

*It was all darkness and always had been.
There was nothing there forever.
Creation was a tiny seed awaiting a dream.
The dream came to be because of the cry.
A howling cry which was an echo in the emptiness of nothing.
The cry was very lonely and caused the dream to turn over in its sleep.
The dream did not want to awaken, but the crying would not stop.
Well, thought the dream, opening its mind, so now I am awake and there is something.
The dream floated above itself and looked into its mind.
It wanted to see what the cry was.
What it saw was a dream within its own dreaming.
And that other dream was Creation.
And Creation was the cry seeking to begin something, but it didn't know what, and that is
why it cried.
So the original dream lifted the Creation dream from its mind and set it free.
Then it went to the other end of nothing and let itself go back to dreamless sleep.
Creation floated all over the nothing, dreaming of all the things it would do.
Its dreaming was interrupted often by crying.
So, it wasn't me crying after all, Creation thought.
Then it thought again, but it is me because I dreamed it.
So, I have begun creation with a cry.
When I begin to create the universe, I must remember to give the cry a very special place.
Perhaps I'll call the cry
Coyote.*

-Told by Peter Blue Cloud (Mohawk)

“Not one great country can be named from the polar regions in the north to New Zealand
in the south in which the aborigines do not tattoo themselves”

-Charles Darwin

“Ye shall not make any cutting in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you.”

- Leviticus 19:28

“I don’t believe, in view of the awakening of the nonwestern European peoples in this
country, that an observational science can be a valid science if the person observing is not
intimately tied in with the community that he’s observing and shares some of the burdens
and responsibilities for what is happening in that community.”

-Vine Deloria, Jr.

“I am sure now that I was too young to understand it all and that I only felt it. It was the
pictures that I remembered and the words that went with them; for nothing that I have
ever seen with my eyes was so clear and bright as what my vision showed me; and no
words that I have ever heard with my ears were like these words I heard. I did not have
to remember these things; they have remembered themselves all these years. It was as I
grew older that the meanings came clearer and clearer out of the pictures and the words;
and even now I know that more was shown to me than I can tell.”

-Black Elk

I am writing this and having a hard time finding my voice. Can I convey what I truly mean by hitting buttons on a computer? In other words, will this writing have an effect on you the reader, or will it pass into oblivion. Alanson Skinner noted in his 1915 ethnography that storytelling for Menominee has a, “richness of gesture and vocal inflection that cannot be transcribed on paper” (235). These things I am writing are living stories and I have only conveyed them through the use of the oral tradition. Storytelling is seen by contemporary peoples as myth, as fiction, but our oral tradition is much more than that. These “stories” have significant meaning to Indigenous people. They are our history; our moral guides; our entertainment; our fears; our aspirations; our explanations; our dreams; they are us. I am attempting to reestablish my connection to this tradition, but where do I turn if the stories are no longer told? “How might one simultaneously acknowledge the destruction and loss caused by colonization, affirm a relation with the past, with tradition, but also affirm creative, legitimate gains within the present when the ‘authentic’ and ‘legitimate’ is so often firmly positioned as ‘past’, a ‘before’ to much of what defines the terms of both ‘today’ and the future” (Pritchard 37)?

This is a reflection of how my dreams and life experiences have led me to believe in the power and resilience of traditional beliefs in a colonized individual. I am writing this in a colonizing language and feel regret that I cannot think in my Omaeqnomenewoq, my Menominee language. This comes not from lack of interest, but from continual oppression of our language and cultural ways over generations. This has happened to Indigenous people all over the world. Our language is vital to the continuation of the Menominee people, to all Indigenous people, and there are some of us who are dedicated to learning and teaching to the young generations and their families. “Language is Power-our people must recover ways of knowing and relating from outside the mental ideational framework of colonialism by regenerating themselves in a conceptual universe formed through Indigenous languages” (Alfred and Corntassel 613).

My grandparents on my father’s side of my family spoke Omaeqnomenewoq, but spoke only English to their children and grandchildren. My father grew up without that connection, as did I. We are both victims of the imperialism that Indigenous people around the world have been facing for generation upon generation. There is a belief in American culture that we, Americans, are living the right life and we are determined to force this idea, whether it’s democracy or the English language, on people around the world. “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on dialectical significance today” (Frantz 210).

How do I combat this on-going colonial belief and recover my language and cultural ways? Over the years I have received many gifts from my ancestors in the form of dreams. Belief in my dreams is absolute. As I read about my people’s beliefs in ethnographies and histories, and when I say my people I mean the people whose stories of their origins are embedded in the soil I now stand upon, I have found that, “For the Menomini dreaming is and was a very significant activity. No dream is casually dismissed. Aside from the dreaming done during the fast periods, night dreams quite frequently carry great import” (Spindler 49) and that, “dream experiences may be

interpreted, in some cases, as the literal equivalent of the experiences of individuals when fully awake” (Hallowell 270).

Two weeks before I started writing this paper I dreamt I was in a traditional lodge. Outside of the lodge I could hear the beginnings of a battle. A woman spoke to me in Omaeqnomenewoq and I recognized that she wasn't speaking the language I was thinking with, but I still understood her. She told me that if I wore the buffalo robe she was placing on my shoulders, I would walk as one of the people, the kias macetewok, the ancient ones, and would be unharmed. I left the lodge and walked into the neighborhood I grew up in, wearing that robe. I walked down the block and got onto the city bus at the corner. I believe what was conveyed to me in that dream is I need to walk in this contemporary world with the comfort of knowing my traditional culture surrounds me. The Spindlers, ethnographers who worked with the Menominee, said that, “for the Menomini, the separation between mind and body, man and animal, spiritual forces and material forces, natural and supernatural is absent in their framework of belief and rationality” (1971:50). I have always felt that my dreams were more than subconscious thought, and because of these ethnographers and my elders, I feel justified in that belief.

I am approaching this project as a reclamation of my indigenism; a description of the path of decolonization that I am currently walking. There has always been something missing in my life and for as long as I can remember I have been in search of this unknown. Lynn Hume writes about Australian Aborigines, but her idea is global for all Indigenous people when she says, “non-remote (urban) Aborigines who, for one reason or another, have been displaced from their places of origin and their traditional religious and social contexts have had to learn what being ‘Aboriginal’ is within a European historical and cultural context” (Hume 125). I have for a long time tried to understand what it means to be an Indigenous person in America. When I was younger I had a romantic vision of native people that came from American popular culture. Over the years I have seen the faults of this vision. I am a witness and a survivor of cultural genocide. I reflect on the attempts to terminate my people. I've read about how the government said we were to no longer be Menominee people. I also see perseverance of Menominee people and our culture. Attempts to assimilate indigenous people have failed and should be reflected upon with scorn. “...A loss of cultural sovereignty, whether through an inability to practice, the influx of imitations, or through the adoption of formal modes of expression by outsiders, is akin to an act of epistemic violence” (Shand 42).

My dreams are a reflection of popular imagination mingled with my desire for tradition and culture. I have always been an active and intense dreamer. Some of my dreams are extremely vivid while others are murkier. I have told people my dreams and tell of them as they are, very much a story, an adventure. Most of my dreams take on a cinematic scope, where I can be any character in the dream, or I could just be a viewer, like a camera angle. I believe this is a part of my cultural upbringing. “The individual dream represents the individual in his relation or non-relation to the culture, and its manifest content reflects his psychology first and secondarily his culture” (194). My love for movies is a love of the stories. If I had grown up listening to traditional stories instead of watching movies, my dreams would be presented to me in a different manner. “[Dream] is interpreted largely from the point of view of its influence on the life of the individual...In areas where the culture has broken down, the individual still interprets his

dreams and regards them as important for his life” (193). Culture has broken down somewhat, but it is resilient and embedded in my blood. I only have to look to my dreams and aspirations to see that this is true.

I have been given many signs/symbols in my dreams that have shaped the way I live. I have looked to my dreams for answers and in some dreams I have seen the future. “Dreaming was a quest, and it was the dreamer’s responsibility to interpret the answers given during the night” (Andrews 201). In the article “Race, Personality and Identity in Samoan Dreams,” Mageo believes that symbolism in post-colonial cultures remains even if those symbols are no longer significant in the present culture. “It was only a dream.” I hear this phrase repeated over and over again in television, stories, and movies, even music. For Menominee, and most other Indigenous people, dream was life. Symbolism and signs received in dreams were taken seriously and “it was only a dream” has no translation in Omaeqnomenewoq. Racism and post-colonialism in particular—“limit the ability of dominated communities to play with signifiers and to circulate their signs” (Briggs 462). We are told that dreams are unreal and during the missionary days, we were told that dreams were the work of the devil.

“I have had no trouble with the savages. None of them have been angry with me because I declared the false divinity of the sun, of the thunder, the bear, the underground panther, of manabus, of their dreams, nor because I spoke against superstitious feasts and of the Jugglers (Cese-ko)” {Father Andre, 1671-1689, in Jesuit Relations 1896-1901, vol. lviii: 265-282}

We need to reclaim the belief in our dreams. Katie Glaskin tells us, “Although dreams are intangible, subjectively experienced ‘events’, the perceptions a people hold about dreams provide important insights into the ontological and epistemological aspects of human life-ways, in terms of which the relationship between tradition and innovation can be more fully understood” (Glaskin 310). There is a story on my reservation about a man who wanted to live forever. Manabus, our culture hero, turned him to stone. The stone sits in a small alcove off the highway and people stop to lay tobacco in offering. It is said that when the stone finally crumbles away, the Menominee will cease to exist. I see our people gathering their powers, and through our de-colonization we can add to that stone and make it a symbol of our desire to hold on to our ways. We will add the stones of our achievements until the pile reaches into the sky.

When I was about five years old, I had a reoccurring dream of many people standing in my room talking. I couldn’t understand what was being said because all the voices mixed together until they merged into the constant hum of a large crowd. The noise was so loud that I would wake up crying and scream for my mother as my dream carried over into my waking world. The noise continued until she opened the door. As she entered my room these people would make way for her and vanish into the shadows. This happened many times when I was young and only once since. Someone told me that those were spirits that had come to talk over me and to decide my life here.

Around this same time, I had some imaginary friends. These friends came to me from a tree house by my favorite lake on the Menominee reservation. I had completely forgotten them until a few years ago when I was eating lunch with my mom. We were getting into a deep conversation when she asked me if I remembered Hu-gok-oo, Das-gok-oo, and The Chief. As soon as she asked me, I immediately remembered them. She

asked me if I remembered when they left. When I told her I didn't know, she explained to me that I had suddenly stopped playing with them and after a few weeks she asked where they had been. She told me that I told her that they had left for California to work on the highways. She then went on to tell me that she had been talking to my grandfather, her father, that week and they happened to discuss his imaginary friends when he was young. We were both amazed to hear that his "imaginary" friends were named Hu-gok-oo and Das-gok-oo and when they left him they went to New York to work on the railroads. My colonized side wants to question this phenomenon. Maybe grandpa told me about Hu-gok-oo and Das-gok-oo when I was young. Another side of me wants to believe that these spirits exist and had visited my grandfather and me across generations. Children see the world in a different way than adults do. I grew up with people telling me that ghosts/spirits don't exist, and to this day I have trouble explaining my own experiences with the fear that people would think me crazy. When I speak about these things with my people, it is just accepted.

When I was thirteen, I went to a summer Boy Scout camp at a place called Gardner Dam. The big activity that week was going white water tubing. My father told me that I should leave tobacco in the water because we would be tubing on the Wolf River, which the people say claims a Menominee about every four years. He told me that the Wolf was not supposed to be used for recreation. I told him I would leave some.

The day came when we would depart down the river on our adventure. We were sat down and told the rules for the safety of the group. We had to wear shoes and pants and wear a helmet for our protection. We grabbed our inner tubes and headed for the Wolf. I was close to the end of the line and by that time I had completely forgotten my tobacco and prayers.

The first obstacle came right after we entered the river. We were supposed to paddle as hard as we could and clear Dead Man's Island to the left. On the right of the island was a sweeper, a tree that had fallen off the island and had lodged itself against a boulder creating an extremely strong current under it. I watched as my fellow scouts entered the river and successfully cleared the island on the left. I slowly made my way forward awaiting my turn. The mud suctioned my feet to the earth in an effort to make me stay on the ground. I was frightened, but I didn't want to lose face in front of my peers. I set my tube in the water and jumped right into the jaws of the Wolf. The water roared around me and I was propelled right into the current. I was lifted onto a crest and no matter how hard I kicked and paddled, I was pulled to the right and shot right toward that tree. I slammed into it and flipped over and was pulled underneath. I was wedged below the tree, against the belly of the Wolf and was fighting for breath. I could see the sky above me through about six inches of water. Slowly I started to fade away, my whole world turning black.

The next thing I know, I am lying over the top of that tree and pulling someone else out from underneath that tree. I was given back to this world by the river, and I believe it was because I had been chosen for something. I could have easily died under that tree, but I was helped. I return to the river often and speak to it, pray to it and thank it for the life I was given. I make promises to live to my potential, but doubt lingers in my mind because I am praying in English, will the spirits understand? Ever since I have felt both fear exhilaration at the power of the river.

Years later, after climbing the pyramids in the Yucatan and throwing snowballs from the top of the Austrian Alps, I found art entering my life again. I made the decision to go to art school and applied to the Savannah College of Art and Design and also to the Institute of American Indian Art. I was accepted into both programs and had to make a decision. I could go to one of the best art schools in the country or I could go to a smaller school with Indigenous majority and cultural programs. I chose the Institute of American Indian Art. Living in Santa Fe was an important time in my life because I had chosen to attend an all-native art school and it was the first time that I spent a lot of time with native people who were around my age and who came from similar backgrounds. I lived in a house with three other Native artists. We all were dreamers and often shared our dreams with each other. Several times we dreamt similar dreams, and all of our dream talks had really inspired my art. It seemed I could hardly sit in peace without a dream image in my head waiting to be acknowledged through my creativity. My life experience changed dramatically within those two years.

One night, during that time, I dreamt I was leading a group of people across a large plain. Off in the distance I could see another group also running in the same direction we were heading. Ahead of me, on the horizon I could see a speck silhouetted against the sky. As we ran I knew that we had to beat that other group to that speck, which was growing larger. All of a sudden a giant arm came out of the earth, it was at least three times larger than me. The hand pointed to the speck, which was now taking the shape of a large farmhouse. I looked over to the other group and saw that there were arms coming out of the earth over there too, but they were trying to stop that group. They caused enough of a slowing that we reached the house first.

As I approached the front steps I could feel power gathering and I knew I had to find the source of that power. I opened the front door and knew right away that the source was coming from upstairs and it was drawing me toward it. I ran up the stairs and at the end of the hall I saw light beaming out through the cracks of a door. I walked up to the door and opened it. The light was extremely bright and I saw the silhouette of a young girl. She was grabbing the source and I almost felt like I was too late. She picked up what looked like a stylized double cross and turned toward me with it in her hands. The light that radiated from it grew brighter as she presented it to me. As soon as I received it the whole world changed; the color of the sky, the architecture of the house, the clothes I was wearing, everything.

I awoke with the image of the symbol I was given burned into my mind. Over the next couple of days I saw the symbol everywhere and realized it was the traditional symbol of the dragonfly. I read about animal totems and found out the dragonfly was a symbol of transformation. I received the dream just before my graduation and I knew then that, not only was I on the right path, but I was about to be transformed.

“[Menominee] look upon their dreams as ordinances and irrevocable decrees, the execution of which is not permitted without crime to delay...It prescribes their feasts, their dances, their songs, their games, -in a word, the dream does everything”
(Seventeenth Century report Jesuit Relations 1896-1901, vol. x: 169-171).

The dream was so powerful, that I decided to have it tattooed on my chest so that I would be reminded of the power of that dream, but also to honor that symbol and those who presented it to me. “Tattooing is mostly the recording of dreams, whether or not the

tattooed are consciously aware of it. The American Indians knew this. They often said to the Pale-face that much of their own tattooing was a memorial to their dreams...Totemism was one of the chief motives of tattooing among the American Indians. The figures of animals tattooed on their bodies were the symbols of their totems-their protectors, the suppliers of magic power” (Parry 2:122).

That summer I had the opportunity to teach traditional native arts at the Denver Summer Arts Institute. I had a class of about fifteen native youth from Denver’s inner city. All summer long we made moccasins, made ribbon shirts, stretched hand drums, and did leatherworking. It was that summer that I realized that I was called to be a teacher. The dragonfly and other dream spirits or, “...’other-than-human persons’ share with human beings powerful abilities, including intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, and ability to discern right from wrong, and also the ability to speak, and therefore to influence other persons” (Morrison 25). I felt natural in the teaching role and I could see that I was making a difference in these kid’s lives.

At the end of the summer they had an honoring ceremony for all of the teachers and presented us with eagle feathers. During the entire ceremony, the field we were in was covered in dragonflies. This was a sign, and I was humbled and energized with a self-confidence that I had never felt before. I knew that I had been chosen to be a teacher, and I have been following that guidance ever since. The dragonfly told me of my transformation to come, my transformation into a teacher. “The spirit asked the chosen individual to take on an incredible responsibility, one that would forever overwhelm his life” (Andrews 202).

Flash forward a couple of years. I was about to graduate again with my Bachelor’s degree. I was screen-printing ancient symbols on vinyl records in the serigraphy studio one day in December of 2004. My professor came up to me and told me about an opportunity to go to New Zealand. He was invited to go there as a part of an art/cultural exchange with the Maori people. I had always been fascinated with Maori art and especially their tattoo tradition. He told me they were looking for more artists and that I should e-mail the Maori woman who was putting together the exchange. I did so and was invited and only needed to find money to pay for my ticket to get there. I found the money and bought the ticket and was on a plane two weeks later. I felt that there was something drawing me there, some unknown force.

I arrived in Auckland a week before the gathering, and someone from the Maori school came to pick me up. I realized that I would have to sit on the driver’s side of her car, which is the passenger seat there. Everything was opposite. When I looked up at the sky at night, I didn’t recognize anything, and it threw me off. It was a different world there. I spent a couple of days checking out Auckland and was determined to rent a car and check out the country. I found a cheap rental and took off. It wasn’t easy to drive on the other side of the road, but I got used to it fairly quickly.

The days leading up to my road trip were filled with rain, almost non-stop, and the weather didn’t change much during my trip. On my first day of driving, I wound through hilly terrain with grass and sheep in every valley and hill. Overhead, I had frequent visits from the eagles hunting the small animals that my car scared up. I wound through a geo-thermal area of the island and stopped to hike. I crossed a bridge over a river of steam and everywhere I looked I could see eruptions of what looked like water

vapor, but smelled like sulphur. The ground was the color of rusted metals set against the foliage of a rainforest. Large fern trees were unfurled in a continual push toward the sky. I wondered what kind of place this was; it was unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

Later that day I drove past a massive waterfall that didn't just fall over a cliff, but shot out horizontally in a continual explosion of a blue color unlike any water I've ever seen. A little ways upriver, I found the largest lake in the southern hemisphere. The lake's reflection showed amazing mountains that looked like the jaws of a fierce animal. I wondered what kinds of stories the Maoris had for the landscape they have lived upon for many generations. I continued driving and encountered a desert. I stopped by the side of the road and watched a storm cloud hit a tall, pointed mountain and wrap around it on its journey toward the direction I was heading. The cloud hit that obstacle and split into two and rejoined as it passed. I continued driving and wound my way through the mountains and all the while I kept seeing those eagles when the rain would let up. I spent the first night in the rental car next to the ocean, listening to the waves crash against the shore. I normally like sleeping in a room that is devoid of sound, but I slept soundly with the noises of the ocean and the beach.

The next morning I awoke and continued my drive south. I stopped in Wellington and toured the national museum, the front offices of WETA Workshop (the studio responsible for all the art direction of the Lord Of The Rings movies), and stopped at the tattoo museum. My mind expanded as I read about the Maori traditions and of their encounters with the colonial forces. I studied the symbols in their art and identified their use of their natural world. I saw the spirals so prevalent in the ferns and foliage of the island. I saw representations of animals and spirits, and I connected. These people were so similar to my people with their art connecting themselves to the natural world. Aotearoa (New Zealand) was "[a] sacred place. You can feel it if you let it speak to your heart. Journeys to the sacred places of the earth lead one to the ultimate sacred place at the center of one's being. Many of these special sites are points of convergence for other dimensions of reality, like holes in time that allow us to step into the past or the future. We are reminded to honor our oneness with each other and with plant and animal life. We acknowledge the spirit in all things (Beaver Culture Canada)" (Matthew 110).

After I left Wellington, I started heading north on a different road than I came in on. About twenty minutes after I left the outskirts of the city, I found a sign saying that there was a park coming up. I pulled off at the exit and followed the road in. I parked and got all my camera gear ready. I put on my coat because it was still raining and walked out. I crossed a bridge and headed into a sort of rainforest, well the closest thing I've come to a rainforest. I found a trail and headed into the dense growth. I stopped along the trail because something had caught my eye. I turned and looked eye level at the top of a fern tree. There sticking out was a fresh fern still waiting to unravel. It was in the shape of a spiral, and when I looked closer I saw small spirals along the larger spiral. I realized these were the fronds of the fern. I dropped some tobacco and cut the spiral from the top of the tree.

I walked further on and came upon a trail leading down to the river below me. The current was swift and I could hear the river before I could see it. I was drawn down to it and felt the need to pray. I thanked the spirits living in New Zealand and asked if

there were any from the land I came from, and if there were I asked them to keep looking after me. I thanked the Aotearoa spirits for the beauty I was experiencing and asked for their protection as well on my journey through their land. I told them that I came in a good way and would remember them when I made my way home. I continued walking and breathing in the moist air, enjoying the sound of the river and the feel of the rain on my face. I walked with a new energy and comfort within these surroundings. I paused now and then to compose a picture, crossed a swaying suspension bridge, and left the park.

I traveled north again and wound through mountains with 180 degree turns and a line of people behind me wanting to speed through. I crossed the pass and decided to head for the coast again. I passed small towns and read the signs that were in both English and Maori. It was still raining and raining. Finally I found another sign that popped out at me. It read "Lost World Highway" and I was ready for it. The clouds had started to break up and by the time I left the last gas station for 150 km, the sun was shining and I was driving with my arm out the window mimicking the flight of the eagles that had been accompanying me along my entire trip. I drove a long way and saw not a single car pass me, there were no other roads except the roads to the homes that dotted the landscape. After about an hour, I saw a sign that said I was about to enter a gorge. The clouds had bunched up again and it looked like it would be raining again before too long.

The gorge loomed up before me and I paralleled a river as I entered. The pavement ended and was now on a small dirt road with a big river on my right and rainforest walls enclosing the river and me. Ahead I saw some boulders littering the road and some earth that had slid down from above. My heart beat faster and I worried about how far I had come on this road and also worried about if I would be able to make it back to that gas station if I had to. I drove around the boulders and edged around the landslide and decided that if something came up where I could turn around, I would. Farther down the road I edged around another landslide and worried if it could fall from above, I might trigger one going down as I edged the car to the river side of the road. The river was some distance down from the road and from the right side of the car, I could see straight down.

My sign appeared in the form of a car coming from the opposite direction. I breathed a sigh of relief as we both slowed down to speak with each other. The family asked me how far to the next gas station. I told them I had been driving about an hour and a half. They told me there were more landslides and boulders ahead of me. They also told me the river had flooded over the road but it was still passable. I thanked them and we separated on our own adventures. I drove farther and found my turnaround, but was no longer worried. I pulled over and fixed a snack and read the historical marker that told me that this pull off was a grave of someone who helped build this road just short of a hundred years before.

As I sat there, someone pulled up in a truck and asked me which way I was heading. I told him and he told me the river had flooded over the road in that direction and that it was rising. He said I probably had about a half an hour before it became impassable. I was beyond the point of no return and decided to try and make it. Again nervousness overcame me as I drove down the road with a little more speed and the same

scatterings of boulders and landslides over the road. I crossed a small bridge and the pavement started again. The nervousness fell behind me as I thought that I had escaped the fate of having to chance driving through a flooded road. I drove up a small hill and saw a small amount of water over the road and laughed to myself because I thought of the people who warned me of the impending danger. I could see the centerline through the small body of water and drove through it with confidence. I sped along happily believing that I had escaped with ease. I drove up another small hill and my jaw dropped as I came upon a huge flood over the road and I was on heading right into it. I could see the centerline going in and coming out on the far side of the flood but I had no idea how deep the middle was. I stopped the car and debated the chances of me making it through this. I gathered all my things into my bag and had it ready in case I needed to bail out of the car. I opened my window in the chance that I would have to crawl out of it. I said a prayer and looked up and saw a truck coming from the opposite direction. I watched to see what they would do. They inched along slowly into the water and I watched as they passed the middle and saw that it was possible to cross, but I wasn't sure if the battery would get wet and fry the car's electrical system. I started forward and waved as I passed the truck. My knuckles turned white as I gripped the steering wheel in preparation of whatever would happen. I cleared the river and shouted a thank you to the spirits who helped me through the gorge and across the river. I dove along with a smile on my face and stopped at the first coffee shop in the small town on my path. I ate the best meal of my entire life and sat and wrote down my adventure in my journal.

After lunch, I continued my journey and made it to the coast that night. I drove along farm fields in search of the beach. I found a small park, pulled up, laid the seat back and fell asleep. That night I had the dream...

I was standing high up on a mountain and was looking at the biggest eagle I had ever seen. It had a brown beak with a black tip that was at least ten feet long. It looked off to my right as a smaller eagle; I think it was a female, looked up at him. I followed the eagle's gaze and saw many huge eagles hovering over an Aotearoa landscape (rolling green hills). I turned back to that eagle, and when I did, the land fell out from under me and as I fell that eagle saved me. He grabbed my arm, and when he did, his talons turned into human hands.

I woke up and remembered the dream perfectly. It was like all my other important dreams; it stood out in my mind as experience, not just imagery. I knew I needed to tell someone about this dream. I later read in the Menominee ethnography *Dreamers With Power*, "The individual tries to find the meaning in the dream, but if he is unsuccessful, he talks about it with an elder, who has great powers and who, by virtue of his nearness to the end of life, is close to what we would call the 'supernatural'. The interpretations placed on the dream experience can foretell a significant event, provide revelation concerning life, death, and sacred powers, or dictate a specific course of action" (Spindler 49). This dream had tremendous power and I was not sure what it meant. I decided to seek someone out, someone from Aotearoa.

I returned to Auckland in time for the gathering of artists from the United States and Aotearoa. That week I experienced the art of many people with similar visions as I have. Halfway through the week, an artist came for the evening lecture. He came to speak with us about Ta Moko, the traditional Maori tattoo. I sat and listened to this elder

explain the importance of Moko to the Maori people and the symbolism used. I saw the spiral that was prominent in most every natural feature on the island I traveled. He spoke of the importance of dreaming and of family and of the power of Ta Moko.

We took a break for tea and biscuits. I walked over to the elder and told him about the tattoos I had and the dream of the dragonfly symbol. I showed him my dragonfly tattoos on my chest. He sat there listening intently and nodded his head when I finished. He paused for a while, drank his tea and took a bite of his cookie. He turned back to me and started to tell me this story...

An elder came to him years ago and told him he wanted to get his Moko done. They sat together and it was decided that the artist, Te Rangi, would sleep on it that night. They departed and that night Te Rangi dreamt of a cave. In the cave there were carved walls and, he told me, at the entrance, on either side, was carved the same symbols that are tattooed on my chest.

The next day he met with that elder and began to tell him his dream. The elder stopped him and told him to just do it. Te Rangi tattooed a large Moko on that elder's chest and abdomen. He used that symbol he saw at the entrance, the same symbol I have on either side of my chest. When he finished, the elder looked down at his Moko and said to Te Rangi, "You were in that cave." Te Rangi went on to tell me that that elder told him that the cave was a real place and that it was a meeting place for Wairua, or souls that travel.

Wairua can be dead or living souls or spirits. There is a similar idea in Menominee belief. According to the translation by ethnologist James Slotkin of a man explaining our beliefs, "Well, that is why I exist...It is because of my soul that I live. If something should happen to me, then it leaves, and I die. My soul which travels at night; that soul of mine walks [then]. Well, this one is always right here; it stay here in my body, that one, my soul. There are two souls of mine. One travels at night. This one right here maintains me; it is right here. That soul of mine is one that is like a shadow [kawe-hseh] (1957: 44-45). In many of my dreams I am a traveler. I have been to all parts of the globe and even into space and other worlds while dreaming. The symbols I have tattooed on my chest are powerful in Maori culture and Te Rangi told me that that elder's Moko was the only time he used that symbol and was taken aback when he saw them on my chest.

I asked him if I could tell him about the dream I had earlier that week. He nodded and I began to tell him of the dream of the eagle. After I finished, he nodded again and was quiet. Someone else asked him a question and he got into another conversation. I thought to myself that that was all. We went back to the lecture and Te Rangi finished. I went outside afterwards and to my surprise he came to find me. He told me that he was going to bring his stuff tomorrow and we would talk about getting my Ta Moko done.

The next day I worked on my art in preparation for the show that would be going up at the end of the week. I took a break for lunch and sat next to one of the grandmothers there. She smiled at me and I smiled back. She told me that she had been asked to ask me a question, and if that was all right. I told her it was fine and she asked me, "What do you call the markings on your face?" I told her moles or beauty marks. She asked if there was significance for them in my culture. I told her I wasn't sure. "They are the markings that tell us you were touched by the gods," she said to me. She

said that because I had so many, I was special and that whatever I chose to do with my life, I would excel at it. I looked into her eyes and only saw the truth. I believe her. I told her of my dreams and she nodded and smiled in complete acceptance. She took me aside and together we prepared for my future. She laid me down on a mat and told me to relax. She passed her hands over me and told me to imagine a place where I am comfortable. I immediately thought of the lake on my reservation, where my “imaginary” friends lived, and I thought about my grandfather’s house. She told me that I could heal myself with my mind and we practiced doing so.

Later that day, Te Rangi came back and we sat down together and I talked about my family and where I come from. I told him about my past and where I’ve been and where I am, and where I am going. He told me he woke up with the image in his mind and where it would be placed. I thought about the elder from his story and told him that I trusted his vision. We set up his equipment in the school’s Marai (Meeting House). The ta moko was a community event and everyone participated. There were people playing guitar and singing; people massaging my feet, my arms, and my head; the grandmother whom I spoke with earlier stretched the skin on my back as Te Rangi tattooed the spirit onto me. We worked in increments, and the entire time I felt as if I were elsewhere. I could feel what should have been pain, but it didn’t bother me. I held onto my medicine bag for over six hours as he drew the outline on my back. Two days later, he came back and worked on the lines and dots and fill-in. “For understanding the tattoo designs one has to learn about the myth and belief behind the designs...there are a few common elements of designs common all over the world, e.g. tattoo marks consisting of lines and dots which represent certain figures and have symbolic meaning” (Joshi 11:20). I didn’t look at the outline until the entire moko was finished, although I could feel it the entire time.

When I finally saw it, it reminded me of who I am. My Menominee name is Waq Nah Wew, or flashes lightning. I am named for the lightning caused when the thunderbirds are coming. “Although the Thunderbirds are primarily conceived as avian in form, their outward appearance is not constant. Outward appearance is actually superficial. Although the Thunderbirds, like other entities in the other-than-human category, have distinctive attributes of their own, they have the same basic, enduring essence as do human persons” (Hallowell 276). The symbol on my back took many meanings in Maori traditions as well as Menominee. “Native American ‘symbols’ are generative because they themselves are persons. So called ‘sacred’, ‘symbolic’ objects are intentional beings” (Morrison 35).

For a long time, Indigenous people have gone through revivals of old ways. “Soon some of the American Indians performing in the Wild West shows began to feel that if anyone should exploit skin ornaments it was the originators of tattooing on this continent. In the 1880’s and 1890’s, more and more tattooed Indians appeared with the traveling shows” (Parry 64-5). I wondered if this was just a way to increase visibility and make more money. I looked further back and saw the older meanings of tattooing on this continent. “American Indians used to get tattooed with pictorial representations of their heroic exploits in battles and hunts” (Parry 80). “In the Queen Charlotte Islands the Haidas are universally tattooed, the design, in every case, being the totem, done in conventional style. Sometimes several families of different totems live together in the

same large house, and in such a case the Haida Chief will have all their totems tattooed on his person” (Bolton 62). “The bearers of tattoo marks believe that, when they present themselves to their God after death, they will be able to give the floral designs and other symbols to the god” (Joshi 19). “Similar belief exists among the Eskimos: The Net-Silik Eskimos believe that an insufficiently tattooed individual, after death, goes to the land of the crest fallen” (Birket-Smith 119:161). I tried to find tattooing done among my tribe and only found a few mentions in Felix Keesing’s ethnography, but I learned what was important, tattooing was among us. It was missionaries and colonials who forced tattooing into hiding. “...the influence of the missionaries, who, in all quarters of the globe, attack the custom [tattooing] with the greatest energy, especially where it is found to be in any way connected with the religion or superstitions of the natives” (Bolton 64).

I looked deeper into the meaning of tattooing to the Maori people and discovered that moko was a sign of property, “thinking the conceptualization of ‘markings’ in terms of the ‘properness’ of property can be useful insofar as it inflects our discussion with a broad range of indigenous concerns, which establish a relationship between dispossession, displacement, and destruction of indigenous peoples and their cultures and representations which provided the justificatory foundation for such acts, in short, the violent reduction and translocation of indigenous beliefs and interests into European derived categories or concepts” (Pritchard 31). Moko had been a way to symbolize your importance within the tribe. The markings were similar among certain Maori tribes, but upon closer inspection you find very distinct differences. “One mark just over [Te Pehi Kupe’s] nose was, he said, his name- ‘Europee man write with pen his name-Te Pehi’s is here’ (pointing to his forehead); and he delineated on paper the corresponding marks or names of his brother and of his son. Every line, both on his face and on other parts of his body, was firmly registered in his memory” (Robely 15).

When the colonials started taking over lands both here and in Aotearoa, many Indigenous people used their symbols to sign important documents. “Some portion of it, some distinctive part, was a mark of identity, and has been copied for Europeans by the Maoris as a signature. For instance, Mr. Wakefield records that in a purchase of land near the Bay of Islands by Mr. Samuel Marsden, the famous missionary, in place of signatures to the deed, facsimiles of the face-moko of the vendors were drawn on the document” (Robely 11). “Many nineteenth-century chiefs chose to sign documents such as land deeds and the Treaty of Waitangi with their moko in preference to a signature so as to increase the tapu of the document” (King 14). Rangi Skipper (Tohunga ta moko/Moko artist) tells us about the Maori struggle to regain their traditional practices when he says “...the ink he buries in skin symbolizes the resurrection of both a unique art form and aspirations for Maori sovereignty...excavated from the past and redesigned for today...an important step in coming to terms with what it means to be Maori” (Watkin 36).

Moko and symbolism was an Indigenous form of the written word. Last Sunday, in the comics section, I read about the origins of the alphabet. The artist had shown how the picture of an ox head may have symbolized “ah”. Later the ox turned into an inverted ‘A’ which the Greeks turned on its side and the Romans later turned it into the ‘A’ which we all recognize today. It is the same with Indigenous symbolism, and it took a Sunday comic for me to realize this. “The Maori used a kind of hieroglyphic or symbolic way of

communication. Thus a chief inviting another to join a war party sent a tattooed potato and a fig of tobacco bound up together; which was interpreted to mean by the tattoo that the enemy was a Maori, and not European, and by the tobacco that it represented smoke; the other chief, on receiving the missive, roasted the one and ate it, and smoked the other to show that he accepted the invitation and would join him with guns and powder” (Robely 19).

“Indigenous pathways of authentic action and freedom struggle start with people transcending colonialism on an individual basis—a strength that soon reverberates outward from the self to family, clan, community and into all of the broader relationships that form an Indigenous existence” (Alfred And Corntassel 612). I have been reading these histories/ethnographies of my people and I realize that I am like the eagle on my back, hovering. I am constantly searching for a connection to the land, to my ancestors, and to the answers that will make that connection. I have used my love for art to connect and have found many answers in my dreams. “It is believed that the dream pulls both [spiritual and physical worlds] into the dimension of the dreamer’s world, crossing the boundaries of past, present and future” (Andrews 197). I have studied the art of my people and it has influenced not only my own art, but it has also invaded my dreams and has changed the way I see. I have listened to the music and have started to speak the Menominee language and it too has influenced my dreams and the way I hear and communicate.

“It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler’s power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power” (Alfred And Corntassel 601). De-colonization is about pulling in whatever is left of your cultural ways and doing so by any means necessary. If you have to look to other indigenous cultures, if you read the ethnologies of your own people, if you go to an elder, if you seek it out in your dreams, that is what is important, the seeking. It seems there are a lot of people looking for something more in their lives and act upon their curiosities in various ways. I know I am young, and may look back on this time of my life and see it as a time of optimism and idealism, but I may also look back at it as a stepping-stone on a greater path.

An elder told me once that we could create anything just by believing it. This is my belief, and it has never failed me.

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