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Ka Pichahna ‘Akkala (My Research Story)

Michelle Napoli

In the *Bad Indians* chapter “To Make Story Again in the World,” Deborah Miranda speaks to the ways our California Indian stories “aren’t easy, they are fractured.”¹ Miranda shares ways “to make them whole,” an extremely demanding task, one which is contemporary California Indian scholarship. We are directed to a “multilayered web of community reaching back in time and forward in dream, questing deeply into the country of unknown memory”; to “look at more than one interpretation simultaneously, . . . at both the blessing and the genocide”; to search out stories that still exist “like underground rivers” that run alive and are singing nonetheless, and call us back; and to listen deeply to our bodies, which “like compasses, still know the way.”² Taking cues from Miranda, this “experiential story” honors this author’s ontological lens and tribal epistemology as a Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo person.³ The piece integrates *koya-’aklanna* (paintings, art), storytelling, and Native languages, as the author is “culturally ready” at this moment.⁴ This story is part of a curriculum about the ethics of locating one’s positionality in a context of colonial amnesia, cultural genocide, and linguicide at a predominately white institution. The intention of this article is to respectfully share story as living relationship in the discourse on Indigenous methodology and culturally sustaining approaches to research and pedagogy. This research story, as a multilayering of *koya-’aklanna*, dreams, embodied knowing, and Native languages, is a quest to be in relation with many relationships simultaneously—to make whole.

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Kanni he ka’inniiko Tamalko he ‘olomko he Liwanwalliiko he ʔahčahčayhča. Matuppe kaa peta luumaamu ke tookawmu ke ‘eyye kochchaamu.

My family and I are Tamalko, ‘olomko, Liwanwalli, and ʔahčahčay. We are from Peta Luuma, Tookaw, and ‘eyye Kochcha.

ONTOLOGY



Saata 'opu yomi.
Saata is home.
Her branches
reach to the earth
and
na'uugi liiletto lillu waa
return to the sky.
Saata is rooted
with the wild grasses
that crash and rise in waves
throughout the storm.

I lean on Saata
singing koya.
Kiwel, hammaako, pap'oyyihko, he toktoola
are clapping and
whistling.
Maako koya kenneetto.

We sing together.

EPISTEMOLOGY



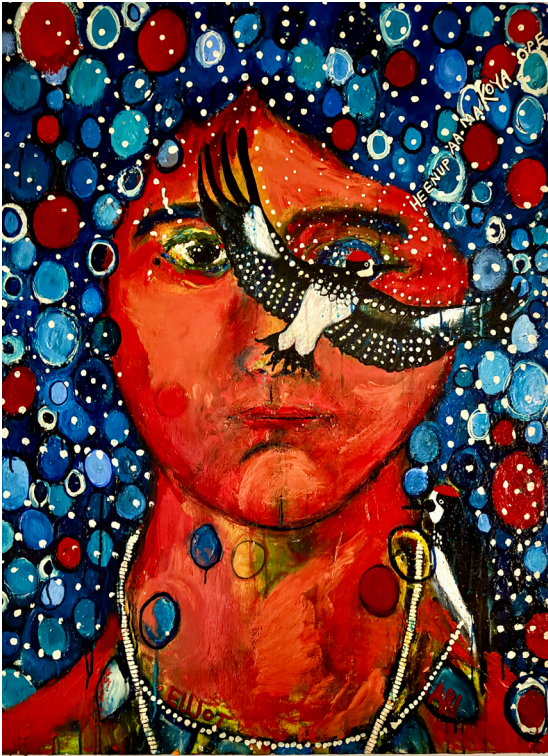
Panak, acorn woodpecker,
is my co-researcher.
She drills thousands of holes,
tattooing Saata's body.
Panak chooche 'umpa
yowaamu, yomikmu ke 'oolokmu.
Panak collects the acorns
in diaspora
from land, village, and ocean.

In my first dream
I am trapped in rock and dust.
I hear nothing, yet
I am tied to a story
that can't escape.
I wake up

swaddled and warm.
Ma machchaw 'opu ka huuli.
Our language is my blanket.



In my next dream
'awwuk, a giant abalone shell,
fills up my body,
stretching and curling me into a spiral,
her ridges form my back.
The holes march
between each rib
and mark my face.



In my latest dream
Panak is knocking
on my roof,
on my forehead.
She wakes me up
and crawls inside my chest cavity.
I am oak.
Panak nests in my heart.

I map out relationships:
Saata grows acorns.
Panak carves out spaces.
As acorns fall from Saata,
Panak returns the acorns home
and nests.
Maakon suṭa nitto haali ko.

I trust these relationships.

My ancestors join me in the doorway.
As I hold the brochure and read
their presence fills up my lungs,
and their memories flow out of my bones.
My stomach recoils in a violence
not written.
Tiil.
Katiil 'opu.
I am sick.

I map out relationships:
lumber
hides
labor
land grants
empire
genocide.

RESEARCH WITH INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY



I walk for miles,
picking up acorns.
I rub my fingers along their
smooth surfaces
absorbing stories
they whisper into my skin.
I say a prayer with each acorn.
They are rolling off my kitchen table, over-
flowing my backpack, bookshelves,
the cup holder in my car . . .
I put them in my pockets.
I hold acorn in my fist.
Kachooche 'opu ma'umpa
I am gathering.

Kana'uuti.
I return
to the General's house
with hearts
pounding
for 147 miles.
The forced military march
from our villages: tookaw, petaluuma, 'eyye
kochcha ke ma:k^hahmo.

Mana'uuti, na'uuti, na'uuti.
We return, return, return.
We return together.
Maako na'uuti kennetto.

Kahawugna,
I pray,
towihnakka ke kiwanakka 'aa ka wuski hunaa kahinak towih nih weyyatto.
Please give me a good, strong heart so that I do good in this world.

Flashes of black and white feathers fill the space.
Red-capped heads are bobbing, while drilling, singing, and knocking
on k^ha:le, oak, redwood, pine, fencing, and siding.
A rhythm emerges
from this place.

The General's house is filled with holes.

I watch Panak.
She places the acorn into the hole.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES



I gather words and stories
from where they have dropped
into the wind, water, baskets, wax cylinder recordings, field notes, and archives.
Ma'akkala.

I listen to generations of teachers:
Tom and William Smith, Maria Copa, Julia Elgin, Marion (Mariánó) Miránda, Elsie
Allen, Essie Parrish, Mabel McKay, Ralph Holder, Dorris Yee, Henry and Josephine
Maximilian, Sarah Ballard, Anthony Pete, Joanne Campbell, Greg Sarris, Joan Vallis,
Isabelle James, Joseph Byron, Kathleen Smith,
to name a few.

I map our story:
We fall from Saata,
land in the dirt,
crouch low in the reeds,
walk in the fog,
listen to the knocking,
tattoo our skin,
fly in Panak's beak,
climb into Saata's trunk,
whistle our bones,
pump heartbeats,
for generations.



Standing at Bodega Bay Headlands,
I gently roll acorn between my palms
and the memory of all our relationships
fill up my hands.

I pull the paper from my pocket
where I respectfully, meticulously, wrote down
our tamal machchaw ke ʔay:a:k^he čahnu village names.

I pull my tongue behind my teeth
close and open the back of my throat,
lengthen syllables,
and pop my lips together.
I sing village names
with kiwel.
Ocean winds whistle through the holes in the earth.

Henkaṭi.
I take in a breath
of all of this
and
toss acorn back to the sky.
‘uh lillu
biʔdu flies
over the cliff.
‘ow

NOTES

1. Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Berkeley: Heyday Press, 2013), 193.
2. Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 194–208.
3. Jo-Ann Archibald/Q’um Q’um Ziiem, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008).
4. *Koya-aklanma* can be translated from Coast Miwok language to mean song-story. The author wants to acknowledge both Joseph Byron in the translation and Mark Minch-de Leon (2021) and his discussion of Frank Day paintings as song-story in “Atlas for a Destroyed world: Frank Day’s Painting as Work of Nonvital Revitalization”; Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Second Edition) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

All images by permission of the artist, Michelle Napoli: *Saata ’opu Yomi*, p. 112; *Wute ’alwab*, p. 113; *Walla Wallan Tuppe*, p. 114; *Panak Suwe*, p. 115; *Ka’ute Ma Wuṣkin Wuki*, p. 116; *Ma ’akkala*, p. 117; *Ka Suwe he Wuki*, p. 118; *Ma Yowa*, p. 119.