

Indigenizing the Academy (Anderson and Hanrahan, 2013)

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The Return of the Native: Personal Perspectives of Identity

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Abstract: This writing is adapted from an early piece (Anderson, 2013) written to celebrate the MUN Reunion 2012 and the 40th anniversary of the Elizabeth Avenue Campus, now known as the St. John's Campus, of Memorial University of Newfoundland. In this particular article, the author reflects, in ways both scholarly and personal, on the unique contribution of *The Morning Watch* to the development of scholarship and to the important recognition of Indigenous realities in the province and country.

Admittedly, *The Return of the Native* is an odd title, but then there are turns in one's life and scholarship that *are* odd. Long-held convictions have come to be seen as strange when contested with perspectives that challenge the epistemological underpinnings of what is true or not true, real or not real. I write this somewhat reflective narrative to situate myself within the context of a special edition of *The Morning Watch* devoted to the theme of Indigenizing the academy. In this modest contribution to *The Morning Watch*, I have written several sections which my co-editor, Maura Hanrahan, has jokingly called *The Return of the Native*. So it is that in the return of the native story I will draw on insights gained having lived away from my native province and returned home. Consistent with Indigenous thought, this narrative reflection will be two-dimensional: one side tells the tale of me as an 'academic' while the other tells the context of the search for my 'Indigeneity'. This two-world response from me covers the same 40-year span and I comment on the systems we serve, why we choose to live where we do, and indeed how my province has come to better know who I am.

Place: Identity as belonging to here and there

I have enjoyed most of the places I have lived. However, my sense of not simply being from this place but belonging to it is strong. Imagine you were able to attend a great university, do a great degree (three actually) at that university, live a great career, and then to return to where it started and actually lead one of the faculties. This is where my life has taken me. I was born in Shoal Brook, Bonne Bay, with my grandmother as midwife, and completed high school in Corner Brook. I attended Memorial University (both at Grenfell and St. John's), graduating in 1978 with a B.Sc., again in 1981 with a B.Ed. and again in 1987 with an M.Ed. I did stray a little and completed a PhD from the University of Toronto, but the campuses of Memorial are my home, plain and simple.

I started teaching in Makkovik in 1981, and then moved to Cartwright, then Woody Point, Lark Harbour, and finally the North Shore of the Bay of Islands. I have been a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Calgary, at the University of New Brunswick and now Memorial University of Newfoundland. I wanted to outline this as I feel this eclectic mixture of experiences, from here and there, enables a unique perspective for comparison and insight.

On Place and Choosing to Live There or Here – the Choices in Identity

Decades ago on a Western Newfoundland open line radio show, a somewhat hostile caller challenged guest speaker Peter Fenwick, then leader of the provincial New Democratic Party. She questioned Fenwick's motives in running for Newfoundland politics, arguing that because he was not 'born here' he did not share the same commitment to the province as those who were. This is an unfair challenge many newcomers and long-time residents often face, yet Fenwick's response was eloquent and I often think of it. He responded: *Yes, but unlike those that were born here, I made a deliberate choice to make this my home.* Therein lays the deepest of commitments to a place.

I faced a 'life happens' awakening while living in Fredericton and working as an Associate Dean with the Faculty of Education for the University of New Brunswick. I enjoyed working there, as it was a great faculty. However, in 2009 I attended a *Wonderful Grand Band* reunion concert in Halifax. This band was all the rage in my last couple of years at Memorial so seeing *WGB* again produced lots of nostalgia. I even found a few long-lost friends who had also moved away. Stemming from this experience, I began to wrestle with the realization that many of us face in a way I had not done before: I had been away from Newfoundland for about eight years, but up until that point, I do not think I actually believed I had *actually* moved away. In the hours of driving back to Fredericton, I was drifting down memory lane and then back to the direction I was actually headed. At some point during the drive, it struck me that I had moved away--I was not going to live in Newfoundland anymore! This might seem odd, but many of us see moving away as temporary and then life just kind of happens. It was not a happy feeling; it was somewhat fearful even. My sense of identity with Newfoundland and Labrador is strong and I was not sure what to do with these feelings. The drive passed, eventually the feelings subsided and life continued to happen.

Somewhat reconciled with my life in New Brunswick, happy in my work at UNB, in the summer of 2010, I saw an ad for "Dean of Education" at Memorial University. I was not sure what to do. I had already passed up one other opportunity to seek a faculty position at Memorial as I did enjoy my life at UNB, but this was a unique opportunity. I knew I had built up a credible resume but one never knows about hiring processes. I applied, was interviewed, and here I am writing this piece of reflection for the 40th anniversary of *The Morning Watch* as Dean for the faculty that has housed it all these years -- 40 years since I started as a student at Memorial.

Speech: What was important 40 years ago is important today – our accent is important

In this section, I will raise the critically salient concept to which Newfoundland and Labrador scholars, among others, have alluded often: our accent(s) and dialect(s). The Newfoundland-Labrador dialect(s) has been source of ridicule and humour. But what about our dialect (s) as a source of pride, as a mark of distinction or identity? This was the subject of strong debate 40 years ago as many rose to defend the legitimacy of our dialects in the face of outright contempt. It may be time to come back to this. Being a distance educator based in Alberta and New Brunswick, I would note how my students would respond once they established that my accent was from Newfoundland. I have often compared this to the experience of seeing a person for the first time, having no awareness that they were of a different race. We hold stereotypes based on culture, race, gender, and indeed accent. Accent is more than a variance in standard spoken usage; it has grammatical links as well.

Beyond our notions of vernacular and standard English, David Corson, a former professor of mine, spoke often of the negative biases held against those from different social cultural backgrounds by the dominant hegemony and their use of dominant language conventions. He outlined this in an article *The Learning and Use of Academic English Words* (Corson, 1997). His view that students who used text and speech that was seen to be 'richer' in Greco-Latin phrases were seen as intellectually superior by instructors, resulting in higher marks in schools and universities. This was not because of the sophistication or complexity of their arguments and ideas but because of 'our' bias towards word content. Has this type of social/cultural language bias been at play in our Newfoundland and Labrador context? I think so. Remember, it was once believed that a truly educated scholar also spoke Latin.

Corson's work was considered ground-breaking research in the late 1990s. Yet this thinking was noted much earlier in *The Morning Watch* as several articles on this subject were published in its very first issues in 1973 in relation to "Newfoundland Englishes". (see "World Englishes", Singh, 1996).

Above, albeit briefly, I addressed the notion that *The Morning Watch* as unique as it represents both conventional and more innovative types of thinking within a unique legacy and mission. This struggle continues today. Indeed, even at Memorial, 40 years ago there were courses to remove students' Newfoundland accents. Is it the case that to be seen as truly educated, a Newfoundlander-Labradorian, has to surrender his/her accent to dominant Englishes and the related language use patterns? I actually do not *always* think so, but sometimes I do; that worries me.

Culture: What mattered before matters now in respecting our Indigenous ways and identity

The false narrative which rendered much of our Indigenous history invisible has recently changed to reflect what, 40 years ago, I was told as family lore. As a boy, I knew my family had Mi'kmaq and Inuit ancestry. However, I graduated from a school system into a society that essentially denied the existence of Aboriginal peoples in this province. We knew that the Beothuk were extinct, but this was characterized by the myth that they were "killed off" by the Mi'kmaq who were brought in by the French to help fight the English. We loyal Britons, its oldest colony, were the result – this was the Newfoundland narrative of our history for a long time. Understandably, this part of my life caused mixed feelings. How do we 'right' the wrongly-written – albeit grammatically correct – versions of our history? This is also part of seeking the answer to the question: what is new in history?

Yet another critically salient concept I alluded to above is our Indigeneity. The Dominion of Newfoundland became the province of Newfoundland in 1949, a distinction many in this province still hold as an active event. The terms of Union between Canada and Newfoundland did not refer to Indigenous peoples in the province hence the Indigenous peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador were not acknowledged on our entry into Canada. As a result, the Harper apology to Canada's Indigenous peoples was a version of "No apology to you" for the Indigenous people of this province as it was not offered to us; in fact, we were explicitly excluded. It may be time to come back to this, too, as it relates to the ending of the forced invisibility and more ready acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples within our province. Despite such additional barriers to official recognition, there is a growing awareness of our Indigenous reality which seems to hold great promise in adding to the richness of our social fabric. This is something we need to build on as we have been long overdue in making our universities truly open to all in a way that celebrates the contribution of Indigenous peoples to every facet of life in our country. Most recently, the creation of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq Band, while a contested process, is leading to a resurgence

of Indigenous awareness in this province. Despite some disputes over membership and related growing pains that are not unusual as bands are established, the Qalipu process is adding to a rich history of successful Aboriginal leadership in spite of some incredible obstacles and ongoing challenges.

Conclusion

Identity is linked to place, speech, and culture. Historical narratives often written through contested worldviews also shape our identity. Time changes this and history changes as well. How do we 'right' the wrongly written, albeit grammatically correct, versions of our history? This is also part of seeking the answer to the question: what is new in history? We need to share the work of our many scholars, practitioners, and stakeholders who are dealing with the struggles, the successes, and the ongoing challenges as we look at how Indigenous peoples were portrayed then and should be honoured now. *The Morning Watch* helps serve a role in giving voice to the researchers and the people who will share this rediscovery.

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