1999

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.bt6h-ygyk>
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**DANCING IDENTITY:
GWICH'IN INDIGENOUS DANCE AS ARTICULATION OF IDENTITY**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Elise Scott Wolf

August 1999

UMI Number: 1396207

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ABSTRACT

DANCING IDENTITY: GWICH'IN INDIGENOUS DANCE AS ARTICULATION OF IDENTITY

By Elise Scott Wolf

This thesis explores an Alaska Native cultural performance. The Netsai' Gwich'ins' indigenous dances are argued to function rhetorically as articulations that embody, avow, and assert core aspects of their identity. These dances contribute to the revitalization of Gwich'in identity and culture. Dance derives its rhetoric in part from choreography, context, and audience. Geopolitical contexts are examined for their influence on indigenous dance and identity. Contemporary issues concerning the analysis of indigenous identity are also reviewed.

Postcolonial criticism is examined for new theoretical understandings of culture and identity and their applicability to indigenous people. Rhetoric and performance analyses are reviewed for their interpretations of dance and nonverbal forms. Finally, a rhetorical perspective is created from the critical positions of American Indian and Alaska Native authors and scholars. This perspective is applied to the Gwich'ins' dances and is argued to present a mediated perspective of identity and culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following for their contributions in this study. First, I would like to thank Sarah James and Faith Gimmell for their insights and information. This work would not have been possible without their valuable assistance. I would also like to thank the people of Arctic Village, Stevens Village, Fort Yukon, and Old Crow for their hospitality and contributions.

Second, I am grateful for the partial funding provided by the San Jose State University Foundation. The comments of Wenshu Lee were invaluable and provided illuminating suggestions for improvement.

This thesis is dedicated to
my father,
William E. Scott
and
the Gwich'in Nation.

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Chapter I: Introduction

This project developed out of over 15 years of research and participation in Alaska Native social issues. After significant observation and discussion with a variety of people, I began to question the relationship between cultural practices and identity. Consequently, I designed this research project to investigate these issues. There had been a number of these practices from which to focus this project, however I chose the Gwich'ins' dance forms. Their performance of the dances and their discourse about them were particularly compelling. Following 2 years of initial exploration I found these dances to have a significant relationship to the Gwich'ins' sense of themselves as indigenous people. These observations confirmed some of my original interpretations of some Alaska Native cultural performances and their relationship with issues of cultural identity. As a result, I designed a research project that included ethnographic inquiry, rhetorical analysis, and investigation into contemporary theories of identity. The following developed out of this research.

This thesis investigates how the Netsai' Gwich'ins' indigenous dances function rhetorically both within the community and geopolitically. These dances are generally considered by the Netsai' Gwich'in and the Gwich'in nation to be an important and meaningful aspect of their cultural lives. Given the Gwich'ins' contemporary political status, these dances serve in some ways as rebuttals to centuries of political, social, and cultural oppression. Their context provides these dances with rhetorical meanings far beyond those discussed openly. This study investigates the more complex rhetorical

meanings expressed by the dances, the dancers, and their context. Not surprisingly, these dances, like many other cultural performances, express elements of cultural identity.

The Gwich'in belong to the family of Athabascan Indians (see also *Kutchin*). Their social structure incorporates several identifications, one of which refers to their regional location. The Netsai' Gwich'in, with whom this work is concerned, occupy the East Fork of the Chandlar River country in Alaska, and the referent *Netsai* refers to that region. However, there are several other regionally identified bands that make up the Gwich'in nation. There are 17 Gwich'in villages located in the northeast corner of Alaska and the northwest corner of the Yukon Territory in Canada. The two primary villages of the Netsai' Gwich'in are Venetie and Arctic Village and are part of the Venetie Reservation in Alaska.

The Gwich'in nation, like many other indigenous nations, is involved in far-reaching political, social, and community issues that force them to address fundamental issues in both its history and its future. Issues of resource attainment and its forms, education, healthcare, government, environment, and language and culture pervade the various 17 Gwich'in villages and communities. At the center of each of these issues is an ongoing debate about who the Gwich'in are today and who they will be in their future.

In Alaska, indigenous people were not entirely the passive victims of brutal, colonial cultural changes, as some of the indigenous communities in the contiguous United States were. In the pre-1800s they engaged in extensive trading patterns that intertwined them with peoples from around the world – those from Siberia, the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Islands and, indirectly, with Europe. These trading patterns

allowed many of the cultural changes they have chosen to engage in both historically and in more recent times. However, enforced Western education and missionaries took what were originally sovereign decisions about identity and culture and made many of them the sole property of the colonial government and its agencies. For example, English as a first language was required by both the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools and by missionaries. Eventually, Alaska Native children were required to leave their villages to attend BIA schools, taking them away from their communities and the cultural education they would have received from their families and elders.

Today, the Euro-American dominant culture continues to make unilateral decisions regarding Alaska Native identity and culture in administering Indian affairs. In 1971, for example, the United States passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Although Alaska's native population approximated 60,000 people at the time, just fewer than 600 Alaska Natives voted on the act. ANCSA purported to "extinguish" indigenous people's claims to the lands and resources of Alaska. It settled the native claims to the land by giving 10% of Alaska's property to 13 regional corporations and converting the 200+ native villages into corporations as well. It is required that these corporations conform to the Euro-American corporate design and U. S. laws. Alaska Native "stock" – resources and land – was only given to those over 18 years of age, today the stock can be sold to non-natives. Furthermore, while these corporations are purportedly native-owned, non-native CEOs direct the majority. These issues are discussed in more depth in Chapter Three. Legislation and politics such as ANCSA leave

Alaska Natives in precarious and unstable situations that threaten their cultural and community survival.

The Gwich'in are forced to operate among numerous political jurisdictions. In some ways, they are postcolonial; that is, the United States' formal colonization period is over. Unlike other people whose colonial overseers have abandoned ship, Alaska Natives face a unique political situation. The Gwich'in nation's historical community stretches across Alaska and Canada, with communities on both sides living under the political and governmental control of their respective colonizer. In this sense, the Gwich'in are not postcolonial; they exist in a world that is ultimately defined and controlled by the Euro-American culture and politics of the U.S. and Canada. Yet paradoxically, United States' laws allow Alaska Natives some degree of sovereignty, though not as much as their indigenous neighbors in the contiguous states. This situation sets itself up to be a type of neocolonialism, with the U.S. retaining control over Alaska Natives' education, health, resources, and government, while also allowing them some independence in control over local village issues.

Alaska Natives and their leaders are seeking increased independence and sovereignty from the United States. These politics are motivated by continued and pervasive threats to Alaska Native culture and ways of life. Non-native encroachment on native lands and resources further complicates their status by reducing the ability of Alaska Native villagers to be self-sufficient and continue their subsistence ways of life.

Intolerance of indigenous ways of life and subsistence rights in Alaska is widespread among non-natives, including state legislators and those wishing to

commercially develop around native land-use areas. According to Arctic Village residents, the Alaska educational system overseeing village schools still does not fully recognize the critical importance of Alaska Native cultural traditions and cultural knowledge (C. Frank, personal communication, July 28, 1994). As a result, village children for the most part get the message that assimilation into Euro-American economics, knowledge, and ways of life is the only and best way to succeed or survive.

This lack of respect for indigenous world views and ways of life communicated by the dominant culture and the dilemmas facing many Alaska Natives today create a number of social problems. Loss of identity, lack of self-esteem, feelings of not belonging and being lost, confusion, and general depression are among the emotional and psychological consequences of U.S. neocolonialism. The political and social environment creates a scene that seems like Alaska Natives live in two worlds. While there is no simple answer to the complexities emerging from Alaska Native history and politics, increasing numbers of Alaska Natives and their leaders are turning to their own indigenous cultures for guidance.

Alaska Natives pursue cultural revitalization both in the villages and in the urban centers. Interestingly, many of those who in the 1970s were avidly seeking assimilation to Euro-American economic forms and development are now arguing for sovereignty (although what that means specifically is debated). It is argued that without their cultures and ways of life, Alaska Natives would not exist (T. Gilbert, personal communication, July 29, 1994). The popular belief today is that in order to solve some of the more disabling social issues in the villages, people must turn to their cultures and find pride

and strength in their indigenous identities. Many believe that to protect Alaska Natives' futures, their indigenous ways of life must be maintained and protected (F. Gimmell, personal communication, July 28, 1994). It is in this context that the importance of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances reveals itself.

This is not surprising. That cultural traditions, practices, and performances represent important elements of identity is a commonplace among anthropologists (Fine & Speer, 1992). Cultural performance is one of many ways people express and constitute aspects of their cultural identity. Indigenous people today seek revitalization of their cultural traditions, partly to overcome the social impacts of having their cultural identities targeted by colonialism. Dance in particular plays an important role in the constitution and articulation of indigenous identity for many of these communities (Heth, 1992; Cornell, 1988; see also Laubin & Laubin, 1976). Yet, these performances emerge in an academic era that challenges the theoretical notion of an essential or stable identity.

As such, interpretation of indigenous dance forms encounters the larger issues involved in the theoretical interpretation of identity (Fine & Speer, 1992). Thus, although this analysis focuses on the interpretation of the rhetorical functions of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances, the broader issues of identity theory are addressed as well. It is argued that rhetorical scholars must contend with the theoretical issue of identity in their analysis of cultural performances. Especially in the case of indigenous people the issue of identity is prevalent, as their identities have been the subject of Western academic research – ethnographic and otherwise. Anthropology established itself as an academic discipline by devoting its research and analysis to the subjectivities and cultural identities

of indigenous people around the world. In so doing, anthropologists created a variety of theoretical interpretations of those people and their cultures. Traditional theory in anthropology essentializes indigenous subjectivity and identity.

Contemporary postmodern and postcolonial theorists/critics attack this theoretical tendency as reductive. Postcolonialism, particularly, debunks Western theory and interpretation of *Other's* identities, cultural lives, politics, and history. These alternative – "from the borderlines" – theories and criticisms now confront Western interpretations of indigenous people. In some ways, postcolonial theory and criticism is applicable to the subjective experiences of indigenous people. Yet, in other critical ways they diverge. It is argued here that postcolonial theory, and criticism of identity in particular, is both beneficial and inapplicable to the rhetorical interpretation of indigenous people's cultural performances.

Research on indigenous people in rhetorical studies is minimal. It is especially limited in its analysis of indigenous people's cultural performances. However, rhetoric, and the field of communication generally, lends itself to the interpretation of performance. One of the purposes of this thesis is to extend rhetoric's scholarship into cultural performance, in this case dance, and indigenous people. It attempts this by applying a rhetorical perspective to the Netsai' Gwich'ins' performance of what they call their "traditional" or indigenous dances. Works in communication studies and postcolonial theory and criticism inform this interpretation. However, it is argued that a meaningful understanding of cultural performance depends on the critical perspectives of the people themselves. Thus, the critical framework applied to the Netsai' Gwich'ins'

indigenous dances in this thesis draws heavily on the works of American Indian and Alaska Native scholars and writers.

Critical perspectives of these authors and scholars are organized into a framework called "indigenous identity articulation." The notion of articulation is explored in its use by indigenous scholars. The phrase "indigenous identity articulation" encompasses three rhetorical functions located in indigenous peoples' cultural performances. These functions are embodiment, avowal, and assertion. In relation to this study, the Gwich'in's indigenous dances function rhetorically, first, as a virtual embodiment of the cultural identity of the community, embodying core values from their indigenous heritage while simultaneously constituting those cultural elements they choose to maintain in their present and future. Second, they function as articulations that avow or affirm critical components of the community's cultural identity. Finally, these dances function as rhetorical expressions that assert (versus resist) an identity that is compelled by dominant forces to be otherwise. Thus, their performance inevitably involves issues of power and politics. The rhetorical functions of these dances contribute to strengthening community bonds and the chance for the Gwich'in's cultural survival.

The following chapters are organized as follows: Chapter two has three sections. The first section reviews relevant research in rhetoric and communication studies. The second section discusses important issues of identity within postcolonial theory and criticism that affect the interpretation of indigenous peoples' cultural performances and their identities. The third section of chapter two summarizes the rhetorical perspective

and themes of indigenous identity articulation that are used as the framework for interpreting the Netsai' Gwich'ins' dances.

Chapter three develops the rhetorical functions of articulation – embodiment, avowal, and assertion – to interpret the Netsai' Gwich'ins' indigenous dances. The dances are contextualized within their geopolitical and socio-cultural framework in the first part of this chapter. The remaining part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis. The research methods used in this work are also provided in this chapter.

Chapter II

Theoretical Contributions

Overview

In rhetorical studies, and communication studies in general, research on Alaska Natives is almost non-existent. While there are a few analyses of media issues concerning Alaska Natives, more in-depth studies of Alaska Native communication and rhetoric are fairly absent. Therefore, the first contribution this research offers to communication studies generally is in the study of Alaska Natives. In a more far-reaching way, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the Gwich'in by the academic and non-academic worlds. Alaska Natives, the Gwich'in included, are given few hearings by both lay and academic audiences. Their contiguous continental neighbors, American Indians, are recognized far more often than the Alaska Native.

Dance is also not a prime area of focus for communication scholars. Consequently, it is not surprising that there are no published works on Alaska Native cultural performance in the field of communication studies and rhetoric. In this work a rhetorical perspective is applied to the Gwich'in's indigenous dances in an effort to illuminate their most critical meanings and rhetorical functions. The second contribution this work offers is in the inclusion of dance as a legitimate form of rhetoric, especially in cases where cultural imperialism occurs. Indigenous dance, particularly, articulates meanings that are more powerful than mere words. It also functions rhetorically in ways that provide it far more impact than oral forms; it is action, not mere words. Review of

relevant literature about both dance and indigenous people in rhetorical and performance studies is pursued. The first section of this chapter explores these works.

This research also recognizes that studies of indigenous performance of traditional or indigenous traditions, practices, or art is a complex undertaking. American Indian/Alaska Native scholars and others argue that cultural performances express certain critical aspects of indigenous identity. The interpretive process, then, becomes one of not simply analyzing performance, but identity as well – especially those aspects of identity expressed in the act. As a result, the interpretation of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances must be taken to a slightly different level. There is no standardized theoretical approach to the study of indigenous performance or identity. Traditional anthropological assumptions about indigenous identity and culture are being challenged by both American Indian/Alaska Native scholars and authors, and by academic researchers in other fields. The most heated challenge of Western theories of identity emerges from the genres of postmodernism and postcolonial studies. This thesis explores the works of postcolonial theorists and critics for ideas and positions that may be useful to this work. It also considers the limits of these theories in relation to indigenous people. This discussion is found in the second section of this chapter.

It is hoped that this thesis offers still another contribution that goes beyond any academic field of study: a deeper understanding and interpretation of indigenous culture, identity, and performance. It tries to mediate between modernistic, *essentialized*, notions of indigenous identity and expression and postcolonial theory/criticism by utilizing the perspectives of American Indian/Alaska Natives. It organizes these positions into a

rhetorical perspective called *indigenous identity articulation*. The three rhetorical functions of this perspective are embodiment, avowal, and assertion. They are applied to the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances in the third chapter. The notion of articulation and the perspective of indigenous identity articulation is explored and explained in the third section of this chapter.

Rhetorical Scholarship

This section reviews literature from rhetoric and performance studies. Those works that are most relevant to the analysis of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances are considered for their contribution. A number of studies explore American Indians as subject. These analyses take discourse or oratory as their object (Balgooyen, 1962; Bosmajian, 1973; Buswell, 1935; Ek, 1966; O'Donnell III, 1979; Philipsen, 1972; Pratt & Wieder, 1993; Pratt, 1998; Scholten, 1977; Strickland, 1982). Studies in social movement theory involving American Indians take rhetorical scholarship beyond the speech act, or oratory, and into more contextually oriented analyses (Lake, 1983, 1991, 1997; Morris & Wander, 1990; Morris, 1997; Scott, 1992; Shaver, 1998). The issue of context is critical to both the interpretation of dance as a rhetorical form and to inquiry into the experiences of indigenous people.

Lake's (1983, 1991) and Morris and Wander's (1990) analyses are particularly informative to this work in that they explore the importance of revitalizing tradition and cultural performances for indigenous people. They also discuss various issues affecting American Indians' identities. Relevant aspects of their works are discussed in the following sections. However, cultural performance as the central focus does not appear

in their works. Lake and Morris and Wander pursue the specific rhetorical functions of American Indians' protest rhetoric as it occurs in a political occupation. This thesis does not intend to house the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances in this arena. While the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances might perform a rhetorical function of "talking back" to more powerful forces, they are not protests. This distinction and function of the dances are discussed further in the third chapter.

There is another aspect of their works that does not apply to this research. Neither Lake nor Morris and Wander explore in any depth the role of cultural performance in the construction or maintenance of American Indian's indigenous identities. Therefore, to address the issues involved in indigenous people's cultural performance of dance and dance's relationship to identity, rhetorical scholars must turn to other fields of inquiry. The interpretation of dance is an area of study normally associated with the fields of drama, dance history or theory, and anthropology (see Banes, 1994; Desmond, 1994; Foster, 1986,1992,1996; Gilbert, 1992; Heath, 1994; Ness, 1992; Schechner, 1985, 1993). However, the analysis of indigenous people's dance forms remains mostly the purview of anthropology (Brandes, 1990; Ellis, 1990; Schechner, 1993; Schieffelin, 1985).

There does seem to be an increasing interest in the study of dance in performance studies. Feldman (1994) offers an analysis of American Indian cultural performance in the context of the museum. Her work is an interesting exploration of what she terms the "cultures" of the museum and that context. She does provide a descriptive summary of a couple of the American Indian performances. However, her analysis is not an inquiry

into the roles or functions of these performances in the lives of the performers or their cultural communities. Hamera (1994) also provides a recent examination of dance in performance studies. Her analysis, while on dance, is only of minimal relevance to this work. Hamera's subject matter is the dancing male's body and how it is ascribed with meaning by the discourse of a particular dance company. Her work is interesting in that it does introduce the body specifically as subject into performance studies. However, it is discourse -- not dance -- oriented.

The analysis of indigenous dance/dancers in the field of rhetorical studies is rare. Yet, Powell (1947) introduced the idea in her study of the Sun Dance. Her work reflects the mediocrity of research published in rhetoric in her era. While she should be applauded for noting the Sun Dance's importance as a rhetorical piece (and *Quarterly Journal of Speech* for publishing it), it is primarily a decontextualized description and not a thorough analysis.

The following discussion explores the two most critical issues that must be addressed in inquiries into indigenous cultural performances as rhetorical forms. The first is the issue of nonverbal rhetoric in the field. As dance is primarily nonverbal, how rhetorical scholars have previously dealt with nonverbal elements is relevant. The second issue relevant to this work is how to interpret dance as a rhetorical form. Context is particularly important in locating the rhetoric in many cultural dance performances and therefore is explored. Critical research in rhetoric, performance studies, and dance is investigated for its contribution to understanding indigenous dance performance as rhetoric in the next two subsections.

The Nonverbal in Rhetoric.

The fundamental question asked in this work is: How do the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances function rhetorically both within the community and geopolitically? Inherent in this question, however, is a more general inquiry into whether dance is capable of functioning as rhetoric, a proposition that is not necessarily obvious within the field of communication. The rhetorical functions of performance in general are widely accepted in performance studies. Conquergood (1991), for example, insists on the connection between rhetoric and performance. He argues that people in performance do not merely imitate (mimesis) aspects of their lives, but their performances serve to construct themselves and their cultures. This perspective locates in performance the ability to be influential (poiesis). Another aspect of the rhetoric that Conquergood finds in some performance is its ability to "talk back" to more powerful geopolitical forces and entities. He attempts to explain performance's rhetoric through his notion of "*kinesis...a decentering agency of movement, intervention, transformation, struggle, and change* [sic]" (1992, p. 84). Thus, he provides performance with inherently rhetorical functions.

I argue that dance may also accomplish the above rhetorical functions. Its performance can move to intervene and struggle against other more powerful forces – to talk back. It also has the potential to transform and change both the performers and their audience. Additionally, it has the ability to convey meaning and have that meaning be influential. It is perhaps because of these abilities that rhetorical scholars are hesitant to deny dance persuasive or motivating functions. However, few have made the jump to the analysis of dance as a rhetorical form. Admittedly, dance is a far more complex element

to investigate, as it often operates without any verbal or spoken aspects.² The fact that dance is a primarily nonverbal expression has led to its current undefined status in rhetorical studies.

While rhetorical scholars are particularly adept at analyzing verbal rhetoric or oratory, they appear to have more difficulty with nonverbal forms. Rhetorical scholars have difficulty making theoretical sense of the body as a producer of meaning, and the reason may lie in rhetoric's own theoretical history. In the mid-1600s, a theoretical separation occurred between philosophy and psychology and interpretations of the body. The human body was provided a "new" mechanistic understanding that fundamentally changed how Western researchers would perceive the body and its role in human experience. The body today is still understood not as a producer of meaning, but merely a reflection of it. Dance critic Cynthia Novak (1988) argues that the mind/body split has skewed the study of dance, leading scholars to either attempt to "read" bodily movement as messages or resort to mere description. Similarly, Desmond (1994) notes that "the academy's aversion to the material body, and its fictive separation of mental and physical production, has rendered humanities scholarship that investigates the mute dancing body nearly invisible" (p. 34).

In order to understand the rhetoric of dance, the rhetorical scholar must provide the body with the ability to produce nonverbal meanings and functions. That is, in order to "read" dance – to interpret its meanings – the researcher must believe that dance can in

² The challenge of talking about nonverbal forms becomes clear when considering that the written language is marked by language metaphors. Thus Gilbert uses "text" to describe dance and I use numerous metaphors borrowed from textual analysis. Theory is biased to the importance of words.

fact produce those meanings through the nonverbal use of the body. Burke (1950) allowed for the inclusion of nonverbal elements in his theorizing of rhetoric, arguing that nonverbal elements may incorporate a "kind of symbolism having persuasive effects" (1950, p. 161). He specifically addresses dance as he includes it in his list of nonverbal practices that fit his definition of "symbolicity" (1966, p. 28). To accomplish this theoretical maneuver, Burke associates meaning with persuasion: "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is 'meaning', there is persuasion" (1950, p. 172). Thus, the question about whether dance is rhetorical might be answered using Burke and arguing that it is a form of nonverbal rhetoric. That is, if dance's nonverbal elements have meaning, then it has persuasive motives: as such it is arguably rhetoric.

Regardless of Burke's and other's early inclusion of nonverbal elements into the body of rhetorical studies, few have actually studied the unique rhetorical contributions of these elements. The study of nonverbal forms for the most part did not occur until social movements revolutionized the discipline. Rhetoricians in the 1960s were left scrambling when they were confronted with one of the most rhetorical moments in history: a black woman who refused to relinquish her seat on a bus. This action sparked an increasing number of other physical protests, from more sit-ins to whole-scale marches to going limp upon arrest. How to make sense of these obviously rhetorical moments gave birth to what rhetoric now calls social movement studies. For the next 20 years, scholars would debate the rhetorical meaning of *movements*, yet never really come to terms with the fact that the most rhetorical elements, that which made the voices (literally) of African Americans heard, were in fact the nonverbal use of the body.

Actions seemed to elicit far more negative criticism than they did exploration (Haiman, 1967). It is unfortunate that Rosa Park's critically rhetorical statement, her use of her body, never did receive the full attention it deserved in the journals of rhetorical scholarship. Yet, her words or her discourse would never have received the attention her kinesics did.

In order to explore further rhetoric's understanding of the body it is useful to look at how some social movement theorists made sense of the body/language relationship. One of the earlier attempts to deal with this relationship rhetorically was offered by Malcom Sillars (1964). Sillars locates a problematic in the field of rhetoric that he describes as a "classificational strait jacket" (p. 278). This approach is one which assumes that, "a [wo]man's actions and [her]his words may be separated" (pp. 277-278). He goes on to argue that rhetoric is an *act*, thus bringing rhetoric closer to the full-integration of the body as capable of producing nonverbal rhetorical forms and repeating Burke's thesis mentioned previously. Sillars makes the statement that if one understands words as acts, then they might find just as much rhetorical meaning in "Mussolini's 'Call to Arms Against Ethiopia' as [s]he finds in Germany's invasion of Poland" (p. 279).

Scott and Smith (1969) extend Sillars work as they define rhetoric as "symbolic":

We have talked of the *rhetoric* of confrontation, not merely confrontation, because this action, as diverse as its manifestations may be, is inherently symbolic. The act carries a message. It dissolves the lines between marches, sit-ins, demonstrations, acts of physical violence, and aggressive discourse. In this way it informs us of the essential nature of discourse itself as human action (p. 7).

Merriam pursues the heuristic value of the rhetorical *act* in his analysis of Ghandian nonviolent protest, arguing, "Symbolic action represents one of the oldest forms of

persuasive communication" (1975, p. 290). Wilkinson (1976) jumps on this theoretical bandwagon, as well, by arguing that, "'vocal' is to be taken in the widest sense of the term since every movement 'voices' its causes in a variety of ways, all of which are languaging strategies, but not necessarily verbal ones" (p. 92). These works lay the foundation for this thesis's consideration of dance as a non-verbal rhetorical form. They also provide initiation into a compelling theme that is continued in contemporary rhetorical studies: that the persuasive meaning of a nonverbal act is derived in part from its context.

Theorizing dance performance as a form of nonverbal body language is one theoretical approach to the interpretation of dance. However, this approach performed in absence of other analysis is reductive. Some forms of dance, particularly cultural performances, have rhetorical meanings and functions that go beyond their mere nonverbal body movements. Dance is what might be called an *embodied* rhetorical form. Its rhetoric derives from varied elements that are both directly and indirectly associated with its performance. The two most critical of these elements are the human body, discussed previously, and the performance context. Dance is about the intentional and synchronized moving of the body – bodies located within a particular socio-cultural and geopolitical milieu. It is the role of the body in dance as well as its contextual complexity that makes dance so difficult to interpret.

Therefore, the second aspect of dance interpretation that prevents some from accessing its more elusive messages is found in the failure to fully appreciate dance's socio-cultural and geopolitical location. Contextualization of the performance is critical to dance's interpretation. Dance interpretation requires an assessment of those socio-

cultural events and issues that both influence its production and are influenced by it, either directly or indirectly. In the case of indigenous dance performance the geopolitical context is critically important. This is one of the reasons why rhetorical analysis is so appropriate for dance interpretation; rhetorical scholars are privy to a history of incorporating context into theoretical analyses. Again, social movement studies are particularly informative as many address the importance of socio-cultural and geopolitical context in their analysis of 1960's cultural revolution events.

Sillars (1964) notes that the rhetorical thrust of an act (or movement) is partly due to the context or "language" that contextualizes it. He argues, "The critic must learn to visualize the rhetorical act in all its social and artistic complexities. [S]he must, in a sense, study movement, even though the study be focused on one person" (p. 281). Part of the contextualizing rhetoric of an act is produced by the act or performer's adversaries. Locating an act or performer's rhetoric in relation to its/their socio-cultural and political adversaries is a theme that continues today in rhetorical studies. Such a contextualization of the act enables scholars to note more complex meanings and rhetorical functions. Sillars argues that while an individual's actions may appear to be consummatory, they may also have deeper rhetorical functions when situated in their historical context.

Cathcart (1980) produces a similar argument to Sillars: that the meaning of the rhetoric of movements must be interpreted in the context of the relationship they have to "already established symbolic forms and meanings" (p. 268). For Cathcart, this is a recognition of the "dialectical tension" that occurs in social movements between the protesters and the status quo. Similarly, Scott (1968), in an attempt to make sense of

African American violence, sought to situate the form in global geo-politics by invoking Frantz Fanon and allowing the "common cause" of black militancy with anti-colonialism movements to emerge in his discussion. Scott and Smith's 1969 article on movement confrontation further extends Scott's earlier ideas on context and rhetorical acts.

These theoretical moves announced the current wave of contextualized rhetorical studies that consider, not simply the immediate rhetorical context, but larger issues of social, cultural, political, historical and geopolitical contexts. To gain a deeper understanding of a rhetorical act the scholar should locate the act's socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts and the discourse (verbal or non) that seeks to alter it. Oratory, rhetorical events or acts, and even literature, it is argued, should not be considered actors alone on a stage, merely gaining meaning from their immediate scenes. These themes of historical and rhetorical contextualization are integral elements of what scholars call rhetorical theory today, though rhetoric still retains its 'verbal' and 'textual' bias. To a large degree, non-verbal, or embodied rhetoric relies on these contexts for their meaning and influential force.

Social movement rhetoricians did much to deepen the practice of contextualizing rhetoric. Interestingly, many did so by appropriating the language of drama or performance studies. Burke of course initiated this practice in the early part of the century and several later theorists turn to his work for guidance. Sillars (1964), Cathcart (1972), and Griffin (1969), find common ground with Burke in his desire to situate rhetoric in an adequate context, to locate the rhetorical agency of the human as actor, and

to integrate more "dramatistic" approaches to the study of rhetoric. For example, Cathcart argues that rhetoric needs a "dramatistic theory" and "dramatistic (politico-rhetorical) definition" of movements (1972). Sillars (1964) predates Cathcart's use of Burke, but with a different focus, in his application of Burkeian notions of identification.

Cathcart's and Sillar's work set the stage for contemporary rhetorical scholars to integrate the critical approaches used in performance studies into rhetorical analysis. In the same vein, Conquergood (1991) implores scholars in performance studies to approach their subjects from a rhetorical perspective. Similar to Sillars (1964), Cathcart (1972), and Griffin (1969), Conquergood (1992) emphasizes the role that context plays in the interpretation of performance. It is only within their proper contexts that some performances' rhetorical functions are exposed. Cultural performances in particular may work to "insinuate, interrupt, interrogate, and antagonize powerful master-discourses..." (p. 84):

Under the nose of their oppressors, they create subtle, complex and amazingly nuanced metaperformances that subversively key the event and critique the hierarchy of power....Even as their bodies are inscribed and scripted to conform to the choreography of power, they simultaneously deploy bodily symbolism to signal defiant release" (pp. 90-91).

In the case of indigenous people's dance performances, such contextualization and attribution of meaning to the body is critical to the dance's interpretation.

Cultural knowledge is embodied in physical actions, gestures, and practices. This is a point of Johannes Fabian's (1990) that Conquergood reiterates: "[cultural knowledge] is powerfully experienced, tacitly understood, but hardly ever spelled out, and if expressed, then more often than not in highly allusive, elliptical, and indirect ways" (as

cited in Conquergood, 1992, p. 85). These experiences are often embodied in the dances of a cultural community. Critically important events, relationships, philosophies, and histories are expressed by the performer's dancing body. The contexts that inform the dancer's body and the performance are all part of the rhetoric of that performance. In this way, context – those socio-cultural and geopolitical elements – and the nonverbal body movements collaborate on the overall rhetoric of a dance.

The works discussed above contribute much to the interpretation of the Gwich'in's indigenous dances. It is clear that the nonverbal can and should be understood as rhetorical – as capable of being motivating and carrying meaning. Additionally, it is clear that context, at times, contributes such magnitude of meaning as to render interpretation without it meaningless. However, the argument that the nonverbal can be rhetorical and that context contributes to meaning does not tell us how dance in particular functions rhetorically. Cathcart (1978) summarizes the critical issues and questions in the next stage of this literature review in his argument that:

To understand movements [dance in this case] as rhetorical acts constrained by a particular rhetorical form requires that we know something about how this form is exhibited, what are the forces that shape it and in turn are shaped by it, how it does its work, and the reasons for its existence as a form (p. 234).

Therefore, in the next section I examine the issues Cathcart suggests in how, what, and why dance functions rhetorically.

Dance as Rhetoric.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the exploration of dance as a rhetorical form in the field of rhetorical studies. Admittedly, however, the meanings that dance produces are sometimes difficult to navigate and voice; dance is after all primarily nonverbal.

Attempting to textualize or voice its meaning with verbal language is a paradoxical challenge that is not always possible and may be reductive, even with the best of intentions. The meanings and expressions that dance produces are not always voiced by its performers or audience. Additionally, the rhetoric that explains the dance may not always reach into the deeper spaces of the performance, leaving the researcher with only superficial understandings of the act. A researcher of dance must admit that she/he will never be able to access the more elusive meanings and messages of a performance. Regardless, dance is an exciting and fascinating form of expression. Dance can brighten and enliven our worlds – it can also "move" us. Consequently, it is a valuable subject of inquiry, especially for rhetorical scholars who in their work seek to excavate even the most hidden meanings.

In this thesis I argue that dance operates with three primary rhetorical functions. First, dance functions to avow a cultural community's beliefs about itself and its cultural identity. This function works to both present cultural beliefs and perpetuate them. Second, dance forms a rhetorical position within the context of its socio-cultural and geopolitical arena. Finally, both the performers and their audience (immediate and distant) ascribe dance with meaning, though this meaning is varied. These three functions – avowal, assertion/context, and ascription – provide dance with a complex and interconnected network of meanings. In this section, I review relevant literature that helps to unravel some of dance's more elusive meanings. I emphasize those works that directly relate to the interpretation of indigenous dance performances. Works from dance studies, rhetoric, and anthropology are considered.

The rhetorical function of dance that is highlighted in this study is its ability to act as a center for the construction/maintenance, avowal, of identity. Fundamentally, dance's rhetorical devices – its choreography, body movements, spatiality, and socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts – function to express beliefs, values, and meanings for its performers, their cultural community, and other cultures with which the community interacts. At the heart of dance's rhetoric is the socio-cultural and geopolitical issue of identity (Daly, 1988; Novak, 1988). Gilbert (1992) argues that, "Movement as a producer of one's self and one's culture has special significance for reading dance as text" (p. 137). Because dance, critics argue, reveals elements of a cultural community's identity, dance can become a site of identity struggles. That dance may be a site in which various challenges to and beliefs about a community's identity take place, is especially so with regard to indigenous people. Indigenous people have a history of having diverse interpretations of their dances and their cultural identities imposed upon them.

Gilbert (1992) expresses this point in her discussion of Aboriginal people's performances in Australia. She explains, "In imperial historical accounts, Aboriginal dance has been encoded as the expression of savage or exotic 'otherness' within a discourse which represents Blacks as objects to be looked at, rather than as self-constituting subjects" (p. 137). Interpretation of indigenous dance as forms that merely reflect a static, exotic otherness, rather than a viable, living self is part of the history of indigenous people in the United States as well. This tendency still occurs today. A more thorough discussion of this issue is offered shortly. For now, it is important to note that dance is a site where cultural identity may be produced, reproduced, and ascribed.

Part of dance's function in the expression/maintenance of identity is located in its presentation of core values and beliefs held by a cultural community. Stanley Brandes (1990) in his analysis of the Sardana, a Catalan dance from Northeast Spain, argues that dances may become national symbols of the culture. The Sardana, he notes, is extolled by the Catalan community as a critical symbol of Catalan identity. He explains that the Catalans believe that the suppression of their dance is necessarily a suppression of their Catalan culture and identity. Such suppression, it is believed, is essentially the same as annihilating the people (p. 34). Contributing to the poignancy of this belief are their philosophical ideas about culture and identity. Brandes explains that the Catalans do not believe that their cultural identity is racially based: "Catalan identity, like Catalan language or dance, can be acquired through learning, and then internalized to the point of thorough identification" (p. 34). If culture is not about race, then if the culture is lost what makes that community unique and indeed "Catalan" is also lost. Thus, it is clear why the Sardana is critically important to the Catalans.

Brandes (1990) makes another interesting argument in his analysis. He notes that the "modern" Sardana has its historical roots in "localized folk dances," which have "existed and evolved over the course of centuries" (dating at least back to the 16th century) (p. 38). The current form of the dance, he claims, is "imbued with a mythological past which is geared toward authenticating the ancient origins of [their] national or ethnic group" (p. 38). The performance is understood as a link to the cultural community's past. The dance also functions to preserve the ties between contemporary Catalonians and their ancestral families and heritage. As such, the Sardana plays a

critical role in the maintenance and production of Catalanian cultural identity (p. 38). These functions of cultural identity and heritage avowal are also evident in American Indian/Alaska Native dance performances.

Richard Schechner (1993), one of the foremost scholars of performance, argues that "the Yaqui struggle to remain Yaqui expresses itself most clearly in their need to perform Waehma" (p. 95). He explains that the Yaqui believe that they "have prevailed over *Diaspora* by *performing their identity* as Yaquis" [sic] (p. 103). The Waehma is a cultural performance that incorporates a variety of dramatic forms including the Yaqui Deer Dance. The Yaqui's belief that by preserving their practice of the Waehma they will ensure their unique cultural identity, reveals a common theory held by numerous indigenous people. Many indigenous people believe that the continuation of their traditional cultural practices contributes to the preservation of their indigenous identities. Dance is just one of many of these traditions that is imbued with this ability.

Benjamin Kracht (1994) finds similar functions for the Kiowa's Gourd Dance. He refers to Kiowa elder Clifton Tongkeamah's explanation that performing the Gourd Dance is an expression of "Kiowaness" and that the "Kiowa are born to dance" (as cited in Kracht, p. 321). He continues to argue that the "Kiwos have maintained a shared tribal identity through the perpetuation of ceremonial song and dance" (p. 323). The Gourd Dance is an anomaly among dances, as it has been appropriated by various other groups and performed at pow wows as a "pan-Indian" dance. However, it is originally Kiowa and it was resurrected by a group of elders and others in 1957. According to Ellis (1990), this group named themselves after an earlier Kiowa society, the Tiah-pah Society,

and made it their goal to "perpetuate our Indian heritage and to revive the Kiowa (Gourd) Dance as near as possible from the past original ceremonies" (p. 23). Similar to the Sardana, the Kiowa Gourd Dance and the Yaqui Waehma function rhetorically to avow these communities' cultural identities and preserve their ties to their ancestral heritage.

Dance functions rhetorically to avow cultural identity in indigenous communities particularly by *performing* elements of that communities' indigenous identity.

Performance of these elements – values, beliefs, and cosmological and philosophical views – confirms that the performers and the community retain an emotional and psychological commitment to them in their present lives. It also presents their choice to retain these cultural aspects of their identity as part of their heritage. Dance also avows indigenous identity by providing the dancers and their cultural community with the opportunity to experience dignity and pride in their heritage. Dancers are often revered and honored members of indigenous communities. They are understood to perform important functions in representing their cultural community and by enacting cherished practices. This reverence and respect for the dancers and the dance provides a unique opportunity for the dancers and other community members to avow their own pride in their cultural ancestry and their community.

The sense of solidarity and belonging created through the dance performance and through its more general function in the community also contributes to avowing their indigenous identity. It provides an opportunity and an arena to come together and enjoy a communal experience. As we will see in the last section of this chapter, belonging is critical to the spiritual and psychological health of indigenous people today. Belonging

also has its cultural history in the worldviews of many indigenous people, as their cultures are primarily communalistic. Avowal relies on the above three elements for its rhetoric. The demonstration of commitment through performance and the opportunity to experience pride and belonging unite to form the rhetorical expression of avowal. Avowal is discussed more thoroughly in the last section of this chapter.

The second rhetorical function indigenous dances often enact is to assert identities that either are, or have previously been, discouraged by larger geopolitical and socio-cultural contexts and processes. To understand the rhetorical function of assertion, indigenous dance must be contextualized within these scenes of power and politics. The identities of indigenous Americans have been and continue to be negated and denigrated in assimilation attempts by the hegemonic culture of the United States, both legally and socially (Morris, 1997). Efforts were made by the more powerful and controlling culture of the U.S. to fundamentally change the worldviews and lifestyles of indigenous people within its colonial territories. As such, indigenous dance should not be understood as a benign presentation of identity. Rather, these dances may function as an assertion that presents their cultural identities in the face of assimilation attempts, creating a rhetorical position in their larger geopolitical context.

Deborah Heath (1994) explains a similar function in her analysis of women's dance in Senegal. These women's performances are contextualized by the cultural issues of appropriate behavior for the role of women in their community with regard to their class and caste, their age, and tradition. These issues are all contested and fundamentally political sites of identity construction in Senegal. Control over the dance – when and

how it is performed – is the domain of men and the government, with the dances being banned at various times of the year and with fathers and husbands dictating when and where women should dance. With this context, it is not surprising that the women's performances become forms of resistance to both patriarchy and cultural hegemony when they are performed inappropriately.

The women of Senegal are not alone in their use of dance as a form of resistance. Gilbert (1992) argues that the Aboriginal dance she discusses functions also as a site of "cultural negotiation, and, therefore, as potential loci of resistance to hegemonic orders which...have been historically constituted within and by imperial and patriarchal discourses" (pp. 133-134). Throughout the world various forms of dance have been interpreted as either threatening, inappropriate, evil, or immoral. Dance has often been something that those in power sought to suppress as they began policies of assimilation. This form of cultural suppression continues to be used today to control people and force their allegiance to a new spiritual or political order. Attempts to suppress cultural traditions certainly occurred in the United States in regard to indigenous people, especially during the colonial era. The United States illegalized various forms of American Indian dancing throughout its historical colonial period.

Interestingly, Morris and Wander's (1990) study of the Wounded Knee protest of 1973 cites a dance that was targeted by early colonial legislation. The Ghost Dance Movement of the late 1800s sought to unify indigenous people across the United States and for that reason was illegalized by the U.S. Congress. Ghost Dance practitioners considered the performance a spiritual practice, believed it empowered those who

participated to resist the cultural and military attacks on them. Morris and Wander's work argues that the 1973 Wounded Knee activists' rhetorical ethos could be located in the earlier Ghost Dance Movement. The site of the Wounded Knee protest of 1973 is not coincidental. Wounded Knee is the site where 300 Ghost Dancers were massacred by the U.S. cavalry in 1890.

Much indigenous activism is centered by the revitalization and practice of cultural traditions and performances (Cornell, 1988). Morris and Wander (1990) do not investigate this aspect of the Wound Knee protest in any depth. However, they do note that the activists characterized their protest not as a revision of the Ghost Dance movement, but as an extension of it. According to the protest organizers, the pan-Indian cultural practice of the Ghost Dance did not die with the Ghost Dancers on Wounded Knee in 1890. Rather, they argue the Ghost Dance remains a viable and living practice today. Morris and Wander do not make it clear whether the dance was actually performed during the 1973 protest, or whether it was used only as a rhetorical sign. Regardless, asserting the notion that their movement was founded in the Ghost Dance movement provided the activists with a sense of geopolitical context, thus forming a rhetorical position within the larger scheme of American Indian cultures versus United States politics.

Indigenous dance properly situated within its socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts allows more elusive meanings to emerge. Questions about where the dances are performed, who governs or has governed their performance, and what issues influenced the dance's existence are all questions of geopolitical and socio-cultural power. In the

case of indigenous people, the power to control their cultural traditions has not always remained in their hands. Their sovereignty over their own cultural status, to a large degree, was removed and given to entities unrelated to them, such as missionaries and the Euro-American government and culture of the United States. These issues are discussed in more depth in the third section of this chapter.

Another benefit of contextualizing indigenous dances is the opportunity it offers to sketch out how the dances and the performers have been interpreted and described (ascribed) over their history. Much of the ascriptive rhetoric influencing a dance may be found in the above contexts. Ascriptions by the community, the performers, and by third parties contribute to the rhetoric expressed by the dances.

What characteristics various people or groups ascribe to a particular indigenous dance, the performers, and their cultural community influence the rhetoric of the performance. In the case of indigenous people, how the colonial culture ascribed indigenous cultures in general affected how they interpreted indigenous dance performance as well. As seen in the Ghost Dance Movement, indigenous people were considered hostile, savage, almost non-human creatures. Indigenous people were so scary to the U.S. colonial government that they illegalized gatherings of 20 or more people and several of their celebratory practices, dances and rituals (Cornell, 1988). The Ghost Dance itself, though not a war dance, was banned due to its being ascribed as a hostile threat against the United States and its people. As a result, though the Ghost Dance was primarily a spiritual practice, it was treated as an act of war.

Paradoxically, while the performance of the Ghost Dance and the Lakota Sun Dance could get an indigenous person killed, other indigenous dances were highlighted at Wild West shows during the same time period. In the safe context of these cowboy shows the indigenous performer became a non-hostile exotic object whose role was merely to entertain an all-white audience. Such interpretation denied the indigenous performer the human qualities of being a self-constituting subject. In the popular arena, audiences began inscribing indigenous people with identities that were fundamentally disempowered as early as the mid-1800s. Audiences viewing performances of Indian war dances, for example, choose to overlook the sovereign Indian identities being presented. Instead, in the context of the cowboy show the indigenous dancer was ascribed as a benign artifact mimicking the practices of a previously threatening enemy who was not present and was increasingly becoming extinct in Euro-American reality. Such an interpretation allowed the white audience the chance to enjoy a thrilling "Jurassic Park" experience of Indians – Indians were still really scary, but basically "extinct." Had the white audience ascribed the War Dance performers as truly self-constituting subjects – expressing their own beliefs, values, and convictions – the appreciation of dances by the audience would have been greatly reduced.

Another popular ascription of indigenous people at the time, and still present today, was the Noble Savage. This indigenous person was viewed as a *victim*, one who had lost everything, been broken down into just a weakened and tattered version of what they once were. This is the "He's a nice guy, but a loser" interpretation of Indians (i.e., Indians as the "underdog.") This interpretation also denies the basic human qualities of

being able to construct oneself and define for oneself who one is, that is as a self-constituting subject. With this interpretation as a perspective, Indian dances could portray how things "used to be." The audience could associate all of the characteristics being performed by the dancer as remnants of some other time. Rather than expressions of contemporary indigenous identity and culture, the dances could be ascribed as part of indigenous "history." This type of ascription continues today. In the Euro-American culture of the U.S. this ascription is fairly blatant; most American Indian and Alaska Native dances are provided only the museum as a performance site.

These interpretations of indigenous people as not having viable, present indigenous identities and cultures are performed today in subtler ways in the halls of academia. The study of indigenous people is generally approached as something of a historical research project. The ways Indians behaved, spoke, danced, acted, ate, subsisted, etc. are all studied as they occurred in the past tense. Such an academic approach provides little opportunity to ascribe present-day activities with any sense of present tense. For dance, however, it is almost impossible to study an indigenous performance practiced a century ago. While there was some documentation of earlier performances, most of these are from Euro-American government agents or missionaries. These people were not dance choreographers. As a result, scholars today generally must study the performance as it is performed today and rely on testimony and oral history to document aspects of the performance's history. Much research of indigenous dance today attempts to locate the present tense in the performance at the same time as documenting its roots.

Nevertheless, indigenous dance performance is often vulnerable to inappropriate forms of ascription in the academy. Indigenous dance may be ascribed variously as an exact replica of some previously practiced form or it may be entirely denied any connection at all to the performance's predecessors. Dance is far too fluid to fit either one of these absolutist characterizations. Dance and other cultural performances are vulnerable to the minor changes that occur with any practice when performed by a multitude of people over time. *Adaptation is inevitable for people and their dances.* Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) argues that some cultural performances are often "invented traditions": traditions that are "actually invented, constructed, and formally instituted" (p. 1).

Invented traditions contrast with those, however, that arguably have their roots in generation upon generation of practice of some earlier form. Some indigenous dance forms have oral histories that place the performance in time-periods occurring centuries prior to their contemporary existence. The indigenous people who perform these dances often refer to their performances as *traditional*.³ The dances are ascribed with the critical functions of weaving the performers and their cultural community to their ancestral families and heritage. This understanding of the dance being a connecting link between people and their ancestry provides them with one of the more important rhetorical

³ The term "tradition" is often used without reflection. In folklore studies it is generally meant to refer to cultural material (song, dance, story, etc.) that is accumulated over time and which is then passed along through the process of inheritance, transmission, and cultivation (Ben-Amos, 1984). However, in the early days of the social sciences "tradition" became associated with the "uncivilized" and "uneducated" past of a people (p. 100). Tradition was used in opposition to "civilized" or "modern." Thus, this work avoids its use. Yet, it is important to note that many American Indians and Alaska Natives do use the term to refer to themselves and their cultural practices. Their use of the term most closely resembles that of folklore studies.

functions of these dances. Unfortunately, however, this ascription also makes the dances vulnerable to being conflated to a mere replica of a previous form, thus being ascribed as a representation of history (versus being a living practice) by non-Indians.

A similar type of ascription occurs that can lead to the misinterpretation of indigenous dance performance. Indigenous dances are sometimes misunderstood because of the popular confusion between what are ascribed as stereotypical Indian characteristics and what are "real" contemporary Indian cultural characteristics. The pervasive stereotyping of indigenous cultures has led to the vast misunderstanding of these cultures and conflation of their uniqueness to a few emblematic items (feathers, teepees, pipes, etc.). Scholarly interpretation is also at risk of promoting these inaccurate ascriptions. Desmond (1994), for example, produces a prime example of this form of ascription. In her analysis of the migration of dance forms she accuses an American Indian dancer of using primitive stage settings and dress, saying:

Trujillo [a dancer] dons traditional American Indian dress, complete with feathers, and enacts a ceremonial type of dance that concludes with his vanishing in a hazy light.... We are...placed firmly in the "primitive" aesthetic, with people enacting magical ceremonies in village clearings on rich, dark earth.... These rituals are presented as "timeless," but this "outside of time" quality refers to the past and somehow fails to index the present. If the dances cannot be contemporary, then neither, we are to assume, are the people who perform them (p. 55).

Desmond fails to demonstrate how the American Indian's performance is of the past or reflective of the "traditionalizing/primitivizing discourse[s] of preindustrialism" (p. 55). Her earlier argument that Latin Americans and American Indians are more vulnerable to being situated in a "primitivizing" discourse of "preindustrialism" is valid. Yet, she does not provide an explanation for why "magical ceremonies in village clearings on rich, dark

earth" (p. 55) or feathers and traditional dress are primitivizing and not present-day features of the dancer's cultural experience.

Rather, her analysis reveals her own ascriptions of contemporary indigenous people and their cultures. It is in her analysis that the association between rich, dark earth, feathers, ceremonies in village clearings, traditional American Indian dress and the primitive, pre-industrial past are made. It is through Desmond's inability to allow present time existence to these elements of indigenous experience that the dancer is shot back to some other time and place. Here, ascriptions that teach that indigenous cultures are part of a past prompt a reputed dance scholar's own investigation. This analysis suggests that to be contemporary (i.e., modern) is to not look, act, or display behaviors or characteristics that could be associated with our ancestors, grandparents, and in some cases, parents. This is a common view in Western society.

These types of ascriptions place indigenous people and their cultural expressions into a difficult double bind. Indigenous dances intended to avow and assert indigenous ancestry and heritage are vulnerable to accusations that they are primitivizing their cultures and participating in the subjugation of their communities. The alternate interpretation accuses the dancers and performance of merely imitating historical forms. Both interpretations deny the performance present-time existence and interpret it as inauthentic. Desmond offers no positive alternatives to how indigenous dances might be presented in order to maintain a sense of authenticity or validity; her critique suggests only wholesale abandonment. The alternate ascription, relegating performance to the past, also provides no alternative other than abandoning historically rooted forms.

The empowering ascriptions of indigenous dance provided by Schechner (1993), Brandes (1990), Kracht (1994), and Ellis (1990) stand in marked contrast to Desmond's (1994) denigrating analysis. Both styles of interpretation evidence the critical importance of investigating how various people and entities ascribe a particular performance. Admittedly, such an exhaustive analysis is not always possible. Sometimes unearthing historical ascriptions of a particular performance is virtually impossible. The Gwich'in's indigenous dances are one such case. Regardless, incorporating the notion that ascription influences the meanings (and sometimes works to reveal those that are more elusive) deepens the scholar's research about a performance. Ascriptions collaborate with contextualization to expose far more complex and meaningful aspects to the performance. These contribute to the overall *scene* of the performance. For indigenous people, especially, it is within this scene that the more elusive rhetorical functions of avowal may be illuminated.

However, to argue that part of what indigenous dance's rhetoric involves is issues of identity forces the scholar into an analysis of not just the dance but of that identity. Yet, identity is a contested notion in academic circles today. The next section of this thesis explores an increasingly popular form of critical inquiry that investigates in part the notion of identity. Within the field of communication studies the importance of looking critically at issues of identity is now generally recognized as a critical theoretical venture (Tanno & Gonzalez, 1998; Fine & Speer, 1992). In rhetorical studies, some scholars are now introducing postcolonial theory and criticism in order to push the paradigms of rhetorical scholarship even further (Conquergood, 1992; Shome, 1995;

Wander, 1996). Similar to postmodernism, postcolonial theory and criticism challenges many of modernism's claims about identity and culture. Some of these claims are particularly useful for the interpretation of indigenous dance. The following explores those aspects most relevant to and those that create a roadblock to understanding indigenous dance performance.

Postcolonial Theory and Criticism

In his text *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, Moore-Gilbert (1997) examines this increasingly popular area of study. He pursues this inquiry in part because of the conflicts occurring among the varied theories and critical perspectives within the genre. He seeks to determine if, in fact, the diversity in postcolonial inquiry necessarily requires that it splinter into "a series of competing, mutually incompatible" practices (p. 11). Moore-Gilbert, however, resolves the differences among postcolonialism's wide-range of critical approaches and perspectives by locating their "convergences" (p. 171). He provides the following definition:

Postcolonial criticism can still be seen as a more or less distinct set of reading practices, if it is understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination – economic, cultural and political – between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neocolonialism (p. 12).

Moore-Gilbert (1997) locates critical works (primarily from literary studies) as far back as the turn of the century that he believes are contiguous with current works in what is being called postcolonial theory. The volumes that fit his definition of postcolonialism are too numerous to cite here. Suffice it to say that these works often cross the

boundaries of inquiry found in academia and attempt to merge them. History, sociology, politics, and art are integrated into studies of literature and culture, bringing to bear a common point made in postcolonial scholarship. Essentially, postcolonialism argues that, "culture mediates relations of power as effectively, albeit in more indirect and subtle ways, as more public and visible forms of oppression" (Moore-Gilbert, p. 8). This critical perspective allows the more elusive effects of power and politics to surface.

Moore-Gilbert (1997) notes several ways the various ideas and perspectives of postcolonial authors converge. He argues that there are "key strategic arguments, tactical manoeuvres and concept-metaphors often considered to be characteristic of postcolonial theory" [sic] (p. 171). He organizes these arguments, tactics, and concepts into two centralizing areas. First, postcolonial critics' perspectives converge in a fundamental approach to criticism that challenges Western theoretical notions that claim to be *universal*, particularly those regarding human experience and culture. This challenge opens the doors to perspectives that see Western culture itself as a form of oppression and a site of politics and power (cultural imperialism). Thus, forced assimilation into Western forms of knowledge and culture (art, literature, performance) become part of the imperial process, not an objective humanitarian practice. Postcolonial critics also point out that Western cultural forms could not be universal because the value and belief systems that sustain them are not. The differences in cultural values and social organization make Western conceptions of Other's cultures and their social functions different (Moore-Gilbert, p. 176). Thus, postcolonial critics call for scholarship that is properly contextualized in its historical, cultural, and geopolitical landscape.

The second key element emerging in postcolonial criticism according to Moore-Gilbert (1997) is its attempt to critically examine and tactically deal with issues of identity. Postcolonial critics attempt to negotiate and come to terms with the politics that pervade issues of identity. The most problematic aspect of Western notions of identity they argue, is in their tendency to essentialize characteristics as signs of identity. Accompanying this conflation of culture and identity is the Western scholarly practice of setting up Western notions of human experience as decontextualized, objective concepts by which other peoples and cultures may be compared. Because this thesis argues indigenous people's cultural productions express and produce elements of identity, postcolonialism's investigation into identity seems particularly relevant. Postcolonial criticism also seems particularly important due to its emphasis on contextualizing both scholarship and culture into their historical, political, socio-cultural, and geo-political landscapes. Incorporation of some of the scholarship in postcolonial theory will help to illuminate the more elusive meanings and functions of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances. The following section explores the works of a variety of postcolonial critics and summarizes what is most relevant to the study of the Gwich'ins' dances. Though postcolonial critics' ideas are not always consistent with each other, they may still be adapted to work together in many ways.

Postcolonial Considerations of Identity.

A central goal of postcolonial scholarship is to de-center the colonial strongholds on epistemological and ontological truths about identity. Postcolonial writers criticize the monolithic constructions of Others regarding their identity that have been created by

those in Western fields of academic inquiry. They often counter these constructions by emphasizing the plurality, marginality, and/or differences that occur within people's identifications. They note that identity and culture are not stable or static forms. Rather, many postcolonial theorists argue that identity is made up of heterogeneous, multiple or plural elements that may even conflict with each other. These critics argue that there is no such thing as an essential, singular identity. However, it should be noted here that postcolonial critics' perspectives or theories of identity do not always agree. In many cases, critics within the genre disagree with how – strategically and theoretically – identity functions. Regardless, as Moore-Gilbert (1997) observes, postcolonial critics' basic challenges converge. In the following discussion I will discuss a variety of postcolonial critics' ideas about identity, pointing out their commonalities and their disagreements.

Many postcolonial critics argue that there can be no homogenous essential identity. Ashcroft (1995), for example, argues that identity should be understood as a "...function of a network of differences rather than an essence" (p. 299). Making a similar argument, JanMohamed and Lloyd (1990) claim that identity is actually made up of "multiple identities...neither reducible nor impermeable to one another..." (p. 15). In a more convoluted way, Bhabha (1994) makes a similar claim for identity. He asserts that what emerges in the investigation of identity is "the impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision" (p. 46). Bhabha argues that instead of the West's "totalizing vision," a transformed hybrid exists. Primarily, what

these critics take to task is the notion that identity is singular and locatable as a central feature. Claims to authenticity, then, become specious in these views.

These critics come face to face with a second version of identity that often dramatically conflicts with the above. Reverse ethnocentrism and cultural nationalism are two similar perceptions of identity that contributed significantly to both the early anti-colonialist movements and those in the 1960s in the United States. It is interesting to note that Moore-Gilbert (1997) locates these essentialist perspectives of identity also in postcolonial inquiry and culture, though it is less prevalent today (p. 196). He cites such contemporary authors as Houston A. Baker, Clinton M. Jean, and Henry Louis Gates. Such appeals to cultural nationalism, he argues, "can still play an effective part in resistance to the dominant global orders" (p. 197). For this reason, essentializing conceptualizations of identity are still appealing to many who remain under the most extreme conditions of cultural imperialism. Moore-Gilbert's argument about the strategic uses of essentialization is similar to those offered by other critics. His attempt to include the nationalists' arguments in postcolonial criticism also demonstrates his desire to not exclude these authors and their ideas.

On the other hand, in other postcolonial anthologies, these positions and authors are left out and their ideas denigrated. In *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, edited by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), the authors clearly express distaste for arguments that essentialize identity. These authors argue that indigenous people, rather than Diaspora, have become the "*cause celebre*" of postcolonialism (p. 214). Yet, they say:

Indigenous groups have so often fallen into the political trap of essentialism set for them by imperial discourse. Imperial narratives such

as that of anthropology in their project of *naming* and thus *knowing* indigenous groups have imported a notion of aboriginality, of cultural authenticity, which proves difficult to displace... locking [indigenous people] into a locally strategic but ultimately self-defeating essentialism [sic] (p. 214).

Clearly, this anthology – as well as several other texts summarizing the ideas in postcolonial theory and criticism – does not see the arguments of cultural nationalism, reverse ethnocentrism, or others that appear to essentialize identity as part of postcolonialism's project. This disagreement in the role of these opposing arguments about identity in postcolonial criticism reflects a general rift occurring both in postcolonialism and in other identity scholarship.

Cultural nationalists seek to define themselves, their cultures, and nations on their own terms, often privileging what they determine are their own values and worldviews. Reverse ethnocentrism seeks to reverse the gaze of the community which has been oppressed into focusing on Western culture, refocusing it instead on the distinctiveness that they find in their own culture and identity. Others, whose goals are not necessarily nationalistic (i.e., indigenous people in the United States), also use arguments that may appear to be essentializing. These perspectives are part of politically oriented approaches to empowerment for many communities who are choosing against full-on assimilation in Western culture and economy. Moore-Gilbert (1997) argues that authenticity has and continues to be a political and cultural commodity and that notions of a cultural community are, in fact, politically viable tools whose strategic utility should not be denied (p. 202).

How to negotiate people's political and even psychological need to retain what they believe is their unique, essential difference and contemporary notions of the hybrid, multiple, or plural self is *the* dilemma at the heart of postcolonial inquiry. It is this dilemma, I argue further on, that ultimately forces this work to question whether postcolonial criticism as a genre is applicable to indigenous people in the United States. I will address this issue later. Suffice it to say, postcolonial critics recognize this dilemma and attempt to negotiate it using various critical approaches. One such approach is to redefine identity in terms of representation and discourse. Conquergood (1991), a communication scholar, offers a view that redefines singular identity as "a polysemic site of articulation for multiple identities and voices" (p. 185). Identity is a highly contextual and ongoing process, he suggests, rather than an essential and stable aspect of someone's personal being.

Stuart Hall (1990) similarly theorizes identity as "a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). The identity(ies) that emerge in these representations, are not the fixed, immutable forms created by the hegemonic West. Rather, Hall argues, identity is under "constant transformation," a "matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past" (p. 225). Identity is a process affected by history, interpretation, and experience. Representation of cultural identity reveals certain *positions* within the discourses of history, culture, and power, rather than essential elements. "Cultural identities are the points of identification...which are made, within the *discourses* of history and culture," asserts Hall (p. 226).

Ashcroft et al. in a similar vein, characterize the state of postcolonialism as "a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction" (1995, p. 2). Postcolonial subjects, while perhaps free of the immediate imperial controls, must still work to reconstruct for themselves their identities and cultures. This process most often is performed within the neocolonial remains of power institutionalized in government, education, economy, and society. Consistent with Ashcroft et al. (1995) and Hall (1990), Griffiths (1995) argues that indigenous people understand themselves to be the embodiment of a "contestational weave of cultures" (p. 240). However, he argues, they strategically place more emphasis on the essential difference that distinguishes them from the Diaspora of the postcolonial urban centers. Griffiths argues that the assertion of essential difference by indigenous people, in this case Aboriginal Australians, functions as a tactical maneuver, rather than an attachment to an understood essential core.

Gayatri C. Spivak (1990) makes a similar attempt to manage the political consequences of denouncing claims to authenticity or essential identity. She argues that one should locate how and what in "universalizing discourses" (such as essential notions of identity and authenticity) might be useful (p. 11). Although she is "committed" to taking "a stand against the discourses of essentialism [and] universalism...", Spivak argues that to do so "*strategically*" would be a mistake (p. 11). Thus, she argues, the postcolonial subject must "pick up the universal that will [provide] the power to fight against the other side," but also recognize that by doing so the subject is abandoning "theoretical purity" (p. 12). That is, the subject should understand and recognize the more theoretical understanding of identity as heterogeneous but should not abandon

strategic uses of essentialized notions. In sum, then, the postcolonial subject lives in a constant contradiction.

Again, attempting to address the dilemmas in postcolonial perspectives on identity and culture, Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd (1990) argue that minorities must "begin from a position of objective nonidentity that is rooted in their economic and cultural marginalization vis-a-vis the 'West'" (p. 15). The postcolonial subjects' representations, they assert, should not be misunderstood as the "dissolving bourgeois subject" (p. 16). On the other hand, they should not "merely fall back on the oppositional affirmation of an essential ethnic or gender identity" (p. 16). Rather, they suggest that the theoretical issue of essence be transformed into "questions of practice...[particularly] the question, 'What is to be done?'" (16). Strategy and tactic again provide an alternative to the theoretical and practical dilemma occurring at the heart of postcolonialism's investigation into identity.

However, there are other critics investigating identity that disagree with the above perspectives and seek to adapt them. It is unclear whether these critics will ultimately be accepted into postcolonialism's anthologies. Regardless, their scholarly insights into identity contribute significantly to postcolonial criticism and should be included in that genre. In a theoretical sense these critics' insights also work strategically to retain the political utility of the essentialist argument.

In this thesis I argue that indigenous people's rhetoric is often simply misunderstood as being essentializing when, in fact, it functions much differently. Ashcroft et al.'s (1995) accusation, cited earlier, that indigenous people have imported the

anthropological project is inaccurate. It implies that indigenous people did not know or name themselves prior to imperial conquest or colonialism. The following critics' investigations into identity offer adaptations to those discussed previously. Their ideas offer an alternative approach to theoretically managing the dilemma regarding identity in postcolonial criticism.

These critics point out that positioning identity in discourse and as a strategic maneuver is not enough to diffuse the consequences of the identity dilemma. Some postcolonial critics claim locating identity in discursive representation, rather than lived experience, leads to the erasure of the subject and thus denies the subject's own characterizations and understandings of themselves. They argue that the emphasis on discourse denies a community or person's subjectivity as a *real* (non-discursive) phenomenon. Their arguments recall issues of the nonverbal body discussed in the previous section on rhetoric. I suggest that indigenous people's rhetoric (or articulations) that appear essentializing to the postcolonial critic are not necessarily so. Rather, they might be theoretically understood as expressing lived or embodied experiences. Similarly to the field of rhetoric, postcolonial criticism appears to be challenged with the role of the body in the constitution of identity.

The following critics argue that postcolonialism should not deny authenticity to the subject and once again privilege theoretical interpretation, even if by non-Western scholars. These critics argue that the subject's experience allows a certain epistemological privilege to the formulation of identity. This experience is one that is not

only constituted in discourse and representation, but through the body as well. Nancy

Hartsook (1990) asserts one of the more polemic challenges:

Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at this moment in history, when so many groups are engaged in "nationalisms" which involve redefinitions of the marginalized Others, that doubt arises in the academy about the nature of the "subject".... Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes "problematic"? (p. 26).

Hartsook calls for an adaptation of postcolonial theory that would engage in the political, historical, and theoretical process of re-constituting the "objects" of history *as* subjects. She suggests that re-constitution of the subject requires exploring subjectivity, a process to be engaged both by the subject and the postcolonial critic. To understand the subjectivity of the postcolonial subject, however, the critic needs, "an epistemology that recognizes that [their] practical daily activity contains an understanding of the world" (p. 35-6). Fundamentally, Hartsook explains, theoretical interpretations of the subject must come to terms with the perspectives and experiences of that subject.

Mohanty (1993) provides a critical position that seems to answer Hartsook's call for a transformed epistemology in the interpretation of the postcolonial subject's identity. Similarly to Hartsook, Mohanty locates the heart of the postcolonial dilemma over identity and culture in epistemological considerations of experience. She argues that "both the essentialism of identity politics and the skepticism of the postmodernist [postcolonial] position seriously underread the real epistemic and political complexities of our social and cultural identities" (p. 55). Not legitimating experience as a reliable source of knowledge, either about the self or the world, leaves the subject with no

essential subjectivity and therefore no privileged or primary knowledge derived from that experience, she claims. To overcome this problem in interpretation, Mohanty redefines experience with a "cognitivist conception," arguing that experience can be understood as a source of "both real knowledge and social mystification" (p. 54). She explains that experience is simply the "raw material" of life that is interpreted and given meaning through cognitive organization influenced by "social narratives, paradigms, and even ideologies" (p. 48).

Explaining that identities are based on the theoretical interpretation of the raw material of experience, Mohanty (1993) argues identities are:

...ways of making sense of our experiences. They are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways. It is in this sense that they are valuable, and suggest why we need to take their epistemic status very seriously. For it is in them, and through them, that we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, that we give texture and form to our collective futures. (p. 55).

Mohanty's view explores the fundamental influence of real life and experience on perception and attempts to provide validation for them. A fair or "realist" approach to identity, claims Mohanty, needs "to explore the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location" (p. 54). This view grants the oppressed an epistemological privilege that underscores their social locations in terms of experience and provides more than a strategic access to authenticity.

Mohanty's perspective also validates the knowledge that is derived from subjective experience, accepting that this knowledge may be real and constructed at the same time (p. 69). Mohanty's view of experience as the raw material of life acknowledges the role

the physical body plays in the production of perceptions and in the expression of cultural identity.

Thomas Csordas (1988) also explores this function of the physical body. He argues the body is "the existential ground of culture" (p. 5). Simply put, he means that culture is in the body, manifested in our movements, created by our actions. Rather than treating the body as a utilitarian object for the satisfaction of our cognitive-created needs, he argues that the body should be understood as the site of subjectivity – "*the* starting point for the study of culture and self" (p. 39). Yet, Csordas also points out that the body does not simply exist in its physical, short-term moment. Rather, the body has an existence, an existential reality that embodies larger sociological structures or relationships, such as culture. Csordas' theoretical perspective allows an approach to the study of culture and identity that accepts the role of the physical body in both the conception and expression/representation of identity. Cultural identity, he argues, is as much in the body as it is in the mind, thus adapting postcolonial critics' theorizations of identity being in discourse and representation.

In a similar approach to Csordas, Dirlik (1990) suggests postcolonial theory reconceptualize culture in terms of relationships and activity. Agreeing with other postcolonial critics, Dirlik argues that culture is not an "architectonic principle" that creates a totalizing, unchanging web of relationships and traditions. Rather, he explains, culture might be understood as an activity "that is bound up with the most fundamental epistemological questions" (p. 394). Culture is created by the activities and practices of people and simultaneously functions as a creator of people. As such, Dirlik argues,

culture operates as a dialectical relationship: "The activity which produces and reproduces culture appears merely as one of the many ways in which people act according to their culture" (p. 395). Thus, the cultural activities which produce expressions or representations of cultural identity are at the same time sites for the negotiation of culture and identity.

From this perspective cultural performance may be understood as a "liberating practice" that, as Dirlik suggests,

...comprehends the present as a dialectical moment, a moment that is structured by the contradictory "inter-presence" of the native past and the West and that holds forth in the resolution of this contradiction the possibility of a future culture that is neither of the past nor of the West (1990, p. 421).

Dirlik's critical perspective is aided by Desmond's (1994) argument that, "Such practices and the discourse that surrounds them reveal the important part bodily discourse plays in the continuing social construction and negotiation of race, gender, class, and nationality..." (p. 39). Desmond's perspective complements the points made by both Csordas and Mohanty, who also note the body's role in the expression and construction of identity and culture.

The critical perspectives above – the validation of the perceptions and experience of the subject, the acknowledgement of the role of the physical body in identity construction, and a reconsideration of culture as an activity and a network of relationships – combine to amend the theories of identity of other postcolonial critics. Without denying legitimacy to the challenge of Western conceptions of identity, the above views attempt to re-place the role of the subject in the construction of her/his cultural identity.

While the postcolonial critics' strategic approach may work as a theoretical maneuver, it is doubtful that it would succeed in the courts and landscapes of political resistance movements. Yet, there is no doubt that history, politics, and socio-cultural issues have negated the possibility of a singular, monolithic identity for much of the world's population. Both Diaspora and indigenous people continue to be contextualized by the geopolitical landscape of neocolonialism. Thus, their identities should be re-interpreted – perhaps more as processes than as essentialized characteristics. Within this context the idea that discourse and discursive representations function to both construct and re-negotiate these identities is probable. In order to understand the critical roles of embodied cultural performances, however, the critic must move beyond the central figure of the word and into the function of the body. Here the latter critics' theoretical adaptations are important to bridge the gap between what might be argued as a purely conceptual understanding of identity and one that recognizes the role of the physical body.

Acknowledging the embodied functions of experience, relationships, and activity in identity constitution and expression does not necessarily mean a critic or group has "fallen back" into essentialism. Rather, such an acknowledgment allows for a more positive and empowering interpretation of the postcolonial subject's identity and cultural practices. From this vantage point, cultural performances such as dance may be interpreted as liberating practices rather than as backwards and static emblems of some essentialized past. It provides the critic and the subject the option of validating those things that the subject chooses to retain as part of a cultural heritage for the future. Yet, it

also does not deny that identity is more heterogeneous today. Additionally, this adapted perspective provides an opportunity to expand what the concept authenticity means. Rather than defining the rhetoric or cultural practices that subjects present as representative of "who they are" as inauthentic, the critic could examine ways in which their expressions actually do represent authentic lived experience. Thus, the idea of authenticity could be expanded to meet the contemporary theoretical conceptions of culture and identity today.

The relevance of postcolonial criticism and theory to indigenous people is undeniable. Clearly, many of the socio-cultural and geopolitical issues that have contextualized these communities are similar to those experienced by postcolonial Diaspora. Additionally, many of the issues regarding identity and culture that postcolonial authors and critics discuss occur in the communities of indigenous people. Therefore, the next part of this discussion of postcolonial theory and criticism will explore the ways in which this critical genre applies to indigenous people and their cultural performances and the ways in which it does not.

Postcolonialism and Indigenous People.

The scholarly or literary works of indigenous people are generally not included in the genre of postcolonialism. One reason the critical works of American Indians and Alaska Natives are excluded is that the genre has maintained a focus on the interpretations and experiences of those existing within regions that were formally colonized by Western imperial forces. The United States is a unique region due to its colonial history and the United States' use of internal, rather than external, colonization.

This is discussed further. Some scholars, such as Moore-Gilbert (1997), do include the colonized of the United States, Canada, and Australia in their broad definitions of the postcolonial. Several American Indian scholars, such as Louis Owens, Gerald Vizenor, and Eduardo Duran, also characterize American Indian literature and experience as postmodern or postcolonial. However, whether the genre will actually open up to the ideas and works of the scholars and authors of these regions is yet to be seen.

Regardless, postcolonialism and American Indian/Alaska Native scholarship does converge on numerous points. They also differ. The following explores the ways in which postcolonial criticism is applicable to the study of indigenous people and their cultural performances, and the ways it is not.

The first way in which postcolonial criticism is relevant to this study is in its exploration of context. Indigenous people in the United States do share the experience of oppression, subjugation, and cultural imperialism with postcolonial communities. Their lives have been defined, censored, and scripted according to the beliefs and values of Western "authorities" (scholars and authors). The points postcolonialism makes about the inability to separate culture and power are particularly relevant to indigenous people. Not only were their cultures defined and described in negative terms, they were in many cases legally forced to abandon them. Western knowledge, language, philosophy, religion, and arts became *the* weapon of choice for total subjugation of indigenous people in the United States. This history is well documented. Therefore, the critical points made by postcolonialism about cultural imperialism and Western hegemony are clearly applicable to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Additionally, postcolonial critique takes contextualization of scholarship, knowledge, and representation to an extreme. This type of deep exploration of context was what the social movement theorists in rhetorical studies were heading for in the 1960s and 70s. Had postcolonial theory and writing not been marginalized during that academic period, the movement theorists might have used their work. In fact, Scott (1968) did just that with his invocation of Frantz Fanon. Rhetorical scholarship and performance analysis in communication studies are moving toward integration of postcolonial perspectives (Wander, 1996; Conquergood, 1992). Thus, any investigation of the rhetorical functions of a cultural performance would benefit from various works in postcolonialism. In order to illuminate the more political rhetoric of a cultural performance, socio-cultural and geopolitical context must be considered. Postcolonial inquiry, thus, is particularly useful to such an exploration.

The second way in which postcolonial criticism benefits the analysis of indigenous cultural performance is through its ideas about identity. Both postcolonial criticism and indigenous perspectives challenge the West's characterization of indigenous identity and culture. They note that culture is not the stable, static design created by Western anthropologists. Identity is understood from both viewpoints as heterogeneous, adaptive, changing, and diverse. Accompanying this view is the idea that identity is an ongoing, continually developing process, rather than an essential quality. Many critics in the postcolonial genre also argue that culture and identity are constituted in representations and through discourse. Because indigenous people around the world have suffered the imposition of Western ascription, the utility of this critique is

unquestionable. Indigenous people are still both romanticized and denigrated by Western ascriptions. As cultural performances often present elements and notions about indigenous identity, the revised theories of identity in postcolonial criticism may be useful. Certainly understanding identity as a process, rather than a stasis, helps illuminate cultural identity's many adaptations over its history. That people have diverse ways of identifying themselves and that those commitments are vulnerable to changing needs and psychology is also something that postcolonialism contributes to identity interpretation.

American Indian/Alaska Native scholars' perspectives and views are in many ways similar to many of the primary tenets of postcolonialism. However, on the finer points of the postcolonial critique of identity, American Indian/Alaska Native authors diverge. Lake (1997), along with Morris and Wander (1990), note that the majority of American Indian protest or movement rhetoric is centered around the call to revitalize and return to indigenous cultural traditions and Indian (or indigenous) identity. Thus, Lake argues that scholars should be somewhat cautious in their wholesale incorporation of the postcolonial perspective of identity and culture, especially with regard to indigenous people. He argues:

For there are any number of "native," "indigenous" or "first world" peoples across the globe for whom participation in the emerging "urban, multinational world of institutional transience" remains an open question at best and a tragedy at worst. Seeking to preserve their traditional forms of life, their "natural cultures," in the face of tremendous pressures to assimilate, it is unclear whether the essentialist view of their traditions is oppressive or emancipatory (1997, p. 67).

Indigenous identity is contextualized by a history of forced assimilation (Morris, 1997).

The argument that "holding on to some notion of an indigenous cultural/national identity"

is useless and theoretically impure (Shome, 1995, p. 10) does not present itself as empowering or even theoretically valid. Rather, this position becomes complicit with the assimilation argument that tells indigenous people that their worldviews are outdated and ideas primitive. The theoretical end result of both arguments is the same – that indigenous perspectives do not somehow fit into the modern, postmodern, now postcolonial world.

Lake (1997) also takes to issue one of the primary claims about identity hailed by postcolonial theorists. He uses James Clifford's (1988) ideas about identity as an example of the problems with a postcolonial perception:

...that cultural identities should be seen as "conjunctural, not essential":
 "Because discourse in global power systems is elaborated vis-à-vis, a sense of difference or distinctness can never be located solely in the continuity of a culture or tradition." There are no autonomous, "pure" or "authentic" cultures...(as cited in Lake, 1997, p. 67).

The apparent "writing off" of cultural traditions or performances as having any claim to authenticity is of great concern to Lake. Cultural performances perhaps do assert identities that may appear essentialist. And, it is true that when interpreted free of their socio-cultural and geopolitical locations, as in the case of museum and some television productions, indigenous people's cultural performances may hardly seem postcolonial and even erroneous. I argue, however, that in many cases American Indian performance, and even discourse, is simply not fully understood. The views of American Indian/Alaska Native authors and scholars deserve more examination as critical perspectives for the interpretation of indigenous forms of rhetoric. Their views are especially appropriate for interpretation of indigenous identity as it occurs in these forms.

Interpretations of these performances via postcolonialism would not provide the depth of meaning that the perspectives of American Indian scholars do. Consequently, turning to their works is necessary.

Cultural performance provides an avenue toward empowerment that functions much differently, and in some ways more powerfully, than other community practices. This point is argued by numerous indigenous scholars and others working in these communities. Performance is just one arena that offers a community a ground on which to express aspects of its unique identity. These dramatic expressions are used today to reaffirm and empower indigenous people's identities and cultures. Such revitalization is considered a critically important element of community survival. American Indian scholars maintain that indigenous identity that is *healthy* retains a sense of coherency. This point is what differentiates postcolonial perspectives from those of indigenous critics. A key element of this difference is found in a person's relationship with the past and place.

Postcolonial critics, such as Arif Dirlik (1990), call for "a future culture that is neither of the past nor of the West" (p. 421). Postcolonial treatments of cultural performances and practices are accompanied by discourse that implores Others not to fall back (Dirlik) into traditions of the past. However, critics such as Louis Owens (1992) and Mudrooroo Narogin (cited in Griffiths, 1995), suggest that indigenous culture is as much about the past as it is the future and the present. For indigenous populations the past is not something to be freed from, it is something to contemplate and bring forth. Whereas some postcolonial theorists or authors want freedom from a repressive cultural

past, indigenous people want to recall many of those elements and allow their presence in their contemporary lives.

These critics argue that the past needs to be emphasized and remembered, rather than conceptually and literally negated. Notably, this is a point Mudrooroo Narogin expresses in Griffiths' (1995) article:

It is no use declaring...that the past is over and should be forgotten, when that past is only of two hundred years duration. It is far too early for the Aboriginal people to put aside that past and the effects of that past....people must come to realize that many of their problems are based on a past that still lives within them. If [the colonial past] is not acknowledged, then the self-destructive and community-destructive acts which continue to occur will be seen as only resulting from unemployment, bad housing, or ill-health, and once these are removed everything will be fine (p. 25).

The attempt to re-affirm and revitalize that which is part of their indigenous past is more than an identity strategy. It is often described as survival or continuance. Indigenous people's cultural performances often assert an identity that has been censored, oppressed, and compelled to assimilate. To fully comprehend these forms requires that the critic or audience contextualize it within this history of cultural imperialism – a point also made by postcolonial critics.

Cultural performance is just one arena that offers indigenous people a ground on which to articulate their unique identity. And while the danger, as Griffiths (1995) points out, is that these cultural forms may be perverted into "fetishized cultural commodities," this risk is not necessarily inherent in the performance or tradition. Often, this fetishization results from a failure of the audience to accurately interpret, especially free of colonial filters, the function of the performance for the community.

Indigenous identity and culture are at a critical point in United States and world history. For many the Indian wars never ceased, but were transferred to the United States court system. Today, the cultural identities of indigenous peoples in the U.S. lie in the hands of lawyers, consultants, and judges who transport academic theory into the courtroom as testimony to truth. More often than not, the Indian loses.

An excellent example of the cost of these identity wars is provided in the civil case filed by the Aleut and Alutiq peoples against Exxon after the Exxon Valdez dumped its toxic contents over 1,000 miles of Alaskan shoreline. The judged sided with the Exxon consultant who argued that there is no Alaska Native culture, that it had been "smashed" centuries prior with the successive intervals of miners, loggers, missionaries, colonialist governments, and disease (Jorgensen, 1995, p. 1). Arguing that native and white cultures were only mildly different, and that the oil spill therefore did not have any more impact on the Alutiq and Aleut than it did on the non-natives in the area, the consultant sealed the fate of at least one Aleut village. Chenega Bay is now primarily abandoned. Interestingly, and sadly, there is enough of a difference between the white and native communities to warrant an enormous inequity in their respective settlements. Jorgensen asks, "If the nonnative commercial fishermen actually collect \$253,333 each and the natives receive \$4,570 each," what is, then, their difference (p. 93)?

The more postcolonial description citing the hybridity of cultural identity won this case. Yet, its foundations in truth are grounded only by the Western tradition from which it is derived. Thus, the second difference between postcolonial perspectives and those of American Indian/Alaska Natives concerns an arena painstakingly examined by

postcolonial critics. Theory is context-based. The critics of postcolonialism must also be contextualized within their own socio-cultural and geopolitical locations. Their commitment to the deconstruction of universalistic discourses should work to discharge *any* claims to universalism – even those theories that they argue to be truths. It appears that postcolonial authors have a hard time relating to expressions that assert a stable sense of identity, as did the Exxon lawyer and the judge above. Perhaps, however, this inability to relate is due to their predominantly Diaspora experience. The postcolonial critic working from within the Western knowledge base cannot help but invoke its distortion of those with dissimilar experience. This critique would apply as well to others writing or creating theory utilizing Western knowledge, including the author of this thesis. In this way, the Western worldview itself becomes a theoretical barrier against adequately interpreting indigenous articulations.

So, how *does* one make sense of indigenous cultural practices, even those as benign as dance, in the face of competing theories? It is important to note that American Indian scholars' notions and perspectives on cultural identity do converge with many of postcolonialism's primary tenets, often making similar, if not identical, arguments. Yet, they also go beyond their more textual or conceptually oriented theories.

I argue that by turning to American Indian and Alaska Native scholarship and writing, the critic's chances of illuminating the more elusive and deeper functions of an indigenous performance are expanded. Indigenous perspectives and worldviews are capable of conceiving of identities that are coherent yet also dynamic, as opposed to the fragmented multiplicities that emerge from individualistic and non-communal

worldviews. Indigenous scholars' worldviews allow them the unique ability to provide empowering and authenticating interpretations of identity and cultural performances, while not essentializing or romanticizing them into the hegemonic, oppressive notions pervasive in modernistic readings.

American Indian and Alaska Native criticism moves beyond many of the more simplistic understandings of identity emerging from the cultural nationalist camp. While making the argument that indigenous people had little, if any, voice in their own theoretical construction, American Indian scholars introduce the more postcolonial point that identities are not static elements, that they are adaptable. At the same time, American Indian and Alaska Native scholars' works do not evidence the purely theoretical creation of identity offered by postcolonialism. American Indian scholars provide legitimacy and authenticity to the indigenous subjects' expression of their identity. These mediated perspectives offer illuminating improvements to contemporary notions of identity and culture. A composite of their ideas is used to establish a critical perspective for this work.

The next section of this chapter explores in detail several critical positions provided by American Indian and Alaska Native scholars. These positions are formulated into a critical framework for interpreting the Gwich'in's indigenous dances in the third chapter. It is argued that this perspective reveals important elements of contemporary Gwich'in indigenous identity which arise in their dances.

Indigenous Identity Articulation: A Rhetorical Perspective

Articulation.

This section explores the notion of indigenous identity articulation. The critical positions of indigenous scholars and authors are organized into a critical perspective on indigenous identity and its articulation. Several themes occur in indigenous authors' and scholars' writings regarding cultural identity and the articulation of that identity. These themes include: the issues of power, politics, and assertion; communalism, balance, and holism; and the environmental context and centrality of place. The notion of indigenous identity articulation organizes the critical positions regarding these themes into a critical perspective. A brief summary and discussion of the notion of articulation and the above themes is the focus of this section. In the final chapter this critical perspective is used as a critical framework for the analysis of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances.

In their work, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) define articulation as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (p. 105). They locate articulation in the realm of discursive construction, arguing that "every subject position is a discursive position" (p. 115). The term is distinguished from representation in its incorporation of constitutive abilities, versus mere expression of a totality. Postcolonial authors Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1996) use the term and its definition as a constitutive, discursive practice, similar to Laclau and Mouffe's usage. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between these scholars' uses and that used in the following discussion. Articulation is used here in a sense closer to one of the definitions provided by Webster's dictionary (1996): "having parts or distinct areas organized into a coherent or meaningful whole; unified." Consequently, articulation is

used here to refer to a coherent, yet heterogeneous unification of identity that is constituted both discursively and through embodied practices.⁴

An articulation may be in its most obvious, and extremely broad form a discursive utterance – for example, the bumpersticker "I am an Indian" or the statement "We are Gwich'in." For a non-Indian, the numerous socio-political writings and popular novels by indigenous authors are the most apparent and easily accessible forms of indigenous articulation. Other forms of discursive articulation include the personal narrative, oral histories, stories, political commentary, personal dialogue, and, of course, public speeches. Discursive articulation of cultural identity is a communal experience that includes the sharing of knowledge, cosmology, or ideas with other members of the community. As such, discursive articulations are a mainstay of indigenous culture.

The importance of discursive articulation is best described in explanations of American Indian and Alaska Native oral traditions. Allen (Laguna/Sioux) (1992) explains, "The artistry of the tribes is married to the essence of language itself, for through language one can share one's singular being with that of the community and know within oneself the communal knowledge of the tribe" (p. 55). It is the "educated, specialized" members of the community, Allen claims, who pass on cultural identity and heritage through the telling of the tribal "literature." She points out that much of the tribal literature – philosophy, cosmology, and spiritual mystery – is retained by these people. The oral tradition is one of the primary forms of education in indigenous cultures. It is how, for example, one learns to use the cottonwood tree rather than willow

⁴ It could be argued that this interpretation allows a role for the existential in addition to the conceptual. It clearly strays from both the essentialist and the anti-essentialist arguments that locate identity constitution entirely in the conceptual and discursive form. As a result, it brings back, at least in part, the existentialist perspective.

or spruce for firewood, as is taught in one of the Gwich'ins' tales. However, discursive articulations, such as the oral tradition, often do not stand alone; other embodied forms of articulation, such as cultural performance, frequently accompany them.

Embodied forms of articulation include cultural performances, dance, traditions, rituals, cultural practices, subsistence activities and community gatherings (i.e., the potlatch). These other practices are rarely understood by the non-native for their complexity and dynamics. Practices, such as cultural performance, often include articulations that are not comprehensible to non-Indians, except in an aesthetic sense. Today it is common for non-Indians to interpret non-discursive articulations, such as dance and ritual, as innocent and quaint recalls of how Indians used to be. Yet, these practices have complex meanings that go beyond the more superficial understandings. Embodied articulations, such as dance, are produced within highly dynamic and complex contexts that contribute to the meaning of the practice and, thus, when decontextualized lose some of their importance. Within indigenous communities, these articulations function both within the individual and within the community to support and revitalize cultural identity. As a result, to reduce them to mere aesthetics or even acts of resistance is to "paddle in the wrong direction."

N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) uses the term articulation specifically in *House Made of Dawn* (1968), where the protagonist, Abel, characterizes his own state of being as inarticulate, expressing his inability to come to terms with his cultural identity. Momaday characterizes Abel, not as, "dumb – silence was the older and better part of custom still," but instead as "*inarticulate*" [sic] (p. 57). Silence, in this case, would have been considered a healthy articulation of Abel's cultural identity. However, his inability

to articulate his cultural identity at all reveals the loss of identity with which he suffers. This phenomenon is prevalent among those who experience cultural loss or instability. Not surprisingly, much of American Indian and Alaska Native rhetoric speaks of issues concerning their expression of an indigenous cultural identity and their capability of executing that expression. While indigenous authors use a variety of other terms or descriptions to express these issues of "voice," Momaday's term *articulation* is borrowed here as an overarching referent for the complexities occurring in indigenous identity expression. The ability to locate or recover a coherent, integrated cultural identity ultimately either creates an articulation of that identity or the inability to form that articulation. Many indigenous communities today, including the Gwich'ins, consider the ability to articulate a coherent sense of identity integral to the health of the individual and the community.

It is important to understand that the articulation of indigenous identification does not necessarily mean the indigenous person must only "walk the good red road." The Western binary of white/Indian is not as set in indigenous thought as it is in Western perception. Unlike the stoic figures cemented into decaying and rigid traditions Western anthropology invented, indigenous people tend toward flexibility and adaptability. Survival in the environmental conditions which many indigenous experience requires adaptability and creative thinking. This ability is applied to all the changing conditions they face, including the impositions of the colonial settler. It is Western rhetoric that creates the controversy – the requirement that one must choose a road. Thus, heterogeneity is a philosophical perspective common among numerous indigenous people and groups.

Early federal Indian policy targeted the indigenous person's savvy at heterogeneous living. The best example of the attack on Indians trying to live in both worlds occurred in the 1830s with the forced relocation of 16,000 Cherokee, many of whom owned property and businesses, to Oklahoma (the Trail of Tears). A more recent example occurred in the 1950s when the U.S. government revoked the Klamath Tribe's status and appropriated over two million acres of their property. As a result, the Klamath were forced to relocate and close profitable logging and other businesses. Prior to this action, alcoholism and poverty were rare in the Klamaths' community. These congressional actions demonstrate that, legally, there has never been an option that allowed the indigenous to live in both worlds (Churchill & Morris, 1992; Deloria & Lytle, 1983, 1984).

Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish) (1992) stresses the importance of bringing "two worlds together in a vital, heterogeneous unity." This ability, he argues, is "crucial...in a world where wholeness is essential and division or fragmentation causes illness" (p. 103). His observation highlights the need for both adaptability and cohesiveness in the indigenous person's world. Adaptability is a skill and philosophy that reflects the requirements of the environment within which indigenous people exist and developed. It is a cultural component that allows for movement, change, flexibility in perspective, and creativity. According to Owens, it is the "dynamic, syncretic, adaptive qualities of Indian cultures that will ensure survival" (p. 26). Indigenous heterogeneity, however, should not to be confused with the fragmented, multiplicity the postcolonialist has identified. Owens argues that "Ultimately, whereas postmodernism [or postcolonialism] celebrates the fragmentation and chaos of experience, literature by Native American authors tends

to seek transcendence of such ephemerality and the recovery of the 'eternal and immutable' elements...." (p. 20). Thus, the indigenous person's heterogeneous existence is grounded by a centered sense of self – the indigenous self that is dependent upon "a continuing and coherent cultural identity" (p. 19).

Owens (1992) also points out that "...Native Americans have fought an unending battle to affirm their own identities, to resist the metamorphoses insisted upon by European intruders, and to hold to that certainty of self that is passed on through tribal traditions and oral literatures" (p. 21). Retaining hold of the continuity that connects a present sense of self with previous generations and their lifeways is critically important to indigenous communities. An indigenous perspective allows the integration of memorial events and historical practices in the present time. However, indigenous perspectives of the notion of time diverge significantly from that of the Westerner. The relationship indigenous people have with what Westerners refer to as the past is extremely difficult for non-indigenous people to understand. Unfortunately, the past – consequently, indigenous peoples' heritage – is often trivialized due to failure to understand indigenous worldviews.

For indigenous people there is no past to overcome; to suggest such is to culminate indigenous life experience into a theoretical model of cultural evolution – a very inappropriate model, to say the least. Ancestors are also considered aspects of the present moment, not necessarily the past. Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) explains how the past is an aspect of the present. "We hear a story about a beloved ancestor from hundreds of years ago, but as we listen, we begin to feel an intimacy and immediacy of that long ago moment so that our beloved ancestor is very much present with us during

the storytelling" (as cited in Weaver, 1996, p. 24). In this case, the past is understood as existing within the present. Yet, this perspective does not deny changes and adaptations; instead, it seeks a path toward integration: "the temporal unification of the past and future with the present." It is this unification that "forges identity," argues Owens (1992, p. 99).

The State of Being Inarticulate.

Articulations of indigenous cultural identity are contextualized by a dominant culture that is predisposed to its own colonial and neocolonial inventions. The indigenous person must negotiate and navigate through the onslaught of imposed stereotypes, expectations, and requirements of the hegemonic culture. The non-native world has created a maze of double binds within which the contemporary indigenous person must navigate and form a sense of self. On the one hand, the dominant culture promotes stereotypes which insist that to be authentically Indian one must act and look the imposed version of Indianness as provided by either anthropology or Hollywood. Yet, colonialism specifically attacks both the cultural and physical expression of this form of indigenous person. For example, legislation such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 both sought to end indigenous lifeways. The more current passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act carried this process into the 1970s as it purported to extinguish aboriginal rights in Alaska. On the other hand, hegemonic stereotypes deny authentic Indianness to the indigenous person who fulfills his or her economic needs through borrowed economic forms, such as casino operations or corporate developments. Additionally, authenticity itself is attacked in contemporary theory. In this no-win context it is understandable that indigenous

people would choose unity and cohesion over the identity fractures imposed by their colonial perpetrators.

Part of the rhetoric of the west that interferes so strongly in an indigenous person's identification process is the emphasis on cultural loss, rather than survival. Instead of being understood as having adaptable, heterogeneous cultures, indigenous people are approached as either having completely "lost" their indigenous culture or being on the brink of losing it. While in some cases this may be true, quite often it is not. Louis Owens claims that what is "resisted most strongly [by indigenous people] has been the great Western myth of cultural extinction...." (1992, p. 21). In fact, many of the indigenous cultures and tribes declared extinct by the laws and politics of the United States (for example, the Klamath and the Arawak) still exist today. However, cultural extinction is not so much of a myth that its possibility may be negated. Rather, the potential for irreparable cultural impact is something to be treated with utmost political savvy and strategy. Unlike those who choose to immigrate to new cultures, indigenous people do retain the cultural, emotional, and spiritual need to remain coherent in their identities as indigenous people in order to survive ongoing processes of neocolonialism. The most obvious articulation of this desire is found in the use of specific national (tribal) affiliations.

The psychic disempowerment that is associated with losing a sense of belonging to one's own cultural heritage, and the resultant loss of identity, is reflected in many of the popular novels written by contemporary American Indian authors. The character Abel in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, James Welch's anonymous narrator in *Winter in the Blood*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's Tayo in *Ceremony* all reveal loss of

identity issues in their lives. These literary classics demonstrate how critically important it can be for an indigenous person to answer Annette Jaimes' (Juaneno/Yaqui) (1992) "all-important" question:

If one is not allowed even to determine for one's self, or within one's peer group, the answer to the all-important question "Who am I?", what possible personal power can one feel s/he possesses? The negative impact, both physically and psychologically, of this process [U.S. imposition of identification policies] upon succeeding generations of Native Americans in the United States is simply incalculable" (p. 136).

The alienation experienced due to the loss of a sense of belonging to a people or culture results in a loss of identity that can lead to both individual and group death, according to Paula Gunn Allen. Alienation is the resultant experience when an indigenous person does not, or is unable to conceive of, a connection to one's indigenous identity and community. Allen (1992) argues that "when an individual's sense of self is, like Abel's, distorted by the impact of contradictory points of view, colonization and its terrible effects will not be assuaged by mere retention of land rights or economic self-sufficiency" (p. 90). Her analysis makes clear that colonization not only affects indigenous people economically and politically. "More fundamentally," Allen asserts, "it affects a people's understanding of their universe, their place within that universe.... In short, colonization alters both the individual's and the group's sense of identity" (p. 90).

The loss of identity for indigenous people is one of the more critical ways in which their communities have become socially and individually disempowered through colonization and the subsequent neocolonial process that follows. The breakdown or instability of the psychological and spiritual health of community and its members are a result. Furthermore, as Eduardo Duran (Pueblo/Apache) and Bonnie Duran (1995) explain, due to these geopolitical processes many indigenous people in the United States

suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), partly caused by wounds inflicted today, but also passed down through the generations. The assimilation and acculturation policies which emerged as an aspect of United States colonization often based their actions upon characterizations of indigenous people that were derogatory and invalidating. Characterizations of indigenous people as "devil-worshipping" "evil" and/or "savages" led to the attempt to extinguish their cultures. Sometimes the indigenous person could not help but internalize the Western assumption that something about them was bad, causing shame.

The combination of feelings of shame with the desire to have their children survive the changes sometimes led to cultural traditions going underground, rather than being passed on to youth. For indigenous people, colonial policies and their translation in the actions of previous generations created the potential for alienation and identity loss among contemporary community members. In some cases, the generations who underwent the most brutal of the assimilation attempts are often still living and passing down the colonists' admonitions against Indian traditions and languages. In some Alaska Native communities, these elders continue to be warned against teaching certain traditions to youth by the non-native priests and educators living in the villages.

Scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. (Sioux) argues, "An Indian never questions whether or not [s]he is an Indian. The query [s]he faces is *what kind* of Indian" (1970, p. 125). This question, like never before, predominates in the politics and social lives of indigenous people in Alaska. The question appears especially when global issues of geopolitics and economics knock on the doors of rural village members. Issues of land and resource use, sovereignty and local control, health and social concerns, and education concern both

Alaskan Natives and those who wish to retain neocolonial control over their lives and lands. For indigenous communities the popular phrase "politics of identity" has both figurative and literal meanings.

The military and legislative control of indigenous identity has a centuries-old history. Currently, "Federal law gives the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner for Indian Affairs [now the Assistant Secretary of Interior for Indian Affairs] broad powers over all Indian affairs and all matters arising out of Indian relations" (as cited in Morris, 1997, p. 70). The fundamental force of U.S. legislation has been to appropriate indigenous lands and resources, while simultaneously extinguishing their indigenous cultural existence through assimilation and acculturation policies. Many of the forces leading to the genocide of indigenous people in the past remain aspects of U.S./Indian relations today. The historic conditions that led to the following statement by a U.S congressman in the mid 1800s are still in place today:

Congress must apprise the Indian that he can no longer stand as a breakwater against the constant tide of civilization...An idle and thriftless race of savages cannot be permitted to stand guard at the treasure vaults of the nation which hold our gold and silver...." (as cited in Morris, p. 67).

The 100 years of legislation following this Congressman's statement created the current economic disempowerment and physical displacement of indigenous people in the United States. They live in a reality where at any moment the colonial powers may choose to "terminate" their existence as "Indians," and thus, "extinguish" their aboriginal identity. For example, the Termination Act of 1953 abruptly ended the United States' recognition of numerous indigenous nations, such as the Klamaths mentioned earlier. Indeed, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) specifically attempted to pursue this route. ANSCA makes the following claim: "All aboriginal titles, if any, and claims of

aboriginal title in Alaska...are hereby extinguished" (Case, 1984, p. 70). ANCSA has since been challenged repeatedly in U.S. courts of law.

As a result of this history, issues and relationships of power contextualize indigenous peoples' articulations of cultural identity. For example, the word *tonguelessness* is used as a metaphor for the political muteness that indigenous people experience within the larger dominant culture. "The inability to speak is the prime symbol of powerlessness" explains Allen (1992, p. 138). In part, the political power of indigenous people as a group is limited due to the size of the population. It is important to point out, however, that these numbers – and the process by which people are designated *Indian* or not – are created by the cultural hegemony in the United States.

Jaimes (1992) argues,

The history of the U.S. imposition of its standards of identification upon American Indians is particularly ugly. Its cost to Indians has involved millions of acres of land, the water by which to make much of this land agriculturally useful, control over vast mineral resources that might have afforded them a comfortable standard of living, and the ability to form themselves into viable and meaningful political blocks at any level (p. 136).

In this context, it is not surprising that indigenous people feel mute in their negotiations for rights in the United States.

Indigenous peoples' attempts to disarm this interference of Western imperial notions center on their ideas of community and nation. Admittedly, the term *nation* is a Western concept. Whether or not communities will choose to continue to use the term or come up with their own is negotiated within these communities. However, the important question here is not whether or not indigenous communities have political unity within their own nation. Rather, the question involves how or on what grounds indigenous

communities will define themselves in the future. As Lenore Stiffarm (Gros Ventre) and Phil Lane, Jr. (Yankton Sioux/Chickasaw) argue:

The first, and perhaps most important, issue is whether American Indians will continue to allow themselves to be defined mainly by their colonizers, in exclusively racial/familial terms (as 'tribes'), or whether they will (re)assume responsibility for advancing the more general and coherently political definition of themselves they once held, as *nations* defining membership/citizenship in terms of culture, socialization, and commitment to the good of the group" [sic] (1992, p. 45).

Numerous indigenous communities in the colonial boundaries of the U.S. are choosing to define themselves as nations. They are, however, often defining for themselves what that means and simply borrowing the English term. For many, Indian identity as a particular nation has more to do with culture and belonging than with racially defined components such as blood quantum. The southeastern Alaska Haida, for example, choose to define Haida identity in such terms as to allow naturalized citizenship.

Articulation or inarticulation consequently refers to the expression of the indigenous experience within the context of a world defined literally by a hegemonic culture. As such, powerlessness emerges not only in the political arena, but also in the ability of indigenous people to define for themselves who and how they will be as indigenous people in their present and future lives. Louis Owens (1992) points out that "native cultures – their voices systematically silenced – had no part in the ongoing discourse that evolved over several centuries to define the utterance 'Indian' within the language of the invaders" (p. 7). While some communities had more control than others, for the most part indigenous people had little to say in the negotiation of fundamental elements of their social, political, environmental, and economic structures. Indigenous peoples' integration of Western technology (such as guns and snowmachines) had no

where near the impact that their loss of self-governance did, and continues to inflict. Along the same lines, while much of indigenous knowledge, tradition, and practice went underground and was passed on secretly, their outward expression in the community was severely limited due to missionary and legislative controls by the colonial culture.

The inability to act on these fundamental elements of cultural identity severely impacts these communities; their long-term effects have been dire. V. F. Cordova (Apache) (1997) argues that "it is not the 'massive and aggressive disruption of ...traditional belief systems' [citing J. Baird Callicot] from which the contemporary Native American suffers, but from the inability to *act* on the basis of his [or her] own values and world view" (p. 33).

The personal, community, and political power to define their own lives – their own cultural identities – is now considered one of the more critical issues in Indian communities today. Indigenous people simultaneously take apart hegemonic inventions enforced upon them, while also taking a part in the articulation of a coherent cultural identity. Thus, indigenous identity articulations involve issues of power and the power to define for themselves the nature of their subjectivity. As such, indigenous identity articulations are fundamentally about social and political sovereignty. Sovereignty, while used broadly here and whose definition is disagreed upon in various communities, remains one of the most important political issues in indigenous communities today (Trask, 1993).

The ability to locate or recover a coherent, integrated cultural identity ultimately is considered a prerequisite for cultural survival in the indigenous community. However, it must be understood that this identity is also inherently heterogeneous. The myth of

authenticity perpetuated by conventional anthropology worked against many indigenous communities by creating a set of standards by which to measure a person's Indianness. Today, indigenous communities are trying to negotiate their cultural identities for themselves, often merging elements of the previous generations' worlds with the worlds of today and tomorrow. Many indigenous communities, including the Gwich'in, consider the ability to articulate a coherent sense of identity integral to the health of the individual and community.

Movements toward the protection of land rights, water rights, language retention, and other cultural revitalizations are all part of an attempt to heal the community. However, as noted by Allen, loss of identity is what will ultimately lead to community death. The ability to articulate an indigenous identity is understood to be one of the primary threats to Alaska Native communities today. Without a strong sense of self-esteem about cultural identity, and the ability to articulate that identity, the indigenous person will not be empowered to work toward the human and property rights and the cultural revitalization necessary for survival.

On Becoming Articulate.

Articulation as a form of "taking a part" in the creation of cultural identity reveals the active versus passive process of indigenous cultural identity articulation. Indigenous articulation of identity has less to do with *resistance* in the postcolonial sense than it does with an *act of assertion*. Articulations are active moves toward empowered control over subjectivity, instead of a reactionary resistance to oppression as emphasized in postcolonialism. They are about the empowerment of the community and individuals to actively assert their cultural identities and asserting the sovereignty of those identities.

An example is found in the popular "fish-in," a scheduled community gathering for the purpose of fishing in areas that have time and other restrictions imposed upon them by the United States Fish and Wildlife Management agency. This action is often misunderstood by non-natives as merely a form of political protest.

In contrast, the fish-in is an act of assertion; specifically, it asserts the right to attain resources in a manner consistent with the people's ancestral cultural heritage and as one's family has done for many generations. The fact that this activity may happen to violate the colonial government's laws is not considered the primary point of the action. The point of the act is not to get arrested, as it often is in non-Indian political action; instead, the goal is simply to fish. Engagement in cultural traditions such as the fish-in, cultural performances such as dance, and various discursive articulations often assert fundamental elements of either a person's or a community's indigenous cultural identity. It is also notable that these elements sometimes reflect aspects of the community's lived experience, as the fish-in does.

As previously noted, indigenous articulations often concern issues relating to the embodiment and physical expression – the continuance – of their cultural identity. This point is perhaps a distinguishing feature of Indian or indigenous identity issues when compared to those of the postcolonial Diaspora. Consequently, indigenous peoples' articulations often "speak" of issues concerning their lived experiences. Issues concerning indigenous lived experiences include: geographical location (or relocation); subsistence sources (food, water, land, and resource rights); economics (subsistence, capitalism); language; healing practices (forms of medicine); spirituality (Indian religion issues); lifestyle (way of life); government (self or colonial); knowledge production

(education); and other issues. Whether an articulation is discursive or nonverbal in form, it often expresses various notions or elements of these indigenous lived experiences.

It is important to note also that nonverbal or embodied articulations (i.e., traditions, cultural performances, or subsistence activities) perform the function of *constituting* those same lived experiences. For example, the fish-in practice functions both as an articulation that asserts an aspect of indigenous identity and also functions to enact or constitute, embody, the practice. Although the context in which they are performed influences their interpretive meaning, these practices retain the function of embodying indigenous lived experience and should be also understood as articulations of cultural identity. Indigenous articulation, then, might be defined as: an active process that both asserts a coherent cultural identity and constitutes that identity through embodied practices. Often these practices incorporate the key values and worldviews of communalism, holism, and balance.

Indigenous worldview operates in stark contrast to Western ontological and philosophical perceptions of the world. Communalism is perhaps one of the more difficult aspects of indigenous worldview for non-natives to understand and for which to register compassion. This worldview that explains human existence as integrally connected to other people and other living beings is extremely hard for someone from an individualistic culture (such as the U.S.) to understand. Yet, it is this notion of interconnectedness that undergirds indigenous worldviews. The experience of being alone in the world is not welcomed or desired by most indigenous people. In fact, in previous years to be banished from one's community was a life threatening experience and considered one of the harshest of punishments.

American Indians "historically have preferred a culture stressing community more than individuality," explains Donald Fixico (Shawnee/Sac-Fox/Muscogee/Seminole) (1996, p. 37). A central focus for the community is its maintenance and each person has roles and responsibilities toward that end. In a communalistic culture the needs of the community take priority over the individual desires of the members. Commitments to the community and acceptance of one's responsibilities are critical for the group's survival. Many communities continue to grapple with the impact colonialism leveled at their worldview and the resultant complexities in relationships it has caused among members within the community. Regardless, for the most part this worldview is maintained as a fundamental and necessary part of indigenous lifeways.

Related to the worldview of communalism is the notion of holism. In many American Indian perspectives the idea of community does not stop with the "two-leggeds" (the human species). Rather, community is extended to the other beings that participate in their environment. Indigenous worldview understands humans as fundamentally interconnected with their lands and these non-human communities. According to Owens (1992), it is a "holistic, ecological perspective, one that places essential value upon the totality of existence, making humanity equal to all elements, but superior to none...." (p. 29). Paula Gunn Allen (1992) explains that, "the American Indian sees all creatures as relatives..., as offspring of the Great Mystery, as cocreators, as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole" (p. 59). This community, Allen argues, is the "bedrock of tribal life." To gain even a minor understanding of indigenous reality one must come to grips with this perspective. An indigenous community does not stop at the village or town's boundaries, but instead

extends into that other integral aspect of indigenous worldview – the community's *place*.

Allen reminds us that community "...necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe's universe" (p. 63).

An eloquent expression of this perspective is given by American Indian activist and poet John Trudell (as cited in Iglori, 1994, no page):

...One time I was visiting with my relatives the clouds, the mountains
the sky, the trees my relatives touched my spirit nudged it lovingly
listen to us impatient one we are forever you must remember the
gentleness of time you are struggling to be who you are...all you
must do is remember remember the people remember Sky and Earth
remember the people have always struggled to live in
harmony...[Honor Song].

Trudell's articulation expresses this important aspect of holism. Animals, plants, as well as other elements of the earth are considered persons, not separate from the community, but rather important members of the whole. As part of a whole, indigenous people strive for harmony in their relationships with all of their community members. Harmony and balance are thus key values expressed in many American Indian worldviews. Externally, harmony is sought among community and family relationships, while "balance in life is the key for harmony" (Fixico, 1996, p. 40).

According to Duran and Duran (1995), American Indians have worldviews that understand the individual as "part of all creation, living life as one system" (p. 15). Maintaining balance within this system is a fundamental aspect of indigenous culture. Ceremonies, songs, dances, oral traditions, stories, and myths all work to maintain this balance. George Tinker (Osage/Cherokee) teaches that one of the lessons of the circle, a prominent symbol common among most American Indian cultures, is the idea that "everything that humans do has an effect on the rest of the world..." (1996, p. 160).

Reciprocity has been a traditional requirement that aids in the rebalancing of the world when actions are engaged in that upset it, such as hunting or violence.

Reciprocity may be both spiritual and physical. The balance and harmony of the interconnectedness of all of creation and the world, including the creators, Earth, her offspring, and other spiritual beings, is maintained through human actions and relationships. These actions and relationships range from large ceremonies and rituals to individual behaviors such as the proper harvesting of animals and plants. For example, in learning to harvest devil's club, an Alaskan herb, I was instructed to care for the plant in a particular way and to say a prayer in order to maintain balance through reciprocal behavior.

The holistic worldview informs indigenous conceptions of identity as well as the peoples' understanding of relationships to other worldly entities and community. The balance that is sought in their relationship to the Earth and community is also sought internally. Duran and Duran (1995) explain the psychological aspects of the indigenous worldview of holism:

Holistic worldviews...allowed Native American people to experience the world as a totality of which they were an integral part....This holistic worldview allowed Native Americans to have a unified awareness or perception of the physical, psychological, and spiritual phenomena that make up the totality of human existence or consciousness (p. 44).

A "unified awareness" brings together and balances all aspects of experience. This holism includes not just the integration of mind and body, but spirit as well. All three are integrated into the indigenous person's experience of the world. "Most Native American people experience their being in the world as a totality of personality and not as separate systems within the person," according to Duran and Duran (p. 15). They do not measure

their experience of being with the "linear yardstick provided by Isaac Newton", but instead have a much more holistic sense of self (p. 203). Instead of fragmentation, the indigenous experience of being tends toward integration of spirit, mind, and body.

In contrast to the mind/body split that is pervasive in Euro-American worldview, American Indians "have a centered awareness" that follows from psychological, physical, and spiritual integration. As the "fabric of the soul," the unified awareness or holistic worldview, experienced a "soul wound," according to Duran and Duran (1995, p. 45). They explain further that it is precisely this aspect of indigenous identity that is impacted most in the process of colonization of American Indians. Once wounded, the injury is passed on through emerging mythology and dreams. Duran and Duran argue that "the manifestations of such a wound are then embodied by the tremendous suffering that the people have undergone..." (p. 45). The personal and social problems afflicting many indigenous communities today (alcoholism, suicide, violence) is argued to be a result of this wound.

Regaining a sense of interpersonal and psychological balance is no doubt critical to the healing process. Much of this process for indigenous people in North America, then, centers on issues of identity and the coherence of that identity. A central aspect of Indian post traumatic stress syndrome, for example, is a result of the soul wound and is one of the emotional pathologies that results in loss of identity and alienation. Identification with one's community forms such a substantial psychological and spiritual aspect of indigenous identity that to lose it or become alienated from it creates intense personal conflict. Allen (1992) explains that "when belonging is a central value, the

excluded [or alienated], who are likely to feel keenly the importance of the value in question, are necessarily maimed by separation" (p. 130).

The famous protagonists in the novels by Welsh, Momaday and Silko are exemplary of the acute and life threatening results of losing an identification with their indigenous community. They demonstrate the need to locate a coherent sense of identity. Part of the process of doing so requires reconnecting in some way to their indigenous community. It is a process, however, that also requires mending, reconnecting, or protecting the indigenous community's connection with its ancestral place, its environment. The bond between indigenous people and the environment, Fixico (1996) claims, "has provided security, a sense of belonging, and Native identity" (p. 37). As such, "The recovering or rearticulation of an identity [is] a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community..." (Owens, 1992, p. 5).

Indigenous peoples' articulations in North America often center on issues of place, those issues concerning their ancestral environment. Land and water rights, reservation status and use, mineral and other resource rights, land claims, environmental degradation and toxicity, and displacement off historic territories are current political issues regarding place that indigenous people in the U.S. struggle with daily. These issues are critically important to indigenous communities because they involve the community's cultural and often physical survival. As mentioned previously, indigenous people have as a primary element of their identity their cultural relationship to an ancestral land or place. This relationship is referred to frequently in the articulations of indigenous authors, scholars, and others. Tinker (1996) claims that for the indigenous person, "the land and spatiality are the basic metaphor for existence and determine much

of a community's life" (p. 164). Cordova (1997) has this explanation for this phenomenon: "Most indigenous peoples have existed in their locales for thousands of years....They have developed myths, religions, philosophies, and value systems to justify their specific adaptation to their specific circumstances" (p. 37). In light of this integration of the land into the cultural fabric of the community it is not surprising that indigenous people to a large extent identify with their ancestral places.

The experience that one is deeply connected with a place – a specific environment and geography – is unique to indigenous people. The environment is critically important to the indigenous community. Allen (1992) explains, "The earth is the source and the being of the people, and we are equally the being of the earth. The land...is not separate from ourselves...." (p. 119). It is important to distinguish between pop psychology understandings of Indians that simplify their worldview as being connected to some vague notion of "land" and the indigenous scholars' explanation. Indigenous people have developed a deep relationship with their ancestral lands – those spaces that contain their *specific* geography, waterways, burial grounds, event histories, and sacred spaces. For these communities, this relationship has created an intense identification with a specific geographic location and aspects of that environment. Even those communities that originally were migratory, their migrations occurred within a certain geographic region. Thus, much of indigenous culture reflects these relationships with land and place.

A critical way in which indigenous peoples' cultures reflect the important relationship between the environment and the people is through the myths, stories, and histories that cement a critical event into community memory. Historically memorable occasions or events are not remembered with a linear timetable, such as a date; instead

they are implanted in community memory through the association of place. Consequently, indigenous ontological notions about the experience of time and space differ vastly from Western views. This concept is not as simple as the lay interpretation that sloganizes indigenous temporality as being "circular." Some American Indian scholars explain Indian time as being "spatial," although a circularity conception that refutes an absolute end or beginning, such as that provided in Western linearity, is common. Duran and Duran (1995) argue that "spatial thinking views events as a function of space or where the event actually took place" (p. 14).

Deloria explains the epistemological process of the spatial consideration of time:

Something is observed or experienced by a community, and the symbols and sequences of the mythology are given together in an event that appears so much out of the ordinary experiential sequence as to impress itself upon the collective memories of the community for a sufficiently long duration of time.... The symbols are always representations for the concrete and the place always has precise location [sic] (1994, p. 72).

The importance of the event, then, is given to the place of its occurrence; the tradition that memorizes it uses symbolism to record the most special aspects of the event. As such, stories, traditions, and performances become not so much myths in the Western sense, but historical recollections. Understanding a particular indigenous community's stories, traditions, and cultural performances fully requires cultural knowledge and worldview usually not available to the non-native. Consequently, these articulations, as they face differing audiences (i.e., community members or non-native viewers) will be interpreted variously.

This explanation of indigenous peoples' profound interconnection with their environment explains the immense emotional, psychological, and spiritual trauma that afflicts some indigenous people due to their dislocation over the last 400 years. It also

explains how critically important it is to indigenous people today to retain or regain their lands, waters, resources, and their cultural relationship to them. United States legislation and military treatment of indigenous people have specifically attempted to sever this fundamental relationship between indigenous people and their land.

Legislative acts of removal and relocation, as well as the requirement to attend boarding schools, attempted to force, often brutally, indigenous people to give up their cultural relationship to their lands. The colonial motive to appropriate and transfer to settler ownership of indigenous property and resource rights, while extinguishing indigenous culture, is clearly stated in U.S. legislative hearings and is written about extensively by various authors (Jaimes, 1992; Churchill, 1993). Indigenous peoples' attempts to maintain their cultural identity operate within this history. Thus, the act of retaining or rearticulating such an identity properly contextualized in its historic relationship with a colonial or neocolonial power becomes both an act of political assertion and an assertion of cultural identity.

Summary.

This brief analysis of indigenous identity articulation and its various themes just skims the surface of what is a highly complex and dynamic issue. The indigenous person today will have a different experience than one of the last generation. Similarly, the political and social uniqueness of each community and its nation's history will impact those members in ways perhaps not experienced by others. However, as Louis Owens pointed out, there are numerous and compelling similarities. These similarities centralize around the common experience of being colonized indigenous people. In the United

States, articulations emerging from these communities quite often express issues concerning cultural identity.

In many cases, the community considers the revitalization of their indigenous cultures and that identity a critical aspect of their healing and empowerment process. Both the healing – in its broadest sense of personal, social, political, economic, and environmental – of the individual and healing of the indigenous community rely to a large extent on these articulations as they emerge in various forms. Indigenous identity articulations assert an identity that is contextualized by a complex political history, contemporary state of affairs, and environment. These contexts contribute significantly to the meaning of both discursive and nonverbal articulations. These articulations often assert a coherent, balanced, holistic, yet heterogeneous identity.

The various forms of identity articulation all contribute to the revitalization or recuperation of the indigenous communities' unique cultural identity. Few of these articulations stand alone as mere oratory. While Western analysis might dissect these expressions into various parts, as Paula Gunn Allen explains, oratory or even contemporary writing occurs within a much larger articulation, albeit one which is rarely researched due to its complexity. The Gwich'in indigenous dances are such an articulation. The Netsai' Gwich'ins' indigenous dances function to embody their indigenous cultural identity and to avow and assert that identity through its articulation. Similar to other forms of indigenous identity articulation, these dances reveal many of the themes of indigenous lived experience discussed earlier. The rhetorical functions of the dances – embodiment, avowal, and assertion – and the lived experiences they articulate are explored in the following chapter.

Chapter III

The Netsai' Gwich'ins' Indigenous Dances

Gwich'in dance and music is diverse and reveals the diversity and creativity of its people. They have simultaneously maintained indigenous cultural forms, while also hybridizing borrowed forms. Craig Mishler, an ethnomusicologist who researched Gwich'in Athabascan music and dance in the early 1980s, found that the type of dancing most frequently performed in the villages to be hybridized versions of various European country dances (1981). These dances, referred to by Mishler as *contact-traditional*, are forms influenced by the dances of the Orkney men, Scots, and French-Canadians who

Two youths dancing a
contact-traditional form

were employed by the Hudson Bay Company in the mid-1800s (Mishler, 1981, p. 274).

These dances are primarily jigs, square dances, and reels which have just a basic resemblance to the Orcadian and Scottish dances that influence them, having been adapted to fit Gwich'in tastes and movement preferences. Fiddle music provides the musical backdrop for these dances. Additionally, many of these contact-traditional dances, such as the Duck Dance and the Rabbit Dance, have their histories in indigenous dances but have incorporated enough Euro-American elements that

they are now hybrid. The indigenous dances and the contact-traditional are today both

considered by the Gwich'in to be important elements of their culture, though they perform different functions.

Both Mishler and the Gwich'in make distinctions between the contact-traditional form of dance and the aboriginal. However, there is no consensus on what referential terms are most appropriate for the two forms. Mishler (1981) refers to the European-informed dances as contact-traditional and refers to the Gwich'ins' original dances as aboriginal-styled. Interestingly, he argues that the aboriginal dances have "vanished" (p. x). Similar to other anthropologists, Mishler looks for authenticity in the uninterrupted and continual use of a practice through time, not allowing for colonial interruptions. This is just the type of scholarship that postcolonialists criticize. In a personal communication, Mishler (personal communication, June 16, 1993) denied that the dances observed for this study were authentic presentations of Gwich'in indigenous culture. Mishler's denial of their validity explains his failure to mention them in his dissertation even though at that time they were being taught in the Arctic Village School – the same village where his dissertation interviews were primarily held.

Though Mishler denies authenticity to these dances, the Gwich'in do not. What one calls these dances seems to depend on whom you are talking to. The Gwich'in interviewed for this thesis refer to the European-informed dances as dances or community dances, while referring to the indigenous dances as "traditional." Their distinction between the two dance styles is reflective of their distinction between their indigenous lifestyle and that of their Western colonizers. The phrase *indigenous dance* is used in this

work. Community members state that these dances were "passed down generation to generation" and express core Gwich'in worldview or cosmology.

This chapter applies the perspective of indigenous identity articulation to the indigenous dances of the Netsai' Gwich'in. It is argued that these dances function rhetorically to embody, avow, and assert their indigenous cultural identity. The Gwich'ins' indigenous identity is coherent, yet heterogeneous. Complex geopolitical processes and the Gwich'ins' ancestral relationship with their community and environment contextualize their dances and their ideas of self. It is argued first that these dances function as embodied rhetoric, working to both enact critical elements in the Gwich'ins' indigenous identity and constitute worldview and environmental elements of Gwich'in life experience. Second, these dances function rhetorically as avowals of critical components of the Gwich'ins' indigenous cultural identity. Finally, they function rhetorically as articulations that assert an identity that is under pressure by complex and powerful outside forces to be otherwise. These three rhetorical functions – assertion, avowal, and embodiment – work together to revitalize individual and community indigenous identity. In this way, they contribute to the empowerment of Gwich'in individuals and community and strengthen their potential for cultural survival.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first provides an overview of the research methods used and the participants that contributed to the inquiry. The second section offers a brief look at the political and historical issues that create the rhetorical context for the dances. In the third section, how the dances function rhetorically to embody, avow, and assert Gwich'in indigenous identity is explained.

Rhetoric, Performance Analysis, and Ethnography

This thesis has an interdisciplinary research focus. It employs rhetorical research methods, performance analysis and ethnography. This section provides an overview of the research methods and the contributors to the study. The community most involved with this study is the Arctic Village Netsai' Gwich'in. The Netsai' Gwich'in have two central communities, Arctic Village and Venetie. Both are located in the Venetie Reservation. The research was approved by the Arctic Village Tribal Government and publicly presented to other Gwich'in people at the 1994 national gathering in Old Crow, Yukon Territories, Canada. The tribe retains rights over the use of the materials gathered, including video and cassette interview tapes.

The rhetorical and historical research methods used include interviews; published articles on Alaska Native politics and history, Gwich'in politics and public statements made in congressional testimony, newspapers, presentations, and other forums, and indigenous authorship. I also researched Alaska Native and Canadian politics and history, Gwich'in history and politics, the Yukon River and Mackenzie Delta regional history of colonialism in the eastern Alaska and Western Canada areas, and I examined several ethnographies of Gwich'in people.

McKennen's (1965) ethnography on the Netsai' Gwich'in (he refers to them as the *Chandalar Kutchin*) was particularly informative. Osgood's 1936 study on the Peel River and Crow Gwich'in in Canada –which is extended to other Gwich'in with the classification of "General" – was also informative. It is noteworthy that Osgood refers to Edward Sapir's work with Johnny Fredson. Sapir recorded Fredson's language and

indirectly introduced him to Osgood. Fredson is Netsai' Gwich'in. He assisted Osgood in his ethnography at Fort Yukon. As a result, one could conclude that although Osgood's work is on the Peel River and Crow Gwich'in, much of it relates to the Netsai'.

The ethnographic research methods used were participant-observation and interviews. The bulk of the information discussed in analysis of the dances is derived from interviews, conversations, and observation. The meanings of the dances and their patterns are specifically from conversations and interviews with Gwich'in authorities. Some of the interviews were videotaped; however, most were recorded with cassette tapes. The interviews were all in English, though one interviewer's discussion was translated out of Gwich'in at the time of recording. The initial research questions that were prepared prior to my second visit to Arctic Village were changed, as they proved inappropriate. These initial questions were designed as circular questions in order to gather more objective data from the participants. However, the participants evidenced serious lack of understanding with this approach. Therefore, more direct questions were used to gather data.

The interviews from the summer of 1994 were acquired with the help of Faith Gimmell, a "co-researcher" from Arctic Village. Gimmell was included because of her interest in the project, my desire to make the project a community effort and her experience and insight as a Netsai' Gwich'in and dancer. Far more interviews were engaged than are used in this work. Some of the interviews were not meant necessarily for the purpose of this work, but more an effort to get elders and others recorded for the community. Also, the videotaped interviews conducted in 1993, although beneficial for

the community and informative, were based on a research focus that had to be abandoned after the first year due to cost and breadth.

My involvement with the Gwich'in extends back to 1988. My political involvement both generally in Alaska Native politics and more specifically in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge development issue motivated my interest in the Gwich'in. Therefore, though I call some of my activities research and participant-*observation*, much of my involvement with the Gwich'in was not so formal or designed. I assisted Sarah James on several occasions with her visits and presentations in the San Francisco Bay Area over the years of 1988-1991. In 1991, I attended the International Indian Treaty Council conference held in Arctic Village. I witnessed the Gwich'ins' three indigenous dances for the first time at this event.

In 1993, I attended the Denakkanaaga, an annual elder and youth conference primarily for Athabascan Indian tribes. I assisted in the videotaping of this conference and participated informally. During this summer I visited Arctic Village, Steven's Village, and Fort Yukon. In 1994, I accompanied the Netsai' Gwich'in dancers during a week of performances at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Following this performance, the dancers, Sarah James, and myself attended the Gwich'ins' bi-annual national gathering, held June 12-18 in Old Crow, Yukon Territories, Canada. Participation-observation methods were conducted more formally during this period. I participated in all of the week's activities, including the talking circles, gatherings and dances, a traditional potlatch, and presentations. In addition, I visited with community members, conducted interviews (sometimes accompanied by

Faith Gimmell), and visited a traditional healer who had established a mountain retreat for youth and others struggling with emotional or addiction problems. Following the gathering, Sarah James and I caught a boat ride down the Porcupine River to Fort Yukon. I gathered more interviews and visited. Finally, Sarah James and I returned to her home village of Arctic Village. I visited informally with community members, gathered more interviews (assisted by Faith Gimmell and sometimes James), and participated in village life.

Dwight Conquergood (1991) calls ethnography an "embodied practice." He argues, "...the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the processes of communication that constitute the 'doing' of ethnography" speaking, listening, and acting together (p. 181). Conquergood condones the validation of the role of the body – "getting one's body immersed in the field" (p. 180) – in acquiring the education needed to speak or write about another's cultural experience. His ideas correlate well to the ideas of those I conversed with in Arctic Village about my research methods. I was overwhelmed with suggestions to go do things if I wanted to understand them. These recommendations are consistent with a generally understood principle about teaching methods among indigenous Americans. It is accepted and understood that teaching requires watching and then doing; American Indians are generally visual learners.

As such, I was expected to watch and participate in activities in order to understand even the most basic elements of Gwich'in worldview and perceptions. For example, when I wanted Sarah James to explain subsistence hunting to me, she arranged a boat ride up the river to hunt moose, fish, gather berries, and find spruce sap. Her

lessons included stories about a wide range of things, most drenched in Gwich'in humor, and sometimes beyond my understanding. Sarah James, Faith Gimmell, and I also joined a family caribou hunting up in the surrounding hills one day. In addition, I spent several evenings (until 2:00 to 4:00 a.m.) picking blueberries with other women.

Although my own youth had included most of these activities, I believe that I gained much from simply doing them with others whose outlooks were so different than my own. Although I was raised hunting, fishing, and picking blueberries in the wilder parts of Alaska, I was not raised with an indigenous worldview. My participation in embodied practice makes up the bulk of the participation-observation methods used in this research. I performed no formal observation. Not only did I believe the method inappropriate for my goals; I also thought community members wouldn't appreciate it. However, the project did require participation in order to acquire fuller understandings (physically and philosophically) of Gwich'in life, experience, and perceptions.

The methods used in this work stray from what has been accepted as appropriate and objective ethnographic procedures once engaged by earlier researchers. However, the fields of anthropology and other social sciences are revising their approach to the study of other people today. They are working to avoid practices that distance the studied from the researcher and sometimes work to denigrate the other's experience. Conquergood claims that traditional ethnography often has not allowed coevalness – the acceptance of another as a contemporary – with the researched (1991). He argues that such a power differential continues the colonial relationship with the once oppressed. Thus, many contemporary anthropologists and social scientists are engaging in forms of

self-reflexivity in an effort to improve their relationships with others and change how ethnography is performed.

Therefore, the role of the researched in this project also strays from traditional understandings of the researched in ethnography. First and foremost, those involved with the study were considered contributors to the study, not subjects or informants. Even the interviews conducted were performed informally with only a couple of pre-designed questions. The interviews conducted in this work were more conversations, with all (including myself) offering their ideas and opinions. I was asked on several occasions to give my ideas on something, and did so. In this way, the interviews took on a dialogic essence, with those involved discussing various aspects of the topic as contemporaries. During the week of the performances at the Anchorage Museum, I was specifically asked to speak with the dancers about the dances and give my perceptions of the role of dance in society and for them. I found that this type of conversational engagement provided far richer, interesting, and deeper discussions than a standard interview.

Second, the role of the contributors to this study strays from traditional ethnographies. Sarah James, without whom this project would have been impossible, is a friend. Our relationship has included a personal friendship and a political alliance. I was initially accepted in the community in that capacity, not as a researcher. Therefore, it was critically important for me to not betray this relationship in an attempt to attain some vague form of objectivity. Following tribal approval of the project, I was accepted as someone conducting research both for them and for the purposes of this project. It is my

theoretical position that objectivity does not truly exist in social science research.

Postcolonial criticisms of objectivity complement my views.

Finally, this project sought to benefit both the Gwich'in and Western theoretical understandings of the Gwich'in. My research goals initially sought to substantiate claims made by the Gwich'in concerning their relationship with the environment. Another goal was to provide theoretical challenges to both primitivizing and romantic notions about the Gwich'in (and indirectly other indigenous people). These notions populate both environmental and development arguments regarding the development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They also continue to emerge in the Western educational system. As such, the critical conclusions of the research are intended to contribute to communication studies' understandings about indigenous people, embodied practices as rhetorical forms, and, more specifically, the Gwich'in.

Historical and Political Context of the Gwich'in

The Gwich'in comprise approximately 7,000 Athabascan indigenous people who

The Brooks Range provides a beautiful backdrop for Arctic Village.

live in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada. Their historical territory ranges from the Yukon Flats region of Alaska, north into the Brooks Range, and across the Canadian border into the Canadian Yukon and

Northwest Territories (see map, p. 155). The Gwich'in have 15-17 villages. Until recently, people did not live in stationary villages but lived a nomadic lifestyle centralized in a specific region. As a result, the Gwich'in identify themselves according to their region, with Gwich'in (also known as "Kutchin") meaning *people of*. The Netsai Gwich'in of Arctic Village and Venetie, on which this thesis focuses, means people of the mountain or hill area, specifically referring to the southeastern part of the Brooks Range.

The Gwich'in share the geopolitical experience of being colonized by the United States with the other indigenous people within the boundaries of this hegemonic entity. However, the colonization of Alaska differed from that of the lower 48 contiguous states. In Alaska, colonization was primarily conducted through economic, educational, and missionary systems. Early colonialism in the interior of Alaska did not include the establishment of military forces, as it did in the expansion across the contiguous 48 states. Continuous military presence did not become established in the Alaska territory until World War II. For the most part, colonization in Alaska was initiated through missionary and settler influences, rather than military force.

In Gwich'in territory, the Canadian based Hudson Bay Company set up trading forts along the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers, the largest and most enduring being in Fort Yukon, established 1847-1848. (For Athabaskan history see, Coates, 1993; Mitchell, 1997; Simeone, 1982, 1995; Slobodin, 1981; VanStone, 1979.) During this time Athabascans, including the Gwich'in, participated in trading with these non-natives primarily from Canada. However, it was the onslaught of non-natives moving into the interior to trap, dig for gold, or commercially fish that had the most impact on the Indian

communities. These non-natives introduced foreign diseases for which Alaskan indigenous people had no natural resistance or medicine. From the mid-1800s to early 1900s, vast numbers of Alaska Natives died due to these diseases. An additional impact that severely weakened these communities was the over-harvesting of animal populations and the use of poison by non-natives in their trapping methods. Disease, the reduction of animal populations, and the increased competition for other resources, such as salmon, made it difficult for Alaska Natives to meet their needs during these early years. The weakening of these communities allowed further colonization to take place in the form of missionaries.

Episcopalian and Anglican missions were established along the entire Yukon River, in addition to the Nenana and Tanana Rivers. The missions provided Western allopathic medicine and began the process of introducing European-American forms of education. These missions led the battle against the diseases the non-natives were spreading – the indigenous healers were simply not prepared for or familiar with these insidious diseases. The missions also cooperated with the United States government in providing European-American education, starting out as day school programs in some of the villages. The Christian missionaries held the belief that Indian "children could not be educated successfully or converted to practicing Christianity unless they were separated from their parents" (VanStone, 1979, p. 136). Thus, they lobbied the U.S. government to allow the establishment of missionary boarding schools in the area during the middle and later part of the 1800s. The U.S. government took over Indian education in 1895 and by 1930 required Indian children to leave their villages and go to boarding schools in Sitka,

Alaska and as far away as Oregon and Texas (Simeone, 1982, p. 100). Bureau of Indian Affairs' schools eventually replaced most of the missions' day schools; by the 1980s most villages had their own BIA elementary schools and high schools were being built in some villages.

While the Gwich'in were spared the intensity of colonization by military force, they have not been spared the social, psychological, environmental, and economic impacts. Similar to the other indigenous cultures colonized by the United States, the Gwich'in live in a world literally and virtually defined by a hegemonic culture. The boarding school requirement, for example, both restricted the ability and opportunity for Alaska Native elders to teach their culture to their children. The schools taught European-American language, education, and culture, while often brutally restricting the children's use of indigenous language and cultural practices. However, until 1971 the uniqueness of the Alaskan geography and the cultural integrity of these communities, to some degree, had protected many indigenous people in Alaska from wholesale loss of land and culture.

Most villages do have their own schools and increasingly, village parents and elders are insisting on youth education being a combination of Euro-American and indigenous knowledge. Many school children today are allowed time off school to help in the duties of subsistence and cultural practices. However, although the Gwich'in and other Alaska Natives have had some success in retaining their cultural heritage through the creation of a hybrid lifestyle, they are not free of threats to their indigenous ways of life. For the indigenous people in Alaska, Louis Owen's (1992) claim that "Native

cultures – their voices systematically silenced – had no part in the ongoing discourse that evolved over several centuries to define the utterance 'Indian' within the language of the invaders" rings very true, especially in the contemporary world (p. 7).

One of the most overarching and continuing threats to the indigenous people of Alaska is translated through the conceptualizations that govern their geopolitical environment. How politicians, bureaucrats, academics, and others see, think, speak and write about Alaska Natives dictates their treatment in terms of geopolitics. The term *geopolitics* is used here to refer to the legal and political issues that include a combination of economics, geography or land, and politics. Euro-American conceptualizations of indigenous people specifically promote various contemporary forms of colonialism. Numerous questions regarding indigenous identity emerge in issues concerning Alaska Natives today. Questions such as what elements make up an *authentic* Indian, what characterizations qualify as *traditional* Indian, what body of indigenous people make a *tribe* and who qualifies, and fundamental issues of Alaska Native *sovereignty* pervade Alaska Native/United States relations. These critical issues emerge especially in legal cases regarding tribal status, land or water rights, land and animal management, subsistence rights, and a host of other legal and political debates concerning the indigenous people of Alaska at both the state and national levels.

In general, the indigenous people of Alaska attempt to mitigate the neocolonial impacts of the United States and the State of Alaska through the legal systems of these colonial entities. Since the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (IRA), Alaska Natives' status as tribes has been the subject of debate among those most

interested in Alaska Native rights and territory. The IRA deferred a stake in this debate by referencing Alaska's indigenous peoples as *bands* rather than tribes – a definition that greatly reduced their legal and territorial rights according to United States law. The sovereignty status of Alaska Natives continued to be vague with the passage of the Alaska Indian Reorganization Act of 1936. In this act, Congress extended the applicability of the IRA to Alaska Natives. However, it has been argued (e.g., *Nenana Fuel Co. v. Venetie*) that because Alaska Natives were not considered "tribes" by the U.S. government, they should not be entitled to sovereignty as are the indigenous people of the lower 48 contiguous states and thus, not entitled to IRA status. (For Alaska Native law see Case, 1984.)

While this reduced status did not eliminate Alaska Natives' ability to apply for reservation status under the IRA, it did limit their ability for self-government. However, few village communities in Alaska had the political education or organization to take advantage of IRA status after the Alaska version passed. In the 1930s, the majority of Alaska Natives only spoke their indigenous languages and their communities were just recovering from years of illness and marked changes in their subsistence abilities. For this reason, there are few IRA tribal governments and reservations in the state, with the Gwich'in communities of Arctic Village and Venetie being the largest.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 built another roadblock against Alaska Native sovereignty. However, the Gwich'in communities of the Venetie Reservation (the Netsai' Gwich'in) continue to legally challenge the authority of the United States and the State of Alaska to define the sovereignty for their communities.

The Native Village of Venetie has been in one legal case after another that centered on questions regarding the Village's sovereignty and status of self-governance (e.g., *Nenana Fuel Co v. Venetie*, 1992; *Yukon Flats School District v. Native Village of Venetie*, 1990). On November 20, 1996, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals made a landmark ruling arguing that the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) did not extinguish Indian country status for Alaska Native villages. Though the ANCSA purportedly eliminated reservation status of Alaska Natives, the Venetie reservation tribal government chose to relinquish these benefits of the ANCSA in exchange for preserving their IRA status, which included the reservation lands and the IRA tribal government. The decision by the Ninth Circuit Court set a hopeful precedent for other villages in the state, as the Native American Rights Fund argues:

The *Venetie* decision represent[ed] a complete and unqualified victory for the tribes in Alaska. It eliminate[d] the argument that ANCSA extinguished the territorial powers of the Tribes.... The additional powers that tribes will have as a consequence of Indian country include the authority to tax, zone, condemn real property, regulate land use, manage fish and game..., exercise civil and criminal misdemeanor jurisdiction over tribal members, and under certain circumstances exercise civil jurisdiction over non-tribal members as well. In addition, a Tribe with "Indian country" status has the power to temporarily or even permanently expel from the community those who violate tribal laws. While the State will continue to have concurrent jurisdiction in some areas...Indian country establishes a presumption in favor of tribal authority ("Yes, there is Indian country in Alaska," 1997, p. 2).

Unfortunately, the State of Alaska appealed to the Supreme Court after unsuccessfully requesting that the Ninth Circuit Court overturn its decision. The legal precedent set by the Ninth Circuit Court would have allowed Alaska Native communities the same rights

as the tribes in the contiguous U.S. (those listed above). However, the Supreme Court overturned it in February of 1998.

The ANCSA purportedly extinguished aboriginal rights to the land, including the subsistence needs of hunting and fishing. Sovereignty activists in Alaska accuse the ANCSA of attempting to commit cultural genocide and force assimilation upon Alaska's indigenous peoples. At an indigenous peoples' tribunal held in Anchorage, Alaska, in March of 1997 several resolutions were created regarding the ANCSA native corporations that reveal many Alaska Natives' fundamental distrust and disappointment with the act. These resolutions were:

That, all further extinguishment of ANCSA lands through sales and land transfers must be frozen and all stock devaluations ceased. That, to preserve Alaska Native cultural identity and heritage, subsistence lifeways, spirituality, and ancestral lands we must resist appropriation of our heritage by the corporations and the state or federal government. That, ANCSA was made without our consent and does not recognize our full sovereignty as Alaska Native indigenous peoples. That, ANCSA was an act of deception and attempts to exterminate Alaska's indigenous people, which includes extinguishing their lands and thereby eliminating our resources for our livelihood, cultural heritage, social and spiritual survival. That, we assert our right to hunt, fish, trap without governmental or state interference and restrictions. That, we assert our fundamental sovereignty and self-determination. That, we give full support to Senator Halford and his recommendation to investigate the ANCSA corporations (Indigenous Tribunal, 1997).

The language of ANCSA clearly reveals, in the least, extreme naivete about Alaska Natives and appears to attempt to commit conceptual colonialism. ANCSA mandated the creation of corporations to manage Alaska Native money and lands acquired through the Act. It imposed an Euro-American form of property and monetary management upon people who at the time, for the most part, were unknowledgeable about implementing the

form due to worldview, language, and conceptual differences. This is not to say that there were no Western educated politically astute Alaska Natives at the time. However, these people primarily live in the large urban cities of Fairbanks and Anchorage, while the majority of Alaska Natives maintain their subsistence lifestyles in the villages.

The United States Congress chose the corporate model instead of the tribal government model of the IRA specifically because it believed the latter to be "an impediment to assimilation" (Berger, 1985, p. 6). Although ANCSA is hailed by non-natives as an unprecedented win for indigenous people in the United States, it has, in fact, been an unprecedented loss. ANCSA removed from indigenous legal ownership Alaska Natives' ancestral lands and placed that ownership in the hands of corporations set up by the U.S. government. Out of approximately 60,000, fewer than 600 Alaska Natives were allowed the opportunity to vote on the passage of the Act, with the majority of village residents having only vague and unspecific information about the purpose or goals of the legislation. The ANCSA gave a mere 10 % of the land – 44 million out of 365 million acres – to the regional and village corporations it had established. For compensation of the 90% of the land and resources appropriated by the U.S., the corporations received a token three dollars per acre, \$962.5 million to be split among 13 regional corporations and 220 +/- villages.

Suffice it to say that after 25 years few Alaska Natives actually benefited from the Act and the preponderance of the population continue to live below poverty levels. Adding insult to injury, Alaska Natives still do not have full title to their lands, which leaves the future of their indigenous cultures, lifestyles, and identities at risk. The lack of

self-governance and the fiscal right to tax non-native companies using Alaska Native villages for business (discussed previously) pours salt on the wound of ANCSA. The hegemonic conceptualizations and inventions imposed by the Alaska IRA, the ANCSA, and the ANILCA are just one form of colonialism still challenged by the Gwich'in and other indigenous people of Alaska. Resource and land use practices by the United States, the State of Alaska, non-native corporations, and private parties become yet another form of colonialism that threatens the sovereignty and cultural survival of these people.

In addition to fighting for the sovereignty rights allowed other indigenous people in the lower 48, the Gwich'in are fighting for protection against environmental impacts which they believe would ultimately threaten their way of life. While the Gwich'in do live a primarily hybrid lifestyle today, they remain primarily dependant upon their environment for food and cultural continuity. Environmental contamination (from a variety of point and non-point pollution sources) poses a current concerning threat. These impacts include: the radioactivity transported through the air from releases elsewhere or from sunken submarines in the Arctic ocean; the use of agent orange to clear pathways for oil and gas pipelines; mercury and arsenic trailings from oil development and gold mining; U.S Army burials of toxic chemicals such as DDT; barrels of PCBs, DDT-toxaphene, as well as other insecticide and pesticide chemicals dumped in lakes during the building of the Alaska Highway; and the results of oil development which include air pollution and oil spills.

These remnants of non-native use of the land and resources severely impact indigenous people's ability to sustain a healthy subsistence lifestyle. Most of these

environmental impacts have been hidden from public knowledge by the agencies responsible for them. Having never been warned or informed about many of the toxins used or spread in their environment, the people for the most part find out about these impacts through the degradation of their environment and their own physical health. These issues as well as other environmental concerns are at the forefront of Gwich'in activism in both Canada and Alaska.

One such issue that the Gwich'in continue to challenge is the proposed oil development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The Refuge is located in the northeast corner of Alaska and borders Canada; Arctic Village lies on its southwest border. The Gwich'in on both sides have organized a political campaign to fight for the caribou that depend on and calve in the Refuge. They have fought congressional legislation to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil development for over twenty years. Save for a couple of the villages, the preponderance of Gwich'in people depend on the Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH). This herd calves in the small 100-mile area proposed for oil development. James argues:

...That place is sacred, cause that is the one place [the Porcupine caribou] go every year to calve. Any changes in [the caribou's] migratory route or changes in that place [the coastal plain of ANWR] are going to effect the caribou. And that is going to effect the Gwich'in people, not only in Arctic Village...we have 17 villages that depend on that herd, between Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada. And we're all related, same language, same culture...(personal communication, July 23, 1993).

The Gwich'in believe strongly that if they lose the caribou they will lose not only their primary source of food, but a central component of their cultural identity. The loss of such an important aspect of their subsistence and cultural needs is argued to lead to the

loss of Gwich'in culture, and even lives. Trimble Gilbert, a previous chief of Arctic Village and the pastor, states that the "caribou is our main diet. Without it, the Gwich'in will die" (Reed, 1989, p. 51).

These concerns led the Gwich'in in both Canada and Alaska to organize their communities and to bring them together politically and socially, identifying themselves as the Gwich'in Nation. It was this issue that brought them together for the first time in over 100 years. In 1988, leaders and others from all of the 17 Gwich'in villages descended upon Arctic Village for a week-long gathering to discuss this and other critical issues. It is said that 40% of the time was spent on discussion and presentations, another 20% on dining, and the last 40% on dancing. Locating empowerment and unity in their identification as Gwich'in, these communities have presented a politically powerful opposition to further destruction of their homelands. They have continued to meet every two years.

The Gwich'in do not exist in a post-colonial state, but one which is characterized by neocolonialism. The current political and geopolitical realities of the Gwich'in people indicate that they are still experiencing the hegemonic forces of neocolonialism. Political maneuvers by the United States and the State of Alaska continue to be made in an attempt to invalidate the indigenous sovereignty of the Gwich'in. Conflicts over land, water, and subsistence rights continue to strip indigenous people of their fundamental human rights to cultural survival, even in the literal sense. Assimilation also still remains a theme throughout school, health, and other social institutions. These impacts on the cultural integrity of the Gwich'in are met with various levels and forms of opposition. The

Gwich'in continue to pursue legal challenges to existing hegemonic laws that threaten their cultural integrity. They also present themselves as an organized, powerful group that works to challenge attempts to damage or impact their environment.

The non-Gwich'in world that continues to knock on the Gwich'ins' cultural doors urges transition away from indigenous economies and resource attainment. Yet, the development models suggested – oil development and mining, for example – would require destroying the environment in which they live and would be temporary at best. On the other hand, subsistence practices and economies have been impacted enough to be simply unable to meet all of the Gwich'ins' economic and resource needs under current United States laws. This double bind – one that seems to pit one "world" against another – is a challenge facing most of the Gwich'ins' villages. According to Alaskan popular media (television, radio, and print), the successful native is the corporate native – not the native living in the village successfully carrying out a traditional subsistence lifestyle. Television images persuading them to buy Coca-Cola, drive a fast car, and catch the "upwardly mobile" escalator to corporate success work to confuse Alaska Native youth and others.

However, there are few roads to drive a sports car in Arctic Village, soda pop contributes to the high rate of diabetes in the villages, and catching the escalator to success requires leaving the village and abandoning many, if not most, of their cultural traditions and community. Yet, many Alaska Native youth and even some adults end up confused about their futures and ashamed of who they are. Unfortunately, this kind of psychological stress and confusion has led to a high rate of drug and alcohol addiction, as

well as suicide, among Alaska Native youth. Faith Gimmell of Arctic Village argues, "When we lose our identities, we have nothing left. And the people that don't know their culture and stuff, start drinking, and doing drugs, and start dying off... Once you learn how to respect the land, you learn how to respect other people; it's just natural to respect yourself, and if you respect yourself you aren't going to go and get yourself wasted..." (personal communication, July 27, 1993). With outside sources denigrating indigenous lifestyles and cultures, it is imperative that these communities locate ways to counteract these effects both practically and psychologically.

It is not surprising then that Gwich'in economics, resource attainment, and other community issues are salient topics of discussion at the Gwich'ins' national gatherings. Statements such as "We have to go back to the land" (Alice Frost, 1994) reflect the common desire to maintain an indigenous lifestyle that includes indigenous economic and resource attainment, such as hunting and fishing. However, others make arguments for the development of minerals or tourism. Overwhelmingly, the Gwich'in are insistent on the preservation of Gwich'in indigenous practices, especially the maintenance of subsistence. These discussions reflect both the centralizing force in Gwich'in identity and its inherent heterogeneity. The consensual agreement to fight for the caribou in their opposition to oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge reveals their core sense of identity as Gwich'in indigenous people.

Identity articulations such as "We are caribou people" ground their identity with a coherent, unified centered sense of self, one that is reflective of their indigenous heritage. Yet, these articulations are accompanied by others that reflect their ability to incorporate

non-native elements in order to provide for the community's future. Caroline Frank of Arctic Village, argues, "You have to know who you are, who you really are..." but being Gwich'in does not mean you "have to live in a skin hut" and migrate with the caribou (personal communication, July 28, 1994).

Having a strong sense of identity as Gwich'in is very important for the people in the villages who retain the primarily subsistence lifestyle of their heritage. However, the global village that intersects with the Gwich'in village community requires fluency in English and certain elements of Western education. While the communities' psychological, emotional, and spiritual health rely on a strong sense of identity as indigenous Gwich'in, the non-native world of politics, legal and property rights, and government all require heterogeneity.

Analysis of the Gwich'ins' Indigenous Dances

The Gwich'ins' indigenous dances are just one of a variety of rhetorical articulations that emerge in the Gwich'ins' negotiation and assertion of their indigenous cultural identity. For many Netsai' Gwich'in, the dances are an important contributor to their process of empowerment. The dances present a coherent, centered sense of self that reflects the continuity of their indigenous heritage. Paula Gunn Allen (1986) argues that "the Native American view, which highly values maintenance of traditional customs, values, and perspectives...has the advantage of providing a solid sense of identity and lowered levels of psychological and interpersonal conflict" (p. 210). Allen points out that for "traditionals," rejecting one's cultural traditions, roots, language, and people is a sign of loss of identity and a result of colonial oppression. The roots of oppression are found,

Allen claims, "in the loss of tradition and memory because that loss is always accompanied by a loss of positive sense of self" (p. 210).

Cultural practices retain those elements that specifically embody and express fundamental elements of a community's indigenous heritage and worldview. When these elements are avowed, imbued with pride, and celebrated, the community and the individuals within that community are allowed the opportunity to experience pride and a positive sense of identity. Furthermore, cultural practices and performances also function to strengthen the identities of those who are already committed to their indigenous identity. Thus, the rhetorical functions of revitalizing, avowing, and asserting indigenous cultural traditions, practices, and performances contributes to the empowerment of both the individual and the community.

Embodiment and Constitution of Indigenous Identity

Perhaps through the gaze of a museum audience these dances might be perverted into a mimetic display of an antiquated past. Yet, the Gwich'in's indigenous dances embody far more complex meanings. Properly contextualized in their geopolitical framework, the fact that these dances have never been interpreted, until very recently, as benign presentations of indigenous culture forces recognition that they should not be so considered today. A performance that has historically been repressed and disparaged cannot emerge in the present as some purely aesthetic, entertaining form. All performances have contexts and histories behind them. Thus, the geopolitical history of the dances' performance disables such an interpretation. Both these dances and the lived

experiences articulated in them defy two centuries of colonial attempts to assimilate that identity.

The embodied rhetoric in the Gwich'in's indigenous dances is located in their expression of the lived experiences in the performance. Consequently, performing the dances does not simply recall these core elements of Gwich'in identity; it re-claims and reasserts them into the present reality of Gwich'in life. As such, they become rhetorical forms that articulate identity. As Helen Gilbert (1992) explains, "by encoding identity through movement... dances function as modes of empowerment for oppressed characters..." (p. 139). Asserting an identity that has been the target of oppressive, hegemonic forces is one approach used to diffuse some of the psychic and cultural violence perpetuated by these forces. These dances, as rhetorical statements of identity, work to help in the empowerment of both the individual dancers and their communities.

As discussed earlier, cultural performances function rhetorically to construct and maintain identity. These dances are one avenue toward understanding one's cultural identity. At the same time, they are a way to enact or constitute that identity. Thus, they function as both means and ends toward the avowal and assertion of their indigenous identity. Consequently, a significant part of the rhetoric of the Gwich'in's indigenous dances is embodied. The experiences embodied in the Caribou Dance, for example, reveal the Gwich'in's centuries-old relationship with caribou and the land. Fundamental worldview and cosmological values of the Gwich'in are embodied in the Skin Hut and Raven Dances, respectively. Thus, the dances perform the epistemological function of providing one way individuals may come to know fundamental elements of Gwich'in

knowledge, history, and cosmology. They also function simultaneously to enact and perpetuate these critical elements of Gwich'in cultural life. As such, the dancers and the community contribute to the survival and continuity of core elements of Gwich'in indigenous identity. Each of the three dances embodies different cultural elements critical to the Gwich'ins' indigenous identity. Explanation of the rhetoric embodied in each of the three dances follows.

Vadzaih Ch'adzah – The Caribou Dance.

The Gwich'ins' beliefs about and relationship to the caribou are core elements of their indigenous identity. This relationship is expressed in part by the statement, "We are caribou people." Their relationship with the caribou goes back at least 1500 years, with archeological data documenting human presence in Gwich'in territory as far back as 25,000 years:

Work done at sites occupied up to 1500 years ago near Old Crow, Yukon Territory, documented a subsistence economy centered primarily on the interception of spring and fall migrations of caribou...The high percentage of caribou bones...show the importance of caribou and its continuity over many years... (Gwich'in Steering Committee, 1988, p. 3).

Frederick Hadleigh-West (1963) also documents this historical relationship and its centrality to the culture of the Gwich'in in his dissertation "The Netsai Kutchin: An Essay in Human Ecology." Supporting these Euro-American scholars' claims, the Gwich'in cite their oral tradition, which includes stories, myths, and history about their relationship with the caribou. Their oral tradition documents not only a subsistence relationship, but also a complex cultural tradition that centers the caribou in their spiritual, cosmological, and philosophical beliefs and values.

Sarah James, of Arctic Village, argues the Gwich'in are "caribou people": an articulation of identity that emphasizes the critical importance of the caribou to the Gwich'ins' cultural health and physical survival. The communal social organization of the Gwich'ins influences the use and distribution of the animal. Caribou is shared along a network of relatives, community members, and other village communities in trade for other resources, such as salmon. The management of the caribou is performed through the oral tradition, cultural rules, elders, and, today, tribal law. Waste is disapproved of and governed by tribal rules. Beliefs and elders mandate proper spiritual and physical treatment of the caribou both before and after a kill. A general philosophy of both stewardship of the caribou and harmony with the land informs their relationship with the caribou.

The Caribou Dance is structured to imitate the behavior of the caribou. In the fall, the Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH), the herd most relied on by Arctic Village and Venetie, migrates southeast into Canada from the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In the spring the caribou migrate back toward their calving grounds in the Refuge on the Arctic coast of Alaska, crossing the dangerous Porcupine River. According to village hunters, the caribou bulls tend to be the group leaders and decide where the herd will sleep and graze. In order to sight predators, caribou sleep and rest in areas of open space, such as hilltops, frozen lakes, or meadows. During the night one or more bulls will take turns staying awake to keep watch over the herd. When the caribou awaken in the morning they randomly move out to graze and start their migration again. Toward the middle of the day, the caribou will start creating formations, begin to move

or less line up, and begin to move again. In the evening, they graze again before lying down to rest. At this time the caribou communicate with each other through vocal sounds and rubbing their antlers together or on bushes. The clicking sounds of antlers are a common form of communication among members of the deer family. Finally, when it is time to sleep, the herd circles around and proceeds to lie down. The Caribou Dance is patterned after these particular caribou behaviors.

The dancers begin the Vadzaih Ch'adzah with a pattern of moves imitating the random migration and feeding behavior of the caribou. The next pattern in the dance

The Vadzaih Ch'adzah: moving into formation.

imitates the afternoon caribou behavior with the dancers moving into formation and following a lead dancer who is acting the part of the bull. The lead dancer is always a male,

usually the eldest or most experienced dancer. The third pattern has the dancers forming a circle and making caribou sounds – clicking sounds imitating the sounds of antlers and caribou vocalizations. Finally, the last pattern concludes the set with the dancers lying on the floor as if to sleep. The accompanying song, backed by drums, tells how the creator – Nan Gwiłtsaii – "told it to do so" or "made it do it that way."

The Vadzaih Ch'adzah has roots in the shamanistic aspects of the indigenous spirituality of the Gwich'in. While this thesis does not fully explore these elements of

the dance, it is important to note some of its more cursory spiritual functions. The functions discussed in this thesis are explained to both native and non-native audiences prior to the performance of the dance. All three of the dances – the Caribou, the Raven, and the Skin Hut – are prayers. In the case of the Caribou Dance, the prayer is to the creator and the caribou. The dances say a prayer for the support and continued health of the caribou and the Gwich'in people. Isaac Ross is an adult dancer in Arctic Village and is grandson of elder Isaac Tritt who taught the dances to Ross and other youth. Ross has a deep connection to the spiritual function of the dances,

I don't dance just for the fun of it, I dance for the people and for the creator and I dance for the caribou, because I want the caribou to last maybe another 100 years. There's a lot of other dances, there's a lot of other indigenous people, they'll probably understand me. We're fighting for them [the caribou], so we dance for them. When I dance, I dance for the caribou so they can last longer and I don't just dance for them, I dance for the environment. They put a washeteria in here and they put the sewer in there and it polluted that creek down there. I used to fish in that creek; I don't fish there anymore. People will destroy what the creator made for us and they will pay for it in the next life (personal communication, July 25, 1993).

Ross feels very strongly about the spiritual and functional importance of the dance. It is interesting to note that he does not restrict the meaning of the dance to just the caribou, but to the entire environment. This spiritual function is still considered by many an important and primary function of the dance, regardless of the fact that the dances may be shared with non-Gwich'in.

This dance particularly, articulates some of the heterogeneous qualities of Gwich'in indigenous identity. In previous times, only men would perform the Vadzaih Ch'adzah. Shamanism was the responsibility for only a few select men historically, though sometimes men with wealth (large and effective caribou corrals, for example)

might also be considered shamans. Healing and curing practices were the responsibility of women (Hadleigh-West, 1963; S. James, personal communication, July 28, 1994). The distinguishing factors between shamans and women healers are that the former used spirits along with other medicinal or healing elements, while the latter engaged in medical practices without the use of spirits. As such, women would not have performed Caribou Dance. Today, the Vadzaih Ch'adzah has been adapted to meet the needs of the community of this era. Women and men participate together in this dance, although a man or an experienced male youth always leads.

Due to the shamanistic elements of the dance, there is much controversy over when, where, and to which audiences the Vadzaih Ch'adzah should be performed. For example, Caroline Frank and Faith Gimmell both discussed the importance of perhaps restricting the dance to Gwich'in audiences and selected times. One concern is that because the Vadzaih Ch'adzah is "spiritually stronger" it may be that by performing it repeatedly and to non-Gwich'in audiences the dance will lose its value (Frank, personal communication, July 28, 1994). On the other hand, the dance is claimed to express core and critical elements of Gwich'in identity; thus it works as an ideal rhetorical articulation of these for the purpose of educating non-natives about Gwich'in culture. With the current threat to the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, this dance functions as an excellent articulation of the people's relationship to the herd and caribou in general (F. Gimmell, personal communication, July 28, 1994).

Historically, the dance was performed only in times of emergency, when the Gwich'in were having a "hard time," or in preparation for the hunting of the caribou. The

Caribou Dance is understood to be sacred; previously, probably for reasons discussed above, the dances were performed only when an especially strong prayer was needed for the health of the community or caribou. Sarah James describes this purpose of the dance as such:

The only time [the dances are danced is when the hunters] prepare to go out hunting or in the wintertime when we're having a hard time. These [dances] are not for the good times, they are for the hard times. Sometimes when the caribou don't come around, we don't see caribou for a long time, [such as during] a famine, they get together and sing and dance for the health of the caribou and to make caribou come, or to keep [the caribou healthy]. [They dance] mostly winter time when they have more time, they don't do it for good time or celebration, that's how come it meant more to us and that's why it is sacred, we just don't want any disrespect...(personal communication, July 27, 1993).

Several elders in Arctic Village recounted an example of a hard time to me. It occurred just after the turn of the century when disease had hit the village and there was a concurrent shortage of caribou. In those days, the Gwich'in migrated to various areas where the caribou would be. A lengthy illness in the community would have prevented this activity, and if the caribou were not migrating close enough for easy reach, their subsistence needs would have been severely impacted. Additionally, the Netsai Gwich'ins' traditional territory near the Brooks Range and in the Refuge is a significant distance from the Yukon River where the missionaries had set up camps and hospitals.

The survivors of the disease and famine were eventually forced to leave their traditional areas and seek help. They miraculously made their way to Fort Yukon, a significant distance away, where they were taken in by this other Gwich'in community, fed and nursed back to health. This remarkable story of survival and community

interconnectedness is provided as an example of when an appropriate time would be to perform the Vadzaih Ch'adzah.

It is interesting to note that this story is referred to frequently as citation of the commitment and support each of the separate Gwich'in village communities has to each other, thus revealing the Gwich'ins' communal orientation. In fact, the commitment that Fort Yukon has shown for the survival of the PCH in terms of fighting for wilderness designation of the Refuge and opposing development legislation again reflects the deep connections the Gwich'in have with their other villages and members. Fort Yukon is one of the few Gwich'in villages located on the Yukon River; thus its subsistence needs are equally met by salmon and they are not as dependent upon the caribou as other villages. The only way they get caribou specifically from the Porcupine caribou herd is through trade with other villages. Quite clearly, the Vadzaih Ch'adzah takes on an even more compelling meaning given this history of famine, survival, and Gwich'in connectedness.

The contemporary controversy over the performance of the Vadzaih Ch'adzah reveals the important role the dance has in the reclamation and revitalization of core elements of Gwich'in identity. While many aspects of Gwich'in spirituality were retained by elders in the community and even integrated into their hybrid Christian spirituality, the historic chastisement of shamanism had a tremendous impact on the Gwich'ins' expression of their indigenous spirituality.

Today, the reclamation of such dances as the Vadzaih Ch'adzah indicates that numerous members of these communities are making a movement toward the validation and honoring of their indigenous spirituality. This movement demonstrates enormous

strength of character and true fundamental pride in the Gwich'in's indigenous culture. Much of the impact of colonialism centers in people's resultant experiences of shame, loss of self-esteem, and loss of pride in their ancestral identities. To be able to revitalize a tradition previously disparaged as "evil" shows tremendous progress toward healing these tragic consequences of oppression and community disempowerment.

Deet'rya Ch'adzah – The Raven Dance.

The raven is another animal that plays a central role in the worldview and culture of the Gwich'in. Again, the dance is patterned after the behavior of an animal. Raven stories are common purveyors of history, cosmology, theology, and general elements of worldview. The raven in some stories is a creator of the Gwich'in cosmos, serving as a theological deity. In yet other stories he is the trickster, always getting the best of his human counterparts. Sarah James (personal communication, July 27, 1993) relates an example of this type of raven story:

Like one time they finally got fed up with [the raven] and they captured him and told them make a big bonfire and make me a big swing and swing me and throw me in the fire, that's how you should get rid of me. So the people did that and they made a big swing and they made a big fire and they put him on the swing, they swing him and they push him off the swing and off he flew, he flew away, you know he can fly, and they couldn't even figure that out.

This humorous tale teaches essential worldview values, but like many indigenous stories has humor and mischief as part of its entertainment.

In this case, the story teaches that humans are not smarter than raven, or other animals. In addition, this story relates that some animals, though they may look and act like they might be on a lesser scale than the human – and certainly the scavenger raven

does – are not necessarily so. As James (personal communication, July 27, 1993) explains,

For some reason in our religion stories, story that is supposed to teach us a lesson, the character is always raven, in those stories raven [has] got control over people...[He is] dominant over the people and that's how that story always goes. The stupid one is the human and raven always outsmart them.... What they're trying to prove, the lesson part, is that he still is important to the earth just as much as the human or we're not dominant over him and he's part of the creation and he has an important role also, not only us. That [is the] kind of relationship we have with the animals, even raven, even a scavenger, and that[s] how come they have raven story...and [in] those stories, he's dominant over human...and anyone can figure it out.

James, as well as others, suggests these stories are one way to teach humility and holism; to teach that one should never consider themselves better than other animals, because animals and plants are equal to humans. Raven also teaches that in the grand scheme of things humans may be at the whim of other animals that have different types of power. In fact, in Gwich'in worldview some animals (such as bear, otter, and wolverine) have such tremendous powers that people must show proper respect if they are to escape their vengeance or retaliation. In addition to humility and the values of a holistic worldview, these stories teach respect and proper treatment of animals to Gwich'in youth or those unfamiliar with deeper elements of Gwich'in cosmology and worldview.

The Deet'ya Ch'adzah contributes to this body of raven related worldview stories, but includes another function performed by these stories. Another aspect of raven stories shared by both James and Caroline Frank is the role they play in creating a "work ethic" among youth and others. Raven gets his food for free essentially, honing in on others' kills and being bold enough to sit down next to virtually any animal and become a

nuisance. It is even told that he can irritate a bear enough to cause the bear to walk away from a fish. Frank (personal communication, July 28, 1994) explains this aspect of the Deetrya Ch'adzah: "Raven Dance has a meaning to our culture because the raven keeps people working...the raven keeps the people who are lazy really working. Because if they are lazy and they leave the caribou up on the mountain, the raven will eat it all...so they have to work to get up there and get back." According to Sarah James, when a hunter gets a caribou he often has to leave some of the animal while carrying other parts back to their camp. While the hunter is away, ravens move in to feed on the caribou. Usually there is just one raven; when that raven has had its fill it calls other ravens to the find. "Pretty soon," says James, "a whole bunch of raven [are] there." While the ravens are feeding they make a lot of noise fighting over the meat and "playing" around – the raven is also a clown.

The Raven Dance emphasizes these behaviors in the pattern of the dance. The

The Deetrya Ch'adzah

dancers dance around a person playing a dead caribou. Some of the movements imitate the raven eating on the caribou, so the dancers bend over and take turns "pecking" at the caribou person. Often the raven will start with the eye of the caribou, the easiest access point if the animal has not been skinned or the skin opened by some other animal. Therefore, in the dance the dancers may at times bend over the head of the supine

dancer. The dancers continue this activity for the entire dance, moving in a clockwise direction. At some point during the dance, a person playing a hunter returns to his "caribou" and the raven dancers "fly" off. But when the hunter dancer leaves again; they come back to clean up the scraps of the kill, and the pattern begins again.

James (personal communication, July 27, 1993) explains the accompanying song as having a part that says, "He should have done that already or they should have thought about that already," and ending with a "silly word at the end...it mean[s] craziness I guess." The hunter, in other words, should already know that the raven would come in to steal his food when he leaves and so he should not have left it there. Essentially, the dance is another raven trickster tale, telling about how the raven will outsmart humans if they are not careful. However, the Deetrya Ch'adzah also honors the bird, even though the raven steals the hunter's food and even though the bird is "just a scavenger." The Raven Dance teaches others in the community, especially youth, how interconnected they are with the animals and birds of the land and that one must have respect for other animals, even the raven.

Both the Raven and the Caribou Dance express the intimate relationship the Gwich'in have with their natural environment and the depth to which they incorporate the natural world into their spiritual and cultural lives. Both are sacred animals because of the particular relationship the Gwich'in have established with them over the centuries. Thus, both are integrated as central features of the Gwich'ins' worldview and cosmology.

The communal nature of this worldview naturally extends community relationships to non-human elements of the landscape. In the Gwich'ins' stories these

animals have many human characteristics, including the ability to speak. Part of the Gwich'in's oral history teaches of a time when people were able to speak with these animals. As time passed humans lost that ability. Descriptions of some recent shamans, however, recount that they still had this ability. Animals, plants, and other natural phenomena are considered community members with significant functional, psychological, and spiritual roles in that community. Thus, the caribou in Gwich'in worldview cannot be reduced to the Euro-American notion of "resources" – a point very difficult to get across to those non-natives creating subsistence regulations. In a similar vein, the raven can not be reduced to the Euro-American notion of bird; the term simply does not come close to describing the raven's role in the Gwich'in's holistic community.

Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adzah–The Caribou Skin Hut Dance.

The Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adzah also functions as embodied rhetoric in the constitution and enactment of the Gwich'in's indigenous identity. Caribou skin huts were one form of housing used by the Gwich'in. They also used a more permanent log home

Log home; new high school in background.

structure and combined moss and log structures. Today, log homes are most common and reflect the more permanent village status mandated by both the ANCSA and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (To

qualify for ANCSA one had to belong to a permanent village.) The skin hut could be

taken apart and transported by sledge to a new location. Where the Gwich'in resided depended upon the seasons and they would move accordingly. While the Netsai Gwich'in primarily relied on the caribou for subsistence, they also used fish, birds, and other smaller and larger mammals. Thus, fishing season required moving to a fish camp (generally the same location year to year), migratory bird season to another location, and caribou season, yet another (James, personal communication, July 27, 1993; Osgood, 1936). Gwich'in territory is dotted with vast numbers of the alternative residences of those affiliated with that region. Therefore, the Skin Hut Dance functions to recall that particular relationship with the land and seasons.

Skin huts were made from willow branch poles which had caribou skins stretched over them. The skins used for summer housing had either the fur removed or the fur was turned to the outside to repel rain. Those used in the winter retained the caribou's fur, turned inward. There was a hole in the top to let the smoke of the fire out. For further ventilation, there was a small hole in the opposite side of the hut from the door so that when opened the air would be driven up toward the hole in the top, pushing the smoke out. A mound of dirt raised the fire off the floor and also allowed less smoke to remain in the hut. A flap of skin (bear, caribou, or rabbit) was placed over the entry of the hut. A smaller version of the skin hut was also used to smoke meat and hides, and for bathing (sweat huts) (James, personal communication, July 27, 1993; Osgood, 1936).

In the Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adzah the dancers' movements imitate human behavior, in contrast to the other two which reflect animal behavior. The dance is performed in a circle and the dancers move around the circle in the direction of the "life circle,"

clockwise. James (personal communication, July 27, 1993) explains that, in order to keep people from running into each other, they would move around the hut in a clockwise fashion. She further explains that the dancers' actions mostly represent the coming and going of people in the skin hut. For example, one movement refers to the

The Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adza.

door of the skin hut opening, while another, the closing. The dancers' movements of stopping and turning to the center of the circle demonstrate the closing of the skin hut door. The

continuation of the movement around the circle represents opening the door. The accompanying song instructs the dancers and their movements. Thus, when the singers call out "he," the dancers turn to the center and dance in one place; when the "he" is sung again, they move clockwise once more.

Unlike the other two dances, the Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adzah is an "open" dance. Near the end of the performance, the dancers invite other people from the audience in to dance with them. It is the only one of the three dances that allows others to join in without preparation and it is the only one that allows non-natives to participate. James says the opening and shutting of the door means "you are welcome into our home – [a] kind of hospitality." The Gwich'in people, says James, "are known for their hospitality."

Many times we think back about and [reflect] that the Indian people...are hospitality people, and that's what got us into a lot of trouble. But we're

not going to give it up, that[s] what make[s] us a special people. Indian people are known for their hospitality and every time that change in pattern [occurs] in the dance that indicate[es] shutting and closing of the flapper as you come and go as you please, you are welcome in our house, you're welcome to go anytime stuff like that is the meaning behind it (personal communication, July 27, 1993).

Hospitality is clearly a significant value in the Gwich'ins' worldview. It is significant enough to warrant a detailed description by Osgood, an anthropologist who in the 1930s provided the first in-depth ethnography of the Gwich'in (1936).

Hospitality is a critical value to have in the environment in which the Gwich'in thrive; sharing and caring for others is often a life or death issue. The example recounted in the Caribou Dance section about the Netsai' famine relates the importance of community quite well. Had Fort Yukon not taken in the famine and disease survivors, the families that now reside in Arctic Village and Venetie would have perished along with their other family members. Many people died over that year and the event is recounted as a grave moment in Netsai Gwich'in history. The survivors chose to go to Fort Yukon because they knew they would not be turned away. The people in Fort Yukon welcomed them, fed them, and helped them get strong again. It is this sort of hospitality and interconnectedness that holds these communities together and is at the root of their survival in their Arctic environment. The Niivya Zheh Ch'adzah rhetorically expresses this critical element of Gwich'in worldview; a worldview that emphasizes community over individuality and the value of hospitality or sharing over greed. The Gwich'ins' views are similar to the communalistic worldviews of other indigenous peoples.

In a less obvious way, the Niivyaah Zheh Ch'adzah also functions rhetorically to maintain harmony and balance within the community. The term *community* here is used broadly to reflect the Gwich'in's animatistic beliefs that community includes animals, plants, and other natural phenomena. Because the Gwich'in's indigenous worldview places them within a larger, interconnected – holistic – system, they believe that everything people do affects this system. As explained in a previous chapter, indigenous people in general strive for balance and harmony with other elements of their environment. Ceremonies, songs, the oral tradition, and dance function to maintain balance and harmony among their entire community, human and non. The Niivyaah Zheh Ch'adzah allows the physical, psychological, and spiritual connection with other members of the community, thus harmonizing these relationships. It also allows them a ceremonial way to reconnect as an indigenous community, with a history of their own tradition, lifestyle, and way of being. This type of reconnection is necessary for the healing of the community, requiring not only interconnectedness among community members, but balance and harmony within the whole scheme of their world. The previous two dances – the Raven and the Caribou – also perform this function.

Dress, Gender, and Accompaniment.

Gwich'in worldview does not require conforming to any rigid or specific set of rules of dress in order to be *authentic* indigenous people. Therefore, the dancers and drummers are not required to "don traditional American Indian dress, complete with feathers" (Desmond, 1994, p. 55) in order to convey or articulate their indigenous identity. However, out of respect for the dance and its meanings the dancers generally do

wear clothes of similar stylistic qualities to their ancestral forebears. Yet, these outfits

Traditional caribou-skin outfits.

reflect the inherent elements that also articulate the creative, adaptive, and heterogeneous elements of Gwich'in identity. For example, even the most traditional of outfits will include elements borrowed from European/American culture (yarn, lace leggings, tennis shoes, make-up). The young man who wears cotton jeans

under his caribou hide shirt is considered no less Indian, or no less authentic, than another who wears caribou leggings.

It is also interesting to note that significant differences in male and female dress occurred only after colonialism made its influences. Prior to colonialism, males and females wore caribou leggings (with or without feet attached) and caribou shirts. The difference between the two was only that the men's shirt had a point in the front and the women's remained straight. Today, women's shirts have been extended to dress length and no pants are worn.

In the Vadzaih Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adzah, the Caribou Skin Hut Dance, the lead and central figure is a man. In the Deetrya Ch'adzah, the Raven Dance, the gender of the person performing as the caribou in the center of the circle may be either male or female today. It is unclear if that would have been the case in earlier years. However, Osgood

documents females performing in the Raven (or Crow) dance in his 1936 ethnography. Females also perform in the Skin Hut Dance. Anyone from a young child to an elder is allowed and encouraged to participate in these dances. The choreography of the first two, the Caribou and the Raven, do not allow spontaneous participation from the audience. However, anyone Gwich'in who chooses to learn the dances and join the dancers in their performance is generally accepted, unless circumstances eliminate that possibility (such as travel).

Drummers and singers accompany the dances; the lead may either be male or female. The drums used today may be either Gwich'in or a drum borrowed from another

From left to right: Sarah James, Faith Gimmell, and Jonathon Solomon.

tribe. Sarah James' drum, with a turtle on the front, reflects this acceptance and appreciation of other indigenous forms of drum.

The Gwich'in drums are round, about 24+/- inches

across, made with stretched, hairless caribou skin, and have a handle attached to the edge.

A wooden stick that has a padded head is used to beat the drum. At the Old Crow gathering in 1994 the singing and drumming section grew quite large, as more and more people wanted to participate in some way with the dances. After the first dance and more people appeared to want to join in, the lead drummers started to explain the singing portion so that people could sing along. As a result, many people got up to stand around

the singers and contribute to the performance. The last dance performed was the Skin Hut Dance. At the end of this dance over half the audience, including non-natives such as myself, were either singing or dancing with the presenters.

Audience.

These three dances, the Caribou, Raven, and Skin Hut, are generally performed together. As discussed previously, there is some discussion about whether the Caribou Dance should be performed as a form of entertainment, especially to non-native audiences. The Raven and Skin Hut Dances, on the other hand, are choreographed specifically as entertainment. The Raven tells a story of cosmology; the Skin Hut, teaches values and acts as a sign of welcome for newcomers. All three are performed today for a variety of audiences. For example, in 1994 the dances were performed both at the Anchorage Museum and at the Old Crow gathering in the Northwest Territories of Canada. In the former instance the audience was primarily made up of non-native tourists visiting Alaska and wanting to see an aspect of Alaska Native culture. In the latter instance, all but a few members of the audience were Gwich'in. Yet another audience for these dances were the indigenous and other activists that showed up for the 1991 Treaty Council Conference held in Arctic Village. These dances are also presented in statewide native gatherings and even in competitions.

The choreographed meaning of the dances, the dances' *stories*, stays the same regardless of audience make-up. However, other aspects of the dances' rhetoric changes. In the case of the museum audience, dancers realized that what they were presenting would be fairly incomprehensible to their non-Gwich'in audience. Thus, the performance

included an explanation of Gwich'in culture, lifeways, and worldview by a Gwich'in authority (Sarah James). What the dances' choreography means, the values and ideas expressed in the story, and the role of subsistence and animals in the life of the Gwich'in were presented.

However, what James or the other dancers said to the non-native audience was strictly regulated. For example, the performers were not allowed to discuss any of the political, environmental, or social issues facing their communities. One particular issue was expressly noted by museum staff as not appropriate – the issue of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Therefore, some of the more political rhetoric that occurs with these dances was simply not allowed an overt forum. However, it is important to note that the explicit refusal to allow discussion of these matters by the museum evidences in itself this aspect of the dances' rhetoric. Regardless, the act of dancing these forms alone asserts a form of political rhetoric and is discussed shortly.

In contrast, when performed for the Gwich'in audience the Caribou, Raven, and Skin Hut dances are contextualized by discussions of politics, environment, cultural and social issues concerning the community. Separation of cultural practices from these other integral issues to Gwich'in life does not happen. In the case of the Old Crow gathering the Caribou Dance was treated as a prayer because the reason for the meeting initially was to discuss what to do about the proposed development of the caribou's calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Gwich'in members from across Canada and Alaska had come together specifically for the purpose of trying to save the caribou and the Gwich'ins' lifeways. In this context, the Caribou Dance was not only an

expression of cosmological and worldview values and beliefs, it made a political "statement". The dance became the centralizing statement for the entire week. It said at once that the Gwich'in were not going to give up their lives with the caribou. It made clear that the caribou were so important as an integral member of Gwich'in community that almost anything would be done to save them. And it announced with pride the respect and love the people feel for their community, the diversity of life that makes up that community, and their heritage.

In a similar way, the Raven and Skin Hut dance were political statements about Gwich'in community issues. As Sarah James stated earlier, the Gwich'in are intent on retaining those values and practices that they believe make up who they are *as* Gwich'in. The Skin Hut Dance functions in this way to express the idea that people are welcome in their communities and to express the importance of the value of hospitality. At the Old Crow gathering we (non-natives) were informed by both dance and discourse that our presence was welcome; we were encouraged to be active participants in all aspects of the gathering. The Skin Hut dance was used historically as one of the initial performances at a gathering of people, Gwich'in and non-Gwich'in. Clearly, the dance still functions in this capacity today.

The Raven Dance also functions politically and socially. It presents to the Gwich'in audience a funny story about the tricks Raven can play on his/her human partners. It is entertaining while also functioning to continue beliefs and values considered central to Gwich'in worldview and culture. The political rhetoric of this dance does not express itself as explicitly as the Caribou or the Skin Hut. Yet, as I will

discuss shortly, its performance projects Gwich'in culture and identity into the contemporary lives of both the community and non-natives. It, thus, asserts itself not as a historical emblem of some other time, but as an aspect of who the Gwich'in are today. Therefore it enters into the political complexities about indigenous culture and identity. The rhetorical force of this dance is increased when all three of the dances are performed together, which they usually are. The function of assertion is addressed in the last section of this chapter. In the next section, the critical role of avowal is discussed in terms of its function in the three Gwich'in indigenous dances.

Avowal of Indigenous Identity

The Gwich'in are pursuing ways to heal individuals and their communities through a wide variety of activities that improve self-esteem, pride, and identity. The critical importance and necessity of having a strong Gwich'in indigenous identity and pride in that identity is articulated by many in Arctic Village and other villages. This perceived need and goal is evident in the following argument of Sarah James, an elder from Arctic Village:

If people make you feel like you don't belong and you have to belong in their culture, after a while it really works on the [mind] and it's hard to get [the people] back into that value [Gwich'in values] again until...[the] more and more we do, the more and more we talk about it, the more we educate people, so they would educate our kids and say you're all right who you are and it's important that you know who you are and be proud of who you are, then that feeling get back and then they [the Gwich'in people] come back strong (personal communication, July 27, 1993).

James expresses some important points. Feelings of belonging are a necessary and critical component in healthy self-esteem and sense of self. Additionally, it is important for both community members and outside others, such as educators, to accept indigenous

uniqueness. Basically, what James is referring to is the process of avowal. Avowal is used here with its intercultural communication meaning; that is, to make an open statement of affirmation about one's self. For James it means something similar: to accept and like who one is and be proud of who one is. Her statement also speaks about the importance of having others ascribe those qualities as well. She points out that the more a person avows one's identity and the more the community and others do it, the stronger the person's self-esteem and sense of self will become.

As noted before, belonging is an integral aspect of communalistic cultures. In contrast to individualistic cultures, communalistic cultures such as the Gwich'ins' developed intricate networks of psychological and cultural elements (practices, performances, traditions) that work to maintain the community. Interconnectedness undergirds indigenous worldview; "community," argues Allen (1986), "...is the bedrock of tribal life...." (p. 63). Loss of this connectedness – the sense of belonging – creates loss of identity in many indigenous people. Sometimes this loss leads to psychological and emotional trauma and problems, drug and alcohol dependency, and even suicide (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Faith Gimmell also emphasizes the importance of "knowing who you are" and believes that feelings of being connected and of belonging are critical for the psychological and emotional health of her communities. Gimmell expresses that the Netsai' Gwich'ins' indigenous dances provide an important connection to her ancestors and her cultural heritage, which she believes influences her sense of identity and belonging:

When I sing it gives me [a] strong good feeling in my heart and in my mind I picture the caribou, and I picture the people eating it.... I picture us happy, and I picture the old ways, it's like it gives the people a sense of respect...love, it's just love, that's what it expresses is love for our people, the animals, the land, all in one dance...It's like it brings you back and you know who you are and where you came from, and where you're going. It's really special (personal communication, July 27, 1993).

She is referring to the sense of identity that comes from strong, healthy feelings of belonging and connection with community and cultural heritage. A sense of pride, respect, honor, and esteem one may hold about their own community, ancestry, and culture provides the ground for loving themselves, their community, and their heritage. Gimmell agrees and argues that the dances help attain these goals. She argues, "They make me feel proud to be Gwich'in and strong in our culture, strong enough to face anybody and say I'm Gwich'in Indian. I'm proud of it" (personal communication, July 27, 1993).

The acceptance and celebration of these dances demonstrates the Gwich'ins' movement toward cultural revitalization and avowal of their indigenous heritage or past. Retaining the continuity between what linear thinking envisages as a past and their contemporary and future lives is critically important in indigenous worldview and psychology. The Gwich'in, like other indigenous people in the U.S., consider their ancestors an important part of their present. For the Gwich'in there is no past to overcome, but rather a temporal unification that places the past, present, and future together into an integrated unity. Thus, in terms of identity, "who the Gwich'in are" includes who their ancestors are.

The Gwich'ins' indigenous dances provide a ground on which to allow the manifestation of this heritage. These dances specifically validate and celebrate their cultural heritage that has been passed on by their ancestors. As part of a cultural revitalization movement, these dances encourage pride and identification as Gwich'in indigenous people. Today, more youth are getting involved with Gwich'in indigenous practices such as tanning hides, sewing, making willow fish traps and other cultural practices, as well as learning or improving their Gwich'in language.

Norma Kassi of Old Crow expresses how important retaining and avowing indigenous heritage is. She says that she used to wonder what happened to the Gwich'ins' drums and was so pleased to find out at the Old Crow gathering that Arctic Village had retained "hold" of the drum and the songs. "To bring out the dances [at the gathering] like that has really brought a lot of pride to this Nation, because it's ours and it belongs to us and it is there to share and we can use it." Kassi continues by saying, "I'm certainly going to teach my little boy how to sing a couple of those songs and play the drum. That will be good for him; that will really strengthen him" (personal communication, July 17, 1994). The Arctic Village Gwich'ins' performance of their indigenous dances helps to invigorate people's avowal of their indigenous Gwich'in identity. Strength through this identification is necessary to preserve their way of life and cultural heritage.

In the larger perspective, these dances function as ceremonial rituals that work to maintain individual identification with the community, an almost transformative function. In the dances, individuals are allowed to escape their isolation and "share one's singular being with that of the community and know within oneself the communal knowledge of

the tribe" (Allen, 1986, p. 55). Paula Gunn Allen explains the transformative process of ceremony further:

The purpose of ceremony is to integrate: to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one....The person sheds the isolated, individual personality and is restored to conscious harmony with the universe (p. 62).

Thus, through the Caribou, the Raven, and the Skin Hut Dances both the dancers and the Gwich'in audience are reconnected with fundamental elements of their indigenous worldview that expresses the interconnectedness and holism of their world. Harmonizing and balancing this connection has the power to contribute to the healing of the fabric of their soul, mending at least part of the soul wound that continues to be inflicted on their communities today.

These transformative and psychological effects of the Gwich'ins' dances may or may not be part of the daily consciousness of the dancers. In fact, the youngest of the dancers interviewed only expressed having fun and feeling good when applauded and provided high levels of attention. Indeed, the adults and some of the older teenagers seemed to be more aware of the psychological and emotional functions of the dance than the younger dancers (13 and under). One young woman stated that she only began to really contemplate these issues after one of the other older youths in the dance group discussed them with her (T. Garnett, personal communication, July 25, 1994).

Much of this understanding of heritage, cultural practices, and connection with ancestors has come about from hearing numerous people speak at the Gwich'in gatherings. For the younger dancers, this knowledge comes about from listening to

The dancers lead the way into the meeting hall
for a special evening of activities.

elders and others explain the dances and their unique role in Gwich'in heritage prior to the dances' performance at gatherings. For these younger dancers the dances' psychological benefits come from having positive qualities

ascribed to them from other community members and non-natives. These ascriptions contribute to their ability to establish a coherent and avowed indigenous identity.

However, while these dances do function as avowals of indigenous identity for many of the older dancers and other community members, it is not always so. It is important to remember that a history of negative ascription and devaluation of their cultural heritage contextualize these dances. Thus, the dance's ability to instill a sense of positive affirmation about Gwich'in cultural heritage is challenged by the socio-cultural and geopolitical context they exist within. For some, the years of being told that Gwich'in culture and heritage were not as valuable as the hybrid Euro-American have instilled such negative feelings that the dances express little. For example, I spoke with one elder who said there were "no Indians" in Arctic Village. What he meant was that he believed those living there had "lost" their indigenous way of being in the world. While a minority opinion, his does reflect the impact of inscription of both Western values and Western forms of knowledge about indigenous people. The next section of this chapter

discusses these issues of context and explains how the dances work to form a political statement within that context.

Assertion of Indigenous Identity

The Gwich'ins' political and public statements are centered by presentations of identity that exhibit pride and strength in their indigenous culture. While the Gwich'in recognize the need for heterogeneous living, they insist they receive respect and validation in their indigenous cultural identity. Their articulations occur within the overarching context of their geopolitical reality and history. Thus, the broad issues of power and politics remain fundamental aspects of these articulations. The rhetoric that occurs in these contexts lends much meaning to the dances.

The history of these indigenous dances reveals the influence of the Gwich'ins' geopolitical context. Indigenous forms of dance either disappeared or were kept secret between the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Osgood reported some of these dances in his 1936 ethnography, one of which was the Raven Dance (also called *Crow*). By 1981 an ethnomusicologist, Craig Mishler, was referring to these dances as being extinct. European-American researchers may never have an accurate history of these dances, as like many cultural practices they went underground when they came under attack by the colonial system. Given the prevalence of Christian missionaries and subsequent incorporation of Christianity into Gwich'in spiritual beliefs, it is not surprising that indigenous dancing fell out of favor. Caroline Frank makes it clear that, at least in Arctic Village, the missionaries influenced the lack of popularity of indigenous dancing,

The Anglicans came into our civilization...and got rid of all those dances and stuff like that we had...they replaced God with it, but we already knew

about God then. Because all the things we do and all the stuff that we do is geared toward God.... They came in with their own philosophy of God and they destroyed the whole thing. They tell us that [the dances and other spiritual practices] are taboo, they are bad luck, they keep evil spirits...but it is not true (personal communication, July 28, 1994).

Christian belief among missionaries in Alaska related indigenous dancing to "the work of the devil." Unfortunately, the racist underpinnings that support such a view led to the assimilationist motivations predominant among Christian missionaries in Alaska. The other reason that the indigenous dances waned is the lack of opportunity to teach the youth due to educational requirements of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs. These requirements sent Gwich'in youth out of the villages to boarding schools where their cultural practices and languages were not allowed – or if they were, no one was there to teach them.

Today, some of these earlier forces that influenced Gwich'in dance forms in the late 1800s and early 1900s are no longer in place. In the 1970s an elder in Arctic Village, Isaac Tritt, and several others began to teach these dances to the youth. Today, these dances, as well as other indigenous practices, are taught to youth in the school system in Arctic Village and Venetie. The current spiritual beliefs of the Gwich'in do not denounce the performance of the dances as evil, but rather in many cases seek to recover and reclaim the previous spiritual functions of the forms. The fact that the Gwich'in are free today to find pride in their indigenous cultural traditions reveals the contemporary move by others to accept indigenous difference, rather than to disparage it. In Arctic Village and Venetie, the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances are important to the community; their pride in the youth and adults who perform these dances is compelling. For these

communities, indigenous dance provides an important connection to their heritage and ancestry.

Indigenous sovereignty is essentially about the power of indigenous people to define for themselves who they will be in the present and future. As explained by Owens (1992) and Cordova (1997), the power to define and act on their own cultural identities is one of the elements of sovereignty colonization attempted to strip from indigenous people. As such, a critical aspect in the empowerment process involves investigating and often challenging the hegemonic inventions and constructions created by their colonial perpetrators. Simultaneously, empowerment requires actively asserting and "taking a part" in their cultural identity and negotiating for themselves what elements will constitute that identity in the future. The Gwich'ins' performance of their indigenous dances are an embodied identity articulation that forms one of these assertions.

These dances articulate fundamental and critical aspects of the Gwich'ins' cultural identity that are compelled by outside forces to be otherwise. Therefore, they function as a form of identity articulation that makes both verbal and nonverbal rhetorical statements within the Gwich'ins' geopolitical context. These dances should not be interpreted as benign and innocent cultural performances that function merely to entertain. To repeat a quote used earlier, these performers:

Under the nose of their oppressors, ...create subtle, complex and amazingly nuanced metaperformances that subversively key the event and critique the hierarchy of power....Even as their bodies are inscribed and scripted to conform to the choreography of power, they simultaneously deploy bodily symbolism to signal defiant release" (Conquergood, 1992, p. 90-91).

It is only framed within this context that the full meaning of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances might be illuminated.

For example, the Caribou Dance is specifically centered on the Gwich'ins' cultural relationship with an animal. This relationship includes the use of the caribou for subsistence purposes and for spiritual and cultural needs. To suggest abandonment of this relationship, as some political leaders and others do, is to suggest that the Gwich'in forgo a central core of their identity, not to speak of their survival abilities. This dance functions rhetorically to argue against the abandonment and alteration of this relationship. That is, the dance asserts this cultural relationship in the face of those who seek to fundamentally change the Gwich'ins' way of life. They make a political statement affirming the Gwich'ins' commitment to their own cultural worldview and its revitalization. Thus, the Gwich'ins' embodiment of significant aspects of their identity in the dances functions rhetorically both within and outside the community to assert and avow their indigenous identity.

Summary

The Gwich'in people recognize the fact that while they might identify more with their indigenous and ancestral heritage, they also have heterogeneous qualities in their identity. They pride themselves for being adaptable, creative and imaginative both in the bush and in the courts. They have also demonstrated an ability to navigate both worlds. Their indigenous dances also reflect this creative, adaptive, syncretic quality. However, they also recognize and take seriously the disabling affects colonialism had on their communities. Today, neocolonial political and institutional forms continue these impacts

to various degrees. Loss of identity, self-esteem issues, and alienation are consequences of these impacts on the indigenous soul. Unfortunately, these impacts emerge in numerous communities as psychological and emotional issues, drug and alcohol dependency, and even suicide.

The Gwich'in believe, as other indigenous communities do, that healing requires mending community connections, validating their indigenous worldview and heritage, and protecting their connections with their environment. Perpetuating the Gwich'ins' indigenous dances – the Vadzaih Ch'adzah, the Deetrya Ch'adzah, and the Niivyaa Zheh Ch'adzah – represent several actions taken by the Gwich'in to revitalize and empower their communities. In this sense, they contribute to the healing of these communities. They perform important rhetorical functions towards this end. They provide a ground from which they may assert their indigenous identity and heritage as a community. The dances embody critical elements of that identity and function to both constitute and enact those elements. And, the dances validate and avow these core aspects of the Gwich'ins' sense of who they are culturally. Thus, these dances contribute to cultural revitalization and community healing.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Caribou are not just what we eat; they are who we are. They are in our stories and songs and the whole way we see the world.... Caribou are our life.... Without caribou we wouldn't exist.

– Sarah James, Arctic Village

This thesis investigates the ways in which the Netsai' Gwich'ins' indigenous dances function rhetorically as articulations that embody, avow, and assert core elements of the Gwich'ins' indigenous identity. Articulation is understood here as an active process that both asserts a coherent cultural identity and constitutes that identity through embodied practices. The Gwich'ins' choice to revitalize their indigenous dances reflects their political decision to affirm and avow their cultural heritage. The Vadzaih Ch'adzah, the Deetrya Ch'adzah, and the Niivya Zheh Ch'adzah dances contribute to the maintenance of their indigenous identity by embodying core elements of that identity. Worldview elements such as communalism and belonging are embodied and expressed in the choreography, the songs, and by the other forms of articulation surrounding the dances. The dances contribute to maintaining balance and holism for the community (human and non) and the environment; thus they have philosophical and religious functions. Primary relationships that make-up part of their core identity (e.g., with the caribou) are both enacted and perpetuated as they are embodied in the rhetoric of the dances.

These dances like other indigenous cultural performances, function along with other community efforts to empower and strengthen the psychological, social, political, and environmental health of the people. They are also contextualized by geopolitical issues and history that are ongoing and complex. The Gwich'in, like other Alaska Natives, remain under the control of a neocolonial government, with an accompanying dominant culture that is unable to find a "place" for indigenous cultures and communities. Thus, they are forced to engage in political and legal debates, as well as social and community discussions, that interrogate "what kind of Indians" they will be now and in their futures.

These debates make Gwich'in identity the concern of all those involved in these debates, native and non-native. The Arctic Refuge debate is exemplary. The oil corporation executives argue that the Gwich'in will have to change their lifestyles in order for the oil development needs of the United States to be met. On the other hand, environmentalists enjoin the Gwich'in in their preservation efforts, at times conflating their identities and lifestyles to romantic stereotypes. These debates rarely engage the Gwich'ins' more complex understandings of themselves or their lives. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the Gwich'in, like other indigenous people, simply are not given the forum for the expression of their ideas and evaluations of themselves. They are limited to the sound-bites they are allowed by those with more power as they discuss the Gwich'ins' futures. This instance of being defined and talked about by Others is the history of indigenous people in the United States. As Owens (1992) argues, indigenous

people have had little say in the "ongoing discourse" that has attempted to sculpt them into culturally benign entities via the politics of cultural imperialism.

Colonialism sought to erase indigenous cultural identities and homogenize them into the dominant culture of Euro-Americanism. Indigenous scholars and writers note this impact and express the importance of locating a coherent, unified identity to indigenous people. However, articulations of indigenous identity, verbal or non, face the contemporary theoretical movement to erase essential notions of identity. Today, those things that are considered integral to the identities of indigenous people are argued to be erroneous by some scholars. The denial of authenticity or essentiality of a coherent, core indigenous identity creates yet another double bind for these communities. While their identities were considered either too primitive or outdated by earlier academics and politicians, today they are vulnerable to simply being erased by regarding them theoretically incorrect. Indigenous scholars and others argue that indigenous identity is capable of being heterogeneous while also centralizing around a coherent core.

There is no miracle cure for the complex and intense psychological, social, economic, and spiritual issues facing these communities today. However, the revitalization of cultural practices and belief systems previously disparaged is argued to contribute to the process of healing and empowerment. Articulations of indigenous identity act as assertions that function to avow those elements previously oppressed by colonialism. Indigenous scholars' critical positions affirm the reclamation and revitalization of indigenous identity as a process of empowerment. They argue that indigenous identity may have at once a coherent, unified core that emphasizes their

indigeneity, while also accommodating heterogeneous contexts and components of this identity. Performances and articulations that validate and revitalize this identity function as a form of psychological and social empowerment.

In many North American indigenous communities, dance plays an important role in their cultural revitalization and community empowerment. The study of cultural dance performance could contribute much to Western understandings of indigenous people and their identities. Rhetorical analysis provides a unique contribution to the interpretation of peoples' cultural performances. Rhetoric investigates human expression and meaning. This approach to interpretation potentially offers validation and legitimacy to those whose worldview, lifestyles, and life experiences may vary from the researchers or the dominant culture. The current trends in rhetoric, initiated with social movement studies, create an atmosphere of acceptance of not just others' perspectives, but of rhetorical forms that emerge outside of the privileged space of oratory. Rhetoric's expanded borders allow recognition of the motivating functions of nonverbal forms such as dance.

At the heart of dance's negotiations or rhetoric is the socio-geo-political issue of identity. Dance is accepted in both dance theory and anthropology as a site where identity, especially cultural identity, may be produced and reproduced. Part of dance's role in the articulation of identity is in its expression of core views and values held by a community. Dance has the power to simultaneously embody, avow, and assert core aspects of identity. Dance at times also functions to re-negotiate identity. These aspects inhere dance with certain rhetorical capabilities. As such, there are often socio-political issues contextualizing a community's dances. Dance has been, and in some cases

continues to be, a site of identity struggles. This is especially true with indigenous people, who have had various interpretations of their dances and identities imposed upon them by colonialism.

Understanding the body's role in the constitution and embodiment of identity could contribute to an expansion of postcolonial interpretations of identity. Clearly, postcolonialism enables the investigation of contexts and issues previously ignored by traditional interpretation of cultural performances. Yet, these critical examinations must move their borders to the realm of experience and an understanding that, if not privileging, at least validates the role of the body. When the body is understood as the existential ground of culture, the scholar may be benefited with access to non-verbal meanings otherwise lost. It may be that rather than essentializing the Gwich'in, their indigenous dances function to liberate them. And, instead of evidencing a theoretical impurity, the dances could produce an authentic articulation. Of course, these alternative interpretations require abandoning the notion that only Western theory and analysis is correct. Instead, this type of reflexivity could motivate the scholar to assume that his or her understanding might be inappropriate.

There are other views and perceptions to consider in the analysis of any cultural performance. In the case of indigenous productions, there are the ideas of the producers themselves. The now large body of inquiry into indigenous experience could benefit greatly with further inclusion of the critical perspectives of American Indian and Alaska Natives authors and scholars. This thesis sought to locate a middle ground in the understanding of identity and performance in the work of indigenous writers. Their ideas

remind us of the fact the binary is unproductive: essentialism does not have to be countered with anti-essentialism. Perhaps there is another way to interpret the performances and expressions of indigenous identity, rather than negating it. Indigenous critical perspectives also remind us that we live in a world that is ultimately concerned with the physical. We are embodied. Thus, indigenous scholars and authors works in some ways recall issues of existentialism. It is with these alternative views that sometimes elusive forms of expression such as dance might be understood.

In the case of the Gwich'ins' indigenous dance, indigenous perspectives allowed far more rhetorical meanings to emerge in the inquiry. Cultural revitalization is critically important to the Gwich'ins' attempt to empower and heal their communities. In Gwich'in villages, people are creating cultural learning programs aimed at educating the youth in their own rich cultural heritage and practices. Gwich'in identity retains a central core that is organized around their relationship with their historical environment and the community intertwined with that place. Their village communities continue to engage in land-use activities passed down through their cultural heritage. Gwich'in leaders argue that their cultural survival as Gwich'in is dependent on the maintenance of these practices and belief systems.

The Gwich'ins' dances evidence their desire to retain those elements of who they are that have been gifted to them by their ancestors. The past is not something to run from, but something to integrate into their contemporary lives. The dances are not simply representations of historic lifestyles; they are embodied articulations of Gwich'in ways of being in the world today. Choreography, context, and audience work to create the

rhetoric of the performance. Avowal and positive ascription will ensure the dances will maintain their place in the Gwich'ins' cultural process and sense of identity. Similarly, positive and illuminating investigations of indigenous dance will allow for their preservation via the larger circles of power and interpretation.

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