Impossible Escape from Capture:
A Journey Toward an Indigenous Political Identity

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the circumstances and options of indigenous individuals dispossessed of their connection to the cultural and political institutions of indigenous communities. Addressed specifically is the question of alternatives to political assimilation into the dominant society. A secondary research question addresses the process by which an indigenous political identity could be realized to counter political dispossession and assimilation. This study provides a critical examination of four theories of indigenous identity formation: emergent behaviours/properties, life stages, self-definition/Recognition of Being, and self-conscious traditionalism. The analysis adopts an aspectival perspective and employs an aboriginal canoe methodology. This thesis argues for a move away from definitional and essentialist approaches to indigenous identity and toward deliberate political identity formation along the trajectories of agency, alliance, and identity. A theoretical model is proposed that links an individual pedagogical approach to practical political alliances with indigenous political and cultural communities for self-determination, survival, and resistance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my mothers Edna Heimbecker and Alma Leslie (nee Poitras), and to the

grandmothers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> "Identity" is never simply a matter of genetic make-up or natural
> birthright. Perhaps once, long ago, it was both. But not now. For people
> out on the edge, out on the road, identity is a matter of will, a matter of
> choice, a face to be shaped in a ceremonial act. – Rayna Green[1]

A journey of a thousand miles may begin with a single step along a road, as

Rayna Green suggests in the passage above, but I have been on "the road" far too long.

The time has come to abandon the blacktop in order to make my way on a river with the

company of a rippling conversation between the water and paddle as it dips into the grey-

green water of the South Saskatchewan River near my childhood home. Like countless

others who have gone before me, I did not begin this journey in a singular moment of

epiphany, a single step or paddle stroke, but in a gradual unfolding. And after all these

years, a question has refused to go away: Who am I? This question has lingered, refusing

to be erased or washed over, even though I know some did hope that it would fade away

for those like me—adopted at birth, raised in a working class, Anglo-Canadian home in

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan during the '50s and '60s. The "Who am I?" is that person who

lived the first half of his life treading water in the urban tributaries of the main/stream of

a tree-lined prairie city. I remember the leaves turned autumn shades of yellow, gold, and

red on the banks of that river. I remember the discarded red leaves on the other side of

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[1] Rayna Green, ed., introduction to *That's What She Said: Contemporary Poetry and Fiction by Native American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); quoted in Kateri Damm, "Says Who," in *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature*, ed. Jeannette Armstrong (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1993), 25.

town, a life lived in reserve, trapped in an urban compound by the intersecting clatter of two founding railroads. In time my eyes became accustomed to the layering of white upon white upon red like a great striped blanket. At night in winter water froze my mouth open as I marveled at the blanket of stars unfolded above the horizon and the distant lights in colours drawn from an icy pallet washed rhythmically across the sky. I remember those people I did not know, the dirty, red-skinned people, who only later turned out to look like me. They are part of the reason why I am on this canoe journey. Those ones who could not survive in that wintry world but knew they ought to remain close by the great river of their home.

When I began my journey, this project, so far away from that home and land, I knew I could not rely on any ordinary means of travel. I had to find suitable indigenous transport to help carry me along this river road. For this task, I brought to my aid Peter Cole's "aboriginal canoe" as a narrative methodology.[2] With its symbolic integrity of construction and strength of purpose, this canoe carries with it Cole's invocation of the legitimacy of centering indigenous ways of seeing the world and a mandate to incorporate indigenous processes, knowledge, and understanding in the academic context. For my project, I also required the strength, integrity, and works of other indigenous writers and scholars to help articulate an alternative to the identity landscape I saw around me. I also required the wisdom, vision, and concepts of a number of non-

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[2] I am indebted to Peter Cole, In-SHUCK-ch/Lower Stl'atl'imx, for the publication of his "canoe journey" in "aboriginalizing methodology: considering the canoe," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 1 (2002).

indigenous writers and scholars who have dedicated themselves to reaching toward a

common ground and a new "place of cultural understanding."[3]

Questions of identity, what it means, and how it is formed have serious

implications for indigenous people. This is especially so for those, like me, whose

connections with "sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language and ancestral homelands"[4]

have been effectively severed by colonial processes and actors. Our "interrupted

histories,"[5] facilitated by state-led child welfare, adoption, and other policies and

practices, are the signs of so-called progress along the road of dubious paternalistic

accomplishment.[6] As newborns and as children we were denied cultural rootedness

through various means actively promoted and sanctioned by the state. Now as adults, our

eyes slowly open on an indigenous landscape disquietingly familiar.

Therefore, the research question I will attempt to answer in this essay is as

follows: Is it possible for an indigenous person, removed from culture, land, tradition,

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[3] Cole, 450.

[4] Jeff J. Corntassel, "Who is Indigenous? 'Peoplehood' and Ethnonationalist Approaches to Rearticulating Indigenous Identity," *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 9, no 1 (forthcoming in 2003): 14, of author's copy.

[5] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 19.

[6] See generally, Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey, *Stolen From Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997); Christine Welsh, *Women in the Shadows*, prod. Christine Welsh and Signe Johansson, dir. Norma Bailey, 55 min. 50 sec., National Film Board of Canada, 1993, videocassette; Gil Cardinal, *Foster Child*, prod. Jerry Krepakevich, Graydon McCrea, and Tom Radford, dir. Gil Cardinal, 43 min. 05 sec., National Film Board of Canada, 1987, videocassette.

and language by the colonial state, to develop a certain indigenous political identity, and by what process might this be achieved?

My contribution to the identity debate will be to argue on behalf of an idea of an indigenous political identity that lies neither in the realm of the totally fixed nor in the totally invented, but rather an identity gained in political activity. In order to ascertain whether there is an alternative conceptual approach to my question of indigenous political identity formation (IPIF), I will bring the focus of my paper in Chapter Three around to a comparative analysis of four concepts of indigenous political identity formation already available in the literature. These are Nicholas Peroff's application of "nonlinear systems theory," Devon Mihesuah's "life stages" process, Kim Anderson's "recognition of being," and Taiaiake Alfred's process of "self-conscious traditionalism." It will be useful to contrast and compare the various ways in which the four theorists frame their response to the identity question and the program they propose that we adopt in order to get "it."

Many scholarly projects might illuminate my present predicament, including an analysis of social work or child welfare practices, policies or procedures, or perhaps a legal or historical approach. Instead I have chosen to focus on my growing awareness of my particular place in the political landscape of relations between indigenous peoples and the state. In the Canadian context, and without a specific indigenous community with which to affiliate, at first glance only these two socio-political options appear available to me. Either I am forced to take on a cobbled-together, pan-indigenous perspective, or I must abandon any hope of reconciliation with a community of origin and its traditions and be absorbed into the Canadian multicultural mosaic. In either case, any recognition of

indigenousness is muted, and neither avenue is a prospect to which I look forward. My project will be concerned with a conceptual political resistance to these two potential outcomes and a continuance of my journey to reconnect to specific indigenous traditions and community.

Identity Constructions

Before I go on to discuss my proposal, it would be helpful to present briefly what I mean by "a certain indigenous political identity" by noting that the purpose of my project is not to define or argue for the conceptual development of an indigenous "cultural" identity. As I noted above, my personal history and political location in the landscape of indigenous/state relations preclude a claim to an indigenous cultural identity at the present time. As I will argue later, I also set aside the notion of a cultural identity founded on an indigenous "community of convenience," even though the forces and temptation to default to this option are great. Many writers and scholars frequently note that all identity formation is inherently political in nature. Nowhere could there be a more positive response to this proposition than in the indigenous context.[7] The meaning of "political" I will reach for is that which moves toward the indigenous tradition of

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[7] See, generally, Peter McFarlane, *Brotherhood to Nationhood: George Manual and the Making of the Modern Indian Movement* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993); Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999); Paul L. A. H. Chartrand, *Manitoba's Métis Settlement Scheme of 1870* (Saskatoon: Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan, 1991); Gregory Scofield, *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999); Robert A. Williams, Jr. *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

deliberate and active alliance making. Thus, in my proposition I will talk about the acquisition of a certain political identity that could only come about through an active process of entering into strategic and tactical alliances.[8] The goal of this process is nothing less than support to the continuing existence of indigenous land-based communities, cultures, traditions, and languages in the Americas and engagement in the relationship between indigenous peoples and the state.

I will also propose that a process toward the attainment of this goal involves three complementary paths: knowledge of the indigenous past, understanding of the indigenous present, and commitment to the indigenous future. This proposed pedagogical approach suggests to me three complementary questions around the issues of histories of indigenous peoples in the Americas, indigenous/state relationships, and the nature of my agency in resolving these ongoing contestations. As well as setting out some options for developing a coherent indigenous political identity, I also would like to discuss briefly the topic of "legitimacy" for the purposes of political affiliation and alliance making. I am content to recognize that individuals seeking a kind of "social clarification" of who they are as indigenous people may, in fact, not require of themselves or others any more evidence of "indigenousness" than self-declaration/identification and reciprocal recognition by others. What I promote though is a sustained evidence-gathering process

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[8] This view of the "political" is shared by Homi K. Bhabha who notes the political "…as a form of calculation and strategic action dedicated to social transformation," in "The Commitment to Theory," in *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular*, ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage Publications, 1992): 8.

for those of us intent on an active engagement in building political alliances and affiliations as a matter of our political survival. Our active commitment or agency in turn would be used to affect the current relationship between indigenous people and the state through political alliances.

For many indigenous people, self-legitimization will be all that is needed. For the purpose of creating indigenous scholarship, however, the question of evidentiary practice becomes central to any proposal I make in the academic environment. The legitimacy I pursue has a "political" dimension—not merely political in the sense of being contextualized by institutions of governance, nor dismissive of the recognition that human interactions are inherently about power relationships and agendas. The "political" I hope to describe is marked by our involvement in the realm of allied indigenous agendas toward common goals in the unconcluded relationship with the settler state and its governments.

As I noted at the outset, this is both an academic project and a personal journey. Because I have deliberately chosen to represent myself as a subject in this narrative, I must also declare up front, as is the indigenous way, the "I" in this story. This acknowledgment about location is also important in the academic sense. It enables the reader to recognize the narrative as descriptive of a perspective that does not originate in an all-seeing eye, but instead locates me inside the landscape we are about to enter together.

My personal landscape includes the fact that I am recognized without prompting by Cree and Métis nation people from central Saskatchewan as sharing a morphological

and "familial" likeness to them. I also note that state-controlled records, until recently,

barred me from direct access to my blood relations and, as a consequence, any

understanding of my indigenous community(ies) of origin. Yet despite this interference,

my birth mother did provide an unsigned note to the Saskatchewan Department of Social

Services indicating, in her words, that I have "Indian blood on his Grandfather's side."[9]

Obviously this is not enough of an evidentiary process for my purposes. So I will

continue on this evidence-gathering track at the same time as I pursue a more

conceptualized indigenous political identity.

I have relied on these two aspects of outside recognition and evidence since 1982

in order to resist the temptation to "pan-aboriginalism." Other indigenous writers have

discussed the social circumstance and emotional epiphany that marked the starting point

of their journeys toward "self-recognition,"[10] as an enabling strategy for reconnection to

indigenous cultures and traditions. Some writers have pointed out that "self-

identification" has been decidedly problematic.[11] I note that self-identification, without

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[9] Bernice Donnelly, Saskatchewan Social Services, letter to author, 26 November 1984. On 21 May 2003 proof of indigenous personal antecedent was provided to me by a birth relative who noted that my birth mother's maiden name is Poitras. This surname is recognized in the genealogy of the Métis Nation of Western Canada.

[10] See generally, Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000); Devon A. Mihesuah, "American Indian Identities: Issues of Individual Choices and Development," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (1998): 193-226.

[11] See generally, Nicholas C. Peroff, "Indian Identity," *The Social Science Journal* 34, no. 4 (1997): 485-494; see Paul Chartrand for a notable discussion about Métis definition and a clarification at the "boundary of Indian definition" in "Who are the Métis in Section 35?" and "Defining 'The Métis People,' " in *Who are Canada's Aboriginal Peoples?*

outside evidence or an evidence-gathering process, does not bring clarity; and that "self-declaration" appears to merely promote tension and confusion about who is indigenous. The alternative to self-identification is "outside naming."[12] The literature is rife with examples of state- or community-imposed "definitions" of indigenousness. These examples note certain measures of indigenousness based on blood quantum, language capability, traditional knowledge, and so on. The striking feature of this "definitional standards" approach to indigenous identity is that it never appears to reach a satisfactory resolution and is always subject to refinement. At the same time, there are notable efforts by indigenous scholars to craft a working definition of "who is indigenous" to aid those working in the area of international law, indigenous rights, and policy.[13] Although identity may be equated with a particular "definition" ("description" would be a better term, I think), this can only be incidental to the intricacies of the actual development of an identity in an indigenous political context. An encounter with the current literature reveals a number of indigenous writers contemplating indigenous identity from the perspective of how others have "defined" us.[14] This quest for the perfect definition seems

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Recognition, Definition, and Jurisdiction, ed. Paul L. A. H. Chartrand, with a foreword by Harry W. Daniels (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2002), 83-125, 268-303; Hilary Weaver, "Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who *Really* Has It?" *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2001): 240-255.

[12] Paul Chartrand, " 'Terms of Division': Problems of 'Outside Naming' for Aboriginal People in Canada," *Journal of Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 2 (1991): 1-22.

[13] See generally, Corntassel, "Who is Indigenous?"

[14] For overviews of the issue see generally, Damm, 11-26; Terence P. Douglas, "Canada Defines the Savage," *Native Americas: Hemispheric Journal of Indigenous Issues* 6, no.

to have a relationship to the colonial legacy of a world simplified by a rational conclusion that the world has moved on into the post-colonial. But if the world has moved on, how do we account for the self-destruction evident as indigenous people continue to impose the newcomers' (identity) politics on themselves? How do we account for the willingness to cooperate in various colonial schemes to enumerate molecules of blood and rationalize their right to exist: full blood, half breed, or just plain mixed(-up)?

Post-colonial Illusions

How can we argue an indigenous perspective without noting the "post-colonial" paradigm or risking being marginalized as irrelevant to the dominant academic debate? This is a question that every indigenous writer in the academy ought to find impossible to escape. A definitive response by indigenous writers may not be required but a reply ought to be considered nonetheless.

Following this line, I argue that critiques of and critical dialogue about the unresolved relationship between indigenous peoples and the state ought to begin with a recognition, especially in the Americas, of the paradox of the "post-colonial" world. Stuart Hall, by example of the current configuration of the nation-states in the Middle East, notes in "When Was 'the Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit" that this confusion about the signature feature of the "post-colonial" is ever so noticeable.[15] Hall also notes

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1 & 2 (2002): 28-31; Weaver, 240-255; Chartrand, " 'Terms of Division': Problems of 'Outside Naming' for Aboriginal People in Canada," 1-22.

[15] Stuart Hall, "When Was 'the Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit," in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), 248.

that, although "the colonial" is reckoned as a time signature for a real event or set of

events, there ensued a scholarly debate about a "post-colonial" that seeks to "go beyond"

the strict binaries of the colonizer and colonized. Hall argues that this kind of "post-

colonial" ambition has sought to create an epistemological notoriety of its own.[16] The

same conclusion about colonial after-effects is regularly voiced by indigenous peoples

throughout the world. Thus it makes perfect sense for Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes, to

exclaim,

> What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?[17]

Sykes raises this question precisely because there is a disconnect between being in a

temporal state of post-coloniality and its Western philosophical counterpart. As Smith in

her analysis points out,

> Post-colonialism is viewed as the convenient invention of Western
> intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world.[18]

So who is privileged to declare when the "colonial" is "post"? Without the power to

resist, that is without indigenous tools, methodologies, paradigms, and so on, an

indigenous writer might be persuaded to see the world first from a Western academic

perspective and only secondarily from an indigenous perspective. Instead, my resistance

to this outside executive privilege pushes me to venture into the process of

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[16] Hall, 254.

[17] Smith, 24.

[18] Smith, 14.

"indigenization." However, I do not take on this role because I know it well. Rather as a matter of survival, I provision myself with (position myself in) perspectives that are best viewed from the vantage point on board the indigenous canoe.[19] But does this mean that I must throw all Western perspectives overboard? That would be impossible, because I cannot escape the fact of my education in the Western tradition of the academy and socialization in this European-derived society. Nor would I want to reject out of hand the concepts, perspectives, and ideas of non-indigenous writers who are working in support of indigenous self-determination.

This canoe journey began with a setting aside of the political options of assimilation into the Canadian mainstream or the cooptation of indigenous traditions in favour of a "pan-indigenous" identity. I will not do this by attempting to close the gap between these two agendas. Rather, I propose a route toward a certain indigenous political identity formation along the three proposed dimensions of knowledge of the past, understanding of the present, and commitment to the future. However, my stance on this matter does not reconcile the tension between these two political options and an uncertain future. In Chapter Two I will argue that difference and its recognition is a key element in the process of a certain indigenous political identity formation. In Chapter

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[19] See generally Smith, 146-147, who also notes in reference to Ward Churchill's use of "indigenist," that it "centres a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action." Taiaiake Alfred cautions, however, that the move to create solidarity among indigenous peoples comes with the risk of a "forced unity and pan-Indianism, or indigenism," noting also that: "It does not, however, supplant the localized cultures of individual communities…[but it] is an important means of confronting the state in that it provides a unifying vocabulary and basis for collective action." Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 88.

Three I will review the salient points of the four concepts of indigenous identity formation noted above. Thus I intend to provide the reader with accessible landmarks before I move on to challenge the orthodoxy of indigenous identity with my own proposal and will argue toward an indigenous identity whose nature is neither totally fixed nor contingent, but a conceptualization of an identity that "takes up" space. And in Chapter Four, I will consider the role of the activation/agency of this theory and thus recognize identity as an expression of my political self-determination. In the fifth and concluding chapter, I will pull key elements of my proposal together for the reader, as well as suggesting further avenues of research for indigenous scholars.

CHAPTER TWO: BELONGING AND BECOMING

The houses, hotels, shacks, and apartments where I grew up are too
numerous to count though many of them look in my memory like
misshapen rocks, jagged with the indecipherable ghost of my childhood,
which to this day remain so much a part of me. Others have faded over
time, submerged in that river of my blood that has always been home.
— Gregory Scofield[20]

Looking for a way to escape . . .

In the previous chapter, I set as my goal the clearing of some conceptual space for

myself in order to discuss the concepts I would be leaving behind as I prepared for the

journey ahead and also to discuss why this careful choosing would be beneficial. With

those limitations noted, I will begin to explore and clarify which approaches might be

advantageous to my project as I navigate the uncharted and muddy waters of this question

of indigenous political identity formation. Therefore, within the canoe of this project, if

Chapter One could be characterized as a "moving away from," Chapter Two should be

seen as a "journey toward," where I engage in a provisioning process and bring on board

the canoe some conceptual tools essential to finding my way in this landscape of identity.

I note here an interesting convergence of "space" within my project. First of all, it

is that space that I recognize as metaphorical; like the volume displaced by Peter Cole's

"aboriginal canoe," it is not an infinite space. This space, like the aboriginal canoe, is a

bounded, constructed space, an instrument of transportation paddled by someone in the

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[20] Scofield, xiii.

process of becoming-canoe, becoming-indigenous.[21] This space of my project also

implies the act of clearing a space and creating a perspective without conquering the

space.[22] My challenge in Chapter Two is to see if I can create a space of sufficient

quantity (and quality) to hold my idea of an indigenous identity formation process.

Indigenous "identity": What it is? Who has it? and How does one get it? And as

Hillary Weaver also asks: How does one measure it, and who truly has it?[23] At one time I

thought of identity as some place at which I would arrive, a "home" so to speak. To reach

my destination, all I had to do was collect enough of those identity labels that the

dominant society around me said were important: girlfriend, car, career, money, real

estate, and so on. Once I had collected all of those trophies, and more if I was ambitious

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[21] Any references to "transformative becoming" portrayed in this paper are based on the works and concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and interpretations of those concepts by Paul Patton. See generally, Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political: Thinking the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000); Paul Patton, "Derridean Beginning and Deleuzian Becoming" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature, Atlanta, GA, May 2001). For the example of transformative becoming referenced by Patton previously, see generally, J. M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (London: Vintage, 2000. Originally published London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1990). In addition to Patton's interpretations of Deleuze and Guattari, I have also relied on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, with a foreword by Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Originally published as *Kafka: Pour une Littérature Mineure.* Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1975). Also of note is my initial introduction to Deleuze and Guattari in Caren Kaplan, "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," (in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, ed. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[22] Gayatri Spivak, *The Spivak Reader,* ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 21.

[23] Weaver, 240.

enough, I could consider myself to be a successful "Canadian" just like those around me. Needless to say, some years later I still found myself searching and have come to the conclusion that it is better to think of my life-long identity project not as a point of arrival but as an act of taking up space and of creating space in which to breathe, think, and speak. The notion of an identity space complements Peter Cole's construction of the aboriginal canoe as metaphor for the vessel that supports and carries the weight of my process, as the creation, maintenance, and transportation of (my own) indigenous knowledge.[24] The use of the indigenous canoe also infuses my intellectual journey with the notion of movement, thus linking the creation of knowledge to a process of becoming-indigenous. The indigenous canoe cannot be limited solely to an expression of art, although some might consider that its aesthetics rival its utility. The utility of a canoe, like identity itself, is in its application as a transportation device.

For the canoe of this project, I will provision myself with some key ideas concerning indigenous identity formation and employ them as a set of conditions by which a certain indigenous political identity might be conceptualized. But what are these conditions? For many, including me, it is to describe a disquieting sensation of always "floating" above the world of people and ancestors, unable to touch solid ground. These conditions are also about living in the shadow of and being overshadowed by, the two political realities in this hemisphere: indigenous and European-derived. The shadow also takes on an additional meaning in the context of the trajectory of my project. This notion

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[24] Cole, 450.

of a shadowed land traces its source to a comment by Paul Patton concerning the

"irreducible gap between political theory and the experiences of indigenous people."[25]

In his comment, Patton was recognizing the infinite chasm between Western-

derived notions about political relationships and the continuing experience of the colonial

by indigenous peoples and individuals. In Patton's estimation, Western political theory

has failed to bridge the gap, even though there are exceptions. Writers such as James

Tully and others noted in this essay, along with Patton himself, have engaged in a critical

dialogue within the academy in order to challenge outmoded concepts, lines of thought,

and perspective in a bid to recontextualize the middle ground. Patton's articulation of this

dilemma suggests a route to open territory for indigenous writers—not in that he

presumes to tell us what to write or think about, but that he seems to be saying that there

is a place inside the academy currently unoccupied and that someone must travel to that

place, into that "irreducible gap," because it is the place where he and other Western

theorists can never go.

If I follow Patton's comment and use the gap and the shadow as motivation to

create indigenous theory, new understandings may emerge from my experience, ones not

dictated to me by either the colonizer or the colonized. I can also respect this place of

shadow and gap, with its Western pedigree, for what it is without caving into its

academic influences, merely noting them as telltale signs of the political landscape along

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[25] Paul Patton, "Aboriginal Rights in the Light of History," panel presentation at the University of Winnipeg conference on Philosophy and Aboriginal Rights: Critical Dialogues, Winnipeg, MB, June 2001.

the way. If I resist the urge to "defend" myself in this strange environment, I am free to

note the central questions raised by the postmodern discourse concerning the "politics of

identity," namely that identity, as James Tully notes in *Strange Multiplicity:*

Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity, is a "self-deconstructing and contingent"

concept.[26] Tully also points out that culture and identity are, contrary to the postmodern

vision,

> overlapping, interacting and internally negotiated . . . densely
> interdependent . . . [and] continuously contested, imagined and
> reimagined, transformed and negotiated, both by their members and
> through their interaction with others. [27]

Far from essentialized, identity is therefore always on the move, yet it seems to me that

the movement is not by chance but guided by dialogue and negotiation. In the context of

Strange Multiplicity, Tully puts forward a justification for a more flexible approach to

support an expansive view of the "middle ground." He advocates for this approach by

arguing that a revamped indigenous/non-indigenous constitutional accommodation in the

modern nation state would be advantageous to both parties. Tully calls this approach to

cultural accommodation "aspectival" and argues that the "identity" of any culture

> is thus aspectival rather than essential: like many complex human
> phenomena . . . cultural identity changes as it is approached from different
> paths and a variety of aspects come into view. Cultural diversity is a
> tangled labyrinth of intertwining cultural differences *and* similarities, not a
> panopticon of fixed, independent and incommensurable worldviews in

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[26] James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 45.

[27] Tully, 11.

which we are either prisoners or cosmopolitan spectators in the central tower.[28]

We must be willing, should we choose to write from/in a new indigenous territory, also to see identity, especially indigenous identity, as an "intertwining of differences and similarities." Should we choose to invest in this non-binary perspective, we may no longer find ourselves at the mercy of contingency, but active participants in identity's unfolding. We are free to engage (contest, imagine, reimagine, transform, and negotiate) with this subject (identity) in order to transform our experience of it and imbue it with the "possibility of a political life."[29] In this process of active engagement, Tully rejects a binary approach to viewing cultures and their diversity and calls for a "politics of cultural recognition." Audra Simpson in her essay "Citizenship in Kahnawake"[30] describes this approach as a "philosophy of listening."

Tully's proposal supports my move away from arguing either for or against postmodern questions of identity. It does this by giving me permission to engage with the topic of indigenous political identity formation from a multiplicity of perspectives. Tully goes on to demonstrate how we might get to this perspective by engaging with Bill Reid's *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, a massive black bronze sculpture depicting various

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[28] Tully, 11.

[29] Bobby Sayyid and Lilian Zac, "Political Analysis in a World Without Foundations," in *Research Strategies in the Social Sciences: A Guide to New Approaches*, ed. Elinor Scarbrough and Eric Tanenbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 253.

[30] Audra Simpson, "Paths Toward a Mohawk Nation: Narratives of Citizenship and Nationhood in Kahnawake," in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117.

beings and creatures from Northwest coast Haida mythology and symbology, who are passengers in a traditional Haida canoe. In *Strange Multiplicity* Tully challenges our perspective on how peoples might get along together in a complex constitutional environment. He argues that in order to accomplish this task, we, as the observer, must embark on a journey through unfamiliar territory. If I might extend Tully's literary device, I would suggest that for some indigenous people it is analogous to the task of swimming around *The Black Canoe* rather than viewing the sculpture from the perspective of a tourist or gallery patron whose feet are firmly planted on terra firma. As an " in-betweener," neither subject nor au/other, I must tread water or swim to stay afloat in my element, this gap, this place which is no place and every place between the worlds of the indigenous and the newcomer. Since, from my point of view, this encounter with the indigenous ocean-going craft suggests that my location cannot be of-the-land, and with no land below, I take up a position in the waters around *The Black Canoe* (floating), staying with it but outside it for the time being while I find my place.

With the aid of *The Black Canoe*'s rich images and meaning, Tully encourages us to move around the great sculpture and confront our assumptions about the passengers on the voyage. He suggests that his readers engage in a critical dialogue with the passengers about the nature of human and political relationships and perspectives. This is his aspectival approach in action—the aspectival being equated with action in the name of a

"politics of cultural recognition," where meaning and understanding unfold in "practical activity."[31]

Taking Tully's call to engage in a transformative relationship with a multiplicity of perspectives, I am able to see that this kind of political engagement in active, respectful dialogue may provide me a measure of justice previously not available or perhaps merely unrecognizable to me. My encounter with this particular canoe, *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* and the "politics of cultural recognition," affords me some insight about how to approach the crafting of indigenous political identity in certain circumstances. As Tully suggests through his interaction or dialogue with *The Black Canoe*, I too argue that we will gain an understanding about our particular kind of identity journey when we "enter into a dialogue" with indigenous concepts of cultural identity and through acts of resistance. However, my use of Peter Cole's indigenous canoe, a canoe in motion, takes a different course from Tully's application and carries me into an indigenous realm of understanding. Thus the perspective as a paddler in the indigenous canoe ensures that my journey is not without the reality embodied in its movement downstream and that this movement represents the active engagement and agency needed to complete my journey.

Building on this perspective, I argue that if we are to find a way to a different answer to the identity question, as indigenous writers inside the academy, we must chart a course of our own making and one that suits our political agenda. If not, what alternative is there to contextualizing and characterizing the "answer" to the question of identity as

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[31] James Tully, "Understanding *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*," (forthcoming), 4.

anything but fragmented and contingent? Postmodern writers have shown the error of a

foundational notion of identity, as Tully notes, and so were able to criticize earlier

identity theories for their inability to account for "difference." These writers, in the

context of constitutionalism and sovereignty, went on to show how later concepts created

without this recognition of difference were themselves flawed. However, Tully

challenges postmodern writers, who, he says,

> have gone on to draw the unwarranted conclusion that any concept of
> identity is self-deconstructing and contingent, thereby heralding the end of
> sovereignty and constitutionalism in an unidentifiable fragmentation.[32]

Likewise, where identity is fashioned in a "personal" political context, the scenario Tully

describes heralds a grim future indeed, where all that is left for us to do is build an

"identity" founded on a continual state of deconstruction and contingency. Surely there

must be other identity concepts to which we may adhere and which allow for a gradual

"building up" of instead of an interminable reconstruction? Differences across cultures,

as Tully notes, are not to be taken as frontiers/borderlines to be conquered but rather

spaces where intercultural dialogue, learning, and respect take place. Thus the

development of identities occurs not as a foreclosure or calcification of perspectives, but

in dialogue and negotiation of alliances made and broken, then made again. In what Tully

insightfully describes as the "play of irreducible diversity"[33] and an absence of

foreclosure—there are no conquering armies or armadas.

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[32] Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, 45-46.

[33] Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, 204.

Even though I might wish to reject this "play of irreducible diversity," I cannot fail to recognize by my own existence as indigenous-other that "difference" is everywhere. Indigenous peoples *are* different. Not to overstate the obvious, but in the rush to lay claim to some kind of indigenous recognition, we must be careful of a curious pitfall. As I noted earlier, difference is essential to our efforts to marshal resources toward the creation of bridges between subjects. By too quickly negating the fact of difference in an effort to avoid the assimilation trap, we risk falling into one that homogenizes us for the sake of simplicity and personal convenience. Here I am speaking about "pan Indianism or indigenism"[34] as a personal, political response to being in this culture gap instead of sticking with "difference" until alliances can be formed and some of the identity questions can be answered for ourselves. I also recognize that this is not an easy position to hold to and that there are times when our real-world, personal survival must be put ahead of any program for and about identity in the abstract.

The concept of difference within and between cultures, as Tully highlights, is not meant to do away with the concept of identity. Rather, he directs our attention toward difference as an entry point into the realm of the Other. How similar this is to indigenous protocol, where the visitor subjects him or herself to the goodwill of the resident other and acknowledges difference in ceremonial acts. In either case, Euro-centred or indigenous, we are asked to notice difference and recognize the significance of that difference in others. This stance of recognition in turn enables us to adopt a perspective

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[34] Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 88.

of the Other in order to see that difference. Should it not be obvious why we ask, How

can we respect differences in others if we are not capable of seeing the world from the

perspective that is not our own? By first recognizing difference as a point of entry and

then engaging in alliance making, we are able to keep difference as a bond between us, as

indigenous people. If we, the in-betweeners, are not too anxious to make ourselves over

into the homogenous Other-indigenous or pan-aboriginal, we might come to experience

difference not as anxiety producing but as a stabilizing factor. This interpretation of

identity, one which argues for a multiplicity of perspectives, not continual

"fragmentation," does not thwart my ability to seek a process for creating an indigenous

approach to identity. Instead, it allows difference to be the way to reconcile the ever-

present tension in the never-to-be-closed gap between identities. Even though we

recognize the utility of an aspectival approach to aid indigenous political identity

formation, it does not negate the troubling aspects, for indigenous writers, of taking on

this approach without recognizing its pedigree. Thus the task of my project is not made

any less formidable with the usefulness of Tully's interpretation, in that an indigenous

approach is still required for my project to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

The postmodern concept of a "self-deconstructing, contingent" cultural "identity"

is a challenging argument against essentialist ideas of culture and identity. Postmodern

and post-colonial writers have noted that ethnonationalistic tendencies and movements,

wherever they are located and however rationalized and constituted, run counter to the

recognition of continual difference within and between cultures.[35] In spite of theoretical

arguments that dismiss the revival of cultural ideals as being a less-than-worthy

objective, the resurgence and renewal of indigenous peoples, societies, and traditions,

after 500 years of over-writing, continues to gain momentum. Land-based indigenous

communities are engaged in processes of recovery through projects such as Taiaiake

Alfred's "self-conscious traditionalism." Similarly, individuals and urban indigenous

communities are engaged in social, cultural, and political revival through processes

alluded to in Kim Anderson's reporting. But is there any way to argue the need for

indigenous cultural integrities without also falling prey to a discourse that has so

thoroughly decimated the credibility of an "ethnonationalist" political solution?[36] Can this

theoretical tension be reconciled? We might also ask, What has been the reaction to this

refutation of the "essentialism" inherent in ethnonationalist arguments favouring a kind

of cultural hegemony? Shauna McRanor describes this indigenous dilemma, noting that

in the face of an onslaught of overwhelming cultural disruption,

> groups struggling for recognition often invoke authenticity—couched, for
> example, in primordialist terms like "strong blood" or "pure genes"—as a
> "strategy of resistance"; as a way of internalizing and localizing identity
> within the physical body; as a hedge against the appropriation of

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[35] See generally, Arif Dirlik, "The Past as Legacy and Project: Postcolonial Criticism in the Perspective of Indigenous Historicism," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 20, no. 2 (1996), 1-31.

[36] In addition to Jeff Corntassel's discussion of ethnonationalism, see Regina Bendix's "Introduction" for a thorough discussion of the pitfalls and anxieties of pursuing the "authentic" in a postmodern age, in *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

"something" that is otherwise viewed as necessarily open-ended, negotiated, and contingent.[37]

Indigenous writers in the academy may be hard pressed to invoke notions of an essential, defendable space, even when it is about our personal physicality. What is pure, anyway? Who could hold themselves up to this highest of standards? The highest standard Western science can offer us is a view into the human genome. But what does it tell us about identity? There are now commercial firms ready to sell us a look into our personal DNA and entice us with the promise of an instant ancestry without leaving our house.[38] The implication in this message to the consumer public is that we are all immigrants, travelers, nomads who have been migrating around the earth since the dawn of humanity. The political implications of this science are enormous in that it seems no one culture has any originating claim over any particular place on the earth and that whoever happens to be the current occupier is simply the latest tenant.[39] Once again, we are faced with crusading forces, "self-deconstructing and contingent," but now, instead of shredding normative concepts about stable identities, gene science does the same for whole civilizations, indigenous and non alike.

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[37] Shauna McRanor, "A Proposal for an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program by Special Arrangement in Political Science, Indigenous Governance, and Anthropology at the University of Victoria, 27 April 2000," unpublished manuscript in possession of the author.

[38] See Ancestry by DNA, http://www.ancestrybydna.com/, accessed 12 February 2003.

[39] See generally, Vine Deloria, Jr., *Red Earth: White Lies* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997).

Western science claims to prove, once and for all, that we are all related (did we not know this already?). So it seems that any notion of cultural and political cohesion can be scrubbed away by the relentless wash of postmodern identity discourse and modern science. With essentialism swept aside, we are left with a sharp-edged debate about indigenous identity that also can vehemently deny "relatedness." In "We're Not There Yet, Kemo Sabe," Daniel Heath Justice notes that Elizabeth Cook-Lynn judges mixed-blood American Indian popular writers and finds them wanting.[40] Justice goes on to note her argument that,

> a responsible assertion of Indian identity is immersed in and
> indistinguishable from the sovereign tribal polity and its land base.[41]

This debate, which invariably seeks to take the "authenticity" high ground of the most pure, most traditional, most "Indian," does not serve the needs of those of us in-between. My perspective, like Peter Cole's "indigenous methodology" of the aboriginal canoe, is one that favours the writing toward the indigenous, toward that which was almost erased or written over. I do not favour the expenditure of energies on a constant rebuttal of the colonial in the defense of the indigenous. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's perspective, which centres a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action,[42]

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[40] Daniel Heath Justice, "We're Not There Yet, Kemo Sabe: Positing a Future for American Indian Literary Studies," *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2001): 259.

[41] Justice, 259-260.

[42] Smith, 146.

as she describes it, is useful because she provides a springboard for the creation of indigenous approaches to problems without having to recreate an analysis and criticism of the academy.

We note how Smith is careful to emphasize the "centring" of the indigenous. We also note that she does not write the indigenous over those ideas and concepts derived from the experience of the colonizer throughout the academy. Rather, she casts a critical eye on the colonial overlay in order to see through those European-derived ideas that gloss over, subsume, and continue to colonize the indigenous. Once these concepts are recognized and brought into the open, she argues that we are then better able to focus on the telling of the indigenous story using indigenous methodologies.

As I noted in Chapter One, the business of creating "difference labels," that is, definitions of who is indigenous, and promoting their acceptance and application, seems to be a natural reaction to the persistent "over-writing" of the indigenous by the colonizer. We also know from our personal experiences that indigenous protocol is not a relic of the past. Have we not participated in "welcoming ceremonies" that immediately recognize differences and place the "interloper" at the goodwill (and mercy) of those whose primacy is recognized and reciprocated by the visitor? This act of informal/temporary alliance is thus initiated through the visitor's acknowledgement of the host's responsibility for, and ancient connection to, the land upon which they meet.

Perhaps our repulsion, as indigenous writers and scholars, to the homogenizing aspects of difference we encounter in academic discourse is what keeps many voices silent on this matter. Instead of gaining freedom from the tyranny of essentialist pressures

via the postmodern argument, we find the postmodern confining and constricting. This is

the importance of Tully's proposal that, because of its location inside the academy,

provides us with some intellectual breathing room. If our goal is the development and

promotion of indigenous theoretical concepts, needs must that we also practice the

indigenous art and (political) science of alliance making and not limit ourselves merely to

thinking in the abstract. The "everyday" of our continuing existence as indigenous people

is not lived in the realm of the theoretical. I have overheard conversations where it was

said that one could be a "weekend Indian," that is, someone who gives the appearance of

indigenous cultural practice but only after the "9-to-5" is done. But if there is any truth to

the notion that "being born Native in this country [Canada] is a political act in itself,"[43] it

may be impossible for me to escape from the residual effects of those early colonial

adventures that sparked the "building of a nation." In the meantime, I will continue to put

forward a view that argues not against the postmodern, but toward an indigenous

perspective based on the social and political circumstances in which find myself. If the

goal of my argument is an indigenous conceptualization of the nature and context of a

certain indigenous political identity, I must continue to reject a binary "either/or"

"us/them" approach in favour of one that is encompassing and, at least as a starting point

within the academy, "aspectival."

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[43] Although this notion was examined recently by Drew Hayden Taylor in, "Life as a Native is Often Just Too Interesting," *Windspeaker*, February 2003, Editorial Section, this idea of being "born into" a political life is also noted by Taiaiake Alfred in *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Don Mills,: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

Recognizing that I tread on new ground, or paddle down an unknown tributary, I have to be ever cautious about this "inventing" environment called the academy. Indigenous writers, "Aboriginal mediators," and "word warriors," in Dale Turner's caution, should engage with this new indigenous landscape,

> by leaving Aboriginal philosophies intact; that is, the legitimacy of
> Aboriginal ways of thinking about the world are not up for negotiation.
> Aboriginal philosophies—the wisdom of the elders—guide the strategies
> that word warriors use to engage Western intellectual discourses.[44]

Here Turner, writing in "Vision: Towards an Understanding of Aboriginal Sovereignty," notes that indigenous writers cannot abandon their philosophical ancestry and must employ the living legacy of their ancestors in the context of their work in the academy. I also note that as an indigenous person disconnected from that philosophy, I cannot situate myself in the indigenous world without a corresponding commitment to support the continuing existence of those cultures and traditions. Turner, citing Robert Allen Warrior, highlights Warrior's view of American Indian intellectuals who

> have been caught in a death dance of dependence between, on the one
> hand, abandoning ourselves to the intellectual strategies and categories of
> white, European thought and, on the other hand, declaring that we need
> nothing outside ourselves and our cultures in order to understand the
> world and our place in it.[45]

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[44] Dale Turner, "Vision: Towards an Understanding of Aboriginal Sovereignty," in *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001), 319.

[45] Robert Allan Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 97-98, quoted in Turner, "Vision," 326.

Warrior's expression of the "death dance" succinctly describes the problematic area for indigenous writers of their reluctance to step into the gap without feeling as though they are simply taking up space in the "margins" of the dominant Western discourse or that they will be implicated by their words in their own destruction and assimilation. Not only will my project have to endure prescribed academic rigours but, in order to gain credibility with indigenous people outside the academy, it also will have to show how it does not merely pander to the agenda of the dominant discourse.

CHAPTER THREE: FOUR MODELS OF INDIGENOUS POLITICAL IDENTITY FORMATION

In Chapter Two I set about creating an indigenous conceptual space for my project. I did this by arguing toward Tully's use of an aspectival rather than binary approach to cultural and identity encounters where questions of indigenous identity are concerned. My goal is to put distance continually between my project and any temptation to fall back on the well-trodden ground of the "bad essential colonizer" and the "good essential indigenous," borrowing from what Stewart Hall calls a "strategy of simple reversals." [46]

Gaining distance is impossible without movement, so I have also adopted Cole's invocation of the "aboriginal canoe" as a methodological and literary device to help me on this journey toward an understanding of how I might develop and express a certain kind of indigenous political identity in the academic environment. This canoe, employed on Cole's terms as a way of indigenizing research methodology and discourse in an academic setting, represents not only the indigenous "message" but also the medium in which it "travels" and the paper/bark on which it is written.

The narrative motifs I have described are strongly related to three trajectories or streams of inquiry or travel illustrative of my journey toward indigenous political identity formation. I note that I have followed a line of inquiry that moved me away from the essential and definitional approaches along a path toward an identity that is self-

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[46] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in 'Race,' Culture and Difference, ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 254.

determining and self-sustaining within an indigenous cultural context, that is, the

trajectory of "agency." Another line of inquiry led me along a path that moves away from

fragmentation and contingency to a place employing a "philosophy of listening" about

difference in order to hear a multiplicity of cultural perspectives, that is, the trajectory of

"alliance." The third trajectory began with the prospect that an aspectival approach to

inquiry about the Other would free me from the lockstep of differential polarizations. The

aspectival, with its invocation of intercultural respect and recognition, carried me to a

point of entry into an indigenous river where an indigenous canoe could carry me toward

a new territory, that is, the trajectory of "identity."

These trajectories of inquiry are, in and of themselves, conceptual in nature. In

order to provide the reader with a context for the proposal presented in Chapter Four, I

will introduce published reports outlining four identity paradigms. Each of these

approaches outlines a path toward the development of a certain indigenous identity:

- Emergent Behaviours/Properties (Peroff)—Systems theory,
- Life Stages (Mihesuah from Cross)—Black Power model,
- Self-definition/Recognition of Being (Anderson)—Aboriginal social,
- Self-conscious Traditionalism (Alfred)—Indigenist tribal collectivity.

In my analysis I have not included the many authors I have encountered who engaged in

broad general discussions on the issue of identity, although some of these voices have

been referenced in earlier chapters. I deliberately limited my analysis to intentional

theories about indigenous identity formation, with a preference for concepts authored by

indigenous writers, in order to limit in a systematic way the potential range of material.

An extensive search of current research and literature revealed just the four theories noted

above, three authored by indigenous writers and scholars: Mihesuah, Anderson, and

Alfred. Notwithstanding this fact, all four contribute to our understanding of the

complexity of the discussion concerning indigenous identity formation. Thus, in a

literature rife with rhetorical commentary on indigenous identity and its possible

formation, only these four presented a congruent set of terms and conditions for the

construction of an indigenous political identity without relying on a definitional or

essentialist foundation.

Table 1. Comparison among Four Published Theories of Indigenous Identity Development

Indigenous Canoes	Environment	Streams / Trajectories of Travel		
		Political Agency	Political Alliance	Political Identity
Emergent behaviours/properties—systems theory (Peroff)	"Native American" communitarian	Some, but only to adapt to dominant culture "metaphors" of "indianness"	Some, but only with like-minded Native Americans in an Indian melting pot	Invented
Life Stages—adapted Black Power model (Mihesuah)	Individual/social integration	Some, but relies on personal "revelation" or the spark of an outside "event" to provide the impetus	Not required	Unfolds over a lifetime of social interaction
Self-definition/Recognition of Being—adapted black feminist model (Anderson)	Individual	Some, personal self-determination	Political alliance in a social setting	Unfolds over a lifetime of social interaction
Self-conscious Traditionalism—indigenist (Alfred)	Indigenous tribal collectivity	Yes, personal and tribal self-determination	Yes, intra- and inter-nation confederacy	Unfolds through intimate interaction with sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language, ancestral homelands

How Do These Four Approaches Relate to My Journey?

As I have noted in the Table 1 above, each theory has characteristics that can be examined across a number of lines of inquiry: environment, agency, alliance, and identity. I will now proceed with an examination of each theory to determine if any of its attributes would be suitable provision for the indigenous canoe.

Emergent Behaviours/Properties Approach

I will begin with a review and analysis of an attempt by Nicholas Peroff to blend Western science and identity concepts. In his 1997 paper "Indian Identity," Peroff proposed an adaptation of "nonlinear systems theory" as applied to the question of tribal versus non-tribal identity formation. The foundation of Peroff's argument is what he refers to as the new science concept of emergent behaviours/properties developed, he says, through the interaction of concepts resident in the disciplines of physics, biology, and computer science. "Emergent behaviors/properties" are described as "the behavior of the elements of a system in interaction with one another and the environment."[47] And, as he notes later on the same page,

> nonlinear systems theory looks for things that are grounded in and at the same time, emergent from the underlying material structures.

Key to Peroff's proposal is the notion that non-linear systems, for example, the stock market, a living organism, an Indian tribe, and so on, must be studied as a whole; as the

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[47] Peroff, 487.

sum of their interaction, rather than a study of their individual parts. Peroff also argues

that "Indian identity" is the sum of the interactions of cultural metaphors in which

> the key emergent property of an Indian tribe, its Indian identity, is in an
> ultimate sense, anchored in a tribe's common body of community-based
> metaphor.[48]

Not only are internal cultural metaphors essential to Indian tribal identity, he says, but

aspects of this identity come about in relation to and interaction with other tribes prior to

contact and with Europeans after contact. This discussion gives Peroff an opportunity to

conceptualize an alternative "middle ground," as he says, to the indigenous identity

question. Peroff argues that "an entirely new Indian identity, not tribally-based and not

white" could evolve from the interactions of dominant culture metaphors about Indians.

He notes examples of such metaphors as in harmony with nature, tourist attraction,

historical artifact, and so on. The resulting "new emergent Indianness"[49] would form the

basis of a new community, with a

> community-based Indian identity . . . anchored in a common body of its
> own community-based metaphor.[50]

Peroff's proposal has aimed high, but seems to fall short of its target. He sets his sights

on a middle ground in the form of a research paradigm that is not hamstrung by either

strict definitions of Indianness or quantifiable genetics. Despite Peroff's reach for what

seems to be a utopian ideal, he unfortunately has inferred by his examples of nonlinear

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[48] Peroff, 488.

[49] Peroff, 491.

[50] Peroff, 492.

systems that the process of Indian identity creation is somehow equated to "ant colonies,

traffic jams and the human immune system."[51] Even if I overlook the patronizing

implications of this comparison, I still have difficulty relating to the self-emergent

communities Peroff predicts. He fashions his concept on the notion that "Indianness"

(with an upper case 'I') is a feature of tribal communities that themselves are the sum of a

"common body of metaphor,"[52] and that members acquire access to these collective

metaphors through interaction. Thus the sum of the interaction of all tribal members in a

community is "Indianness." The other hinge in Peroff's argument is the notion of

"indianness," (with a lower case "i") which he uses to illustrate the continuation of the

dominant culture process of "outside-naming." However, in this case, Peroff refers to

what I think could more properly be referred to as "myths about Indians." These

dominant American culture metaphors of "indianness" are illustrated by ideas such as

"harmony with nature," "tourist attractions," and "historical artifact." To his credit,

Peroff brings in such authors as Vine Deloria Jr. and Russell Means, which suggests that

he does not believe these stereotypes. Yet, when he goes on to describe his theory in

practice, he does not gain any more ground than he might have already lost. Peroff's

process for obtaining a "new Indian identity" consists of three steps: (1) I could throw my

lot in with other "Indians of diverse and varying degrees of tribal heritage" (supposedly

because we would not be welcomed by tribal communities), under the banner of a

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[51] Peroff, 487.

[52] Peroff, 488.

dominant culture metaphor of the quality noted above; (2) I and my rootless brethren would live together long enough to begin to accumulate a body of shared experiences culminating in the creation of "community-based metaphor(s)"; (3) The inherent quality of "nonlinear interaction" is exemplified in the phrase "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," thus out of this interactive process is "a new emergent Indianness." Peroff is correct to note that these Native Americans would not be tribally based Indians, but he also seems to defer to the ideas of "tribal identity," at least for some of the Tribes he expects will survive, as a being the "sustaining spark" of a "living Indian community." It seems to me, however, that "Indians" will always choose, where possible, a "tribally" entrenched identity that, in turn, links them to a specific place and sense of belonging. Peroff's "Indian communities of convenience" seems to reflect a sort of passive alternative to total erasure. For my purposes, an invented identity of the nature proposed by Peroff contains neither the link to agency/self-determination nor the need to be politically allied with the continuance of indigenous culture and societies in North America.

Life Stages Approach

The notion of "inventedness" described in Peroff's model above, lingers in Choctaw scholar Devon Mihesuah's "life stages" process. Mihesuah has adapted the work of African-American scholars William Cross and Thomas Parham to the indigenous identity project. Mihesuah notes that Cross

posits that as Blacks respond to a variety of social events, pressures, and expectations they progress through a set of definable stages that lead to an identity resolution.[53]

Mihesuah proposes in her adaptation to

substitute American Indians for Blacks and figure in social, economic, and political influences . . . to . . . logically consider here–albeit briefly–the various elements that influence the identity choices of persons who claim to be racially and/or ethnically American Indian.[54]

At the first stage of her adaptation, indigenous individuals might have a vague awareness of their "indigenousness," labeled the "pre-encounter" stage. This awareness could be radicalized through the "experience [of] a shocking event,"[55] and is labeled as the second or "encounter" stage. The third stage is referred to as the "immersion-emersion" stage, further demarcated in Mihesuah's interpretation by three goals: "becoming an Indian," "becoming more Indian/rediscovering Indianness," or "becoming less Indian." The fourth and final stage is what Mihesuah calls the "internalization" stage, where "a person develops inner security about their identity."[56] To close her paper, Mihesuah notes in ten points why she considers it important that attention be paid to the various intersecting identity agendas.

There are several issues I will address, including the linearity of her stages approach, which coming from a recognized indigenous scholar, I found to be most

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[53] Mihesuah, 194.

[54] Mihesuah, 194.

[55] Mihesuah, 196.

[56] Mihesuah, 214.

perplexing. Most notable is the conclusion to which she leads the reader after the length

of the paper, when she states that

> the escalating incidences of ethnic fraud demonstrates [sic] the need for
> definitive guidelines for determining who is and is not Indian.[57]

So in this one short statement, Mihesuah rationalizes away any justification of an identity

fashioned at least through social interaction and as a resistance strategy against cultural

assimilation into the American mainstream. It seems to me that "definitive guidelines"

gets us right back where we started. My second critique relates to Mihesuah's hinge

proposal that indigenous Americans can follow a model constructed on the back of the

so-called "Black experience." I note that early in her paper she attempts to draw a parallel

between Blacks and Native Americans. The similarity she notes is that both "ethnic"

groups "live in a white world" and are therefore, quoting sociologist Maria P. P. Root,

subject to the imposition of a marginal status by the dominant society.[58] This may be the

case, but I am not sure that this is a strong enough rationale for implying that elements of

identity are the same for "Black" Americans as they might be for tribal American Indians

with, as Corntassel noted earlier, their sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language, and

ancestral homelands in North America. The problem of Mihesuah's assumption becomes

more obvious when contrasting, and I am greatly oversimplifying here, Native American

and "Black" American political agendas. I would characterize this dissimilarity in terms

of autonomy and protection of Native American uniqueness versus Black integration and

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[57] Mihesuah, 217.

[58] Mihesuah, 195.

equality under the law. These are issues that are not easily set aside. And it is not that we would fail to recognize that the protection of unique cultural characteristics and equality under the law are vital agendas for all cultural groups. It is just that indigenous writers should use caution when importing and applying identity development paradigms. They should include a full and frank discussion of the social and political entanglements those agendas bring with them. Similarly, we note that Mihesuah asks the reader to believe that it is acceptable to universalize the "Black experience" and layer it on to indigenous people without recognizing the similarity of this technique to the over-writing imposed on indigenous peoples by the Western academy. This is a serious critique and one where the academy has been challenged by many writers, indigenous and non-indigenous alike.[59]

An additional challenge to Mihesuah's stages approach is raised with her linear construction of an indigenous identity as a developmental process from primordial state of pre-awareness to fully formed state of internalized satisfaction. What strikes the reader about this progression of identity states is the inability of the subject to embark on a new identity journey based on some fresh insight. Mihesuah's adherence to an evolutionary/Darwinesque "forward" movement appears to negate the possibility of any indigenous "circular" movement or a lifelong renewal. Even a brief acknowledgement of an indigenous motif of cyclical renewal, with its inherent contradictions to a linear

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[59] See generally, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Gordon Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas Through Their Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

progression, would have added some indigenous complexity to her argument.

Unfortunately, the reader does not get to see the promise of the depth of her scholarship

and experience in the field. Instead the "stages" process simply concludes at the end of a

blind alley.

My final critique of Mihesuah may force the structure of her argument to collapse

from the inside. Black scholar Stuart Hall, in his essay "New Ethnicities," called for the

recognition of

> the end of innocence, or the end of the innocent notion of the essential
> black subject.[60]

In this essay, Hall argues, among other things, that the "encounters" the subject of

"Blackness" has had with the poststructuralism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, and

feminism have thoroughly altered the Black subject. He goes on to note how these

encounters have revealed the "Black" subject as a "politically and culturally *constructed*

category."[61] The essential black subject, according to Hall, served a purpose at one time

as a kind of shorthand reaction to racism, especially as it relates to race relations in

Britain in the 1980s. This constructed idea of "Blackness," he says, relates to the notion

of Blacks as objects, but rarely as subjects. There developed a recognition that the Black

experience is not merely one homogeneous experience, but a multiplicity of non-white

cultural and political experiences from around the world, especially from Africa and

south Asia. Just as there is no one "Native American" or indigenous culture for that

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[60] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," 254.

[61] Hall, 254.

matter, any concept of identity based on an essentialist root stands on shaky ground, as I have argued previously. Although the "stages" of Mihesuah's model might act as a kind of introspective shorthand, I am not sure it can sufficiently overcome its deficits to support a process of indigenous political identity formation. In terms of my research trajectories, the life stages approach hints at political agency and alliances, but only if individuals progressing through this evolutionary process were so inclined. There is no indication in Mihesuah's construct of a requirement by individuals to walk either of these paths.

Self-definition/Recognition of Being Approach

The theme of stages or progressions is continued in variation in Cree/Métis writer Kim Anderson's 2000 work *A Recognition of Being*. Here Anderson argues an indigenous women's perspective to the theoretical debate on identity formation. Drawing on the same rationale of portability and adaptability as Mihesuah, Anderson describes her conceptual framework as being

> similar to one that has been applied by other oppressed peoples, but with a distinctly Aboriginal approach.[62]

The similarity between the approaches ends here, as Mihesuah's linear "steps" give way to Anderson's "circular, interactive" approach. Her model is conceptualized using the outline of an indigenous medicine wheel and pivots on four key aspects: "resist, reclaim,

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[62] Anderson, 15.

construct and act."[63] In her monograph, Anderson writes to and for indigenous women as a way of recognizing a new or perhaps hidden cultural identity. She proposes that a generalized indigenous identity is formed through understanding and action on three fronts—personal, external, and knowledge/tradition: personal, in that it is about recovering from an identity imposed by the dominant white-male mainstream; external, in the sense that mere self-recognition and knowledge are not enough and that each woman must be actively engaged in "translating tradition into the contemporary context";[64] and finally, knowledge/tradition in that indigenous women must act out their new-found identity

in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities.[65] Thus indigenous women would actively blend knowledge of self and tradition with action in the real world of community.

As Anderson notes in her chapter called "Setting Out," she is resisting the academic format of objectification of the subject as well as rejecting the notion of an impartial, third-person voice of authority. Anderson's work in this monograph portrays an intensely personal journey based on life events and her encounter type of experience in university, which jarred her out of her "complacency" and on to a more social and political journey of self-discovery. Anderson notes that she lived with and knew both her

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[63] Anderson, 15.

[64] Anderson, 15.

[65] Anderson, 15.

parents and could draw a familial line back to Cree, Métis, and Saulteaux communities and heritage in Manitoba. She initiates her "process of self-identification," which she explains in limited detail, from a foundation formulated by Black feminist author Patricia Hill Collins, who wrote that Black women must

> resist and construct a different knowledge of the self as a matter of survival.[66]

Anderson did not write this current work in an academic environment and has chosen not to subject her work to scholarly review, but she does note that this project began as a master's thesis. So it does not seem fair to judge her model based on my need for academic rigour. However, she does present her concept in the public domain as "a theory of identity formation,"[67] and the work is on three undergraduate course reading lists in at least two Canadian universities,[68] thus opening up its contents to more review.

As I noted above, Anderson does not provide her reader with full justification for why she has chosen Collins' "resist and construct" elements. Anderson adds, with some introduction, the notions of "reclaim" and "act" to round out her model and also provides a short explanatory phrase for each of the four elements of her theory of identity formation:

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[66] Anderson, 15.

[67] Anderson, 15.

[68] Available at
http://www.carleton.ca/ssw/course%20outlines/Fall%202002/52.5305.02.htm,
http://web.uvic.ca/socw/outlines%2003/SOCW491Y01.pdf, and
http://web.uvic.ca/socw/outlines%2003/SOCW391Y01.pdf, accessed 19 March 2003.

- Resisting negative definitions of being,
- Reclaiming Aboriginal tradition,
- Constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context, and
- Acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities.[69]

Without doubt, despite the following critique, Anderson's work is an indigenous project of exactly the kind that Linda Tuhiwai Smith envisioned. The method Anderson employs is one of recontextualizing and analyzing the stories of the lives of the women she interviewed and ordering their responses, with her additional commentary, around the four themes noted above.

While I do not argue with the meaning of the four elements Anderson proposes, I note that she may be committing the same error as Mihesuah in relying on what Stuart Hall argued was an expended notion of an essential and singular "Black" experience. Women of colour, writing in the post-colonial context, point out that their experiences have often been overshadowed by this all-encompassing "Black," in much the same way that women of colour talk back to the dominant position of white Western feminists.[70] These are not new ideas, and perhaps Anderson could have been more thorough at unpacking this piece of cultural imperialism. And even though Anderson could have provided her reader with more detail about her rationale for including Collins' concepts, I am sure she could have just as confidently created an indigenous context for each of her

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[69] Anderson, 15.

[70] See generally, Inéz Hernández-Ávila, "Relocations Upon Relocations: Home, Language, and Native American Women's Writings," *American Indian Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1995): 491-507.

terms, or rationalized their use with indigenous references. However, key for my

purposes is the question, Is she writing about us "in-betweeners"? And is Anderson's

model suited to my purposes of the development of an indigenous political identity?

There are aspects of her indigenous/circular approach that might have parallels to

my discussion, such as the movement toward self-determination and the development of

an identity grounded in indigenous traditions, uncovered or recovered. In addition, I

might infer that the "political" is inherent in her model of personal development in that

Anderson asks indigenous women to "resist" the imposed colonial labels, definitions, and

stereotypes of who and what an indigenous woman is suppose to be and to "reclaim"

their rightful role as equals with indigenous men. In this sense, Anderson's proposal for a

theory of identity formation does not overtly rely on state-sanctioned notions of

indigenous identity and the state's "manipulation of identity criteria."[71] But her proposal

does run the risk, I believe, of being in tacit agreement with political definitions and

labels imposed by the colonial state. I suggest this because Anderson does not provide the

reader with a specific argument against the political labels and identities created by state

forces—this despite her admonishment to indigenous women that they should reject the

social labels that have wrongly been applied to them.

In the current historical context, the activity of shedding imposed colonial labels

and identities must be regarded as a political act, as I have suggested earlier. So, there are

some aspects of Anderson's approach that would be useful for those of us without an

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[71] Alfred, *Peace, Power Righteousness*, 86.

indigenous community to which to reconnect but who steadfastly resist the strong undertow of assimilation into the main/stream. I also have a lingering concern that Anderson's approach might encourage the creation of communities of convenience where indigenous women and men are living right now, rather than proposing political alliances for change that involve a politically reciprocal relationship with land-based indigenous communities. However, I am not proposing that indigenous women give up their fate to the social circumstances many fled over the decades and return to those selfsame conditions. Fundamental change would be required in indigenous land-based communities before many indigenous women would be inspired to return or participate in the political and social life of their home communities. In the meantime, Anderson's "self-definition" model may provide hope and expression for some who desire a less active political life, but it might not be able to take them from the notion of individual self-determination toward its collective counterpart. This is a question that remains to be answered.

Self-conscious Traditionalism Approach

Anderson points out that many indigenous women are living what amounts to a life in exile from their political communities of origin because of the effects of colonialism and dominance and disruption by the settler state. The theme of colonial political disruption is taken up with authority by Kanien' kehaka (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake Alfred. In *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Alfred extends a theme he began in his earlier work, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors*. In *Peace, Power, Righteousness*

Alfred appears to develop two complementary narrative themes. There is the theme of the on-the-ground renewal of indigenous political and community processes as a way to recover from the onslaught of colonialism. The other agenda is somewhat more conceptual but nonetheless important. In it Alfred challenges the status quo regarding an indigenous future in the Western hemisphere and interjects a project of indigenous political and cultural activism into the discourse on the future of political philosophy. Alfred argues for the rejection of conservative strategies to indigenous survival, ones that present incremental arguments for justice vis-à-vis the current relationship with the state. Instead he favours a strategy that, while arguing against indigenous complacency in political tactics with the settler state, attempts to set a new agenda for the promotion of self-determining, confederal relationships.

Alfred describes this process of Native nationalism as "self-conscious traditionalism." Its purpose is nothing less than to jump-start the revitalization of indigenous community leadership and governance based on traditionalized values, along with the rebuilding of institutions of self-governance based on each nation's unique culture, tradition, language, and relationship to the land. In this proposal, individuals would regain their indigenous political identity by rejecting the stereotypes and colonial identity that blanket them as part of the colonial project of assimilation of indigenous tribes into the mainstream of Euro-American culture. The success of this process would hinge on the "reconstruction of traditional communities" based on the traditional

teachings of the nation.[72] This step would entail a reinvigoration of indigenous

institutions of governance based on individual adherence to traditional leadership values

and processes. Thus, an indigenous community would begin to disengage from colonial

governance processes and structures and, over time, rely upon indigenous modes of

leadership and governance.

Alfred's approach has been described by one critic as a model of "exclusionary

ethnic nationhood."[73] His approach apparently disregards indigenous people who, if not

for blatant colonial attempts at destruction of the original peoples, might now be

considered the citizens of indigenous nations. However, Alfred clearly lays the

responsibility for this identity turmoil at the feet of the colonial state as

a mess created by the state and its manipulation of identity criteria.[74]

Others agree with Alfred's claim that the colonial government has indeed created an

identity "mess." Métis Nation elder Harry Lavallee, whose heritage is a mix of Cree,

Saulteau, and French, agrees with that assessment:

> By creating two phony classes of Indian, the federal government was able
> to divide and conquer the native community. "It's stupid to have status
> Indians and non-status, Métis and half-breeds. We're all Indians."[75]

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[72] Alfred, *Peace, Power Righteousness*, 81.

[73] Val Napoleon, "Extinction by Number: Colonialism Made Easy," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 16, no. 1 (2001): 140.

[74] Alfred, *Peace, Power Righteousness*, 86.

[75] Kevin Griffin, "Métis Elder Overcame Numerous Obstacles," *The Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 2003.

From Alfred's argument that indigenous nations have the right as self-determining peoples to determine who their citizens are, it follows that there will be those like me who claim indigenous heritage but cannot at the moment (or may never) claim citizenship of any one particular nation. I do not dispute that this is where we are located. Many indigenous people for reasons of colonial interruption, cannot adhere to an indigenous community, but neither do we seek the prospect of assimilation into the settler society. This is a problem not of our own making, but how might we resolve it?

It is clear to me that Alfred does not have the answer to my identity question, even though he does state that any problems created by the state are not the responsibility of indigenous land-based communities. The promise of his proposal is mainly directed at those indigenous individuals who can still draw on a direct connection through their familial heritage to their traditional homeland, whether or not they choose to live there at the present time. Yet there is a significant benefit to Alfred's proposal that has gone largely unnoticed by commentators. The benefit, unintended perhaps, of Alfred's proposal is that it clears a conceptual path to the creation of solutions to all sorts of identity questions. Recall Stuart Hall's earlier proposal in my analysis of Mihesuah's "stages" concept. Hall called for the recognition of the "end of the essential black subject." In the same way that an essentialized black identity came apart after its encounter with a critical analysis, I believe the notion of a stable but fictive indigenous identity finally fell apart with the advent of Alfred's "self-conscious traditionalism." Alfred was stating in a forceful and unambiguous way that indigenous political identity was not something one made up at whim, to be had by joining a political movement, or

"developed" through evolutionary stages. Instead he argued that the only way out was through an indigenous tradition of self-determination and self-governance. Alfred's proposal also suggests that the way forward for us "in-betweeners" is to reject the identity "mess" in which we find ourselves, and enter into alliances of solidarity with land-based peoples and communities.[76]

How Do These Approaches Complement or Support My Journey?

Before embarking on the final leg of my journey, I must set aside Peroff's "system's theory" concept and Mihesuah's "life stages" approach for reasons of suitability, as I have discussed above. This will free me to focus on those key aspects of Alfred's and Anderson's approaches that can be taken on, as provisions so to speak, toward the creation of an indigenous political identity.

I begin by acknowledging that each of the remaining authors, in their individual monographs, provides far more detail overall than I am using for my purposes. In order to narrow my research focus, I chose to review and discuss, generally speaking, only those aspects I considered essential to the final outcome of my project.

In my analysis above, I noted how the models proposed by Alfred and Anderson recognized movement along the trajectories of self-determination, as well as those

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[76] Alfred discusses what he says is confusion about the terms and processes of "cohesion" and "solidarity." "Cohesion" is a term, he argues, that connotes political activity occurring in a community, self-conscious and secure in itself, around a set of beliefs and institutions. He notes that the term "solidarity" implies a political activity that allies itself with others in common cause larger than that of the communities or groups themselves, 87.

processes that acknowledge and seek out a multiplicity of interests and agendas through social alliances and political, confederal relationships. The strong themes of self-determination by both authors create movement toward the ideal of indigenous political agency at the personal/individual level and at the level of the indigenous nation collective. This recognition of personal responsibility toward self and others is a key motif throughout Alfred's and Anderson's work. In addition to self-determination, the recognition by the authors of the interactivity of political and social agendas supports the movement toward indigenous political alliances and community-building processes that focus on the interconnectedness of relationships.

Yet, of these two approaches, Alfred's "self-conscious traditionalism," although not directly applicable to my personal life circumstances at the moment, is none the less the most politically and strategically robust for the conceptualizing of an idealized process of a certain indigenous political identity formation. What sets Alfred's proposal apart from Anderson's "interactive self-definition" process is its foundational aspects of a prior and continuing existence of self-determining, indigenous, land-based societies in the Americas. The other important distinction in the context of my project is the adherence by self-conscious traditionalism to the ideal of "indigenous governance," which might have application wherever indigenous people located themselves. Despite the balance of deficiencies and strengths of indigenous land-based communities presently, Alfred's model presents a clear and strong response to the ongoing pressure toward an eventual and final assimilation of the original peoples of Turtle Island. As I noted above, the first intended audiences of his approach were/are land-based indigenous

communities, their formal and informal leadership, plus those individuals who can claim legitimate membership in those societies.[77]

I must exclude myself from this collective to which Alfred refers, whether Cree or Métis nation, until such time as I might be able to make representation to a particular community about the nature of my membership. Therefore in these circumstances, my identity formation project must be capable of sustaining internal integrity and legitimacy. This "self-sustainability" is needed because of the fact that I am reluctant to endorse the notion of membership or citizenship in an invented community or a community of convenience, no matter how great the psychological or social pull is for me to do so. However, I am not rejecting the social affiliation or membership indigenous people living in urban population centres take up for their well-being and survival. This is an acknowledged strategy for our political and economic survival. And as I stated at the outset of my essay, I take up this stance of "in-between" in order to resist the notion of assimilation into the mainstream of Canadian society.

With my canoe thus caught in the grip of these determined conceptual forces, where might my journey end if not in my own demise? This will be the subject of my proposal in Chapter Four, where I will discuss what I perceive to be a conceptual gap in the debate concerning political identity formation. I will argue that perhaps for those of us cut off from history, ceremony, language, and homeland and surrounded by the

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[77] Note: sanctioned "membership" in a land-based community, according to Alfred, is a product of deliberation by a self-determining collectivity of indigenous peoples exercising their right to be self-defining and self-governing. See generally, Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, and 84-88.

constrictive colonial presence, our raison d'être ought to be to forge symbolic and practical alliances for survival and resistance. Thus we would be allied with indigenous writers, scholars, politicians, and communities embracing the revitalization and continuance of tradition and relationship to a specific geography.

CHAPTER FOUR: AGENCY AND ALLIANCE: A JOURNEY TOWARD A CERTAIN INDIGENOUS POLITICAL IDENTITY FORMATION

> In the old days, having an identity crisis meant that you couldn't find the spirit or ancestor living inside of you. The strength of indigenous societies at the time, and the clarity of the cultural boundaries between them, meant that people didn't have to think about their group affiliation--much less whether or not they were truly "Indian." But the breakdown of those traditional societies created in all Native people--even those consciously seeking recovery--many questions about belonging. -- Taiaiake Alfred[78]

Recalling my foundational research question, Is it possible for an indigenous person, removed from culture, land, tradition, and language by the colonial state, to develop a certain indigenous political identity, and if so, how might this be achieved? I now set out to articulate how each of these challenges might be answered.

Indigenous Political Identity Formation

There are three key features that make up my proposal for a process of deliberate identity. The first feature consists of the three research trajectories I discussed earlier: agency, alliance, and identity. I have also argued that in the academic context of my project I would have to move away from certain conceptual constraints and toward other flexibilities for my project to enjoy any chance of success. I have therefore proposed that these three trajectories of travel, albeit in their early days at this point in my personal journey, would help improve my chances of escape from a territory hostile to indigenous survival.

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[78] Alfred, *Peace, Power Righteousness*, 85.

The second element of my proposal consists of a self-directed journey with real-life consequences. Thus, I must be willing to engage along three complementary and lifelong paths, roughly scribed as knowledge of the indigenous past, understanding of the indigenous present, and commitment to the indigenous future. As I noted earlier, this pedagogical approach suggests three complementary questions to guide my indigenous identity development. These are questions about the prior and continuing existence of indigenous peoples in the Americas; questions about the current relationship between indigenous peoples and the state; and questions regarding the nature of my participation, or agency, at the political level toward the resolution of perplexing issues of coexistence. These questions are not meant to solicit definitive, text book answers, but are needed to further my knowledge and understanding about the many histories and circumstances of this indigenous hemisphere. The primary attribute of this questioning stance is to help keep me from a tortured existence of interminable loneliness in a dominant society that sees its best solution is to see me as an individual, productive worker living in a middle-class urban enclave. However, my situation is complicated by the nature of the current indigenous political context, so these complexities demand a level of understanding not normally required of individuals. This is why I believe the process of answering these questions will prove to be most beneficial.

The reader will recognize Table 2 below. Table 1 earlier compared the attributes of the four published identity development concepts. Table 2 adds the "Indigenous Political Identity Formation" process for comparison.

Table 2. Comparison of the Four Theories with the "Indigenous Political Identity Formation" Approach

Indigenous Canoes	Environment	Streams / Trajectories of Travel		
		Political Agency	Political Alliance	Political Identity
Emergent behaviours/properties—systems theory (Peroff)	"Native American" communitarian	Some, but only to adapt to dominant culture "metaphors" of "indianness"	Some, but only with like-minded Native Americans in an Indian melting pot	Invented
Life Stages—adapted Black Power model (Mihesuah)	Individual/social integration	Some, but relies on personal "revelation" or the spark of an outside "event" to provide the impetus	Not required	Unfolds over a lifetime of social interaction
Self-definition/Recognition of Being—adapted Black feminist model (Anderson)	Individual	Some, personal self-determination	Political alliance in a social setting	Unfolds over a lifetime of social interaction
Self-conscious Traditionalism—indigenist (Alfred)	Indigenous tribal collectivity	Yes, personal and tribal self-determination	Yes, intra- and inter-nation confederacy	Unfolds through intimate interaction with sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language, ancestral homelands
Indigenous Political Identity Formation proposal (Leslie)	Individual	Yes, personal self-determination	Yes, initiated confederacies	Unfolds over a lifetime through - knowledge of indigenous past - understanding of indigenous present - commitment to an indigenous future

In comparing each of the concepts above and their features, I note that there are elements of Anderson's and Alfred's processes that share some commonalties to the indigenous political identity formation (IPIF) proposal across the streams/trajectories of agency, alliance, and identity. However, it is in relation to Alfred's proposal of "self-conscious traditionalism" that the promise of the strongest ties are located. This connection brings me now to a discussion of the third and final element of my proposal.

Application of Agency, Alliance, and Identity

If any of us dare embark on this journey, we will need to share the canoe with others who desire the same sense of self-determination gained by defining one's own life in a deliberate fashion. Thus, the third and final element in my proposal is taken up when I:

- Refuse to live in political isolation in the main/stream;
- Enter into tactical alliances ("cohesion") with others in the same canoe; and
- Negotiate strategic alliances ("solidarity") with indigenous land-based communities and peoples.

I have argued throughout my essay that the simple invention of a "community of convenience" will not do for the purposes of seeking answers to the three questions posed earlier.[79] True, there may be "convenient communities" in which we live our daily lives. However, I suggest that we should not be satisfied with this state of affairs, that we should begin to seek out those who share common goals and aspirations and that we must actively engage with them and others who are on similar journeys in order to be

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[79] I do recognize, however, that many indigenous people, caught in social/political circumstances not within their control, will opt for inventedness over demise to ensure their personal survival.

politically effective. The strength of the "confederate ideal" in relationships is, notes

Alfred,

the best example of a political tradition among indigenous peoples.[80]

Therefore, we should do no less than that to aspire to this ideal.[81]

I have proposed that some indigenous people who find themselves in the political

and social circumstances I have outlined above could negotiate active alliances with

indigenous communities and peoples for knowledge, understanding, resistance, and

survival in a practical sense. This might ensure that we engage with and test this concept

in a crucible with practical ramifications to the lives of ourselves and others. The other

implication of my project is the opportunity for conceptual alliances between

communities, individuals engaged in a broader process of "self-conscious traditionalism,"

and those individuals engaged in this new process as a counter strategy to Western

notions and ideals concerning indigenous identity, especially in an academic context. The

advantages of an alliance of this kind are far-reaching. An example of the benefits of this

type of alliance concerns the real need for human resources by indigenous communities

and organizations, engaged in community renewal on one front and with the state

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[80] Alfred, *Peace, Power Righteousness*, 88.

[81] See also, generally, Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council, with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter, and Dorothy First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Robert A. Williams Jr., *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law And Peace, 1600—1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Russel Lawrence Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1986): 181-198.

political, legal, and administrative systems on the other. There is also the promise in

these confederated relationships of an opportunity to harness the energies of many

politically minded, activist indigenous people to the continuing existence of indigenous

nations, cultures, and societies in the Americas. Even though many of these activists may

never claim formal indigenous membership, they are none the less dedicated to the task at

hand of ensuring that there will always be a significant indigenous presence. It is no small

recognition to state that their spiritual and mental health depends on that continuing

existence, as well as a knowledge of where they have come from and where they belong.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

> my canoe is a place of cultural understanding
> it transports it connects me to the forest and the water and to my spirit
> it conveys it acts as a place of gestation of birthing
> in transit and finally worldly threshold for generations
> millennia of my relations if ever there was home for our migrations
> it is this form this vessel this tree relation — Peter Cole[82]

The impossible escape from capture . . .

Where I have come from and where I belong might be described as two sides of the same paddle. In the end, who can tell which side is which? Nonetheless, the promise I made to myself at the beginning of this project was to argue for what I thought would be a workable resolution to my "identity crisis" and my crisis of belonging. I also attempted to articulate a way out of the conundrum of my exiled existence on the edge of assimilation by engaging in an indigenous canoe journey. The canoe in which I have journeyed so far was not built on a rigid frame but assembled from elements that are substantive yet flexible. At least, that was my goal. A life's journey requires flexibility and principles, just as much as it needs defining structure and rules—maybe more so.

I note that in my estimation, this study would have failed to meet its reach if readers had been rewarded with yet another "definition." I did not venture anywhere near that endgame. Instead, my project has engaged in a process that moved away from the notion of identity as fragmented and contingent and toward an unknown territory, along three streams or trajectories conceptualized as agency, alliance, and identity. My voyage has benefited from the use of Cole's "aboriginal canoe" methodology as a way of

incorporating a multiplicity of perspectives into an indigenous dialogue. The study was also aided when Tully's "aspectival" perspective was brought into the canoe as a way of recognizing difference rather than acquiescing to notions of fragmentation and contingency. Together these approaches buttressed the study's case for the creation of indigenous conceptual space.

The reader will also recall the purpose of this project, which was to answer the question of a) whether or not it was possible for me as an indigenous "in-betweener" to develop an indigenous political identity, and b) if this goal were achievable, at least conceptually, by what means might an idealized indigenous subject achieve this transformation? My response to the first is noted below in a discussion of the study's key findings. I will provide a response to the second question in the later section on implications for future research. I begin with an explication of the conceptual framework of indigenous political formation, followed by a reiterative comparison of aspects of the four theories examined earlier.

Findings

As has been noted in Table 2, the environment or context for the four concepts ranged from invented community, social integration, and indigenous collectivity, to the individual. The importance of this delineation was not to point out the obvious nature of all human relationships as discussed in earlier chapters. Setting the context was meant to heighten the reader's awareness of "authorship," that is, the location of the concept in the

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[82] Cole, 450.

indigenous landscape and the subject's location. In the case of IPIF, the context of the

individual highlighted the inescapable nature of that place "in-between" as neither part of

an invented community nor member of an indigenous collectivity. Thus the idealized

subject might have found isolation as an indigenous individual unbearable and required a

response or reaction toward political agency in the form of personal self-determination.

In this regard I was not speaking from a place of idealized subject. After all those many

years, I finally realized that to respond effectively to colonial injustice, I would need to

add depth to my repertoire beyond self-loathing and interminable loneliness.

As the study has noted, to one degree or another each of the four theories were

able to answer in the affirmative the question of agency, yet only in one was personal

self-determination a key factor. With regard to IPIF, I have noted how agency was linked

to the creation of indigenous identity concepts, which in turn were manifested through

acts of survival and resistance. Thus I have shown how an idealized subject might

employ personal commitment to affect the relationship between indigenous peoples and

the state and find a channel/tributary for acts of resistance and acts of alliance making

through this self-determination process.

The study found that, through the act of entering into alliances or confederated

political relationships, the idealized subject might be transformed through a process of

"deliberate identity." The act of political alliance making was noted as the heart of the

matter. This hinge proposition allowed for the development of an indigenous political

identity without the subject being raised in an indigenous cultural and political

community. Therefore, the study found that an act of deliberate identity making would

include the creation of practical political alliances to forestall the ever-present question of final assimilation.

This study analyzed each of the identity frameworks and concluded that each writer portrayed, whether explicitly or implicitly, identity formation as a journey rather than a destination. The most striking difference encountered was the reliance by one theory on the notion of "inventedness." The other concepts subscribed at a minimum to a process of social interaction or, in the case of the most politically complex concept, interaction with indigenous tradition. The study has noted that an "interrupted history" precludes a direct connection, or uninterrupted history, with an ideal indigenous political or cultural milieu. Therefore, this study has conceptualized a personal pedagogical process to act in proxy for an alternative, albeit idealized, process of identity formation. The steps described might also act as a ceremony of reconciliation with a personal history that is simply unrecoverable.

In the same way that neither feathers nor a fringe jacket could ever be an adequate identity label, indigenous political identity would not gain surety from a finely crafted definition. Instead, this examination has concluded that a process of political identity formation could unfold over a lifetime through a three-fold quest or journey of knowledge of the indigenous past, understanding of the indigenous present, and commitment to an indigenous future. Yet the reader ought not to have inferred from this conceptualization a promise of an indigenous identity similar to that formed by constant and unending contact with sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language, and ancestral homeland.

Throughout the study, my line of inquiry was confirmed, despite the uncovering of numerous commentaries on indigenous identity. The study has noted little serious academic research by indigenous writers beyond the broad themes of "who has it" and "how to get it." Also, it was frequently noted that both questions were generally located within the strict confines of definitional or essentialist approaches. The field appeared wide open to alternative indigenous theoretical approaches.

Therefore, the study has found that, for indigenous individuals in an idealized setting, a pedagogical approach to indigenous political identity development could be a viable alternative to reliance on social identity and self-identification. The study has also noted that a subject's involvement in the unresolved political relationship between indigenous nations and the colonial states would require commitment and agency. However, I have also concluded that this agency would be blind without conscious alliance making with indigenous peoples and nations to benefit their continued political and cultural existence in the Americas.

Implications for Future Research

With these findings in mind, an obvious test of the utility of the IPIF concept would be critical dialogue among indigenous writers, scholars, and students on its features and challenges. Future research studies might apply the IPIF model to subjects and test its concepts, at the same time subjecting those concepts to the realities that indigenous people face in their daily lives. Future studies might also include investigations of situations where the IPIF concept has been implemented or where

comparative studies of political identity formation processes are already underway. Finally, further investigations might employ the comparison framework table described above in order to compare and contrast other conceptual or applied models of identity formation that lie outside the confines of the current study's subject matter.

Implications for Indigenous Governance

Whatever the possibilities for individuals of the application of this study's concepts, the implications for indigenous governance activities are also significant. As the study briefly discussed at the end of Chapter Four, indigenous organizations and communities are increasingly engaged at all levels with non-indigenous governments and their legal and administrative processes. Indigenous institutions and other expressions of governance are continually pressed to use indigenous people in analytic, research, program, and administrative capacities from outside their current structures and communities. The fact of the matter presently and in the foreseeable future is that not all of these intellectual resources will come from within communities themselves.[83] In the meantime, is it not to the benefit of all that the intellectual resources of those journeying toward a deliberate indigenous political identity find a place in an indigenous home/land?

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[83] See also Chartrand, "Conclusion," *Who are Canada's Aboriginal People?* 310.

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