Pulling Together: Indigeneity, Masculinity & Allyship

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Abstract:

With the colonization of the Americas, traditional gender relations were thrown out of balance as communities were displaced and patriarchal social structures were imposed. While increasing attention has been given to the negative impacts on women and transgender peoples, little has been said about the ways in which colonization disrupted the roles and responsibilities of men. However, many communities are today working to revitalize the traditional values associated with Indigenous masculinities and gender relations as one part of a greater decolonial movement of cultural revitalization. The positive outcomes of this revitalization are not only beneficial for Indigenous men, but also for the healing of families, communities and the environment. Using the Tribal Canoe Journeys as a point of departure, this essay examines the interconnections between indigeneity, masculinity and allyship. Applying Dian Million's concept of "felt theory" and embracing Taiaiaki Alfred's notion that transformation begins within each one of us, I write this essay "from *within* change" as a way to explore the possibilities of decolonizing myself, the academy and the process of research itself.

Introduction:

As I pulled into Port Hardy, B.C. a wave of panic washed over me making my heart race and the palms of my hands start to sweat. What was I doing here? What place did I have going to Bella Bella for the Tribal Canoe Journeys?[1] What if I wasn't welcome and they didn't want me there? Although I had already made contact with two of the Qatuwas 2014 volunteer coordinators and they were expecting me, I couldn't help questioning my impulsive decision to take the week off and travel halfway to Alaska.[2] Two ferries and a seven-hour car ride later I was on the North end of Vancouver Island and there was no turning back. Of course I could turn back; I could forfeit the money I had spent on my ferry reservations between Port Hardy and Bella Bella, fill up on gas and head back south, but I knew I would never forgive myself if I did.

Something that has become increasingly apparent to me in my own life is the amazing way in which things come together when one is able to let go and make space for the unexpected. Looking back on the 2014 Qatuwas Festival I have no doubt in my heart or my mind that I made the right decision in going. Being a part of such a vibrant gathering and witnessing the protocols of so many canoe families from up and down the Pacific Northwest Coast was a powerful and inspiring experience. The connections I made during my time in Bella Bella were also impactful, leading to new relationships that

1. Also referred to throughout the paper as Tribal Journeys, Canoe Journeys and simply Journeys, the Tribal Canoe Journeys began as the "Paddle to Seattle" in 1989, the same year as Washington State's 100th Anniversary. The event sparked the interest of other First Nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast and led to the revival of the canoe, an essential element to the culture of these maritime peoples. Since the 1993 Paddle to Bella Bella there has been a Canoe Journey every year, hosted by a different tribe each time.

2. David Neel, *The Great Canoes: Reviving a Northwest Coast Tradition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 3. The Qatuwas Festival was born as a result of the 1989 Paddle to Seattle, where maritime First Nations gathered at Golden Gardens, outside of Seattle. As Neel explains, "Qatuwas, in the Kwakwala language of the Heiltsuk Nation, means 'people gathering together in one place.'"

I look forward to building upon in the future. The Tribal Canoe Journeys are a unique event; while an amazing amount of hard work and dedication is needed each year to make them happen, everyone who participates is so excited to be a part of them and to be together that the positive energy is multiplied, radiating outward and animating anyone and everyone in its path.

Using the Tribal Canoe Journeys as a point of entry, this essay explores three general themes: indigeneity, masculinity, and allyship. While these themes serve as guides throughout my train of thought, they do not confine the stories shared in these pages. The goal is to build new relations with these themes and to draw new connections between them. I do not intend to come to any definitive solution or to be able to answer all of the questions that arise throughout the following pages. If anything, this paper may raise more questions than it answers. Drawing from Dian Million's notion of "felt theory," I want to create a space that allows for "the affective legacy of our experiences" to be felt/heard.[3] Weaving a narrative from my own experiences and the stories of others, I hope to build new relations and linkages in an effort to find new interpretations and reformulate the way in which we see the world around us. As Million states, "I think of theorizing as a part of a process of comprehension and reformulation, one that stimulates the creation of narratives *and* analytical narratives that are theoretical across a wide field of participation that is not necessarily bound by discipline."[4] Following this line of thinking, the narrative written on these pages is a part of/the product of my theorizing in action – "a process of comprehension and reformulation."

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3. Dian Million, "There is a River in Me: Theory from Life," in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson, and Andrea Smith (Duke University Press, 2014), 32.

4. Ibid., 36.

Writing is both a process and a way of processing. Embracing this idea and connecting it to the ideas of Taiaiaki Alfred, I write these words "from *within* change," rather than "*about* change."[5] What I mean by this is that I write from within my own experience, reflecting upon my time in Bella Bella as a way to begin exploring the possibilities of decolonizing myself, the academy and the process of research itself.

How the concepts of indigeneity, masculinity and allyship came into my life and found their way onto these pages is important. Working on my undergraduate degree in Latin American Studies over the past four years I found myself continually coming back to the Indigenous movements in Latin America that have become so visible during the last few decades. As I learned more about the complex ways in which imperialism and colonialism persist in Latin America today, I realized how little I knew about the history of colonization in the United States, and in my home state of Washington in particular. Reflecting on my age at the time I realize now that one often has to leave home and experience living in a different environment in order to gain perspective on the place one grew up. For me, spending time in Central and South America has given me the opportunity to make new connections between geographically distinct places and to see my own country, community and home through new eyes.

An important part of learning about the place I call home has been articulating my own position within my community as well as identifying the responsibilities I have to the people and landscapes I am in relation with. Throughout my life I have recurrently turned to the trees, the waters, the mountains, and other members of the Northwest landscape as a source of motivation, sustenance and revitalization. While in my heart I

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5. Taiaiaki Alfred, *Wasáse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom* (Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 34.

have known these relationships to be true, it has only been through my exposure to Indigenous scholarship and through my conversations with Native peoples, such as the friends I made in Bella Bella, that I have begun to find the words to articulate these relationships and begin to build upon them. Being a settler, I also recognize that in many ways I am occupying territory of the Samish, Lummi, Swinomish and other Native peoples of the Salish Sea. My relationship with this land is young and marred by a history of colonialism. In this way, the Indigenous theories and ways of understanding that have been shared with me have also pushed me to question my own positionality and to continually challenge and complicate the way I think, feel and engage with the world around me. It is with this awareness that I approach this essay. While part of me wants to refrain from speaking within the academy for fear of reproducing the colonial relations often linked to research, I refuse to let the challenges of my positionality within this arena prevent me from taking risks and moving forward.[6]

The theme of masculinity is tied to my positionality in a very personal way as well. Acknowledging that I am a white man who has in many ways inherited a legacy of privilege as well as legacies of violence, domination and exploitation is important. While this history may be a part of who I am, however, it is not all of me. For me, part of being a white male means challenging the dominant (racialized) discourses of masculinity and refusing to let them confine my identity within the narrow categories of expression presented to me. In this way, my connection to indigeneity, both in the academy and in my personal life, has given me new tools with which to "weaponize my privilege." At the same time that I seek to use my voice as effectively as possible, I also recognize that, as

6. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999). As an academic working on issues surrounding indigeneity I have found Smith's thoughtful and thorough critique of research to be a wonderful resource to continually return to.

Leanne Simpson remarks, "academics who are true allies to Indigenous Peoples… must be willing to step outside of their privileged position and challenge research that conforms to the guidelines outlined by the colonial power structure."[7] This is where the theme of allyship comes in. Below I explain some of the challenges of claiming allyship and why I am reluctant to do so. Nevertheless, I am committed to exploring the possibility of future alliances by building relations and challenging colonial power structures within my own writing.

In my writing I draw from a number of Indigenous, feminist, queer and settler colonial scholars to inform my theoretical framework as I move forward. As Scott Morgensen explains in "Theorizing Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism,"

> Heteropatriarchal colonialism has sexualised indigenous lands and peoples as violable, subjugated indigenous kin ties as perverse, attacked familial ties and traditional gender roles, and all to transform indigenous peoples for assimilation within or excision from the political and economic structures of white settler societies.[8]

Recognizing the gendered and sexualized methods of heteropatriarchal colonialism, I have chosen to center gender and sexuality within my writing in an effort to deconstruct hierarchical and binary understandings of these terms. Focusing on masculinity in particular, I look at how the Tribal Canoe Journeys might open up space for young men to embody the traditional, non-patriarchal roles and responsibilities associated with the concept of Indigenous masculinity.

Although this essay may be written from within the academy, the intended audience I write for is the people I met during my time in Bella Bella. My goal in

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7. Leanne R. Simpson, "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge," *American Indian Quarterly, 28* (2004): 381.

8. Scott Lauria Morgensen, "Theorizing Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism: An Introduction," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012): 4.

exploring the ideas presented in these pages is to build upon the relationships I have formed and to expand upon the conversations we started. Recognizing that I have very little to offer when addressing subjects such as the Tribal Canoe Journeys, I offer what little I have by sharing a part of myself, making myself vulnerable and opening up to the possibility of lasting relationships.

The Tribal Canoe Journeys: Forming Relations & Building Alliances

> There are many differences among the peoples that are indigenous to this land, yet the challenge facing all Onkwehonwe is the same: regaining freedom and becoming self-sufficient by confronting the disconnection and fear at the core of our existences under colonial dominion. We are separated from the sources of our goodness and power: from each other, our cultures, and our lands. These connections must be restored.
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> –*Taiaiaki Alfred*[9]

Although Taiaiaki Alfred is speaking specifically about his people, the Onkwehonwe, in the previous quote, his words hold meaning for the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast as well. Striving to revitalize their traditional canoe culture, the peoples gathering together for the annual Qatuwas Festival are confronting the "disconnection and fear" at the core of the dominant neocolonial society by reconnecting with each other, their cultures and their lands.

In many ways the Tribal Canoe Journeys are a personal journey as each puller in the canoe is pushed to challenge her/himself both physically and mentally. When all the canoes come together on the shores of the host nation, however, a powerful sense of unity

9. Alfred, Wasáse, 20.

emerges. Sharing this time together and sharing their cultures with one another is a powerful form of medicine that feeds the spirits of these people and instills in them a sense of hope, pride and determination. As Barbara-Helen Hill remarks in her book, *Shaking the Rattle: Healing the Trauma of Colonization*, "Healing the spirit of the individual will eventually spread to healing the spirit of the family and this in turn will spread out into the communities, and so on, until eventually the nations will be the positive role models for the rest of the world."[10] After the Journeys are over, each individual returns to her/his family and community carrying with her/him a part of the medicine they experienced. In this way the Canoe Journeys are an important source of empowerment as the positive energy produced radiates outward.

While much of the focus is on the revitalization of native cultures, the space at Qatuwas is also about uniting against neocolonial capitalist forces, such as Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline or the proposed coal terminal at Cherry Point on ancestral Lummi land[11]. The threats to traditional ways of life are many as the settler governments of the United States and Canada continue to conspire with corporations in an effort to integrate Native peoples into mainstream society and to exploit the natural resources found on their territories. Sharing visions of self-determination and decolonization, many of the people who participate in the Journeys build new alliances and ties of solidarity and continue to work together and support each other after the Journeys are over.

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10. Barbara-Helen Hill, *Shaking the rattle: Healing the trauma of colonization* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995), 36.

11. Richard Walker, "Canoe Journey Message: Protect Our Fragile Environment," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, July 17, 2014, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/07/17/canoe-journey-message-protect-our-fragile-environment-155904. The Northern Gateway pipeline, approved by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in mid-June, will cross through several First Nations' territories carrying crude oil to the Pacific Coast for export. The proposed coal terminal at Cherry Point in Bellingham, WA, if approved, will export coal from Montana to China.

Understanding the historical context in which the Canoe Journeys take place, I was initially hesitant to attend the 2014 Qatuwas Festival in Bella Bella. Reflecting my own positionality and the fact that I am in many ways an outsider, I did not want to impose on something that was not meant for me. While it is true that the Journeys may not be meant for me, however, I was immediately welcomed by the people I met upon my arrival. In fact, the moment I walked off the ferry I made two new friends who I spent time with throughout the week. One of the people I met was Thomas Wamiss Jr., who is from Port Hardy and whose people are the Kwakwaka'wakw. While Thomas did not pull with his canoe family this year, he has participated in a number of Journeys in years past. During my time in Bella Bella I had many conversations with Thomas and he shared with me some of his stories, a few of which he was gracious enough to let me include in this essay. The other friend I made was Thomas's partner, Dennine Reid. Dennine is a member of the Heiltsuk Nation[12], and was returning home to visit family and be a part of the Qatuwas Festival. Having known me for less than ten minutes Dennine invited me into her grandparents' home, where she was staying, and helped me connect with one of the Qatuwas volunteer coordinators.

The relations I formed with Thomas and Dennine reflect the overwhelming spirit of celebration and inclusivity at the Qatuwas gathering. While the work being done in the space of the Tribal Canoe Journeys runs much deeper, the positive mentality the people around me held is important. Most of the people I talked with in Bella Bella are very aware of their history and of the oppression their peoples have faced and continue to face, but they are not letting the weight of this knowledge paralyze them or prevent them from

12. It is the Heiltsuk Nation that hosted the 2014 Qatuwas Festival in Bella Bella, B.C., a central community on Campbell Island. The Heiltsuk Nation also hosted the Tribal Canoe Journeys in 1993.

moving forward. Joy and laughter can be powerful tools, as can grief and pain when they do not consume you. On numerous occasions during protocol at Qatuwas I found myself crying as the beauty of the dancers moving to the sound of the drum made my heart soar with joy.

As I write these words now I am overcome by these seemingly contradictory sensations of pain and joy. For me, the Qatuwas Festival was unique in that it provided me an opportunity to build relations with people from the Lummi, Susquamish, Heiltsuk and Duwamish nations as well as many others from up and down the coast. In a very basic and real way, as humans sharing a place on this earth, sharing a connection to the lands and the waters of this region we call home, I identify with many of the people I met. It was a joy for me to spend time with them, to learn from them and share with them a part of myself as well.

Unfortunately life is not so simple and eventually other elements of our lives, such as politics or our different historical backgrounds, intervene to complicate our relationships. What pains me is the fact that I am a white man and therefore I represent a history of settler colonialism that is responsible for the histories of oppression and genocide that belong to so many of the people I met. It is not this simple either, however, and while this may be the dominant narrative, the dichotomy between “us” and “them” is a construction that can and *must* be challenged. Inhabiting this seemingly contradictory space of emotions I see an opportunity to cross boundaries and open up new spaces for dialogue. Using the words of Alfred on “the warrior’s path” to center myself, I am

exploring what it means to by an ally to the friends I made in Bella Bella, to the First Nations of this region, and to Indigenous peoples around the world.[13]

As Shana, an Onkwehonwe high school student, remarks in Alfred's *Wasáse*, "I think it is important to look at who designates himself as a 'warrior,' and who is designated as a warrior. They serve the people, so they should be chosen by the people. A lot of times, people self-designate themselves, and maybe they're not serving the interests of the main community."[14] Reflecting on Shana's words I believe they hold a certain truth for the concept of allyship as well. Alliances are formed through relationships that are founded on respect and accountability. To be a true ally one must earn the respect of the people one is in relation with and, as Alfred says, "put [oneself] in a position of dependency, so to speak – for [one's] own legitimacy, for [one's] own self-esteem, and [one's] own reward – on people outside of [oneself]."[15] So what does this mean in the context of the Tribal Canoe Journeys? While I may have a desire to build relations with the people I met in Bella Bella, I have no right to declare myself an ally. On a very basic level I may have helped by volunteering my time, working in the kitchen and helping clean, but it is not for me to decide whether or not I would be considered an ally. What is for me to decide is whether or not to be open to the possibility lasting relationships, which may lead to alliances in the future.

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13. Alfred, Wasáse, 19-29. Alfred describes the warrior's path as a spiritual journey and "a living commitment to meaningful change in our lives and to transforming society by recreating our existences," through "self-transformation and self-defense against the insidious forms of control that the state and capitalism use to shape lives according to their needs – to fear, to obey, to consume."

14. Ibid., 260.

15. Taiaiaki Alfred, interview by Sam McKegney, February 11, 2011, transcript.

The Seventh Generation: Our Future Leaders

> When you're out on that water, you know, they say you have to pull your own weight plus the weight of the canoe. If one person stops paddling for a moment you're pulling their weight too, so everybody has to pull their own weight plus a little more... That's also good metaphor for life, you know, your own weight plus some of your family too, and whatever luggage you and your family are taking with you...
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> *–Waylon Ballew*[16]

One of the most important parts of the Tribal Canoe Journeys is the focus on youth. It is the youth who will be the future leaders and it is the youth who will carry on the traditions and cultures of their peoples. While the Canoe Journeys offer amazing opportunities for the youth involved, they also require them to challenge themselves and to take on a new sense of responsibility as members of their communities. As Waylon Ballew says, when you're out there on the water "you have to pull your own weight… plus a little more."

During my time in Bella Bella, Waylon was one of the people I formed a relationship with and had the opportunity to talk with about the role of the Tribal Canoe Journeys in young men's lives. Waylon identifies himself as Northern Cheyenne on his mother's side and Lummi on his father's. Although he was not able to join the Lummi Youth canoe family for the journey this year, Waylon came to Bella Bella to support them and partake in their protocol. On the long ferry ride back from Bella Bella to Port Hardy Waylon agreed to share some of his stories and his insight with me. Talking about the role of the youth in the Canoe Journeys he explains that the ways in which the youth are asked to pull their own weight are multiple. While in a literal sense this means doing

16. Waylon Ballew (Northern Cheyenne and Lummi) in discussion with author, July 2014.

your part while in the canoe, the canoe is also a metaphor for life more generally. During the Tribal Journeys youth must learn to participate and be held accountable for all of the daily tasks that need to be done. Thomas echoed this sentiment during one of our conversations in Bella Bella, saying,

> You're with those people 24-7. You wake up with them, you sleep with them, you eat with them, you paddle with them all day, so you don't really even have a choice but to learn from people… it builds a lot of structure for people who don't have structure… it's totally different than say a job, you kinda dread it and you work eight hours or whatever, but this is like a full time job, so they don't even have a choice! [laughter]… Its one of the few chances you get to be fully immersed around the culture and people, where you don't get that most of the time.[17]

While the Journeys may be like a full time job, they are something that many youth look forward to with anticipation each year. Knowing that their communities are counting on them many youth are eager to step up and participate in the Tribal Journeys with a sense of pride and a sense of belonging. Talking with Waylon about a canoe family that brought kids from a youth home illustrated just how important the structure provided by the Canoe Journeys can be for some kids. As Waylon says,

> They don't live with their families… and some of them have never washed dishes before, and you know, this was their opportunity to learn, to scrub, to learn how to be responsible… so it gives them that sense of family, how to take care of each other… and by the end of it most of them, they'll end up calling each other 'journey brother,' 'journey sister'…[18]

It is the sense of family and community within the space of the Tribal Journeys, as Waylon explains, that gives youth such a sense of pride and belonging. A conversation I had with another young man I met at Qatuwas, Austin Shelafoe, reflects this notion as well. Austin, who identifies himself as Duwamish, Chippewa and Sioux, pulled with the

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17. Thomas Wamiss Jr. (Kwakwaka'wakw) in discussion with the author, July 2014.

18. Waylon Ballew (Northern Cheyenne and Lummi) in discussion with author, July 2014.

Blue Heron canoe family, traveling over 450 miles from the Seattle area to Bella Bella. After the Canoe Journeys were over Austin agreed to meet up and share some of his experiences with me. Addressing the sense of family on Journeys he says,

> You know, from where I come from, out of a foster home, I had no family. I had my brothers and sisters, that's it. And then, imagine having just a couple family members to having thousands. Its like… you're welcomed by everybody. They let you in their houses, they let you drink out of their own water, you know, they let you use their washer and dryer, they let you sleep on their lawns, in their house, let you use their bathroom at any time you want… I mean, it's like another family… It's very uplifting.[19]

For Austin, the relations he has made over the years through the Tribal Journeys really are like family. He started participating in the Journeys since 2003 as a part of the ground crew and has since then become a lead puller in his canoe family.

Although the Tribal Canoe Journeys are important for everyone involved, in my conversations I have chosen to focus on the experiences of young men in particular. Witnessing the way in which many young men carried themselves during my time in Bella Bella inspired me. Those I talked with seemed to have such confidence in who they were and such an awareness of their place in their communities. As I talked with Thomas and he shared stories with me, the transformative impact of the Journeys became clearer to me. Speaking of his mentor, nicknamed "WA," Thomas says,

> The first time I ever hung out with WA was going on the Tribal Journeys down to [Neah Bay]… so it all started from there and then it kept rollin… it seriously changed my life. I went from just drinking and hanging out… trying to be cool… I used to be an alright athlete… my attitude… I just thought I was better than everybody. But because I hung out with WA… he would never really lecture me or anything at all, it was just a learning by doing sort of thing… even just having that role model, like taking care of elders or learning all different aspects of culture… that gave me a different perspective on life in general and it just made me think, like, what the heck am I doing here?[20]

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19. Austin Shelafoe (Duwamish, Chippewa and Sioux) in discussion with author, July 2014.

20. Thomas Wamiss Jr. (Kwakwaka'wakw) in discussion with the author, July 2014.

Hearing Thomas talk about the changes he has made in his life since his first Journey in 2010 amazed me. The person he described sounded so different from the young man who was standing in front of me now. Thomas confirmed this, saying "it's been a big growing thing for me too… all within such a short period in my life… I'm like 19 and still young, but within like 3 ½ - 4 years I'm like a totally different person."[21]

Reflecting on my conversation with Thomas I found that one of the reasons the Canoe Journeys are so important for young men and youth in general is because they provide an opportunity for them to learn about their culture and their heritage. In doing so, youth develop a new sense of self and belonging. "For me," Thomas continues,

> A big part I always think of when I'm dealing with youth is a lot of people are in the position they are in because they don't really know where they belong… once WA started teaching me, he actually knew a lot about my family to begin with, so all of the sudden I'm gettin all this information, like 'you come from somewhere,' like 'your great grandfather was a big chief' and just all these different things…all of the sudden it's like 'woah, I'm actually a part of something!' I think that was kinda what was missing in my life.[22]

The sense of belonging the Canoe Journeys lead to for Thomas has been a powerful source of inspiration for him in his life. Since he started learning more of his culture he has become a leader for other youth. While he has learned to lead many of his people's songs, he has more recently focused on his art. Earlier this year he was awarded a grant to travel to Mexico City for a month where he led art classes and helped restore a Northwest Coast totem pole. "I just can't help but think that it's because of my culture that I've

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21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

gotten to do all of these things," says Thomas after sharing more of his experiences with me.[23]

Another important theme that came up in my conversations with Thomas was the role of mentorship in the Tribal Journeys. While the Journeys have been a positive experience for Thomas in many ways, the connection he made with WA stood out. From what Thomas told me, WA is a prominent figure in the community who is dedicated to maintaining and reviving the culture of his people. When WA saw Thomas's interest in learning and his gift for singing he took him under his wing and starting bringing him along to cultural gatherings. The guidance Thomas received from WA has been transformational as it gave him a new sense of motivation and taught him the importance of balance and respect in life.

Applying the teachings from the Journeys in the rest of one's life can be a challenge. While the idea of living with balance and respect may sound good, it is often easier said than done. Thomas expressed this difficulty, saying,

> Yeah it's great when people learn their culture and stuff, but in today's society you have to learn to… fit into the other society too… it's just within the last couple months actually that I'm starting to kinda find balance in my life and starting to do more artwork and more cultural stuff and try and work at the same time… and a lot of it is pretty hard, because a lot of things just weren't taught to me.[24]

Austin echoed Thomas's sentiment saying, "On Journeys they really want to connect with your cultural side… but I mean it's hard, because you've been living outside this

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

culture for so long."[25] When I asked Waylon how he balances living his culture with engaging in mainstream society, however, he responded differently:

> I carry it with me, you know, I don't hide my identity anywhere. I'll be down at school walking down the halls singing away [laughter]. But I think part of that is... you know, they say these songs, they have a life of their own, you know, you treat them well and they'll treat you well. And I think when I'm down, or lonely it helps me out, it gives me that strength to complete whatever I'm doing...[26]

The strength with which Waylon carries himself made me smile as I pictured him walking down the hall singing at his college in New Mexico. For Waylon his culture does not weigh him down, it is his culture that nourishes him and keeps him alive.

Heteropatriarchal Colonialism & Indigenous Masculinity

> A lot of times feelings start to come out, you know, old hurts, old pains, you know, your *emotional* pains… you're on the water for anywhere from like 5 and 14 hours paddling in one day, just silence around you… we don't bring any headphones, any boombox, or music, its just silence, that's all you can hear out there… I think that's part of it, you're able to talk about anything you want out there and just let it go, you know, just let it go...
>
> *–Waylon Ballew*[27]

> A lot of the roles that we used to have aren't in place anymore, that's something we're working on too. Everyone wants to be a chief, meanwhile, there are all these different positions that people used to be put in, like even keeping track of who's there and who gets what for a potlatch...there's just tons of roles, but I don't think the men have enough anymore.
>
> *–Thomas Wamiss Jr.*[28]

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25. Austin Shelafoe (Duwamish, Chippewa and Sioux) in discussion with author, July 2014.

26. Waylon Ballew (Northern Cheyenne and Lummi) in discussion with author, July 2014.

27. Ibid., (emphasis added).

28. Thomas Wamiss Jr. (Kwakwaka'wakw) in discussion with the author, July 2014.

Putting the Tribal Canoe Journeys and the experiences of young male participants in conversation with ideas of Indigenous masculinity raises a number of provocative and potentially productive questions. While young men are not the central focus of the Tribal Journeys, the Journeys open up new spaces for male participants that in many ways reflect the traditional roles and responsibilities associated with concepts of Indigenous masculinity. Using the phrase 'roles and responsibilities' when talking about masculine identities is still something relatively new to me. The phrase kept coming up in my readings, however, and as I become more familiar with it I find it to be a useful concept when thinking about gender. If, as many feminists argue, gender is a term used "as a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes," then the idea of roles and responsibilities is fitting.[29] When talking about Indigenous masculinity in particular, however, we must expand our understanding of relationships, as most Indigenous societies in the Americas were traditionally land-based and many gender roles were formed in relation to the land, as well as to the family and the community.

Exploring masculine identities in a contemporary context can be challenging as most people on the planet today, including many Indigenous peoples, are living in urban environments relatively disconnected from the land. In a book chapter titled "Indigenous Masculinities: Carrying the Bones of Our Ancestors," Anderson, Innes and Swift embark upon an exploration of "traditional, non-patriarchal roles and responsibilities" and begin

29. Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053.

"to think about how these responsibilities can be translated into the modern world."[30] Reading through this chapter I found myself continually returning to my time in Bella Bella and the conversations I had with the young men I encountered there. As Thomas points out in the opening of this section, many of the roles that used to be in place for men have fallen out of practice. Still, many of the central values are in place, including balance, respect, and responsibility. Using these values to form linkages between the stories of these young men and more general literature on Indigenous masculinity led me to ask a tangential question: How have traditional gender relations been disrupted?

Not surprisingly, this question directs us towards the infamous history of colonization. In order to begin to rebuild gender relations based on balance and respect, rather than domination and violence, we must include a critical analysis of how colonization initially disrupted gender relations within Native communities. When asked by Sam McKegney in an interview why the disruption of balanced gender relations was "so crucial to the colonial project," Alfred explains one of the main reasons:

> One is that the central objective of colonization, as it was practiced in our part of the world, was to impose cultural practices and to impose worldviews that come from Europe on Indigenous peoples. It just so happens that at the time that this project was in full force, doing its business, patriarchy and the subjugation of women was at the forefront of that culture, so I think that was one of the driving forces. It was part of the package of European civilization.[31]

Drawing from Indigenous feminists, Anderson, Innes and Swift echo Alfred's words, noting "that pre-contact gender relations were based on equity and balance, and that male dominance in the areas of governance, social relations, economics, and spiritual practices

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30. Kim Anderson, Robert Alexander Innes and John Swift, "Indigenous Masculinities: Carrying the Bones of the Ancestors," in *Canadian Men and Masculinities: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Christopher J. Greig, and Wayne J. Martino (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2012), 280.

31. Taiaiaki Alfred, interview by Sam McKegney, February 11, 2011, transcript.

were introduced by settler society as a way of breaking down Indigenous families and communities.[32]"

While a critical analysis of colonization in its myriad forms is crucial, it is beyond the scope of this essay. On the other hand, I do want to highlight the connection between colonization and heteropatriarchal gender relations. Understanding how colonization disrupted traditional gender relations based on equality and respect is an essential component to a larger project of decolonization. It is my belief that most men recognize the need for dominant discourses on gender and sexuality to shift. Similarly, I do not believe that most men would choose to be violent towards women, children, and/or others if they were given the space to express themselves alternatively. I do not wish to victimize men, for as Michael Atkinson states in *Deconstructing Men & Masculinities*, men's "relative positions of power and authority *within their local communities* are better than women's."[33] The idea of a 'masculinity crisis,' which Atkinson examines, is extreme and particularly problematic if, as he claims, "The crisis for many men is about wanting but not wanting to change one's male identity, and of figuring out how to fashion a new patriarchal society and pastiche hegemony that seems harmless and accommodating to everyone."[34] While Atkinson is focusing on the experience of white middle-class men, the danger of reproducing hierarchical relations is clear. In this essay I argue that men – Native, white or other, of any class – need the space to express themselves in alternative ways, but in ways that challenge heteropatriarchal structures of gender and sexuality. If

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32. Anderson, Innes and Swift, "Indigenous masculinities," 267.

33. Michael Atkinson, *Deconstructing Men & Masculinities* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

34. Ibid., 18. Atkinson defines pastiche hegemony on page 20 as "the practice of only finding personal power in localized social settings, rather than having the ability to be powerful across many social settings."

the reconstruction of masculinities is done in such a way I believe it will not only address the anxieties many man experience, but it will also bring healing to our families and communities.

This brings us back to the concept of Indigenous masculinity. One of the reasons many Indigenous men experience feelings of hopelessness and helplessness is because their traditional roles and responsibilities have been displaced as a result of colonial processes of dislocation, oppression and assimilation – materialized in such forms as the Indian Act, residential schools and reservations. As Anderson, Innes and Swift explain, traditionally "it was the men's job 'to protect and to provide.'"[35] Living in land-based societies, "the role to 'protect' and 'provide' ensured a sense of purpose, belonging, and identity that did not involve having power over others – human, animal, or environment."[36] The idea of providing for others came up during my conversation with Waylon as well. When talking about what it meant to be a man during his ancestors' time Waylon explained that you would often have to give away your first kill "to prove that you were a provider and that you were going to take care of… your family, your community and your people."[37] When settlers displaced communities from their lands, the ability to provide for one's family and community was taken away from Indigenous men, and along with it an important sense of purpose, belonging and identity. Dispossession also undermined Indigenous men's ability to protect. While Indigenous men had a responsibility to protect their families and communities, they also had a responsibility to the land that nourished and sustained them. As quoted in Anderson,

35. Anderson, Innes and Swift, "Indigenous masculinities," 271.

36. Ibid.

37. Waylon Ballew (Northern Cheyenne and Lummi) in discussion with author, July 2014.

Innes and Swift, Will Cambell (Métis, Alberta) states, "How can he protect if he has nothing to protect?"[38]

Reflecting on the consequences of colonization for Indigenous men reveals the deep-rooted causes of many contemporary problems, such as alcoholism and domestic abuse, which frequently occur at disproportionate levels in many Indigenous communities today.[39] This "dispossessed masculinity" is an intergenerational problem as well; discussing the Canadian Indian Act in her book, *Therapeutic Nations*, Million explains that it "is a law that supports removing three or more generations of Indian children from their communities, isolating and sex-segregating them in institutions where a mixture of state-induced poverty and banal stupidity creates conditions that eventually destroy large numbers of individuals, psychologically if not physically."[40] This legacy of psychological and physical disconnection and destruction can be self-perpetuating, as many Native young men growing up lack positive male role models in their life. The cycle is not foreordained to repeat itself, however, and this is one of the reasons I have identified the Tribal Canoe Journeys as so important for young Indigenous men in this region. As Thomas expressed, one of the main reasons the Canoe Journeys were so impactful for him was because of the connection he made with his mentor, WA. Through this relationship Thomas developed a new sense of self, based on the fundamental values of balance and respect. While the notions "to protect" and "to provide" need to be further examined within the context of the modern world, the Journeys open up space for the

38. Anderson, Innes and Swift, "Indigenous masculinities," 275.

39. Ibid., 274.

40. Ibid., 279; Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 41.

reconstruction of masculine identities that represent the roles and responsibilities associated with the concept of Indigenous masculinity in a contemporary context.

Again, while the Tribal Journeys are not centered around young men, the work being done in this space is important as the young men participating move towards non-violent, non-patriarchal gender relations grounded in the cultures of their peoples. In order to "heal and decolonize from the violence of patriarchy" as Anderson, Innes and Swift claim, we must "provide… nurturing environments for our boys and men."[41] I believe that the Canoe Journeys provide such an environment and that what is taking place in this space is a powerful form of healing and decolonization. While old hurts and pains may come up during the Journeys, as Waylon says in the opening of this section, being out on the water in the canoe provides a space to process these feelings and to let them go.

Indigenizing Gender & Sexuality & Reconstructing Masculinities

> Now that theorists seek frameworks for dismantling the hierarchies so long undergirding Western thought, indigenous standpoints that never constructed such hierarchies in quite the same way can and should be at the front edge of this new ethnographic and theoretical work.
>
> —*Kim TallBear*[42]

41. Anderson, Innes and Swift, "Indigenous Masculinities," 280.

42. Kim TallBear, "An Indigenous Approach to Critical Animals Studies, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms," (paper presented at the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 2013): 5.

In my effort to bring the concepts of indigeneity, masculinity and allyship into conversation I find Kim TallBear to be a powerful voice. As she highlights in the quote above, one of the main objectives emerging for theorists across disciplines is the deconstruction of hierarchies in an effort to "better serve [indigenous] interests, and the interests of many marginalized others."[43] I share this goal, arguing that the reconstruction of masculine identities is congruous with the deconstruction of hierarchies, as they are both a part of a larger project of decolonization. In my attempt to complicate notions of gender and sexuality in such a way that aligns with Indigenous interests I have found it necessary to include Indigenous perspectives. As TallBear says, "Indigenous thinkers have an important contribution to make."[44] "If we are to serve contemporary indigenous interests," she continues, "we must work to articulate indigenous thought (not completely but somewhat intelligibly) into such frameworks."[45] I agree, however, I would add that if we are to incorporate Indigenous thought into alternative frameworks, we must also "learn to see indigenous peoples in [their] full vitalness, not as the de-animated vanished or less evolved."[46]

Recognizing the potentially problematic task of doing research that addresses Indigeneous knowledge I have had to be careful about what I choose to share and how I choose to present what I have learned. While there may not be a clear boundary, there is a distinct difference between sharing and learning versus cultural appropriation. Turning to

43. Ibid., 6.

44. Ibid., 5.

45. Ibid., 6.

46. Ibid., 9.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, I find her examination of research to be insightful in addressing this dilemma. According to Smith,

> In contemporary indigenous contexts there are some major research issues which continue to be debated quite vigorously. These can be summarized best by the critical questions that communities and indigenous activists ask, in a variety of ways: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it?… These questions are simply part of a larger set of judgments on criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us?…[47]

As Smith demonstrates, while it is important to ask critical questions when doing research, it is equally important to engage in self-reflection and to trust one's intuition. If your gut tells you something's wrong, stop and identify what it is before you decide whether or not to move forward.

In my exploration of masculinity I have had to engage in self-reflection frequently and question my motives as I have found myself drawn to the Indigenous values and worldviews associated with notions of Indigenous masculinity. While I may be pulled in this direction, my story is not the story of "the white man goes Native," as depicted in popular culture such as Avatar.[48] As Gail Bederman demonstrates in *Manliness & Civilization*, historic men such as U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt have promoted a romanticized notion of a "pure, essential masculinity" based on primitive savagery.[49] These Darwinian understandings of manliness do not serve the interests of Indigenous

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47. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 10.

48. Avatar is a 2009 science fiction film directed and produced by James Cameron that was one of the highest grossing films ever. In the film the protagonist is a white male marine who is accepted into a local community of the Na'vi, an Indigenous people on a faraway moon called Pandora. The film is a classic story of the "white savior."

49. Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 208.

peoples, but rather serve to promulgate discourses of imperialism and racial supremacy. Furthermore, this misguided understanding of masculinity relies upon the violent domination of nature, undermining many of the fundamental values of Indigenous epistemologies. Addressing romanticized visions of indigeneity, Morgensen invokes the idea of "settler indigenization," explaining how many settler colonists impersonate "indigenous difference to resist imperial rule only to replace it by ruling in the name of civilization on lands to which they now belong."[50] In this way "settler indigenization appears to supplant indigenous presence" and "presumes the replacement of primitive culture by modernity even as it obliterates or appropriates indigenous gender/sexual difference to defend its primacy on settled land."[51]

Although I agree with Morgensen's notion of "settler indigenization" as a way of naturalizing settler occupation on stolen land, I would like to use the term "indigenize" differently in this essay. Drawing from the ideas of Simpson and TallBear, I would like to indigenize our understanding of gender and sexuality for "the betterment of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples…to advance the agenda of decolonization and liberation."[52] The fact that, as Simpson asserts, "the spiritual foundations of [Indigenous knowledge] and the Indigenous values and worldviews that support it…exist in opposition to the worldviews and values of the dominant societies" is one of the reasons I have turned to them for guidance and perspective in so many areas of my life.[53] In my attempt to complicate and challenge dominant conceptions of gender and sexuality in

50. Morgensen, "Theorizing Gender," 9.

51. Ibid., 14.

52. Simpson, "Anticolonial Strategies," 374.

53. Ibid.

particular, I have turned to authors such as Qwo-Li Driskill, who is a part of an important movement of Indigenous Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people, which "are asserting uniquely Native-centered and tribally specific understandings of gender and sexuality as a way to critique colonialism, queerphobia, racism, and misogyny as part of decolonial struggles."[54] In her essay, "Stolen From Our Bodies," Driskill defines "a colonized sexuality" as:

> One in which we have internalized the sexual values of dominant culture. The invaders continue to enforce the idea that sexuality and non-dichotomous genders are a sin, recreating sexuality as illicit, shocking, shameful, and removed from any spiritual content. Queer sexualities and genders are degraded, ignored, condemned and destroyed.[55]

While Driskill focuses on the experiences of Two-Spirits in particular, I believe her words provide insight for us all, for as she says, "It is not only First Nations people who have internalized dominant culture's concepts of gender and sexuality."[56] Recognizing the fact that women and transgender people have experienced oppression and abuse to a much larger degree than men, I believe we must also think about how men have been impacted by the dominant structures of society. In my own life, understanding the constructed nature of white masculinity has allowed me to take a step back and think about the ways in which my own gender and sexuality have been conditioned by the

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54. Qwo-Li Driskill, "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances Between Native and Queer Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 69. The term "Two-Spirit," as Driskill explains, is a word used to resist colonial definitions of 'alternative' genders and sexualities, and to make room for, rather than confine complexities. GLBTQ is an acronym used to describe a Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Queer movement.

55. Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 16.2 (2004): 54.

56. Ibid., 55.

structures of dominant society, as well and how I might move away from the norms of a "white supremacist patriarchy."[57]

Returning to the space of the Tribal Canoe Journeys, I find that Driskill's examination of gender and sexuality speaks to the experiences of young male participants in a number of ways. Although sexuality was not something that came up during my conversations in Bella Bella, I think it is important to think about the ways in which the Canoe Journeys may address sexuality. As Driskill remarks, "Native people survive a legacy of spiritual and sexual abuse…" which "damaged our senses of Self and wounded our sacred connection to our bodies."[58] An important part of the process of healing and decolonizing from this legacy many Native people experience involves reconnecting with their bodies, their "erotic selves," or what Driskill identifies as "a journey back to my first homeland."[59] While I cannot speak for any of the young men who participated in the Tribal Journeys, I wonder whether or not they would identify the Journeys as a way of reconnecting with their own bodies. Pulling in the canoes, dancing, and singing are all practices that have a spiritual element to them and require a sense of awareness of one's own body.

Whether or not the Canoe Journeys address sexuality directly, the fact that they open up space for men to be in their bodies in a non-violent, non-dominant way, such as singing, dancing or pulling in the canoe is significant. Being aware of one's own body and one's emotional self is, as Driskill shows us, is an essential element of healing and decolonization, not only for men, but for families and communities as well. If we are to

57. Ibid., 53.

58. Ibid., 54.

59. Ibid., 53.

learn to respect and care for each other, we must also learn to respect and care for ourselves.

Drawing the connection between the individual, the family and the community is important. While the Tribal Journeys may open up space for young men to express their masculine identities in alternative ways, it is within the context of the community that the sense of self, the sense of belonging and the sense of pride these men have are cemented. Waylon illustrated this point during one of our conversations. Talking about how the Journeys have been transformational for him he says, "I think its given me a chance to actually prove to myself what I can do, what I'm capable of... and that I realize now that I know more than I thought I did."[60] Moving on the greater impact of the Tribal Journeys he continues,

> Journey has brought that pride back to my family, its instilled their ability to... to use their gifts that have been handed down. I recently got told by an elder that they were really worried for us, that at one point in time, just because they were wondering who was going to carry on these songs, you know, there's not very many *young men* interested enough to carry these songs, and now they got a good core group of us... its healed community wide…[61]

While I have highlighted the importance of the Canoe Journeys for men in this essay, clearly the movement is having positive reverberations within the families and communities involved as well.

Emphasizing the importance of family and community in shaping gender and sexual identities I believe is another way in which to challenge dominant understandings of these terms as dichotomous and hierarchical. As Million states,

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60. Waylon Ballew (Northern Cheyenne and Lummi) in discussion with author, July 2014 (emphasis added).

61. Ibid.

> Indigenous societies organized themselves through descent, adoption, and voluntary affiliation in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies that can be characterized by their great diversity. Gender relations among tribal people were variable, depending on the circulation of tribal knowledge and resources that were often distributed through the women's descent lines. More notably here, even beyond the richness in variety of social organizations that existed prior to the Canadian state, are the power relations within and between these societies arranged through familial relations and gendered responsibilities. The heterosexual couple was not necessarily the focal point of marriages. Marriages were unions of family systems that placed responsibility on clan and kinship bonds between these groups first, not on the relations between the two people."[62]

I find this passage speaks powerfully to the space created by the Tribal Canoe Journeys. Not only are the Journeys bringing families and communities together, but they are rebuilding the power relations and kinship ties between different Indigenous societies within the Pacific Northwest Coast region. I don't know how many people I talked to during my time at Qatuwas told me that they had discovered new family ties through their conversations with people from other nations. Regaining these connections is an important form of healing and empowerment that challenges colonial projects of assimilation and annihilation. Furthermore, as Million illustrates, returning to traditional forms of organization within a space such as the Tribal Journeys challenges binary patriarchal notions of gender by allowing for more variable gender relations based on responsibilities to one's family and community, rather than simply the relations between a heterosexual couple.

62. Million, *Therapeutic Nations*, 41-42.

Conclusion

In my quest to develop a better relationship with my own identity I am continually looking to the experiences of others for guidance and perspective. As a human, like many other animals, I am a social being and my relations with others are what shape me. In this way, the relations I made at Qatuwas and the connections I have made with other authors in my writing have changed me. While I have learned a great deal from my experience in Bella Bella, I also recognize that the experiences of the young men I met are not my own. Reflecting on the Tribal Canoe Journeys and the notion of Indigenous Masculinity I see that many of the traditional teachings are specific to Native men of the Pacific Northwest Coast and Indigenous men more generally. Culture and heritage are extremely important in how we shape our identities. In this way, the need to reconstruct masculine identities based on balance and respect can also be seen as a need to turn to our cultures and embrace our heritages.

What this means for non-Native men such as myself, however, is somewhat problematic. What is my culture and where is my heritage? Being a white settler, isn't it the Western culture of my ancestors that needs to change? These questions are big, and I am still grappling with how to answer them. While it is important to know where we come from, it is also important to acknowledge the contemporary context in which we live and to begin to think about how we can move forward in a positive direction. I have no intention of appropriating the cultures of the people I met in Bella Bella. That said, I believe the lessons I learned have a deeper meaning that can be applied in the context of my own life.

Putting the Tribal Canoe Journeys in conversation with the notion of Indigenous Masculinity reveals the need for men to have the space to construct non-patriarchal, non-violent masculine identities, both within Native communities and more generally. By adopting an understanding of gender in terms of roles and responsibilities – to one's family, to one's community and to the land – we can challenge hierarchical binary concepts of gender and make room for gender relations based on balance and respect. Learning to respect oneself, and to be in touch with one's own body and emotional-self within the context of the family and the community is equally important and is also a part of larger projects of decolonization and self-determination. As Alfred says, "It may sound clichéd, but it is still true that the first part of self-determination is the *self*."[63]

Centering this essay within my own experience I have in many ways *felt* my way across these pages. Reconfiguring my own understanding of masculinity by drawing linkages between a diversity of ideas I hope to empower Indigenous voices and ways of understanding. Building upon the relations I formed during my time in Bella Bella I open myself up to the possibility of powerful alliances in the future.

63. Alfred, *Wasáse*, 32.

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