at the world today. According to the dominant modernisation paradigm, internal deficiencies in South countries or regions such as "overpopulation" and lack of capital, modern technology, education, and a strong private sector are identified as causing poverty and economic "backwardness." Hence, the rich countries and organisations such as transnational corporations and the IMF and World Bank can and will help the poor regions to industrialise and catch up with the rich world. From the perspective of critical poets such as Mila, however, the conditions of poverty, hunger, and homelessness in the Philippines have their root causes in such a modernisation paradigm of development that

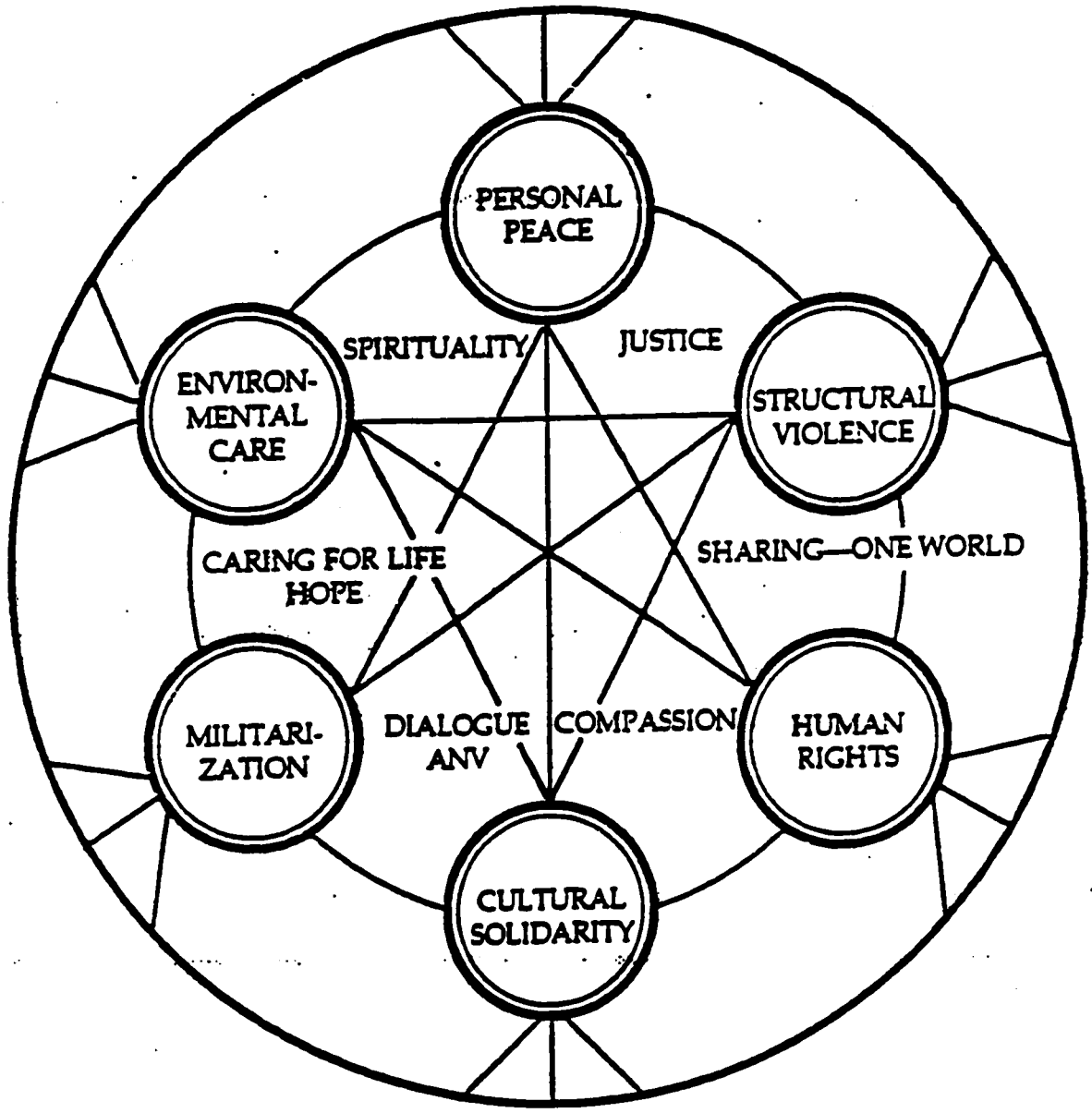

Figure 2. A holistic framework of peace education (from Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990, p. viii).

has benefited primarily the elites. Put another way, we need to search for creative ways of achieving sustainable, just economies that do not blame the victim for the problem and use the funds spent on militarisation to work toward these ends. As Toh (1987) has elaborated, a PEACE paradigm of development needs to be based on the principles of participation, equity, appropriateness (in values and technology), critical empowerment, and ecological sustainability. Hence, the current dominance and practices of transnational corporations and powerful multilateral agencies such as the IMF and World Bank need to be seriously questioned (Barnet & Cavanagh, 1994; Bello, 1982; George, 1987).

I was deeply reminded of the impact of structural violence on the well-being of peoples in the Philippines after my daughter returned from a two-month global education study tour in 1995. Among her exposures was a visit to the infamous garbage dump known as Smoky Mountain in one of the slum areas of Manila, on which the urban poor lived and worked under very difficult and health-damaging conditions. The problem of the lack of housing is notorious in such large urban centers of South and Southeast Asia as Manila, Djakarta, Bangkok, Calcutta, and Bombay, and into Latin America and Africa and even parts of North America (Hardoy, 1989). Conditions on some of the First Nations reserves in Canada are akin to those in the South (Jeannette Sinclair, personal communication, 1993). In the South this problem is caused by the lack of employment opportunities for poor farmers ousted from their lands by "economic and technological development" spearheaded by the transnationals and driven by the "capital-intensive investment" mindset (Crow, 1992; George, 1976).

There are many ways to "kill" or to destroy a people. In the North, the relegation of peoples to reserves where they are alienated from their value systems by the imposition of Western thought, and often without a solid economic base, may be a form of killing. If killing is the basis for condoning the intensification and prioritisation of militarisation, it follows that militarisation kills not only with bullets but also through poverty, hunger, and social injustices.

Although the issue of structural violence may be inherent in Rita Joe's poetry, it is not voiced as clearly. Rita Joe (1996) said: "They say that I must live / A white man's way" (p. 51), which reflects the structural base, more covertly violent, which condones the cultural genocide that First Nations people have had to resist and overcome. Structural violence and its close association to militarisation and humans rights issues is also a thread that runs through Catherine's poems. When she wrote, "there are wounds that never heal you know" and "there are other forms / of slaughter / you know," she seemed to be crying out quietly for the recognition of the daily pain that erodes any sense of agency. Although she did not explicitly state it, it is a cry against the lack of respect for humanity.

Militarisation

Wailing echoes . . . through long corridors of life an death. (Acholonu)

Militarisation is a broad concept encompassing several issues and problems that impact greatly upon the life at the micro and macro levels. There is no doubt that much destruction, bloodshed, and human suffering have been the result, directly and/or indirectly, of militarisation.

> High military expenditures and consequent diversion of resources away from real security needs are raising domestic tension and conflict to dangerous levels. Military proliferation via the arms trade is also culpable in the escalation of Third World conflicts into all-out wars. (Barnaby, 1988, p. 39)

The spectre of nuclear annihilation of human civilisation and planetary life still remains. As children in grade school we were taught how to hide under our desks during mock nuclear attacks. Of course, this was a direct result of the first nuclear bombs being dropped months before I was born. It was not until years later, as an adult, watching a film called *The Morning After*, a story about a group of survivors of the nuclear holocaust, that this fear that had been embedded in my cells for years was released. It may also have been connected to the fact that I was also a mother by then, and I found that motherhood

brought up feelings that I had not experienced previously. The film devastated me so that I was unable to stop weeping, and after a night of fitful sleep, I awoke to a winter morning filled with such gratitude for the release and because the world still existed.

Catherine's work reflects a strong militarisation component, which is hardly surprising because, as mentioned earlier, Nigeria has been primarily under military rule since independence was declared. Her poems "Biafra Days," "The Man Died Tomorrow," and "Harvest of War" all include strong images of militarisation: "And shall we / twenty years from now / have learned from this / or simply forget the pain / when the sound is closed?" she asked in "Biafra Days." And her images of a "dripping stump of a tongue" and the long corridors of "life and death" evoke the fear and potential harm under which people live in a military state.

The aforementioned structural violence in the Philippines is sustained by a high level of militarisation. "After the peace talks broke down with the NDF-NPA in early 1987, a 'total war' policy aimed at defeating the insurgency has taken a huge toll on lives, property, livelihoods, basic rights and human dignity" (Floresca-Cawagas & Toh, 1994, p. 44). As Mila said, "But hands must hold / gun / then pen / then gun again / cupping in another way / harder goals," indicating the intricate balance she has had to keep and reflecting the very real options she has to fight for justice, either through violence or nonviolence, and making it clear to the reader that violence is a huge part of her life. The U.S. interventionist approach to political events in the Philippines had its seeds in the "bloody confrontation" with the Spanish in 1896, and culminated in "economic exploitation, political dominance and cultural hegemony," which resulted in armed insurgent movements for 'national liberation' (p. 40).

Rita Joe did not write about militarisation; this, I believe, reflects the fact that she lives in Canada, and other than the major confrontation at Oka and mostly nonviolent altercations on logging issues and land rights, fights are held in the courts.

On March 11, 1991, the Mohawks of Kanesatake occupied an area called *The Pines* in Oka to protest a proposed expansion of a golf course by the municipality of Oka. The land that was to be used was, according to the Mohawks, part of 22 hectares of land that belonged to them and included an ancient burial ground. The claim was that this land had never been signed away. Despite efforts to hold a peaceful blockade, the Mayor of Oka called in the provincial police to dismantle the blockade in July. The confrontation took place over many months, and when talks broke down in August, the Canadian Army was called in. It was an explosive, and, as Bob Antone (as cited in Austin & Boyd, 1994) said: "The crisis was just moments away from erupting into violence many times. . . . They vowed with their life to defend Indian rights. . . . What other way out was there except in a body bag?" (p. 71).

On the reserves and in First Nations urban communities, domestic violence is a recurring theme. Because of social problems that include dependencies upon alcohol and drugs in these communities, violence is always in the wings and explodes in numerous forms from physical violence, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse: "The chances for an Aboriginal child to grow into adulthood without a single first-hand experience of abuse, alcoholism or violence are small; . . . the tragic reality is many Aboriginal people have been victimized" (Canada, 1993, p. 156), and this reality impacts upon Aboriginal women and children, be they Métis, Status, or non-Status.

The rule of repressive dictatorships or authoritarian regimes causes much pain, death, suffering, and destruction, with refugees and violations of human rights becoming the norm. The arms trade and disarmament efforts are two sides of the same coin.

> Since war began philosophers have decried its folly, individuals sought to resist it and leaders tried to tame it with codes of honour and bans on weapons. But this century has seen a new phenomenon: shocked by the atrocities of two world wars, and in fear of nuclear holocaust, humanity has set out to abolish war itself. . . . We have also tried to address transnational security issues and seek non-violent means for change, Mostly we have failed, so far. But at least we have begun. (Barnaby, 1988, p. 144)

Militarisation takes funds away from more human and humane endeavours such as sustainable development. Thus, not only does militarization assist elites to maintain their power, but it further accentuates the levels of structural violence as the poor majorities have even fewer national resources to sustain their basic needs. Commitment to killing contributes to economic structural violence in two ways: It diverts enormous tax, human, and material resources from service to human needs; and it props up inequitable relationships between rich and poor, privileged and deprived, within and across societies and states on a global scale. A non-killing ethic can contribute to nonviolent economic structural transformation. (Paige, n.d., p. 11) To gain acceptance of non-killing as a human right requires dialogue, not only among civilisations, but also among those of us within civilisations. This dialogue needs to take place within "spiritual, secular, and political communities," and all voices need to be raised and combined in global concert and "vigorously engaged in non-killing global transformation."

Human Rights

The question of human rights continues to be a major global problem despite the enactment into international law of a host of covenants and declarations seeking to uphold and promote the rights of all human beings, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and those in specific sectors. I have been most involved with the *Forward Looking Strategies* (United Nations, 1985) document that was the result of the 1985 Nairobi Conference on Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations (1979) in 1989.

Whether it is civil and political rights or social, economic, and cultural rights, the record of many states is poor and results in individuals, groups, and communities suffering. This is especially true in the South, and the South in the North. The marginalisation and discrimination faced by specific groups within and across societies has resulted in the above-mentioned declarations, with a focus on women. The issues of

racism and gender fall under this heading. The racist basis of colonisation and the movement of non-Anglo-Celtic peoples around the world in which they encounter lack of respect for their cultural traditions and rights to practice them as well speaks to human rights queries. Gender speaks to the need to prohibit and eliminate any legal or systemic discrimination on the basis of sex (United Nations, 1979).

By independence in 1946, the Philippines' political system had become entrenched in patron-client structures, with the economic and political elites intermeshing to sustain exploitative and oppressive conditions for the poor majorities. A wealthy landed minority owned most of the lands, while the peasantry laboured hard for pittances under virtual semifeudalism. The modern sector was dominated by foreign, especially U.S., investors, whilst Filipino politicians ruled through "guns, goons, and gold" (Floresca-Cawagas & Toh, 1994, p. 40).

In the Philippines, human rights violations continue. At this time there are over a hundred political prisoners in jail, and detainees continue to be tortured and mistreated during interrogations. Hundreds of people continue to be sentenced to death by civilian courts. For example, Lubuk is a remote village with approximately 90 households, situated west of Barangay, Limpapa, west of Zamboanga City. In this primarily agriculture area, the families work on small pieces of land, but the area is part of a logging concession granted to an influential man in the 1970s. His beneficiary now operates this area, and recently, farmer residents of the area were alarmed when they found that they were entangled in the reforestation project that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is bent on implementing. One of these farmers was killed in front of his son on April 26, 1999, after being commanded to release hidden firearms they did not have. His name was Hermelo Falcatan, one of the farmer residents of the area who spoke out against this so-called deal. This is only one of the many travesties that have come out of the Philippines recently (Derechos, 1999a).

In Nigeria, of course, this research project began with a defiance of human rights when Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others were executed in 1995 for speaking out against the military government's collaboration with Shell Oil. Nigeria's human rights record is dismal. Other human rights problems include infringements on the press, association, travel, workers' rights, and violence and discrimination against women. There are many reports of sexual abuse of female prisoners. Although there has been a National Human Rights Commission established, it is not taken seriously and has had no discernible effect on the human rights climate (Derechos, 1999b).

The Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue (ANSD, 1998), which took part in a West African workshop on women in the aftermath of civil war in December 1998, created a declaration based upon the United Nations Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Constitutive Acts of UNESCO and the World Health Organization, as well as CEDAW (United Nations, 1979). The recommendations coming out of that coalition are numerous; for example, to address "the lack of appropriate government-supported mechanisms to address the consequences of violence against women and ongoing violence in their aftermath" and "the responsibility of the state to protect all citizens, especially the most vulnerable, in this case women and children" (pp. 1-4).

Rita Joe and Catherine spoke of human rights more often than Mila, who focused on class issues, which will be addressed later but do fall under the rubric of human rights.

Gender

There are other forms / of slaughter / you know. (Acholonu)

Among peace educators, there is a strong consensus that a holistic concept of peace necessarily includes gender equity and nonpatriarchy. "A culture of peace must be based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between men and women" (UNESCO, 1999, p. 21). Gender

bespeaks a fundamental social polarity that varies with times and places (Illich; as cited in Trinh, 1989, p. 107). It is inherent in men's and women's acts; their speeches, gestures, grasps of reality; their spaces, patterns of living, and the objects in their surroundings; which is, in my view, irrevocably tied to patriarchy. The concept of patriarchy is associated with the suppression of the marginalised; that is, most women, men and women of colour, the mentally and physically challenged. It is also associated with violence, war, and domination. The hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity are challenged by feminists, and although the poetry in this work perhaps does not state explicitly that the poets have a feminist bias, by their actions, thoughts, and words, all of the women live a type of feminism.

I am reminded of an earlier research project, *Strategies for the Year 2000*,[16] that involved interviewing members of Canadian women's nongovernment organisations. While I conducted the interviews with First Nations and Inuit women's groups—the Women of the Métis Nation Alliance - Alberta, the Ontario Native Women's Association, and the Pauktuutit Inuit Women—it was made clear to me that men and women need to work together, not in opposition. In fact, a couple of the groups declined to participate in the project because they did not view women working in isolation or excluding men as progress. This concept emerged again as I read and dialogued with the poetry.

Dr. Catherine Obianuju Acholuno echoed this in her paper "The African Feminist Challenge in Life and Literature." The varied cultures of Africa of course would indicate that the role of women may vary across cultures and regions, as it would in the indigenous

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[16] Prior to the women's world meeting in Beijing, China, in September 1995, a project was funded to review the progress made on issues of women's equality, celebrate their achievements, and press for action in outstanding areas. The book that resulted from that project was a how-to manual for women in Canada and around the world who wished to assess the progress made by their governments in implementing women's equality obligations found in two international agreements. I was the project coordinator and worked closely with Deborah Stienstra and Barbara Roberts. Initially, the title chosen was "Little but Lip Service"; however, because the funding body was part of the federal government, this title was unacceptable.

groups in the Philippines or the numerous First Nations groups in North America; however, as Acholuno (1991) stated,

> A few generalizations can be made with reference to the role, the place, the status of women in the different religious communities imported from abroad. Beyond that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make generalizations about women's place in Africa. (p. 1)

Acholuno (1991) stated that status in inter-gender and intra-gender relations has been heavily influenced by other factors such as age, seniority, economic power, titles, and other achievements. Thus a titled woman would far outrank an untitled man, "senior sisters outrank junior brothers," old women outrank younger men, and "where males prostrate before their elders, they do so for females, as well as for males" (p. 28). Class and caste are two major determinants of status in traditional Africa and, I dare say, throughout the world. Members of the nobility or ruling classes enjoy a high status, whereas the untouchables and slaves suffered and still suffer subordination and segregation by the rest of the society. In most traditional African societies, the peasantry suffered exploitation by the wealthy and the powerful. Indeed, might was often considered right, and in such a situation the weaker were taken advantage of; hence the slave trade. The crux of the matter, therefore, is that exploitation, subordination, and stratification in traditional Africa were not gender (or sex) specific (oriented); rather they were class, caste, and power based, and have been ever since (p. 28).

As in Africa, the Philippines has a political elite and domestic class struggles during which women and children suffer. Therefore I do not imply that gender is not an issue. Women are half the world's population, and in the South the injustices and oppressions experienced by women are "accentuated by poverty, militarization, lack of workers' rights and sexist cultural traditions (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990, p. 153; see also Basu, 1995; Brock-Utne, 1985, Lather, 1991; Stienstra & Roberts, 1995; Trinh, 1989).

> First world feminisms have a tendency to regard third world women in certain positions as victims who are totally exploited and totally victimized or, alternately, to underestimate the tragedy of their lives, especially in a culture of terror and violence. As encultured bodies, Filipino women . . . have negotiated their positions through domination, submission and resistance in heterogeneous and contradictory forms, a process which they share with other subjugated peoples. However, imposition has never been total, not negotiations singular, fixed, absolute. The political organizer beheaded, her child ripped from her uterus; the widow burying her husband and going into hiding; the political detainee sexually tortured and threatened with death; and the military prostitute dying of AIDS and nursed by her Amerasian children, are all powerful images of resistance. (Hilsdon, 1995, p. 186)

In the instance of First Nations women, as well as those in Nigeria and the Philippines, gender is an issue because of the exploitation and imposition of Western ways upon the indigenous peoples—which alienated them from traditions. The women I approached when doing the research project mentioned earlier seemed to be reframing this view. As Lee Maracle (1996) said:

> Among the elders I visited in the first ten years of my life, there was a quiet and deep respect for thinking which extended to men, women and children. I was shocked as a twenty year old by the concepts of sexism coming from the mouths of young Native men; no one would dare doubt the intelligence of women ten years earlier. At the time, the alternative to this sexism was a feminist movement which objected to the role played by women in the home and the inequities between men and women in child rearing and work. Sexism, racism, and the total dismissal of Native women's experiences has little to do with who does the dishes and who minds babies. These oppressions result from the accumulation of hurt sustained by our people over a long period of time. Our communities are reduced to a sub-standard definition of normal, which leads to the sensibility of defeat, which in turn calls the victim to the table of lateral violence and ultimately changes the beliefs and corrodes the system from within. On this table of lateral violence sit the violence of men and women against children and the violence of men toward women. The "healing movement" of the 1980's and '90's spearheaded by women, is the struggle to clear the table of violence. (p. ix)

Rita Joe, in her clear, straightforward language, albeit the language of the oppressor, saw "the battered women in all walks of life" as standing together. Battering can be psychological, verbal, and/or physical. It is systemic in the ways of poverty, marginalisation, and the patriarchy. We, as women, have all been battered in some

manner—beaten down by countless daily oppressions into hopelessness, unhappiness, and depression. I am not advocating the victimisation position in any way; however, it is clear throughout history and the experience of women worldwide that privilege is not the daily dole—perhaps to clarify, privilege in the sense of being agents in our own lives. This notion is, of course, predicated on the belief that we accept the White North American male world view as the only world view. In Lee Maracle's (1996) words,

> The desire of our people to gain a foothold in this society is arrogantly interpreted as a desire to be like Europeans. We have never feared or rejected new things, new knowledge. But quite frankly, we do not respect the ways of European CanAmerica. We seek knowledge that we may turn it to our own use. Do not be surprised when I tell you that your knowledge is not the only knowledge we seek. (p. 87)

In African Nigerian cosmology, the "male and female are viewed as two sides of the coin without which the society cannot function and without which the inherent order of the society would be destabilized" (Acholonu, 1991, p. 7).

When Aguilar (1984b) talked about short-signed men—

> Short-sighted men
> Know much about the world
> Immediately below their noses
> They huff and puff
> to get what little
> they could lay their hands on
> And then what much
> they get, they use again
> to gain some more.
> They loot and burn and kill. (p. 10),

—she was not damning all men, for she has a son and men as comrades. She was describing the patriarchy and the horrors of power out of control. In the Philippines the colonial legacies "remain potent forces to this day" (Floresca-Cawagas & Toh, 1994, p. 39). The successive colonisers, Spain and the United States, left the country embroiled in economic exploitation, political dominance, and cultural hegemony. All of these factors have created a culture of distrust and dependency.

Aguilar's (1984a) poetry clearly highlighted a feminism that recognises the interrelationships between gender and class. "In the face of class murder / How can we be lyrical?" (p. 1). When I was a small child growing up in the multiclass world of a small prairie town, the seeds for recognising and wanting to change the social injustices and status quo, respectively, were planted. And although I placed myself within the dominant context, this knowledge was not lost. As my horizons were broadened and I ventured outside the small town into a larger, albeit no more complex, world, I continued to observe these discrepancies in wealth, knowledge, and power. Giving birth and raising two daughters increased my dedication to this work. On the external level I began to be active in the feminist struggle for equality between men and women; on the internal level I was in a constant state of confusion, a true product of the affluent postwar era and a thinking human being. Ultimately, my focus shifted to *Women Against Poverty*; a report of the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee (1989), and I spent four years, as a volunteer and in a paid position, working on this project. When I reflect upon that process, I realise that it was born from honest intentions and acknowledged a concrete issue that faces many women in Canada. I see poverty as a form of violence and socially sanctioned. From poverty serious illness, family breakdown, and overt forms of violence can emerge. Although Canada is rich and in 1992 was ranked the best country in which to live, poverty remains a serious and growing problem that disproportionately affects women. The underlying reasons for poverty seem to lie in the inequality of opportunity and are supported by systemic economic disparities in turn supported by the power dynamics of the infrastructure. Looking back, I see that the process of the *Women Against Poverty* project may have fallen short of the idealised results, and perhaps the women involved were not as empowered as we would have liked. Poverty still exists, and women and children still bear the brunt of it. Those of us who worked on the project were so intent upon "giving voice," "breaking the silence around poverty," and "empowering poor women" that we may have neglected the silences, and we certainly failed to be inclusive.

Women of colour, immigrant women, and aboriginal women participated in sharing their experiences of poverty; however, only one member of the research group was a woman of colour. Also, because of time and financial constraints, the time actually spent had to be carefully limited. However, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, everything can be used except what is wasteful, and we have to remember this when we are accused of destruction. The lessons of this previous research experience and Audre Lorde's words informed the current research project.

Race and Ethnicity

I do not teach hate
The solid part of one 's identity
Is communication
Exchanging words or touch. (Rita Joe)

It cannot be denied: In its most raw form racism is manifested in physical violence. In a more covert way it is revealed, for example, in the obvious whiteness of my workplace, with people of colour visible only cleaning up after us.

> Race relations occupy an important place in social interactions from which they cannot be abstracted. Attempts to do so falsify social reality and historical fact. The specific experience of racial disadvantage is as undeniable as the broader socio-economic inequalities with which it overlaps. (Henfrey, 1988, p. 185)

As a North American White woman, how can I speak to the issue of racism? I know it exists and have felt the anger that is its sister. Racism is violent—in the giving of it and in the receiving of it.

> You don't
> Kill weeds with just anything
> I'm sure you use weed killers
> that don't poison the soil too.
> Otherwise what's left for planting? (Aguilar, 1984a, p. 13)

She inspired me to go further into this huge, at times insurmountable, issue.

I remember as an undergraduate in Native studies, our Cree instructor, Marjorie Memnook, invited a guest speaker from Small Boys camp. After the presentation I went up to speak with him and was met by a silent wall of palpable disgust. This was a very different experience within the context of Native studies and threw me into a place of depression and self-questioning. With the help of my peers, an understanding emerged. When this man saw a non-Native person, he saw the priests and nuns that took away his identity and his traditions and abused him daily. His hatred of "white" defined his life. It took several days of self-examination on my part to come to an understanding and to decide to remain in the School of Native Studies. I tell this story only to establish how I came to understand, at a very minimal level, what it must be to be a person of colour in a predominantly "white" world. That experience happened years ago, and when I recall it, the strength of feeling rejected, dismissed, and hated creates a physical and mental distress in me. How, then, does an individual who has a different pigmentation deal with this on a daily basis?

The social construction of race has created the chasm between colour and creed. As Rita Joe (1978) said, "I am the Indian / And the burden lies yet within me" (p. 1). Like sexism, marginalisation within the context of gender, racism is systemic, based upon a power dynamic created by the dominant to maintain the status quo:

> Both sexism and racism are systemic in the sense that they have become ways of thinking about and treating groups of people [or individuals] unequally as if these ideas are 'normal'; since they [have become] common sense [they] are not open to interrogation. (Ng, 1993, p. 4),

and they have become part of the environment.

When I ask people about their experience of racism, they are reticent. It is an arrogant question perhaps. And perhaps my very appearance dictates the dialogue. "Understanding racism involves a great deal more than the overt abuse and physical attack which the term evokes. . . . The problem is that racism is more likely made into a taboo

subject" (Mama; as cited in Humm, 1992, p. 159). I do not know how to speak to racism; however, it is obvious that the exploitation of the South intersects with race and ethnicity.

Colonisation was a racist act that involved "different kinds of European personnel, including missionaries, traders and state officials. . . . Finally, colonization was, above all, the expansion of the European economic system" (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 123). The colonised woman experienced a "doubling," not in the sense that the colonisation doubled, but that the levels of oppression multiplied: "They were dominated, exploited, and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African women" (p. 122); and White women were the oppressors too. Then as the few garnered wealth, as in Nigeria, by colluding with the "new colonist paradigm" (Sachs, 1996, p. 17) and accepted "meaningless handouts of foreign companies and the stooge governments that feed off them" (p. 17).

The inability to see how all of humanity and the world are interconnected makes it easy to view racism as "their" problem or to hide behind a screen of guilt and passivity. Not seeing race as a white issue is part of the privilege of being white. Understanding the impact of race on our lives—what we gain and what we lose—would encourage us to see the issue of racism as our issue. As Barbara Smith (1982) suggested, "You have to comprehend how racism distorts and lessens your own lives as white women—that racism affects your chances of survival too, and that it is definitely your issue" (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991, p. 300).

This analysis does not, of course, reduce problems of intercultural relationships in multi-ethnic societies to white-nonwhite conflicts and the racism of dominant groups that Rita Joe's poetry moves us to consider deeply. Globally, humanity is comprised of a multitude of cultures with different languages, spiritual or religious beliefs, norms, and institutions. Over the centuries, the interactions and relationships between and among these diverse cultural groups have often resulted in conflicts and violence; for example, the tragedy of Yugoslavia, ethnic disputes in the Middle East, the Muslim-Christian tensions

in the Philippines, and Nazi Germany's determination to exterminate all Jewish persons. In a holistic peace education framework, complex issues of identities, representation, acceptance of differences, and learning from each other's wisdoms are all vital dimensions of building a culture of intercultural peace and harmony.

Environment

> The image of woman as the primeval temptress and destroyer is foreign to African peoples, who, traditionally viewed women as the primeval mother of all, deserving worship and veneration; provider of justice, riches, wisdom and children; the protector of the land which is her womb and into which all life shall eventually be swallowed. (Acholuno, 1991, p. 20)

The state of the environment has become an issue of vital concern since the 1980s. Ordinary citizens as well as governments have had to acknowledge the problems of environmental destruction and try to create strategies to overcome them.

> As the assumptions of modernity unravel around us and we race the clock against the momentum of destructiveness, we are challenged to create new possibilities and haunted by failures of immense proportions. How is it we have paid so little attention to the steady degradation of our habitat for so long? How is it that the global nuclear arsenal reached fifty thousand cataclysmic warheads before the grassroots outcry became widespread? How is it that our landfills reached 90 percent of their capacity before recycling became commonplace? How is it we have allowed the groundwater to be so recklessly depleted? How is it that hundreds of nuclear power plants have been constructed around the world without safe means of transporting or storing radioactive waste? How is it the enthusiasm for the modern nation state overlooked some five thousand indigenous or long-standing cultural nations who have resisted the rule of capitalist or socialist states, resulting in hundreds of wars and millions of refugees? (Spretnak, 1993, p. 10)

For me the strongest, most compelling emanation of the dialogue is environment. Mila, Rita Joe, and Catherine all registered strongly on this issue, perhaps through their use of language mainly, but it indicated to me that there was a strong tie between the three of them and the concept of nature. My thoughts on environment are induced by the images of the natural in the poets' dialogue, from Aguilar's (1984a) "has the wind from the

mountain of my soul / rustled through your leaves" (p. 26), to Rita Joe (1991) when she said,

> Lay on the grass
> . . .
> And look at the sky,
> . . .
> the reward of nature
> Gives you high high (p. 31),

and on to Acholonu (as cited in Chipasula & Chipasula, 1995) and her, for me, powerful direction, "Listen to the trees in the forest / and remember what they say" (p. 11). Is this connection just the starting point, the reminder that the earth is mother, and without her we are null and void? We have not paid attention.

> there is a certain
> order in the universe
> that you can only push
> so much. (Aguilar, 1984a, p. 5)

We have moved, or been moved, "from awe at Earth's sacred majesty to scientistic rationalism and the technocratic imperative" (p. 11), and we "eagerly sacrifice it to an unqualified growth economy" (p. 11), a world in which transnationals call the shots and leave behind them a wake of ecological devastation and human misery (Spretnak, 1993, p. 11).

According to Huckle (as cited in Hicks, 1988):

> The root cause of our present environmental predicament is the unequal distribution of economic and political power. The world's land, natural resources, and human environments are owned and controlled by a minority of the world's people. The vast majority have little control over the social use of nature or the social construction of the environments in which they live. (p. 197)

I am reminded of a conversation with a friend in which feminism was being discussed. She clouded the discussion for me when she said, "You can work all you want on feminism, racism, . . . but if our environment is not taken care of, none of those things

will matter." Of course, she was referring to the physical natural environment that has finite resources that are being overtaxed and exploited to the point of depletion. Worldwide, women are taking leadership and inspiring roles in challenging ecological destruction and building sustainability (Dankelmann & Davidson, 1988).

Marilyn Waring (1988), when writing on women and economics, looked out upon a hill covered with evergreens, knowing that the hill had no "value" until it was clear-cut. This makes a powerful statement about the dominant group's (referring to the percentage of those with the economic power, placing them in the position of being decision makers) perspective on nature. I shall attempt to show how this treatment of nature is echoed and reverberates in the words of the poets and in the world. The decisions of a few create the realities of many, in areas of the physical—water, housing, and fuel, for example—and violence. "Structural violence is built into people's environments and fosters conflict in the home and community" (Huckle, 1988, p. 197). Verbal abuse, sexual harassment, vandalism, mugging, terrorism, and warfare are all caused by and a result of a lack of environmental well-being. The genesis of this condition, this expectation that a few have power over the natural resources of earth and, consequently, power over the lives of most of us, is embedded in Western capitalist tradition. As Mila Aguilar (1984b) said about Manila,

> Manila: metropolis mushrooming
> Not out of any dream
> But the sweat of millions
> On hot steel machines
> And the toil of millions more
> On placid-fertile greens. (p. 1)

This is a postindustrial scene repeated over and over in the South. Some historians place the blame on industrialisation, capitalism, and expansion; and, of course, these were very real events that impacted the world in a myriad of ways. We can blame any number of historical figures and events, and blaming is the easy way out. But what we require are

solutions, and creative critical thinking and spirit combined. Susan Ahearn (1994) suggested that we create "landscapes of peace"; this can be achieved only if justice prevails so that "everyone has access to the environment and the essential products of the environment" (Jacobson, 1994, p. 71). Therefore, when environment emerges for me as a primary issue, it is based firmly in ecology but connected very closely to the issues of class, race, militarisation, structural violence, gender, and human rights. "Inequality between human beings is the planet's main developmental problem. Economic inequality is the planet's main environmental problem" (Nordland, 1994, p. 3). It is impossible to divorce ecological concerns such as acid rain, global warming, water pollution, and deforestation from other issues; for example, the lack of individual rights and freedoms the lack of social justice, which includes racism, gender inequality, discrimination, dissemination of information (who decides what is knowledge and who receives education), international debt, the lack of health and basic human needs, which include nutrition, housing, and adequate clothing.

The growth and spread of the mechanistic, technocratic perspective, rather than improving life on this planet, has served to fragment and disintegrate—the hoop has been cracked, in some places broken, resulting in conflict within the individual and between individuals, states, and countries. Vandana Shiva[17] (as cited in Spretnak, 1993) has concluded that modern "maldevelopment is antidiversity and hence reflects the values of patriarchal, technocratic culture which is destroying forests, soil, water and air that have supported diverse cultures and rural women's economic patterns in particular" (p. 165). (See also Shiva, 1991.) Shiva (1989) said in her book *Staying Alive* that maldevelopment becomes a new source of male-female inequality and that

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> maldevelopment is the violation of the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems that sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustice and violence, . . . blind to the fact that a recognition of nature's harmony and action to maintain it are preconditions for distributive justice. This is why Mahatma Gandhi said, "There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for some people's greed." (pp. 5-6)

Personal Peace

> *To the Indian / peace is the ease of mind / of being able to worry / without being afraid.* (Rita Joe)

In terms of personal peace vibrations, Mila evoked the least resonance in me, with Rita Joe second and Catherine the strongest. I believe that this is why I felt a much stronger connection to Catherine, almost as if we had met before or were walking parallel paths, whereas I felt a little further removed from Mila and Rita Joe.

As I have mentioned, implicit in peace education is the notion of a personal peace, which focuses on working at an individual level toward empowerment and compassion, thereby impacting our world view. For me, it is acknowledging and living in the awareness of how each of us is connected to each other and how my individual actions, even thoughts, will affect others; and how living a nonviolent, just, and compassionate life serves to enhance me personally, but others as well. So in a very real sense this thesis has a spiritual base—embedded in First Nations, Buddhist, and Christian traditions. I see connections between all of these that go beyond the scope of this analysis, or what has been referred to in interfaith dialogue movements as a "parliament of souls" (Tobias, Morrison, & Gray, 1995). Harris (1988) said:

> Peace education has been practiced in a variety of forms for hundreds of years, originating in the Western world with those teachings of Christ that promote pacifism, and the practice of those Christian Churches—such as the Mennonites, the Quakers, and the Brethren—that pursue nonviolence. In the East nonviolence has been preached by Buddhists, and in India, followers of Gandhi have discovered dynamic ways to apply the Hindu concept of "ahimsa" (nonviolence) to everyday life and political struggle. Many Native peoples . . . have practiced peace throughout their history. (p. 38)

Even this explanation seems limited; however, it makes the point.

It is not acceptable while working toward our own sense of peace to ignore those around us—those with whom we interact daily and those we may never meet, and the very real issues that create a nonpeaceful world. Denial and helplessness based upon an inability to think critically about the issues erode any progress made in changing ourselves into peaceful individuals. It is our moral imperative to look beyond ourselves.

> There is no European substitute for our own philosophical premise for being: "spirit is life force—essence." All things—stone, earth, flora, fauna (of which people are a small part)—are alive with their own spirit and reason for being. This premise puts us all on the same level. To articulate this premise without conducting oneself as though it were true is to be comfortable with one's hypocrisy in the same way that middle-class CanAmerica is generally comfortable with its hypocrisy. (Maracle, 1996, p. 101)

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Reflections on Poetry as Pedagogy

As I come to the end of this research project and reflect upon it certain things become clearer in the reflection. As I searched for a methodology that would encompass the my world view and honour others, hermeneutic enquiry emerged as the appropriate method. However, as shown in Figure 1, it was informed by different process circles and impacted the greatest, I believe, by the dialogic. Another circle has been added. First, the research process began with an awareness of conflicts, tensions, inequalities, and a genuine concern about and toward fellow human beings, followed by a restriction upon how "social action" in my particular case might be enacted. Ken Saro Wiwa's death and dialoguing with the Nigerian students on campus as well as being involved in campus-based activities to educate and inform North Americans about Shell Oil's part in the deaths and devastation suffered in Nigeria catapulted me into this particular research process. Dialoguing with the poets, as well as widening my understanding of the social issues in the nations from which they come, took me to a deep level of communication with them and liberated me into self-examination and clarification of values and hopes for the future. It aided in the ongoing life process of defining my own conduct at the personal and interpersonal levels. Therefore, as well as this being research for and about people of the South, it impacted upon one individual of the North; that is, transformation.

Aguilar (1984b) was once critiqued by an American publisher for writing "bad poetry," particularly because it contained "venom" and "propaganda," to which she replied in poem form:

> Friend, my reply is
> you do not understand
> the weight, the ocean depth
> of our class hatred.

Yesterday I heard
a comrade had been ambushed.
One of five bullets
had smashed through his young heart. (p. 5)

Literary criticism was not the purpose of my research; therefore the poetry contained in this work is simply an example of how poetry may be introduced into the peace education classroom as a pedagogical device. The poetry is not to be used alone but is to be used in conjunction with other information about the peace paradigm and the contents of the countries or issues being brought into the students' learning process. The context and political, environmental, and race/ethnicity issues can be presented and integrated at a cognitive level and enhance their ability to think critically on the components of any culture. To enable seeing beyond the "diet, dress, and dance" level of another culture or issue within the context of that culture, poetry may be introduced, for to read the poems of another takes one beyond the cognitive to a deeper level, what might be called the *soul*. The words of Saro Wiwa, Aguilar, Rita Joe, and Acholuno have touched my life in a certain way; they may touch someone else's in another, or not at all. Perhaps another poet reaches more deeply into the heart of that person. The primary notion is that the poetry is a starting place for a connection that taps into the imagination, the spirit, human, and divine. If the classroom process embodies the skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Hicks, 1988) inherent in peace education, introducing poetry into the classroom would not be difficult. As Reardon (1988) aptly suggested, peace education needs to be grounded in three core values; namely, planetary stewardship, global citizenship, and humane relationship. She also identified seven essential capacities for peacemaking as reflection, responsibility, risk, reconciliation, recovery, reconstruction, and reverence. Through my dialogue with the women poets, I can feel many places where these values and capacities surface and move my mind, heart, and spirit. Hence a teacher who educates for peace through the works of poets such as Mila, Rita Joe, and Catherine will be able to facilitate learners to reflect on such values and capacities of peacebuilding.

Of the many crucial attitudes involved in the peace education classroom, along with self-respect, respect for others, ecological concern, openmindedness, and commitment to justice, is vision: "Students should be open to and value various dreams and visions of what a better world might look like, not only in their own community, but also in other communities, and in the world as a whole" (Hicks, 1988, p. 15), which is another way of suggesting the use of imagination, which in turn highlights the impossibility of viewing any one issue, any one country, any one sentient creature in isolation: "Since what is known by the social body is woven into the social fabric of perception, to introduce a perception that has before been excluded from vision can rend and reweave the fabric" (Griffin, 1996, p. 45).

It did not surprise me that issues of gender and poems that reflected these issues resonated strongest with me as the majority of my work toward social change has focused upon women's issues. What did surprise me is the "awakening" to environmental issues and concerns that I experienced.

"One of the emerging phenomena of the new millennium is the rapid migration of people escaping from environmentally degraded areas and from areas where conflict has arisen over too few natural resources for too many people" (Gallon Environment Letter, 1999).

Poetry can be useful, not simply as a reading/writing exercise, but as a means of connecting with others at a deeper, more "soulful" level. This does not imply any specific religious or spiritual tradition or agenda, nor is it age restricted. If, as Milosz (1983) said, poetry participates in "the incessant transformations of religious, political and social thought" (p. 25), then poetry is almost a crucial pedagogical method. It chronicles the process as well as the hopes and dreams of the future. It is a method through which the voices of others may be heard and one's own voice proclaimed, or in the case of this particular project, reclaimed. Poetry can support and motivate groups, as in Saro Wiwa's and Aguilar's, Rita Joe's, and Acholonu's; or it can transcend boundaries of country,

colour, or creed. It can be filled with love, anger, and/or spirit. Voices may blend, fade, or harmonise—the relationships change between the reader and what is read, creating the space for transformation. It can inspire revelation or revolution, and the need to write one's own poetry.

> Poetry is a political action undertaken for the sake of information, the faith, the exorcism, and the lyrical invention, that telling the truth makes possible. . . . Poetry means taking control of the language of your life, . . . and a poem is antithetical to lies/evasions and superficiality; anyone who becomes a practicing poet has an excellent chance of becoming somebody real . . . and listening and hungering for kindred real voices utterly/articulately different from his or her own voice. (Jordan, 1995, p. 8)

Poetry is a way of transforming our "individual trajectories into non-violent, but verifiable, power" (Jordan, 1995, p. 9). In being readers and writers of poetry, we reveal our understanding of ourselves and others and our connections to the world we inhabit.

Pamela Stafford (as cited in Jordan, 1995) acknowledged the power of words in our society; however, "so many young people today have no words for the things they suffer, the things they fear" (p. 57), but when they discover poetry they become active agents in the world.

When Nordland (1994) wrote of "learning for life" (p. 16), she spoke of everyone "mastering oneself as a person," that mastering academic disciplines is not "first and foremost"; we need informal education, "more people who know a lot about human beings and about society as a whole" (p. 16). Therefore, students are able to see themselves not as alienated, separate beings surrounded by other alienated, separate beings, but the "interbeing" of us all. This is a holistic, and ecological, pedagogy. It also echoes Freire's (1990) "speaking the word" (p. 77) as an "act of creation" imbued in faith, humility, and love; might it be suggested, an act of communion. "Learners and teachers confronting the enormity and complexity of justice and development problems must cultivate hope" (Griffin, 1999, p. 87). If the goals of learning are enlightenment, emancipation, transformation, and action toward a new form of ethical political community through

dialogue, reflection, and praxis, I think that poetry has a valuable contribution to make to learning, for "poetry is a good medium for revolutionary hope" (p. 87).

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Locating Myself II

The moment of change is the only poem. (Rich)

The definition of *paradigm* is a broad worldview with assumptions, values, concepts, and ideas about its subject(s) field. For me, the crux of the issue was the suppression of my spirit and the limitations placed upon my imagination. It seems to me that in the process of this limited yet intense dialogue with Aguilar, Rita Joe, and Acholonu, I have experienced a personal paradigm shift, one that takes me into the realm of imagination and, consequently, hope: "Released from habitual ways of ordering the world, the life of imagination can take circuitous and surprising turns. . . . Like a rainforest or an ecosystem, the process of creation is endless" (Griffin, 1996, p. 46). In order to have hope within the context of social activism or working toward social change, one must have a sense of agency. That had not been my reality.

I was born one hundred and six days after
the children had their images
burned upon that city's cement and
the world's soul circle
as I grew walking in sun-filled freshness
in a small prairie town where
I would dress my persian cat in baby clothes
and wheel him in a grey doll buggy along
the ribbon of cement called the sidewalk
outside my parents' house where
books held pictures of that perfect cloud.
And at Christmas time the gifts of dolls
were like nothing ever before imagined
made of cuddly post-war rubber

so real and life-like with smiling mouths
as if they could make up for
all those lost children.

I was born in North America, conceived during the Second Great War, and raised under the threat of nuclear destruction. Years later, when I was creating a life map, the benchmark signs on the map were world conflicts: Korea, Vietnam. . . . I began to wonder at that time if my body/psyche were affected by these conflicts that, although taking place on the other side of the world, made me begin to question from where my quest for peace had stemmed.

When I was a little girl
all spindly legs and
knobby knees
my mother's rage would
crush my bones
and fill my head
with the crashing
of waves
wave after wave
of fear
her voice stopped
the beating of my heart
caught my breath
between stomach
and mouth
it is no surprise
that sitting under
the lilac bush
bare legs against
the earth
the smell of growth
and a quiet breeze
allowed me to breathe again

A sense of agency has emerged from this process through the dialogue and through the self-reflection, critical analysis, writing of poetry, and, of course, conscientisation. As mentioned, the space created for the poetic voices also offered room for transformation. I cannot take a drink of fresh water, step into a hot shower, or open

my refrigerator these days without my mind going to Nigeria, the Philippines, or, closer to home, the peoples of the First Nations. At this very basic micro level the change in me has been huge. I live more simply and with fewer materialistic expectations. It is difficult to articulate, but I see the change manifested daily in my life. Even though I still live a life of relative privilege, I am aware there are also spaces and opportunities in the wider society and global community to reconsider personal transformation towards building a culture of peace and nonviolence. The growth of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and peoples' movements struggling for human rights, justice, sustainability, and cultural solidarity are hopeful signs that no matter how powerful the forces of marginalisation and repression, ordinary peoples can work at local, national, and global levels to construct alternative humane and humane relationships of living and sharing. Personal circumstances to date have not enabled me to participate as fully as possible in this expanding civil society . But the instances in which I have become involved, such as LINGAP Institute's solidarity work with the Philippines, the Nigerian Students group for the Ogoni peoples, the Alberta Status of Women Action Group, and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, have facilitated a greater sense of interconnectedness with the realities of Mila, Rita Joe, and Catherine. I also recently heard about and was from a distance inspired by the Hague Appeal for Peace held in the Netherlands in May 1999, when over 7,000 people and hundreds of groups gathered to share insights and lessons on building local, national, and global cultures of peace, human rights, democracy, and sustainability.

In this study it became apparent to me that of the three poets, Mila was the one who lived with the tension of violence and nonviolence. She said: "But hands must hold / gun / then pen / then gun again," and in so saying, suggested the role of violence as an agent of transformation. How, then, does this perspective fit within the peace paradigm in which the principle and strategy of nonviolence are strongly advocated for resolving conflicts and violence? The example of Mila indicates that peace educators who draw on

her work will need to fully engage learners in a critical dialogue on ends and means. This study exemplifies the reality that the peace framework is open ended and dialogic, no more static than the poetry or the poets. It is open to different voices and different views, albeit not in a relativistic way, but in an critical openness that reflects the hermeneutic approach. The study itself had many moments of tension and was enriched by those moments of questioning and revisiting ideas and presuppositions held by the researcher. In sum, it is important to clarify that I view the idea of a "paradigm" not as a "closed system" or "meta-narrative" that is imposed on reality with fixed boundaries. A peace paradigm always faces and accepts the challenges of being enriched and transformed through dialogical encounters with multiple voices.

Images of my childhood inevitably emerge as those of the natural world that reflect those used by the poets: the smell of the earth, sky, rain; in my case, snowstorms.

I grew up in a rural area where the natural environment deeply affected all our lives and affected every cell of my being. Growing up and away from this close connection to the natural physical world, I experienced an alienation, a lack of balance; for as difficult and confusing as my early life had been, there had always been the outdoors and a larger community to sustain me. I became alienated from self, out of balance, and feeling as though I were at the edge of an abyss. This illness I have is not life threatening, unless the possibility of poverty is perceived as such (Griffin, 1999, p. 115), but it makes me feel less than everyone who is healthy; in other words, a failure by the standards of the strong. I am the weak link in the chain of evolution. When I was diagnosed in the 1980s, I became self-centred and completely preoccupied by and mired in fear. The medical profession, knowing very little about the condition, prescribed copious amounts of drugs which, while quelling the symptoms, made me a zombie-like creature—an example of the walking dead. I threw out the drugs and fought harder; I became sicker. My body was betraying me; and because the truth of it was so difficult to hear, contrary to appearances which had to be "kept up," any sense of being an agent in my own life was eroded daily; and my need to

survive took me places that, if healthy, I would never have considered. Consequently, I betrayed myself in the end. It does not come as a great surprise, then, that my year of living by the lake, a year of giant pines, flocks of geese, and solitude, has divested me of all the artifice collected over the years. I reconnected with Mother Earth, which, when I was a child, had taken care of me; which, when my biological mother had forsaken me, reconnected me with a source of strength that in the past had sustained me through betrayal and shame.

> One way women have visualized a connection between the environment and their souls and bodies is through [our menstrual cycles], and often lose themselves in nature, to experience a merging with the earth and to feel that they are an inseparable part of the natural world around them. (Howe, 1997, parts 1-2)

The other side of the coin, of course, is that we as women, if we are aware of and hold that perspective, are subject to the atrocities done on and to Mother Earth: If the earth is objectified as a resource and exists only to be controlled, then it follows that women are viewed likewise.

As I read and dialogued with the poets, I felt connected to the experiences of others while their words evoked memory and spoke to me of commonalities, one of which is nature. The use of images of the natural environment proliferates in their poems, in both positive and negative forms. But when I read Rita Joe's words—"I like living close to nature / My ancestors did"—they evoked this reflection.

I am discovering that something almost miraculous occurs when living close to nature, surrounded by rolling hills, on a half acre of grass, trees, and shrubs inhabited by birds beyond counting, racoons, and foxes. The lake is so close that even when I cannot see it, its presence is felt and smelled. When I walk to its edge to watch the light transform its moods, I am comforted. At night when darkness falls, the lake disappears and the sky reveals its treasure of stars that take me back to my childhood. When we place ourselves close to the earth, memories are revealed, not just our own, but those of others who have

come before us, and the possibilities of the future emerge. The earth is constantly recreating, and only by placing ourselves close enough to her to touch her, breathe her in, can we fully appreciate how alienated we have become in our institutions, office buildings, emporiums of entertainment, and psychological prisons. We can forget to love Mother Earth and forget to love ourselves. In so doing, we lose sight of others. We, fortunately, have not severed the connection completely; the energy flow may be limited but not destroyed. There is still a chance we may regain the connection that actually will make the difference between life and death for us all.

It may be that, rather than being the "weak link," I am one of the canaries sent into the mine or a barometer of what is happening within and being done to Mother Earth. These observations are too huge to contemplate further in this work. However, when Black Elk spoke about the crying for a vision ritual as a sacred "lament," there is a resonance. There are numerous reasons for the lament—thanksgiving, to request an understanding or a favour—but the overarching reason is "that it helps us to realize our oneness with all things" (Tedlock & Tedlock, 1975, p. 21). This work has been my "lament." And in the lamentation, my transformation has included conscientisation through dialogue, a vivid re-evaluation and clarification of my personal values steeped in and created by a holistic perspective; the circle is complete. This does not imply that the process is ended but that this step is complete and a new beginning beckons from the horizon.

There is that space again. It is the cosmos and a speck of dust. It is the beginning and the end; freedom and fear; the moment before and the lifetime after; oceans and land; potential and limitation. It is all and nothing, no one and everyone.

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