

Community PRESENTATION - Penác: A Fair Wind

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Introduction:

My name is Carol Henriquez and I am Mestiza from Chile (Mapuche/Spanish). I would like to thank my family and my parents for their endless support in getting me to this point.

I would first like to acknowledge and give thanks for the opportunity to work and learn on WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) territory

I would like to thank Charles and his family for allowing me to work on this project with them; I would also like to thank the community of Tsartlip.

I would like to thank Jeff Corntassel and Taiaiake Alfred for creating the space for projects like this to occur.

I would also like to acknowledge all the ancestors present - I hope that what I say today is spoken with respect to their presence.

Finally, I would like to thank the canoe itself for the lessons and spirit it shared with me.

Penác: "fair wind" – We named this canoe after Charles' father, and it refers to the traveling conditions that arise when a good breeze works in harmony with a strong ocean current. The goal of this project was to collaborate with Charles to digitally document the process of carving a traditional Coast Salish canoe. As his student apprentice, I would assist with the hands-on-work as well as photograph the whole process for the purpose of making a photo essay to be formatted as a booklet. The finished booklet will be left in the community of Tsartlip for the youth to use and reference.

I was invited to take on this canoe project by Taiaiake Alfred in the spring of 2010 as part of my community governance project. He told me how IGOV and Charles had collaborated on a canoe project a few years back with another student and fellow community member. However due to her life's circumstances she was unable to finish.

I first started coming up to see Charles in the summer of 2010. At the time, my methodology was deeply influenced by Waziyatawin's research methods course; a course that emphasised research that was rooted in reciprocity, mutually transformative research, resurgence and responsibility. These research principles were crucial for me.

Being from Latin America I knew that most of my research and work would be done outside my own community, thus, it was extremely useful having key principles to work from.

Another person who influenced my work was Jeff Corntassel. His teachings around sustainability and self-determination made it possible for me to understand that Charles' Carvings are not only works of art but more importantly are living expressions of self-determination. By continuing to work with Cedar Charles is constantly reconnecting with the land and strengthening his own Indigeneity and culture.

With these principles and teachings in mind, we approached master Carver Charles Elliott to help complete the canoe project.

What I will present today is small part of a much larger journey. For the purposes of this Community Governance Project, I would like to talk about how our work came to encompass the four principles of reciprocity, transformation, resurgence and responsibility.

Reciprocity: Over the past year while working on this project, I came to learn many lessons but I also feel that I brought a lot of lessons with me. In Chile, our political resistance did not come out of hate for the military dictator who was our oppressors but out of our much deeper love for our people. Reciprocity was taught to me as an 'act' of giving openly and lovingly to your family and community. When we help each other out either politically or socially, we do so as an expression of love for each other but also as a conscience act towards justice. It is a deeply emotional act of personal engagement with justice being the final goal. So much so, that children in Latin America are punished for not helping their community or not doing their chores with 'love'. The lesson of reciprocity was only strengthened in me by working on this canoe with Charles.

Resurgence: Another key teaching that came from this canoe was the real and tangible effort required in community resurgence. I have to say that resurgence is very nice in written form, but I remember the first couple of days working on the canoe, before it was moved inside and before it had its tent cover. I was out there in the blazing sun, and had been sanding for ½ hour when my arms began to burn and shake from the effort. I had sanded about a foot and half of the canoe, and I felt like I had been sanding for hours. When I looked up and saw that I had 27 more feet to go, I thought to myself this is going to take a lot longer than I thought.

The lesson for me was that regardless of the particular type of resurgence we engage in, we have to remember, that at one time these activities were entire ways of being,

and complete life-styles. We cannot expect to accomplish complete cultural resurgence as “weekend warriors”. This does not mean we should not participate in cultural resurgence but rather it should serve as a reminder to keep our expectations realistic so that we do not lose heart or waiver in our commitment.

During my time working on the canoe I learned to chisel, plane, sand, paint, hold cords sweep, and sometimes just staying out of the way. I am not proficient in any these tasks but instead through their engagement I gained a huge respect for what it takes to become a carver and full time artist.

Responsibility: this canoe also created new opportunities to practice responsibility. Through this project, I became responsible and accountable to Charles and his community. I asked Charles to hold me accountable while I continued to work and live on his people's territory. This accountability is the root of our mutual and ongoing relationship of responsibility and reciprocity.

Mutually transformative research: As in any project, where cultural practices are being regenerated, tensions between colonial and traditional practices are inescapable. For Charles and I, we had to learn to negotiate the tension between colonial law and Coast Salish law, between Coast Salish understanding of time and self-sufficiency and the colonial pressures of capitalist society – in other words being forced to work in order to have the basic essentials of life, food, clothing, shelter. For me, there was always tension between what a colonial academic institution requires me to learn and produce while still holding up and honouring the wisdom and teachings that were actually emerging from the work.

This Canoe project was also relationally transformative in the sense that when Charles and I started this project, we both became accountable to the university, we let the institution negotiate the boundaries of our relationship. This will inevitably change as Charles and I reclaim our relationship. We are now accountable only to each other and the community – but more importantly, we are now free to negotiate it independently of the institution.

Lessons from the Land and Cedar:

The canoe really showed me that, Charles could not be who Charles is without the land. WSÁNEĆ land! Charles the Carver is the direct result of his connection to the Cedar. His carvings are completely inspired and influenced by the land. Charles explained to me that it was the grain patterns of the Cedar that inspired many of the Coast Salish designs ie. Split U, and moon crest. To me, this means that the land is Charles' culture, without his territory or cedar he could not be a Coast Salish carver and artist.

During our time working together, Charles would often become a storyteller and he would talk about how canoes and paddles were treated with the utmost respect. As he said once, "This cedar log is hundreds of years old, we must treat them like our ancestors our family members." It was this teaching that made me very mindful of the energy and spirit I brought to the canoe every time I came to visit.

It was during one of these visits, that I found myself alone with canoe, and I wanted to see if it was happy becoming a canoe. But more importantly, had I given it enough opportunity to teach me all that it wanted? After a long sit, a teaching came: the pieces you chipped away are just as important as the pieces that remain, it All must be respected. I can say this teaching changed and healed me.

Another big part of this project was observing relationships; not only between Charles and I, but between Charles and the cedar. Charles told me that he often talks to the spirit of his carvings, to wake them into being and make them emerge from the cedar. He would knock on the cedar while speaking to them and calling them into life, making sure to let spirit of the cedar guide him.

Watching Charles work with the cedar was like watching a co-creative relationship unfold before me. The cedar would reveal itself to Charles, showing him the direction of the grain, where the knots were and how to work around them. It was like watching two old friends interact. They knew each other so well and could express themselves mutually without effort.

Another relationship worth noting was the one between Charles and his community. In the year I worked at Charles' shed not a week went by without people stopping by to talk to him about his work, friends dropping off fish or deer, classes of children and students to stopping by to visit, not to mention his family. Charles' shed is not only a place where Charles creates his work but is a gathering place where people come to learn, laugh, and feast. Charles and this shed enrich the whole community.

Vine Deloria Jr. once said

"Sacred places are the foundation of all other beliefs and practices because they represent the presence of the sacred in our lives. They properly inform us that we are not greater than nature and that we have responsibilities to the rest of the natural world that transcend our own personal desires and wishes. This lesson must be learned by each generation..."

This Canoe has come to signify a lot of things but resurgence is the key. When we engage in the cultural practices, practices that affirm and move us closer to self-

determination, we decolonize our relationship with the land, with our culture, and with our community.

For centuries now the Canadian state has tried to wipe out all traces of Coast Salish culture, including their land and water based cultural practices. The state has relocated villages, imprisoned the people and dictated the use of their lands all the while, allowing themselves free access to all if the Coast Salish resources. Case in point, Charles had to request this canoe log from a logging company, instead of cutting it down in his own territory with his fellow carvers as tradition would dictate. Thus, given the history of colonization on the coast to me, it is an amazing act of community resurgence that we can still carve a traditional canoe today and that we still have the knowledge keepers to do it.

But to push the idea of resurgence further, when we engage in acts of cultural resurgence and consciously practice them as acts of resistance, then we are not only reconnecting with our ancestors and with our original teachings but we are creating a culture of resistance. This means when we fish, carve, weave, sing, drum, or cook we are not only acting out pragmatic customs, but instead consciously move towards decolonization and resistance, thus becoming our daily acts of resistance.

Finally, throughout the project, I came to learn we must be mindful to let the land show us the way, to let the canoe tell us what the next step will be. If just and transformative community relationships are to occur then our job is to create enough time, space and calm to hear its directions and lessons. As students, we must bring the ability to listen, learn and a willing spirit, in return, we will get lessons of reciprocity, resistance, resurgence and responsibility. These lessons cannot be forced; they are lessons that only come with respect and time and actual engagement.

While preparing this presentation my good friend Chaw-win-is told me the Story of – Condor and the Eagle: Ancient responsibility to come to the assistance of each other during times of need - and I will continue to adhere to that ancient agreement and I make myself open available to whatever the next step the canoe is wanting to take.

Huy'chka!! Thank You, Gracias