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GANA'JÔH: HAUDENOSAUNEE PEDAGOGIES OF THE DRUM LETTERS FROM THE WOODSHOP

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This article presents reflections on a drum-making workshop organized for young Haudenosaunee men on Six Nations of the Grand River territory in a region now known as Ontario, Canada. Imbued with an inductive character, we reflect on the disconnections between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and draw on transdisciplinary methodological approaches to praxis. The main body of the article is constructed through a series of letters where each author reflects on the tensions and contradictions between Indigenous ways of knowing and the modes of knowledge creation promoted through academic White settler ideals. Drawing on Indigenous epistemologies from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson we argue that material production in relation to the making of Haudenosaunee drums can become pedagogy and fuel Indigenous-specific resurgence and intelligence. After we introduce ourselves and sketch the context for our project, the narrative proceeds through two voices in conversation. Each co-author reflects on the insights that emerged from an effort to decolonize learning through the pedagogies of the drum.

KEYWORDS: Decolonial learning, Indigenous intelligence, land as pedagogy, material culture.

INTRODUCTION

We introduce ourselves purposefully as this research is relational and consequently this prologue is crucial for the story to follow. Sherri Vansickle (Onondaga, Eel Clan), is a member of Six Nations, and grew up in Brantford (adjacent to Six Nations). For the past 20 years she has worked as the Native education counsellor in Brantford where most students from Six Nations attend secondary school. She is also a faculty member at the Tecumseh Centre for Indigenous Research and Education at Brock University. Margot Francis is an associate professor in Women's and Gender Studies at Brock. She is a White queer settler scholar whose research explores the ways art and cultural production mediates Indigenous-settler relationships. Over the past four years we

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have developed a friendship and worked together on a variety of activist and academic collaborations. The project documented in this article is our first joint research endeavor. Drawing on Simpson's (2014) analysis of land and pedagogy we aim to create activist learning opportunities for students, and ourselves, to explore the kinetic production of theory through praxis.

We start by recognizing that de-colonial learning happens in a context where Indigenous young people bear the weight of structural violence (ongoing colonization; land dispossession; enforced poverty and racism) as well as cultural genocide in Canada (Blackstock, 2011). For over 150 years traditional Indigenous knowledge about culture, education, kinship, economic life, and environmental sustainability has been demeaned in residential schools and erased or romanticized in popular discourse, and is frequently still illegal in law (Simpson, 2014, p. 20). These multiple forms of violence have resulted in Indigenous youth facing disproportionate rates of removal from their homes and communities into foster care, disproportionate rates of violence within their homes and in their wider communities, higher rates of suicide, and fewer economic opportunities overall (Blackstock, 2011). This history *and* these contemporary realities continue to injure the social, economic, educational, and kinship relations within Indigenous communities and circumscribe the possibilities for a dignified life—resulting in a wide range of hardships now characterized as individualized risk factors, despite their origin in structural and state-sanctioned violence (Styres, Haig-Brown, & Blimkie, 2013). In this context, it is particularly critical that researchers prioritize Indigenous theory and transdisciplinary processes that facilitate de-colonial learning to honor the perspectives of Indigenous elders, youth, and families in ways that reach across disciplinary silos within academe (Moore, Tulk, & Mitchell, 2005).

INDIGENOUS THEORY AND LIFE PRACTICE

In her award-winning article “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation,” Simpson (2014) argued that Anishinaabec theory is not simply generated as an academic pursuit, but instead emerges through engagements with story, cultural production, kinship and community relations, generational shifts in knowledge and, most importantly, in a reciprocal relationship to land and all the elements of creation. This conceptualization of theory resituates intellectual production within a broader project that aims to question coercive educational institutions, capitalist consumer culture, and alienated relationships to the natural world, while also building resistance movements “on the ground” with the capacity for Indigenous-specific intelligence. Simpson's analysis sketches out an enormous undertaking. As she herself puts it, “it's not just pedagogy; it's how to live a life” (p. 18). This theorization of “how to live a life” is both an ambitious reimagining of new worlds lived out despite the continued colonial context and also an invitation to very different forms of research than are typical within academic contexts. In keeping with Simpson's analysis, we began our joint research relationship

with a modest intervention: a drum-making workshop for young Haudenosaunee men. We hoped that this site of cultural production, intergenerational learning, and kinetic experience might provide an opportunity for Indigenous youth to be in conversation with their culture *and* also contribute to making theory through on-the-ground life practice.

Both co-authors undertook this project in an effort to open up non-school-based opportunities for youth who often have limited options for connecting to cultural practices on their territories. As Sherri works within a secondary school system where Indigenous modes of education are unfunded, viewed with suspicion, or seen as an afterthought, she is acutely aware that every project where youth can get out onto the land and engage with Haudenosaunee-specific forms of learning is a hard-fought struggle. Hence the stakes in attempting this modest incursion are high, as every small project must navigate colonial resistance and authority. Nevertheless these structural constraints only emphasize the importance of creating spaces to nourish reciprocal relationships that demonstrate very different forms of pedagogy and life practice.

We have chosen to present these reflections through letters as they allow each author to maintain their own distinct voice and perspective—a decision that seems particularly important given the reality of colonialism that shapes all present-day Indigenous/White settler relationships, including our friendship and research collaboration. In her analysis of Nishnaabeg theory and life projects, Simpson (2014) foregrounded the importance of narrative and story as a specifically Indigenous epistemology. One can find this emphasis in a great deal of Indigenous scholarship, including that of Cherokee novelist, essayist and scholar Thomas King (2003), who memorably argued, “the truth about stories is that’s all we are” (p. 2). Here King is not trying to argue on the basis of any essentialist version of narrative or identity, but rather to suggest that stories allow a unique point of entry for decolonial learning. Through these letters, which combine story, reflection, and analysis we attempt to present an ethical mode of engagement that does not paper over differences in voice, perception, location, and investment. Instead, we craft narratives that attempt to lay open the messy, uneven, and generative process of fostering decolonial alliances despite the colonial context that forms and surrounds us.

Introductions ...

She:kon (Greetings) Margot,

I remember sharing with you that my grandmother Ariel, whom I adored, went to the Mohawk Institute as a child. This Indian residential school followed the government mandate of removing all traces of Indian from the children while at the same time enforcing the teachings of colonialism on children against the will of their parents. My dream is to use the education system, the kind of organization that systemically tried to strip us of our culture and belief systems, to build up students in my care from the Rez and ground them bit by bit in our ways, responsibilities, and ancestral knowledge. I am old school that way.

When you asked me what was on my wish list of projects to do with secondary school students, I wanted to prioritize making water drums with our young men. Our water drums are held in the hand, covered with leather, hold water, and a stick is used strike them. I remember that you asked me how to make a traditional Haudenosaunee water drum: the mechanics, the process, and the length of time. It is a very distinct drum to us as Haudenosaunee people. It is used in ceremonies and for social singing and dancing events. It is a unique part of our culture to learn to make a drum from the beginning with one of our very respected knowledge keepers. This is a gift that I wanted to leave for my students. I asked around the community about who would be a good person to share this learning journey and was directed to PR, a well respected speaker in the Longhouse who is fluent in the Cayuga language and extremely knowledgeable about our laws, customs, traditions, beliefs, and spirituality. So, I decided to go ask him directly.

The day I knocked on PR's door was the coldest day of the winter and so he invited me in just inside the door. I asked him if he would be interested in running a traditional water drum workshop with some young men and us. I could tell by the look on his face that he was going to very politely turn me down.

Then I mentioned who my uncle was, and he said something that caught my ear. Ever so quickly things changed as we realized that his sister was married to my uncle. "Come on in. Sit down," he said. We did the usual kin-keeping and visit down memory lane of those whom we love and have journeyed on to Sky World. It was beautiful to reminisce and learn new things about my aunts, uncles, and family.

Not long after this he asked me to run my plan of a workshop for our young men by him again. I could see him thoughtfully contemplating the work involved, the time commitment, and his physical space. It did not take long for him to be willing to share his ancestral knowledge with us. He decided he could accommodate four young men. I just showed up at his door out of the blue and so he asked me to visit again tomorrow after he had more time to think things over and have a sleep because he works nights and had just arrived home when I knocked.

I arrived the next day and we had a wonderful chat about family, the old ways, and life. He talks the way a lot of our old people do—you visit first and then you take care of business. He decided that he would be willing to accommodate more students and I could feel my face light up. We talked about the tools and the supplies. We went to his workshop and I took pictures to make sure I was able to acquire the right tools. He is a very humble man and has a wealth of Haudenosaunee knowledge. He showed me the other projects he had on the go and my heart smiled because he said he would be willing to share these skills and teachings with my students as well. I left with a "to do" list and could not wait to call you and share the great news!

Linking Material Practice and Culture

Dear Sherri,

I was super-excited to get your call, and when the workshops eventually started it was a beautiful spring morning in April. Very quickly, as the day unfolded, I realized that PR was an unusual teacher—and this sparked my curiosity. As we gathered that first morning, PR focused on the utilitarian function of the drum, and in particular on a space for the communal craft of woodworking. So, I wondered: how would this focus on material production unfold as a specifically Haudenosaunee cultural and spiritual practice?

We began, five young Haudenosaunee youth, you and I, sitting in the warm light outside the woodshop, using the chisel and mallet to carve out the interior core of our logs to create the frame for our drums. PR provided us with pine logs he purchased for this purpose. As the process of hollowing out a log by hand is painstakingly difficult, he wanted us to use the soft pine to ensure we would not become frustrated at the start of the project.

That morning I had the first of many silent meltdowns about the technological skills needed to be a drum maker. Though my father was a skilled woodworker, the gendered dynamics of our relationship meant those skills were not passed along to my sisters or me. The youth participants, however, were much more technologically literate. They spent the first hours of the workshop completely focused in a companionable practice. No distracted playing on cell phones or complaints about the difficulty of the task. Instead there was some mildly competitive and pleasurable commentary on tools and techniques and a focus on getting the work done.

I buckled down and by the early afternoon, we had each hollowed out the core of our logs to shape the skeleton for our drum. But in the process, the soft pine wood had cracked. While these cracks could be repaired with wood filler, we concluded that the number and width of the splits made our drums skeletons unusable.

In response to this setback, there was no “drama.” Instead, after some informal conversation, one of the youth suggested that we go for a walk in the forest to find a log of hardwood. So we set out through PR’s property in a forest filled with trout lilies and trilliums and eventually found a black ash tree with a dead limb. Taking turns, we each contributed to sawing the limb from the trunk, and hauled it back to the workshop where it was cut it into eight drum-sized chunks. Black ash is one of the hardest woods in southern Ontario, and also quite rare. So our project had just become much more ambitious—carving out the center of one of the most difficult hardwoods in the region. This became our work for day two, and the very different process of working with a hardwood also shaped the subsequent tasks we undertook in the project.

By day two, I began to wonder: could we become attuned to what Leanne Simpson (2014) calls “land as pedagogy” (p. 1) through a focus on the communal practice of making things? Was our process of gathering materials influencing not just the process of design, but also the re-emergence of a shared culture? This, I think, was the kind of no-nonsense connection to land that PR

was interested in teaching. Our workshop was becoming not simply an out-of-school opportunity to make drums. It was also a long, slow, shared practice of learning how to become drum makers. It was exactly this period of working together that allowed us to imagine what it meant to be constituted by a shared practice. Leanne Simpson (2014) argued that Indigenous theory is “generated through embodied practice ... [and] woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, [and] is contextual and relational” (p. 1). I was beginning to see that making drums was a relational practice that was remaking *us* with a shared task and emerging culture.

As the project unfolded, it became clear that the difficult and pleasurable work of drum making functioned to construct an emergent positionality where the drums were both objects and metaphors for a shift in our relationship to each other and to the land. As Simpson (2014) argued, decolonial learning happens not simply through “dreaming alternative realities” but also through creating them “on the ground in the physical world, in spite of being occupied” (p. 8). Perhaps the radical possibility in this project was in creating a context for developing relationships—to each other, to wood, hide, tools and fabric, and through these to land—and to a shared practice within which learning and culture emerged.

She:kon Margot,

The anticipation of starting this phenomenal project kept me awake last night. The young men were eager to meet PR and to start our Workshop. We pulled into his laneway and I could see smoke coming out of the chimney of his shop and immediately felt this overwhelming peace and comfort that only surfaces when I am reminded of the power of place—of being on Haudenosaunee territory. Today, his workshop, the land and the bush would be our classroom. The boys and PR were all anxious to get started and so we had some safety lessons, rolled up our sleeves, and then got started. While I wanted to make a drum for myself and thoroughly enjoy the process with these young men, I was also acutely aware that this school trip took an enormous effort to get approval for and that if I wanted to run another workshop, this one had to be perfectly executed. I spent the day moving from student to student, cleaning, removing trip hazards, and generally making sure things went smoothly.

Our original plan with the pine fence poles did not work out very well so PR followed the lead of the young men; a very traditional thing for us to do—listen to our youth. They suggested we go back into the bush and find a tree for us to use. PR told us what to look for, made suggestions, and explained why we should continue to look rather than pursue some of the ones they suggested. Along the way we were given a lesson in architecture, engineering, and safety as we explored the trees upon which the beavers had begun to chew. We were given teachings on horticulture and natural medicine on our walk as each of the medicines revealed themselves to us. PR is a wealth of ancestral knowledge. My favorite part was that he sometimes spoke to us half in Cayuga and half in English. I think it was the befuddled look on our collective faces that helped him clue in to what he was doing. It was so comforting to hear the

language flow so effortlessly from him—even though I did not understand it. My grandmother was fluent in Mohawk and I should be too but her time at the residential school made sure that did not happen.

For us as Haudenosaunee spirituality is not separate from everyday life, and only available in formal and structured teachings. Rather it is imbedded in the entire process of everyday life. To me, it was spiritual to walk in the bush, to see the evidence of the flora and fauna for which I gave thanks earlier that morning. In our way, I know that we will be given what we need to learn when the time is right.

We found our tree, it had already been felled by the winds. We carefully shared in sawing off a piece we could all use. Another life lesson from our teacher—take only what you need.

Back at the shop the boys already knew what to do. This wood was substantially harder than the soft pine upon which we initially learned our drum making skills. There was no complaining, no criticism, and, most importantly, no whining! They all got busy and did exactly what they had been taught earlier. I get such pleasure from watching my students learn about our ways and embrace our teachings—educational opportunities denied my grandmother, mother, and me.

Non-Directive Learning

Dear Sherri,

I realize, reading your letter, how much I *was* trained to separate spirituality from everyday life, rather than understand it as something that emerges from a shared practice in relation to land and culture. I am just at the start of a journey to *really* rethink those assumptions, and am so honored to be able to work with you in that process.

As our time together continued over several days, I was also struck that this workshop did not “tell people how to do things.” Here I want to think more about PR’s pedagogical strategies, which prioritized long, slow time to work together, listening (as you said) to the youth, and listening, also, to frustration and pleasure, attending to our working materials, and becoming more ambitious—but not because we were directed to do so. In short: I was repeatedly struck by the realization that PR created a space I had not experienced before, of profoundly non-directive learning.

Perhaps I was more attuned to this than others, as I was the least skilled woodworker in the group. In a context where neither PR, nor you, took on the role of being a “teacher,” I needed to find other ways to learn. Hence, I watched, observed the nature of the wood, which tools were used, how to move from one step to the next and frequently asked questions from those who seemed most confident in the craft. Quite frankly, this frustrated me—feelings which I kept to myself, as nobody else seemed frustrated by the non-directive process. But as we kept going, I quickly realized that when I watched and problem solved, this opened up a different kind of space for learning. Nobody

shamed each other. Participants were competitive and teasing, but the emotional connections were, overall, gentle.

So I wondered: why is this process of learning so different from others? One reason was that we were not being judged on what we produced. We were intensely motivated by a desire to make drums we would give to family or friends, or to keep for our own personal use. This eliminated the kind of hard competition so common in school, work, or sport environments. But this shift in the end-goal did not just eliminate anxiety, it was also productive of a different kind of environment, one that fostered more democratized technological learning, encouraged norms of sharing, and emphasized understated forms of pleasure, humor and expressiveness.

Equally important for this affective environment was this: we had time. The workshop was scheduled over six full days. In stark contrast to learning under neoliberalism, this was an anti-anxiety and anti-efficiency environment, which unfolded with ample time and materials and took place outside in the spring air, beside PR's workshop. Consistent with this ethos, perhaps we also remembered and embodied traditions of work that intrinsically include elements of fun and sociality—as some agricultural and craft traditions did prior to the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, these traditions are still within living memory. PR told us that when he was a child his family was largely self-provisioning and ate what they grew—a process that was common for many Haudenosaunee families at Six Nations in that era. In the intervening period, the separation of work and play has been an achievement, it is not “natural” and, in many places, it is still not common (Tanenbaum, Williams, Desjardins, & Tanenbaum, 2013, p. 2605). It seemed PR's non-directive learning environment aimed to reconnect these arenas of affective, social, and technical work with aesthetic and pleasurable experience. And these together constituted a uniquely Haudenosaunee form of material and cultural expression.

As you hint in your second letter, this non-directive learning environment has its own backstory. Our long, slow time together required planning, funding, relationship, and institutional maintenance; insider knowledge and connections; and the simple tasks of schlepping people, tools, and food from one place to another. While we shared the task of raising funds for the project, and I contributed to the labor of grant writing and administration, you undertook most of the work to make this project happen. Without your labor to organize the necessary tools and materials; liaise with students, parents, and school administrators; purchase snacks; and organize planning meetings with PR, the non-directive learning environment would not have been possible. Long, slow learning requires intense preparation and we were all the beneficiaries of your labor.

So what did that purposefully non-directive space—organized with such loving attention—offer us? In my view, PR brought a Haudenosaunee place-based literacy that lacked the coercion and gendered authority so naturalized within Western pedagogy. Through his non-directive style and attention to materials and place, we were invited to understand the importance of being

driven by curiosity and our own desire to learn from and with wood, each other, and the land around us. This produced an environment of respect, humor and reciprocity, combining material practice and aesthetic pleasure. It also modeled a very different kind of masculinity than the dominant norms aspired to within White settler culture and education.

Friendship, Connection, and Spiritual Resurgence

She:kon Margot,

I have really been enjoying spending time with our young men and these workshops and especially appreciating you for being such a good sport about things. I know they have been teasing you a lot which is not something you are accustomed to but with all sincerity—it means they really like you. It is our way of demonstrating acceptance and belonging. You bring a wonderful presence and a unique perspective to our time together. I loved celebrating our birthdays with them and especially enjoyed when they asked you in our way “how many winters have you seen?” Just so you know, I told them you were 29.

I have been reflecting on PR’s teaching style and how he is a holistic educator. To me, holistic education is about having choice in your learning journey. It’s about problem solving. It’s more child-centered rather than adult driven and allows for more fluidity. Holistic teaching and learning also involves our connection to the cosmos and the spiritual world. I also think that holistic education is about the awe and wonder of life. When I listen to PR work with the youth he does all of this without thinking about it—he is just such a natural teacher. These young men are provided with the opportunity to learn, explore, try, make mistakes, and solve problems, all in our gentle way, without fear of ridicule, criticism, or shame—something denied my grandmother at residential school.

Dear Sherri,

The friendship that can develop between co-researchers is rarely mentioned in academic writing¹. A whole set of unspoken rules separate academic writing from personal relationships. You break those rules—and that capacity for connection was crucial to the success of this project. I also loved our time together and know that your generosity and humor is a balm against violence. I aspire to reciprocate this gift and never take it for granted.

In this final letter, I want to talk about what I learned from the workshop overall, and from PR in particular, and about the remarkable cultural resurgence now underway in Haudenosaunee territory. This was particularly visible to us as PR’s workshop is located across the road from a Six Nations Longhouse, which is used for many significant cultural celebrations.

Each day we worked with PR at least one car would pull into the driveway and a small knot of people would emerge and ask to speak with him. Often they were coming to ask that he officiate for the Haudenosaunee rituals that must be performed when a person passes into the spirit world. Sometimes they

were there to acknowledge his role in the healing of a person who had been very sick and beyond medical help. As one of only a very few Cayuga speakers still alive who learned the language and traditions from his parents, PR carries an unusual body of knowledge. His skills as a language speaker and leader of ritual and ceremony are in extremely high demand. In addition to his facilitation of our workshop, in April and May of 2016, he was often away from home as a result of his role as a facilitator of Haudenosaunee ceremony in communities spread around the present-day New York State, Ontario, and Quebec. Along with these responsibilities, PR has a full-time job, working nights to support his family.

The youth participants in our project already held PR in high regard before starting the workshop. They had met him in ceremonies, or funerals, or heard about him from friends, family, or kin. But in our time at his workshop we were able to bear modest witness to his importance as a crucial anchor for the regeneration of Haudenosaunee culture, especially as this is acknowledged through spring celebrations at the Longhouse. The sun and moon ceremony happened mid-way through our project. As we pulled into PR's workshop that morning, I noticed that there were 70 or more cars parked across the road at the Longhouse. The ceremony had begun at dawn continued into the evening, long after we had left for the day.

It was on that day that you persuaded PR to talk about the sun and moon ceremony then in process. After lunch, we settled on benches and chairs and PR offered us place-based stories that unfolded the "small doings" central to his youth, when his family planted and harvested most of what they had to live. In keeping with Haudenosaunee matriarchal cosmologies, PR described a landscape fueled by fertile energies where the sun and moon ceremonies provided rituals to bless the seeds, acknowledge gratitude for the warming air, and honor the new growth at night, enabling the grandmothers to release the babies of spring. Tobacco is burned to thank the sap for the sweet water that can be made into maple syrup. To recognize the return of the birds, PR narrated his dad's tender stories of the birds "who went away to practice their songs over the winter, and then return in spring to sing them for the people while they are planting."

Also crucial to the sun and moon ceremony was a social dance, a site of unshamed pleasure where the hope was that participants would "meet someone and have fun." These forms of sociality highlight the land as a space of fertility and invite us to wonder about Haudenosaunee theorizations of gender and sexuality alongside epistemologies of the land as full of life and the basis for self-determination (Tuck & Recollet, 2016).

How to pull these threads together? Certainly this workshop demonstrated how material practice, story, ceremony, and matriarchal epistemologies are central to Indigenous intelligence and futurity. PR's role as a knowledge keeper and language speaker provided a window into multiple kinds of Haudenosaunee resurgence now underway in Six Nations territory. And his gentle presence embodied a model of masculinities based on reciprocal

relationships, non-directive teaching and learning, and a deep connection to language and culture. In addition, PR's work highlighted the deep importance of elders in the project of translation and modeled how land, and long, slow learning, can once again *become* pedagogy.

She:kon Margot,

Working in the public school system does not provide a lot of opportunity for expressing one's spirituality. These young men held and represented a variety of different spiritual beliefs. PR infused our learning journey with Haudenosaunee spirituality in small ways but also with times of teachings. He shared personally with some of the young men and at other times collectively. We learned of larger ceremonies and of more personal ones. He taught us over time, and in our way as our hands were busy, about grief, mourning, friendship, reciprocity, birth, renewal, and so much more. He taught us in a very quiet and humble manner.

My favorite part one day was when the young men called us outside and told us to look up toward the sky. We were visited by the most majestic bald eagle who was circling above us! What a gift. I remember one of the boys commenting that the reserve is so big they wondered why this visitor chose to circle over us for so long when it could have chosen to travel further. This marvelously complex collision of spiritual understandings leaves us all with the sense of mystery, awe, and wonder about what we may be missing out on. More often than not, as a result of the legacy of the residential school system, we have been taught to silence our spiritual selves at school. I wonder what message the eagle carried back to Shonkwya'tihson (Creator) about our day.

The last day of our water drum-making workshop was so very bittersweet. As Haudenosaunee people we are very sensual. We experienced new smells, new sounds, and new sensations. Listening to these young men sing our songs for the first time with their new drums made my heart soar! It was wonderful. I am not certain who was more proud of these young men, you, PR, me, or PR's wife who fired up the barbecue for our special lunch. Margot, when we were presenting at the Native American and Indigenous Studies conference in Hawaii you found the perfect gift for our teacher. I loved PR's smile when he received his Aloha shirt still smelling like the ocean!

As Haudenosaunee we are all about positive relationships. PR, Margot, and I had the marvelous opportunity of watching these fantastic young men learn and grow in their understanding of our Original Instructions from the time of Sky Woman. PR's teachings were rooted in the land and transcended to the cosmos. Acquiring these traditional skills and teachings will help them, as young Haudenosaunee men, to stand humbly before all of creation. This project was not just about sanding, drilling, and chiseling—it was also about the meaningful interaction between the young men and significant adults who are cheering them on in life. After this powerful journey together I know that these young men will find their voices in a good way and continue to walk a good path. Nia:wenkowa (thanks big) to PR for sharing his ancestral knowledge and his willingness to teach us in our gentle way. I am so often struck by the fact that

the beauty of our ancestral wisdom is in its elegant simplicity. As always, these teachings do not stay with us, they are to be learned, remembered, recited, shared, and preserved for the faces yet to come. I have learned so much spending time with PR, you, and these emerging leaders and this truth I know for certain we are forever changed!

While these young men were learning to make water drums we learned that our knowledge keeper, PR, actually does not have one. To my surprise, the boys were able to learn how to repair and restore the original pine drums that had cracked and consequently, all of the boys finished not one, but two drums on our final day together! I watched with tears in my eyes as a young man passed PR a drum as a thank you for his time with us and his teachings. What we did not know when we started our workshop is that PR would be using this drum, that one of our young men made, at a ceremony for this same young man's relative who has journeyed on. All of these unexpected connections remind me of the interconnectedness our lives, the importance of reciprocity and the wisdom of our precious teachings.

So, to answer your original question to me—"how do you make a traditional Haudenosaunee water drum?"—you find an amazing elder to ground you in your ancestral teachings. You go for a walk in the most beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, virgin Carolinian forest which still exists in Six Nations of the Grand River territory. You listen with your heart to words in the language. You learn about medicines and appreciate all of the parts of creation for which we give thanks in the morning. You learn what to look for and you go in search of it. You watch, listen, and learn and then you do the best that you are able. You travel your path gently and with humility. You keep forever in your heart the sacrifices of your ancestors who have journeyed on before you. You remember your responsibilities to the faces yet to come. You look to the cosmos and most importantly ... you give thanks!

Nia:wen!

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The theorizing that emerged from the pedagogies of the drum suggests the importance of embodied life projects that fundamentally contradict Western forms of education. Instead of competitive, goal-oriented, neoliberal educational structures, PR's practice invited us to consider the power of place, the process of material production, and the long, slow work of listening to each other to regenerate culture. Consistent with this experience, Leanne Simpson (2014) wrote:

We cannot just think, write or imagine our way to a decolonized future. Answers on how to re-build and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment. Intellectual knowledge is not enough on its own. Neither is spiritual knowledge or emotional knowledge. All kinds of knowledge are important and necessary in a communal and emergent balance. (p. 16)

The pedagogy of the drum provided one way into reimagining the “web of consensual relationships” where the object we created also became a metaphor for relationships lived out as a specifically Haudenosaunee life project. We hope these letters, stories and analysis provide a window into that uneven process of decolonial learning, where in the long, slow time together we performed other worlds. While there is no possibility for a utopian space separate from colonial frameworks, PR did help us fashion an elsewhere in the here and now, through listening to each other, to the land, and engaging with the material production of culture.

NOTE

1. One recent exception to that rule is Dorothy Christian and Victoria Freeman’s (2010).

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