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Appropriating Balance: Reversing the Imbalance for Indigenous Women through Spirituality

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Introduction

Controversial issues surround the co-opting of Indigenous spirituality for public consumption. This paper will discuss the terms “shaman” and “shamanism” as they related to some of these issues. Once these terms were used to refer to men, but they have now shifted to refer to women as well. This study will provide evidence of Indigenous women held up as examples for their helpfulness, faithfulness, and ability to embrace acculturation and assimilation, and it will further show how the damage of cooption by mainstream women has damaged Indigenous women. The discussion will then turn to specific examples of women who are victims of internalized oppression and one who is redeemed through reconnection and ownership. Finally, I argue that cooption must be stopped and Indigenous women must return to the blanket to begin to heal.

Some vital parts of the appropriation of Indigenous spirituality will be explored in this paper including: (1) the use of Manifest Destiny and Borderland Romanticized Living to appropriate the spiritual life of the “others” and (2) the emptiness of the “conquered” peoples produced by acculturation and assimilation. Indigenous women are directly affected by the negative impacts that result from the blending of New Age, neo-Paganism and Indigenous ceremonies, practices and sacred objects. Unfortunately, it is not only a spiritual stripping of Indigenous sacred ceremonies, objects, and practices; it is the stripping of their very voices and their ability to self-determine. The dynamics of Indigenous cultures are pushed to the edges of imbalance from cooptation, which is generally defined as using something for one's own purposes. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on females who internalize oppression and may struggle with drug or alcohol addiction, depression, suicide, abuses to self and others, and various other acts. To analyze these two areas, there are four points that will be explored: the history of the prevailing culture stripping the Indigenous peoples of their cultures and voices through appropriation; removing self-determination by replacing it with one of the prevailing culture's religions as an example; disruption of the nature of Indigenous religions by disturbing the balance of all things; and the need of Indigenous peoples, especially women, to reclaim all of these points.

Literature Review

Many researchers have discussed the appropriations of didgeridoos, sweat lodges, Gaelic practices, myths, and the term shaman/ess as well as the effects of the appropriation and cooption on those who are Indigenous or have a great respect for those cultures.¹ Virtually all authors who have written on this subject agree that New Agers and neo-pagans are imagining these cultures as having occult knowledge that is missing from the current Western philosophy. Christina Welch sees prevailing cultures that stress “these ‘Other’ cultures . . . as emphasizing elements which are missing from contemporary Western society, notably environmental friendliness, a tribal/community ethic, and a lack of technologisation and industrialization – attributes that combine to form a Golden Age Arcadian fantasy of indigenous life.”² Various groups of the prevailing culture pressure Indigenous women to give primal and Indigenous cultural essence away and reveal the “occult” or hidden and mysterious pieces of information, further stripping Indigenous women's souls until nothing recognizably Indigenous is left. As Andrea Smith has discussed, “Withholding knowledge, then, is

¹ Paul C. Johnson, “Shamanism from Ecuador to Chicago: A Case Study in new Age Ritual Appropriation,” *Religion* 25 (1995): 163-178. Suzanne Owen, “Indigenous Knowledge and its Intertribal Transmission: Sources of Contemporary Mi'kmaq Traditional Practices,” [article on-line] (accessed 15 January, 2009) available from http://www.cst.ed.ac.uk/2005conference/papers/Owen_paper.pdf. Cynthia R. Kasee, “Identity, Recovery, and Religious Imperialism: Native American Women of the New Age,” *Women and Therapy* 16, no. 2/3 (1995): 83-93.

² Christina Welch, “Appropriating the Didjeridu and the Sweat Lodge: New Age Baddies and Indigenous Victims?,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17, no. 1 (2002): 21.

an act of resistance against those who desire to know you in order to better control you."³ Welch states that while " . . . appropriating indigenous intellectual and cultural property is validated by the West's perceived need to save such valuable information for posterity . . . The opposite is the case..."⁴ Once these religious/spiritual beliefs which are based in space, place and time are appropriated the disenfranchised cultures are set adrift its cultural essence gone. Others argue that since Indigenous cultures share practices with each other they should also share with the prevailing culture. Suzanne Owen provides some insight into the issue:

Along with other influential Native American activists and scholars, they have made the problem of appropriation one of ethnicity between the 'colonised' Indians and the 'colonising' euro-Americans. However, when pressed, Lakota spiritual leaders deny such exclusivity and when asked for reasons why non-Indians should cease from participating in or conducting ceremonies, they often speak of protocols – the way things are done. Lakota and other Plains Indian ceremonial practices have spread to other tribes and indigenous peoples . . . and even to other continents, but these appropriations have escaped criticism . . .⁵

The prevailing culture wants to quantify and qualify Indigenous spirituality instead of allowing it to exist in space, place, and time. Because the dominant culture follows a linear progression, it destroys the non-linear nature of Indigenous spirituality, that which has been kept secure within the various Indigenous cultures that are tied to place, space, and time. Central to native belief systems are how each spiritual element is done, when it is done, and (most importantly) where it is done. For example, many Indigenous women from virtually any Indigenous tribe/Nation wake up in the morning, face the sun rising on the East and rejoice that another day has dawned. It can be in prayer, song, or meditation but it is done. Although this can be done anywhere, the ceremony must be performed in the prescribed ways with the original intent. It can be done alone, but the women would be engaging in this practice with the knowledge that other peoples who share her cultural background are engaging in the same practice, at the same time, in the same prescribed manner—albeit in different locations. This links the single practitioner to the larger community.

Discussion of the Problem

Although there are many scholarly analyses and definitions of Shamanism, two definitions from the work of Jenny Blain and Wendy Rose are particularly relevant. Blain, Rose and others commonly describe "shaman" or "saman" as a Tungus word for healer or spiritual leader. Blain states, "'Shamanism' in the modern West has a history of abstraction and appropriation, constructed as being something to marvel at, something exotic that 'other' people do; described by recourse to individual."⁶ Rose refers to Geary Hobson to define whiteshamanism as describing 'the apparently growing number of small-press poets of generally white, Euro-Christian American background, who in their poems assume the persona of the shaman, usually in the guise of an American Indian

³ Andrea Smith, "Spiritual Appropriation as Sexual Violence," (2005) *Wicazo Sa Review*, 20, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 97.

⁴ Welch: 26.

⁵ Owen: 1.

⁶ Jenny Blain, "Shamans, Stones, Authenticity and Appropriation: Contestations of Invention and Meaning," (Accessed 1 February, 2009) available from http://www.sacredsites.org.uk/papers/Blain_J-perm.pdf, 2001. Blaine paraphrases Mircea Eliade, *Indian Religions* (S.I. 1964), 53.

medicine man. To be a poet is simply not enough; they must claim a power from higher sources.”⁷ As Rose further states, the presses are not always small, and they are not always using the guise of a man but of a woman.⁸

One has only to search any Internet book site, and type in key words “American Indian” or “Native American” to discover that the majority of the writers are white. Women such as Lynn Andrews are indicative. One recent search revealed that she had 13 items that were “related” to Indigenous spirituality on Amazon.com, and, in order to make the appropriation complete, she and others have crowded out by sheer volume the Indigenous woman’s voice. According to Rose, Lynn Anderson is a “white woman from Beverly Hills who has grown rich claiming to have been taught by two traditional Cree women.”⁹ These women are said to have taught her how to overcome innately evil males through female empowerment. Of even greater concern, given the plight of women in the present, is the fact that Anderson extracts elements from other belief systems and fits them into a feminist model, much to the detriment of an overall understanding of Indigenous belief systems.

The majority of Indigenous cultures view the world differently than the dominant culture does—both mundane and spiritual. Neither gender is more powerful than the other. Males are not innately evil and women have traditionally been empowered. It is a system that revolves around balance.

One can use aspects of Cherokee culture to illustrate the idea of balance. Traditional Cherokees believe, for example, that they are one piece of the tapestry of the world and everything has an essence. The loss of balance would cause “sickness, bad weather, failed crops, poor hunting, and many other problems.”¹⁰ It was necessary for humans to work with the rest of the world to maintain balance. One can imagine that, in earlier times—when Indigenous women were out tending the crops that would feed their families, they performed rituals for healthy plants, enough rain and sunshine, and strength from the food they were tending. They would be talking to the corn mother, Selu, who gave the Cherokees corn, beans and squash. Selu died by the hands of her biological son and her adopted son. Before she died, she instructed them to drag her body around in the earth seven times and her blood produced corn, beans and squash. Selu did this to assure AniYunWiYa (Cherokee) always had food.¹¹ She sacrificed her life on earth to provide for the whole. (Other Indigenous cultures have similar stories of how cultivated food came into being.) Because of the sacrifice of her life for the sustenance of the tribe/Nation, Selu—and the similar sacrifices made by first mothers of many Indigenous cultures, the first cultivated foods should be considered sacred. George Tinker posits,

Corn and all food stuffs are our relatives, just as much as those who live in adjacent lodges within [the] clan-cluster . . . we are eating our relatives . . . This may sound cannibalistic to the prevailing culture. However, there are many reasons that Indigenous cultures would interact with respect of life essence and honor the food plant or animal. This care and concern is reflected.¹²

⁷ Wendy Rose, “The Great Pretenders: Further Reflections on White Shamanism.” Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot, eds. *Native American Voices: A Reader (2nd ed.)* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1992), 330.

⁸ Rose: 330.

⁹ *Ibid*, 338.

¹⁰ Karen Raley, “Maintaining Balance: The Religious World of the Cherokees,” (1998)(accessed 20 January, 2009) available from <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/1839>.

¹¹ Kana\`ti and Selu.” *Encyclopedia Mythica* from Encyclopedia Mythica Online. (accessed 6 April, 2009) available from <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/kanati_and_selu.html>.

¹² George Tinker, “Jesus, Corn Mother, and Conquest: Christology and Colonialism” in Jace Weaver, ed.

On a scientific level, it is generally accepted that “the evolution of corn depended on intense intervention on the part of Central American humans.”¹³ Without these acknowledgments of relation and the centrality of women and their contributions to balance and knowledge of history, Indigenous women step into the acculturation and assimilation pushed by the prevailing culture that causes loss of the essence that connects them to their essential culture and place.

What are the various impacts of the loss of essence? There is oppression and its insidious relative, internalized oppression. Virtually every scholar of American Indian/Native American/Indigenous Studies would argue that Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be oppressed by the prevailing culture in numerous ways. The result of centuries of oppression has resulted in internalized oppression. Webster’s New World College Dictionary defines “internalize” in the following manner:

[T]o make internal; interiorize; specifically to make (others, esp. the prevailing, attitudes, ideas, norms, etc.) as part of one’s own patterns of thinking¹⁴ and oppress as “to keep down by the cruel or unjust use of power or authority; rule harshly; tyrannize over; to crush or trample.”¹⁵

In cases of internalized oppression, Indigenous women accept the negative stereotypes of Indigenous cultures. Therefore, when Indigenous women allow their essence to be removed by the combination of internalized oppression, acculturation, and forced assimilation at the hands of the prevailing culture; there is nothing to replace the lost essence it except an emptiness that cannot be filled.

The question of why the prevailing culture has turned away from its own religions and wants to co-opt Indigenous religion is a vital point. America has been and continues to be a voracious consumerist society. Religious participation consumes something that the prevailing culture in America does not want to offer – time. Both Catholicism and Protestantism expect several daily prayer sessions and acts of charity as well as weekly formal community services and high days of prayerful celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. If practiced, these obligations would build community and bring practitioners closer to internal peace. Indigenous spiritual practices are no different. A healer or spiritual leader who has become known to the Western world as Shaman/ess leads an even more rigorous spiritual life, because s/he is at the work of keeping the world in balance by helping others through the spiritual terrain.

For Americans, spirituality and the process of becoming a shaman/ess, like any other consumable product or service, becomes a pay-per-view / on-demand pursuit. Allan Greer cites Jill Lepore as seeing Americans constructing a ‘triangulated’ identity, in relation to the native ‘other’ but also to the European ‘other.’¹⁶ Lisa Aldred conjectures that a significant number of white affluent suburban and urban middle-aged baby-boomers complain of feeling uprooted from cultural traditions, community belonging, and spiritual meaning to which the New Age movement has been one answer. As part of a consumerist society they pursue spirituality and identity through the very acts of consumerism they claim they want to escape. This spiritual consumerism leaves them

Native American Religious Identity: Unforgotten Gods (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 151.

¹³ Jude Todd, (2008) “Corn Culture: A Story of Intelligent Design,” *American Indian Quarterly*, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 475. (Fussell cited in Todd)

¹⁴ *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* 3rd ed., s.v. “internalize” (New York: Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁵ *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* 3rd ed., s.v. “oppress” (New York: Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁶ Allan Greer, “Natives and Nationalism: The Americanization of Kateri Tekakwitha,” *Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (April 2004): 260.

wanting because the community is not grounded in time and place. This gives the prevailing culture a feeling of loss and abandonment that cannot be filled.¹⁷ Michael Gibbons supports these consumers in researching “their own mythologies for cultural innovation and ethical grounding for desired behaviors.”¹⁸ However, he does not support them in the cooption of others’ religion or spirituality. Exploring the effects that Christianity has had on Indigenous peoples, Tinker observed at the Living Waters’ Sunday service that “[t]he political compromise and resulting disempowerment that come[s] from participating in the conqueror’s ceremony was and is simply too great.”¹⁹ Those who choose to participate in Christianity without some syncretism with their own essence is oppressive itself. “To call upon Jesus as Lord is to concede the colonial reality of new hierarchical social structures; it is to concede the conquest as final and to become complicit in our own death, that is, the ongoing genocidal death of our peoples.”²⁰ Western culture leaves itself and the conquered in a spiritual void.

The Prevailing Culture and Its Use of Indigenous Women

For many Americans, filling the spiritual void that results from the unwillingness or inability to commit to religion in its original format is not enough. Both Protestants and Catholics hold high the ideal assimilated Indigenous examples of Kateri Tekakwitha and Catherine Brown to lure Indigenous women to the emptiness of assimilation and spiritual void. They both become part of the Pocahontas Perplex “Princess” icon that is virgin-like, pure, and helpful to European/Americans.²¹ The Pocahontas Perplex for Indigenous women is no different than other women of color. The good and evil perplex sets impossible goals (virginity, helpful, pure) which forces women to attempt the impossible - maintain perfection for an entire lifetime or fall into deprivation. This impossible quest is extremely complex and confusing. It damages self-esteem and nurtures internalized oppression similar to that which has often been promoted by Catholicism and Protestant faiths in the Americas.

The Catholic Church has long had a tenuous hold on America because of the strong Protestantism that crossed with the Mayflower and so many others after her. By 1884, the Church needed to reshape its image and solidify itself in the U.S. During the Plenary Council of Baltimore, many names came up but one finally emerged as a favorite candidate for canonization – the Mohawk convert, Catherine Tekakwitha. She was a perfect choice at the time, because she fit the stereotype of the pure Indigenous woman of the country’s imagined past; she could reflect the borderland-romanticized life that Americans envisioned. Most importantly, she connected the Church to nature, land and the explorer individualist who was the opposite of the urban realities of the time.²² Her story is told as follows:

Born in the Mohawk valley in 1656, Tekakwitha was a sickly and reclusive orphan who converted to Catholicism as an adolescent, taking the baptismal name of Catherine. The villagers persecuted her

¹⁷ Lisa Aldred, “Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24 no. 3 (Summer 2000): 329.

¹⁸ Michael S. Gibbons, “New Age Cowboys and Indian Religion: Boundary Maintenance and Religious Inter-Cultural Borrowing” (2004), (accessed 15 January, 2009) Available from faculty.evansville.edu/mg86/docs/020%20New%20Age%20Cowboys%20and%20Indian : p. 18

¹⁹ Tinker, 137.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 139.

²¹ Reyna Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: the Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot, eds., *Native American Voices: A Reader* 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2001), 206.

²² Greer, 262.

and she fled to Sault St. Louis (Kahnawake) to a Jesuit mission. She joined a group of other young Iroquois women who abstained from sex and marriage in order to obtain religious perfection through Catholicism. Her self-inflicted penances-- including fasting, self-flagellation, sleep deprivation, mixing ashes in her food, creating a bed of thorns, branding herself with hot coals and more, were judged to be severe but brought her particularly vivid and illuminating visions and dreams. She died at 24.²³

Her following among French Canadian and Indigenous Catholics grew. Tekakwitha's citizenship became a contested issue between Canada and the U.S. There are now two shrines in her honor. One is in Kahnawake, Quebec, Canada and one in Fonda, N.Y. Clarence and Nelly Walworth, an uncle and niece, were crucial to the survival of Tekakwitha's legend. Clarence found her grave and personally financed a gravestone. Nelly had written about her adventures in Europe and Asia. She wanted to tackle Tekakwitha's life and bring her two favorite styles to it, romance and archaeology. Nelly "approached the challenge by confronting the meager evidence directly bearing on that phase of the life with what she could find out about Mohawk culture and the history of French and Dutch colonization. On that well researched basis, she then imagined a life for Tekakwitha, complete with cozy episodes of domestic routine and dangerous wartime adventures."²⁴

Greer later states that "Europeans and natives all take their place in this picturesque tableau without any hint that one group is flourishing at the expense of the other."²⁵ To make the story complete, Nelly eliminates the name Catherine from the title and uses a Mohawk mispronunciation of the Italian saint along with a French approximation of a Mohawk name to present her creation as a pristine aboriginal.²⁶ The most interesting thing about Kateri is that she was venerated in 1943; beatified in 1980; but has yet to be canonized.²⁷

This story raises many interesting questions. What does that say for the faithful, that only one more miracle is needed and has not occurred in twenty-nine years?²⁸ Is Kateri no longer

²³ Cheryl Petten, "Lily of the Mohawks Blessed and Devoted," *Windspeaker*, (April 2004): 34. (accessed 20 January, 2009) available from <http://www.catholic-pages.com/saints/process.asp>.

²⁴ Greer, 267.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 269.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 271.

²⁷ The qualifications for anyone to be canonized are as follows:

5. For the beatification of a confessor a miracle attributed to the Servant of God, verified after his death, is necessary. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation, following a procedure analogous to that for heroic virtues. This one too is concluded with the relative decree. Once the two decrees are promulgated (regarding the heroic virtues and the miracle) the Holy Father decides on beatification, which is the concession of public worship, limited to a particular sphere. With beatification the candidate receives the title of Blessed.

6. For canonization another miracle is needed, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after his beatification. The methods for ascertainment of the affirmed miracle are the same as those followed for beatification. Canonization is understood as the concession of public worship in the Universal Church. Pontifical infallibility is involved. With canonization, the Blessed acquires the title of Saint." For more information, visit <http://www.catholic-pages.com/saints/process.asp>.

²⁸ The reference to "twenty-nine" years refers to the period between the date of beatification (1980) and the date of the author's presentation at the Women and Spirituality Symposium (2009).

interested in being the perfect Indigenous woman for the Catholic Church? Has she abandoned the faithful? Could it be that the very people who could have attributed a miracle no longer invest the time that it takes to pray for intercession to “create” that final miracle? Or could it be that she no longer serves the Church because Indigenous women cannot live up to that idealized iconography?

Leaving Catholicism behind, one can turn to an idealized Indigenous woman for the Protestant faith, Catherine Brown. Catherine Brown was a Cherokee who also led a brief life which seems to be one of the criteria to become the venerated ‘other’ for the prevailing culture and easier to keep pure. Catherine Brown came along at an earlier but no less important religious time in the early 19th century. She was born around 1800 and died by the time she was 23. Unlike Kateri, she was a living model for the Brainerd Mission School and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABFM).²⁹ The ABFM wanted to be a mover and shaker when it came to the “Indian Question.” It supported complete acculturation and assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the prevailing culture at any cost.

Some Cherokees also understood the value of the appearance of acculturation. The pressure from states to move tribes/Nations that lived in the Southeast such as Tennessee and Georgia was becoming unbearable. Cherokees had traditional land that covered five to seven southeastern states. By the 1820s, most of the Cherokees were confined to Georgia where, unfortunately, gold was discovered in 1827 on Cherokee lands.³⁰ This discovery encouraged a campaign to portray the Cherokees as uncivilized when the opposite was actually the case.

In order to present a “perfect” acculturated and assimilated example that would be acceptable to the ABFM’s funders, the group promoted Catherine. However, Catherine’s case backfired. Instead of becoming a unifying force to promote Christianity, she estranged herself from the Cherokee because of her faith.³¹

As a progressive Cherokee, Catherine saw the mission as a way to save her people from total destruction. She eventually convinced her entire family to convert which was a great cause of distress for her.³² First, Catherine’s brother John contracted tuberculosis. After caring for him, Catherine came down with the same disease. At 23, she was dead. The ABFM felt that her “physical appearance and innate character traits made her more susceptible to the Christian message and more educable in academic subjects. Nevertheless, only a small minority of Cherokees joined Christian churches before the Cherokee Nation’s removal west of the Mississippi in 1838-39, and mission records reveal that half of them became backsliders.”³³ Her Cherokee contemporaries thought of Catherine as separate from the collective group mentality of tribal/National cultures and put her into the singular mindset of the prevailing culture. In the end, however, when she witnessed her brother’s illness and death-- and when she was diagnosed with the same illness, she allowed her parents to take her to traditional healers.³⁴ This final act suggests that Catherine’s search for help through acculturation was only at the surface and that she reverted to her traditional belief systems in the end.

²⁹ Theda Purdue, “Catherine Brown: Cherokee Convert to Christianity.” In Theda Purdue (ed.) *Sifters: Native American Women’s Lives (Viewpoints on American Culture)* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 78-79.

³⁰ Colin Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s Press, 2009).

³¹ Theda Purdue, “Catherine Brown: Cherokee Convert to Christianity.” In Theda Purdue (ed.) *Sifters: Native American Women’s Lives (Viewpoints on American Culture)* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 77-91.

³² Purdue, 85.

³³ Purdue, 89.

³⁴ Purdue, 88.

Acting Out of Internalized Oppression

In the contemporary world, the cooption and corruption of Indigenous beliefs results in disruption and imbalance that continues to harm Indigenous women. These conditions are manifested through alcohol and drug abuse, loss of identity, depression. Combinations of the aforementioned problems can lead to attempted and completed suicide.

According to Philip May, Indian female mortality rates due to alcohol-related incidences in completed suicides is highest in the 35-44 age group at 9.3 compared to 7.2 per hundred thousand in the U.S. This figure does not account for attempted suicides, which can often be looked upon as accidents. His statistics for deaths in accidents of various types for this age group is 49.1 compared to 14.5 in the U.S. For Indigenous women, then, the combined figure is a staggering 58.4 per hundred thousand, compared to 21.7 per hundred thousand in the U.S. The statistics are not much better for the 45-54 female age group, because the death from alcoholism and its related illnesses is up to 57.3 compared to 7.6 in the U.S. per hundred thousand. The accidental death is 46.1 compared to 15.6 per hundred thousand. May does not track any group above 54 or below 15 years of age, but these statistics show a downward spiral that peaks in the 35-44 age groups.³⁵

Here is where the onset of hopelessness due to the realizations of cooption, the presence of negative stereotypes, and the forces of internalized oppression are clearly reflected. These statistics do not begin to cover the emotional price that is paid.

The following two examples show the dramatic responses of Indigenous women to these challenges. One modern researcher, Paul Spicer, looks at Indigenous identity and alcohol through narrative. He discusses a woman he calls Beth (Ojibwe) who was raised in Caucasian foster homes and searched for her Indigenous identity through encounters with other urban Indians through alcohol and its abuse. Beth was lived between both foster homes and institutions. She would run away to meet up with other Urban Indians and go on binges. Beth left the child welfare system at 16 but continued to feel lost. She married an Urban Indian who was 10 years her senior out of fear of the prevailing culture. She stayed sober for most of the marriage but returned to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism for her anxieties. Beth found a medicine man who was able to help her for a short time, but he passed away. He was Ojibwe as well and told her many stories of her people. These interactions with her Ojibwe medicine man allowed Beth to start connecting to her cultural community in time, space, and place. The disconnect she had experienced spiritually, through no fault of her own, had started to reconnect her to an innate spiritual existence inaccessible in the foster care system and the homes of her Caucasian foster parents. Beth was sober for five years, when she became involved with an abusive man, and lost her daughter. Beth ends her story with "When I say I'm drinking, I'm talking about every day, until I can't drink no more."³⁶ This is a clear example of how the lack of balance and spiritual anchoring through the disruption of traditions and Indigenous socialization harms Indigenous women.

In the next account of Gladys, it is clear that her knowledge of self brought her out of the alcohol syndrome and gave her purpose in life. In her youth, Gladys was spiritually centered in the traditions of the Lakota. She had been a Sun Dancer and a pipe carrier. As Gladys grew older, she began to drink more, and she moved away from traditions. Following the example of her brothers, Gladys joined the military service, and her alcohol and drug use increased. Gladys became addicted to heroin, which kept her away from alcohol for a time. When she returned home to care for her ailing father, she encountered a medicine man who predicted she would be dead at 34. When her

³⁵ Philip A. May, "The Epidemiology of Alcohol Abuse among American Indians: The Mythical and Real Properties" in Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot (Eds.) *Native American Voices: A Reader (2nd ed.)* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994), 436-453.

³⁶ Spicer, Paul (1998). "Narrativity and the Representation of Experience in American Indian Discourses about Drinking," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 22 (1998), 155-158.

34th birthday had come and gone, Gladys thought she had outlived the prediction, but she was struck with a massive heart attack. Gladys went to a ceremony with elderly women on the reservation looking for guidance, then she left the reservation and returned to Minneapolis still looking for signs.

Gladys went to the Indian Center and met some other women who told her that her path would be revealed soon. She returned to the Center a few days later and discovered that a pipe was crying because it was assembled and on display. She spoke to the Ojibwe man who had left it assembled. She told him her story about being a pipe carrier, and he gave her the pipe to care for. The reawakening of her earlier spiritual connection as a pipe carrier, and receiving the pipe as a gift, spoke to her, opened her up to receive not only the direction her life should take but also a recovery program for Indigenous people. Gladys was able to synthesize her earlier spiritual experiences and return to her spiritual roots. She shared her vision with others, in order to bring healing through traditional themes.³⁷

Both stories show the power of connectivity for Indigenous women through traditional practices that seem to have an innate healing power. Although Beth lost that connection, it helped her for five years. Losing that spiritual connection sent her into a tailspin from which she felt she could never recover. Beth had no connectivity to time, place, space, or the spirituality needed to sustain the balance. The Indigenous spiritual connection helped Gladys navigate through the shift to urban living and alcohol socialization back to sobriety. Gladys also discovered the need to give back to her people through a drug and alcohol treatment plan that she had received from her higher power. Gladys understood the connectivity through time, place, and space because she had the innate connection that could not be achieved without the collective memory of being Indigenous.

Conclusion

The need for reclamation and setting of clear boundaries—which include pan-Indian sharing, reversing victim mentalities, and Indigenous women returning to the blanket or traditional ways, is unmistakable. There are several points that Michael Gibbons stresses on boundary maintenance. Blurring cultural boundaries to the point of compromising uniqueness flies in the face of cultural diversity. As the population increases, it is necessary to appreciate and respect multiplicity. Indiscriminate borrowing of rituals and spirituality without contextual cultural support devalues them and leaves them meaningless in time and place.³⁸ In looking at groups such as the Mi'kmaq, Catawba's and others, the intergroup sharing is no different than the historical sharing and regrouping demonstrated by Ohio's Mingos or Michigan's Sauk or Sac and Fox, who were eventually driven to Oklahoma.

When looking at Kateri Tekakwitha and Catherine Brown, their iconography has ultimately failed the prevailing culture, because they are no longer useful and have been left out of the proselytizing to Indigenous cultures about Christianity. They have outlived their usefulness and are cast aside like an abalone shell and sage when it is no longer fashionable to use in an appropriated way. Beth will never find her way home in spite of her Indigenousness. She was stripped of her Indigenous roots and will continue to wander aimlessly until she dies from the disconnection that was out of her control through abandonment by her parents and the acculturation and assimilation that has left her spiritually void. This is the price of those who appropriate or co-opt Indigenous

³⁷ Spicer: 144-150.

³⁸ Michael S. Gibbons, "New Age Cowboys and Indian Religion: Boundary Maintenance and Religious Inter-Cultural Borrowing," (2004): (Accessed January 15, 2009, faculty.evansville.edu/mg86/docs/020%20New%20Age%20Cowboys%20and%20Indian%20Religion.pdf).

spirituality out of context as well. Clearly, in the example of Gladys, it is possible to reverse victim mentality and synthesize hurtful and helpful behaviors through tribe/Nation-specific and pan-Indian practices when taken in totality. By taking the time to learn about time, place, traditions, and specific uses—instead of picking and choosing bits and pieces of Indigenous cultures, traditional back-to-the-blanket ways can heal both tribes/Nations and Urban Indians.

This is a modest attempt to continue the work of getting at the roots of how Indigenous women can reverse acculturation and assimilation and return to the work of balance. It is an additional plea to other women who are not Indigenous to be intentionally aware of the negative impact of appropriation out of the contexts of time, space, and place. This paper adds to the literature on the effects of Christian conversion on Indigenous women specifically and to Indigenous people in general. Indigenous rituals and spirituality must be seen as a tool for Indigenous women to regain collective and personal empowerment whether they are rural or Urban Indian women. By stopping the cooption and appropriation of rituals and spirituality, non-Indigenous woman can show support of Indigenous women in their fight to continue to cleave to Indigenous spiritual paths. These paths must be reclaimed as part of the overall healing for Indigenous women who have continued to suffer the assault of cooption and appropriation.³⁹

³⁹ I would like to express my extreme gratitude to Dr. Robert Wheeler for reviewing and editing this paper. His insight was invaluable.

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