

Book Reviews

PADDLING TO WHERE I STAND: AGNES ALFRED, QWIQWASUTINUXW NOBLEWOMAN

Martine J. Reid, Ed.
Trans. by Daisy Sewid-Smith
Vancouver: Uuniversity of British
Columbia Press, 2004

REVIEWED BY TRACEY LINDBERG

Paddling to Where I Stand is the written memoirs of Agnes Alfred (Axuw), a Q^wiq^wasutinux^w Noblewoman of the K^wak^wakewak^w Nation (1889-1992) on the west coast of what is known as British Columbia. The author details within its pages the life around her (spirit and human), the history of her people (and their interaction with other nations), her life (childhood, womanhood, and her marriage) and the ceremonies and rituals of her people. The principal part of the book is a series of interviews, translated, documented, and edited and committed to page in seven chapters and with a number of supporting appendices.

Within this work burn the embers of ancient fires.

The editor, Martine J. Reid, writes in the preface to the work:

Paddling to Where I Stand is the first published memoir of a Q^wiq^wasutinux^w woman. The three of us—Axuw, Daisy and I—have attempted to lead you through the magic of myth time, along the rocky roads of daily survival, to the present (not necessarily in that order), providing a glimpse of First Nations life on the Northwest Coast during the period of its most rapid change.

This is most accurate. Of particular interest are the interrelationships that the author discusses with her editor and translator. Within this work the author details the nature of relationships between human and spirit (in the first chapter, Myth Times), between humans (Chapter 2, War, Conflict and Slavery). These chapters are immensely readable, compelling and moving. The author discusses the ancient stories and the reader becomes aware that the history of the K^wak^wakewak^w is alive. The recorded stories/histories (myths) are vibrant in their telling and could stand on their own as a book. The fluidity between nature and supernatural is profound and clearly established, with the author's discussion of the interrelationships grounding what most would consider fantastic in a place that is certain and familiar. The matter of fact approach by the author to the interplay between supernatural and natural worlds (presented superbly, in part, by the natural relationship between the fluent translation and editing) grounds the reader's understanding in a way that gently teaches and normalizes what could, for many, be incomprehensible. While loath to categorize the stories, it is notable that the lessons learned about relationships (brothers to brothers, wives to husbands, fathers to sons) are ones which readers will reflect upon for quite some time.

The author's telling of the aftermath of a war between the Q^wiq^wasutinux^w and attack by another nation (Chapter 2) is so raw and pained that it cannot fail to move. Readers would not have access to the pure emotion and the intricacy of the long-term impact of this event without a work such as this. There is an honesty and ownership of responsibility and an enduring ripple effect from this time that pervades the entire work. The ramifications for territoriality, fa-

miliar and international relationships, and for preservation of identity from this event are stunning and eloquently discussed in this chapter.

The book transcends reading an historical account and retains the orality of the many, many discussions that Agnes Alfred had with Reid and her granddaughter Daisy. It is important to note that Elder Alfred's granddaughter did much of the translating. It may be for this reason that the written words are richer than their ink. There is a cognizance of the audience that she is speaking to, an intimacy, that most readers would not be privy to that is moving and compelling. This is most evident in the chapters addressing childhood, womanhood, and marriage (Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively). Because of the relationships between the author, translator, and editor the reader can feel genuine warmth and a kitchen table friendliness in much of this discussion. This does not detract from the seriousness and import of much of the work in these chapters. The distinction between ceremonies and ceremonial occasions is an important understanding in a world where the word "potlatch" was historically used as an undifferentiated catchall for non-Indigenous academia to describe a number of gift-giving gatherings. As well, the discussions of nobility, the passing of coppers, tribal rank, the proprietorship of names, and the ceremonies surrounding birth, womanhood, and marriage are thought-provoking and thoughtfully discussed in a way which encourages the reader to re-visit her/his understanding of the intricacy of tribal and inter-tribal relationships.

The author's humour, decency, and dignity are readily available to the reader—and this may be in part due to the nature of the relationship between the author and the translator. It is clear in the text that

the author is not an impartial or objective observer of her people, her community, her family or herself. She is an active participant. However, her participation is thoughtful and kind. Reflective and intelligent, her words resonate with you not just because she is so informed and rich with experience, you remember the work because she is so clearly human and so clearly kind.

There is such fluency here—between spirits and humans, between past and present, between individual and communal—that your breath is, at times, taken away. It is such a gift to be able to hear *in the first person* the nature of interaction between spirits and people. Part way through reading the book, I was struck by two things. The first was that I had never heard oral stories written this way before—with their intent, fluidity, and source so evident and complete. The other thing I understood was that this is a rare gift—where a community had such a rich resource in the person able and willing to speak with such resonance and over such a breadth of issues.

Some issues arose for me as a result of my reading (but which are not inherent to or issues within the text). I wondered about my right to access the traditional ceremonies and rituals. Without context, ancestry or those particular memories in my blood, I felt truly that reading the same could be intrusive. More than that, I thought about who should have the right to those stories and I did not feel like I was one of the people who should receive them. Undoubtedly, it is important that the traditions and understandings are passed onto Kwakwaka'wakw citizens. In an era when teachings can be lost, each person who possesses those teachings needs to make an assessment about how to ensure that the peoples receive and honour them. I respect Elder Alfred's decision to make them available. Perhaps any text that challenges a reader to examine why, whether, or how they should read traditional teachings

from another culture and how they will treat them is important for that reason as well.

The work is important and thorough. At times, I found myself struggling with the introductions by Martine J. Reid and wondered if the tie between her anthropological review/assessment and the history and remembrances as told by the author was too forced. I found myself also wondering if the editor was trying to reinforce anthropological and historical relevancy by references to contradictions within other accounts of Kwakwaka'wakw (or other Indigenous peoples') life. Upon re-examination, the discussion of the anthropological and historical materials add some contextualization and clarification, reminding us of the relevance and importance of this work in assessing accuracy and entrenching orality, oral histories, and memoirs as sources of the same. While the construction at times may have felt awkward to those not grounded in that academic tradition, the additions and discussions by Reid provide an interesting context. By the end of the work, they seem more naturally woven with the text. They are also an important look into the potential approaches, materials, and understandings considered by an ethnographer or editor of an Indigenous memoir that can serve as a tool for other people looking to collaborate with Indigenous Elders, communities, and knowledge holders.

The eulogy of Daisy Sewid-Smith for her grandmother, the epilogue, and the Appendices themselves are excellent resources for those who want an in-depth history of Agnes Alfred's family history, genealogy, and the Kwakwaka'wakw language. Of particular note is the documentation of the wedding ceremony of her granddaughter and translator Daisy Sewid and Donald Smith. Additionally, the documentation of the author's response to the legal record of the incidents related to a prohibition of a potlatch is a one of a kind resource. All of these pieces, intertwined with the text, are

invaluable pieces—a reminder that culture, language, and history are alive. The book as a whole can serve as a guideline for communities and nations who are considering different approaches to recording and reviving their traditions.

This book is a very welcome and excellent addition to the resources available for Indigenous studies, history, anthropology, law, and women's studies courses. It may also be useful for those communities and individuals who are pursuing community and oral traditions preservation and history projects.

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“REAL” INDIANS AND OTHERS: MIXED-BLOOD URBAN NATIVE PEOPLES AND INDIGENOUS NATIONHOOD

Bonita Lawrence
Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA A. MONTURE

Bonita Lawrence's work on identity of urban Indians¹ focuses on their experiences of status, band membership, belonging, location (on- and off-reserve), and Bill C-31 (as it remains known). Her analysis of identity and belonging is linked continuously to Aboriginal demands and struggles for self-determination. She sees Indian status as “a system that enabled Canada to deny and bypass Indigenous sovereignty, by replacing ‘the Nation’ with ‘the Indian.’” Lawrence's work is the most comprehensive work on Aboriginal