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Xoq'it-ch'iswa:l

On Her—They Beat Time, a Flower Dance Is Held for Her

REVITALIZATION OF THE HUPA
WOMEN'S COMING-OF-AGE CEREMONY

[Yima:ntiwinay] made a kinahɫdun-ts'e:y dance rattle stick. He saw no one, but after nightfall he heard the sound of many feet. The invisible people ran in until the house was crowded. They danced until morning. The next night more people came, and the night after that still more. After the tenth night they ceased dancing. Standing outside, Yima:ntiwinay threw incense root onto the fire, praying, "May you live to be men." When it was dawn, he did not see them. He went into the house. When they stopped dancing, the noise stopped in the house. He sang again and stopped. The invisible ones sang, and smoke came in the home. A cloud of fog enveloped her and took her away. They took the girl with them to the world above. The girl became a perpetual kinahɫdung.

—Ruth Bennett, adapted from Goddard, *Hupa Texts*

IN THE CENTER OF THE HOOPA VALLEY LIES A VILLAGE KNOWN AS Ta'k'imiɫ-ding, the acorn-soup-making place, or "they are making acorn soup" place.¹ It has been described as the heart of the valley and is particularly significant because it is the site of the Hupa world renewal ceremonies and the place from which the tribe's main spiritual leader is chosen. It is also the site of the xontah-nikya:w, or Big House, which is the most sacred house for people of the valley. This is also the home of the tribe's spiritual leader. Ta'k'imiɫ-ding was an important site for the Hupa people as they continued to struggle for

their very existence and resisted outside forces who attempted to assimilate and terminate their ceremonies. Photographer Edward Curtis, who visited the reservation in the early 1920s, observed that while some of the Hupa were waiting for allotments they still lived in Ta'k'imił-ding. Ta'k'imił-ding also remained a center for cultural practices throughout the continued attempts to assimilate the Hupa people.

The Hupa world renewal ceremonies continued despite legislative attempts to outlaw and discourage them. As Hupa people navigated the changing landscape and relationships with the government, they found ways to set their own boundaries and negotiate this cultural shift. Pliny Earle Goddard notes how Hupa women continued to wear their basket caps “constantly” and carried their children in baby baskets. “Many of the women,” Goddard commented, “still wear these hats in connection with civilized dress.”² The Hupa also continued to eat acorns, one of the staple foods of the valley that had been given to them by their K'ixinay and tied them to their ancient ancestors. Goddard notes, “Those who have plenty of food such as white people use still make the acorn mush occasionally. When a little salt is added it is quite agreeable to a white man's taste.”³ This may be in part why Ta'k'imił-ding represented such an important site of cultural continuance: it was the acorn-soup-making place, the place that was dedicated to the nourishment and sustaining of Native bodies and minds. And in 2001 it would be the site of the first revitalized Ch'įwa:l, or Flower Dance ceremony, at the place of world renewal, and the place where the Hupa had long held their ground against continued attempts to erase and degrade their cultures and cultural epistemologies.

This chapter focuses on the revitalization of the Hupa Ch'įwa:l as a case study to demonstrate how women's coming-of-age ceremonies are a decolonizing praxis. In this chapter I present the voices of the kinahłdung and two of the women primarily responsible for revitalizing the Ch'įwa:l for the Hoopa Valley Tribe. Melodie George-Moore is a medicine woman for the Hupa people, mother, and teacher. Lois Risling is a Hupa elder, trained medicine woman, and educator. Several other women, although they are not interviewed here, were closely involved with this revitalization as well, and many of them continue the work of revitalization throughout the region, including Laura Lee George, Callie Lara, Kishan Lara-Cooper, and Marcellene Norton. The kinahłdung who agreed to be interviewed include Kayla Rae Begay, Natalie Carpenter, Alanna Lee Nulph, Melitta Jackson, Deja George, and Naishian Richards. Together they span the first ten years of this revitalization. It was important for me to gather their stories because during the first ten years many

profound changes happened in our community. For instance, whereas there was at first a kind of dismissal of the Ch'itwa:l because of its ties to menstruation, as more and more girls observed and experienced this dance, the dance became more socially acceptable. After ten years, girls started to request that the dance be done for them, instead of being approached by elders hoping they would want one. In those first ten years, women began to make up new songs, and where there had not been many songs at the first revitalized dances, now women have multiple songs to sing and know each other's songs. Men have also commented on how this dance has helped them see women in new roles and appreciate their singing and dancing, and has inspired them to take on new roles in young women's lives.⁴

The epistemological foundation of survivance and decolonization that is built into this ceremony values the land as part of creation, understands that every aspect of that landscape is embodied by the K'ixinay, demonstrates respect and empowerment of women, insists on gender equality, and is grounded in Hupa feminism. These are the tools that we will use as contemporary Hupa people to build a decolonizing praxis that shows how ceremony is theory and knowledge embodied through song, dance, and movement. We are not re-creating rote actions that are divorced from our understanding of the complex epistemologies that make up our cultural ceremonies; instead these ceremonies allow us an embodied theoretical framework for healing, reclaiming Native feminisms, and effecting decolonization. This ceremony, and decolonization in general, must necessarily address aspects of historical and ongoing trauma. In the 1980s, Bonnie Duran, Eduardo Duran, and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart began to explore issues of historical and intergenerational trauma “offered as a paradigm to explain, in part, problems that have plagued Native Americans for many generations.”⁵ Historical trauma was conceptualized by Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart as a model of how Native peoples carried with them unresolved historical grief across generations. For Brave Heart the purpose of understanding historical trauma was to be able to find a way to heal the unresolved grief that communities struggle with.⁶

Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran explore how sociohistorical factors have a “devastating effect on the dynamics of the Native American family” and how the effects of colonization “have been devastating both physically and psychologically.”⁷ Luana Ross believes that “culture” can be a powerful weapon against continued oppression.⁸ Kim Anderson writes that understanding and relying on cultural precepts can restore balance and address gender issues.⁹ Jaimes Guerrero believes that Indigenous knowledge systems can aid in

decolonization, and she calls for a development of “Native Womanism” and traditions that provide for women’s respect and authority.¹⁰ Dian Million, an Athabascan scholar, both challenges and extends on Brave Heart and Duran’s approaches to healing with what she calls Felt Theory. Million sees the lasting effects of colonialism as a “felt, affective relationship” that is “intuited as well as thought.”¹¹ Million sees Indigenous epistemologies and cultures as fundamental building blocks to healing, and storytelling as integral to that healing. Million is well aware that critiques of this type of healing would argue that “we can’t produce the ways of life we once had,” but she counters, “Yet no spirit is static.” She argues that these epistemologies are diverse and never static, and they do effect change.¹² Yakama scholar Michelle Jacob explores the revitalization of traditions in her own community, which she conceptualizes as understanding Indigenous bodies as “sites of critical pedagogy,” centering social justice “to build a moral community,” and utilizing grassroots Indigenous resistance “as a mechanism to dismantle colonial logics.”¹³ This becomes a Yakama decolonizing praxis, which she describes as a critical healing approach that “advances our understanding of social change efforts concerned with ‘making power’ to reclaim indigenous traditions, bodies, languages, and homelands.”¹⁴

It is important for me to demonstrate how we, as Hupa people, are working to address the many issues of poverty and social inequality that often plague Native peoples by making power and reclaiming our traditions, bodies, languages, and homelands.¹⁵ In the United States, Native peoples make up 1.7 percent of the total population and have one of the highest rates of poverty in the country (28 percent as opposed to 15 percent national average) and suffer from some of the highest rates of violence. In a 2008 Centers for Disease Control study, 39 percent of Native women said they had been victims of intimate partner violence in their lifetime, which was the highest rate of any race or ethnicity surveyed.¹⁶ Data from the US Department of Justice notes that Native American and Alaskan Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than other women.¹⁷ A 2014 report by Dr. Joely Proudfit with Dr. Theresa Gregor noted that American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) high school students have disproportionately high dropout rates compared to the California state average.¹⁸ The dropout rate for these students remains higher than all other ethnic/racial groups in the state except for Hispanic/Latinos.

Hoopaa’s statistics are often just as staggering. In 2013 Hoopa Valley Tribal Police reported 136 incidents of violent crime. This was the second-highest in

the Humboldt County region. The first was Eureka, California, which has roughly four to five times the population of Hoopa.¹⁹ Hoopa also had the most incidents of aggravated assaults in the region, though its population is smaller than most every city or township in Humboldt County. Hoopa also has a high incidence of drug use, and in a 2012 article Hoopa tribal member Allie Hostler notes that “meth data specific to the Hoopa Valley doesn’t exist. The scope of the problem can only be pieced together anecdotally, and only understood truly by those who live here. If you ask, they’d tell you that meth use in the valley today is rampant.” Hostler also notes that in her interview with local area physician Eva Smith, Smith “reported multiple cases of treating 50-, 60- and even 70-year-old men and women who were actively using meth.”²⁰

Perhaps Allie Hostler can help explain some of the reasons that Hoopa faces such staggering statistics in their contemporary lives. “History matters,” she writes. “Multiple generations are grieving the loss of a cherished way of life, a way of life that lasted for thousands of years prior to settlers finding their way to Hoopa.” She quotes Hupa medicine woman Melodie George-Moore as explaining that because these traumas are not engaged with in history classes or society at large, “there’s this elephant in the room and we can’t talk about it. So it just explodes into all these areas of our lives, because you can’t keep all that negativity contained.”²¹

As I have continued to participate in Ch’iłwa:l ceremonies, it has become very clear to me that the resurgence of the Ch’iłwa:l is a tangible, physical, spiritual, and communal act of healing and decolonization. This aspect of the dance was reflected by Hupa medicine woman Melodie George-Moore as well. For her, the dance is about empowering women because of the way colonization targeted Native women. This empowerment provides a clear rejection of dominant colonial narratives that seek to disempower and victimize Native women: “[The Ch’iłwa:l is] a very powerful nod to what women bring to their tribe. Especially powerful seeing as colonization, and for some tribes up to five hundred years of colonization, it’s amazing to see when they come what they experience . . . decolonization, I would say, at a very basic level, at a very biological level. We are celebrating menstruation. I don’t care what you think of it, this is what we think of it.”²²

It has been just over fifteen years since the revitalization of this ceremony, and we now have young women excited about the possibility of what this ceremony will bring to their lives. In this chapter, I make every effort to allow the young women to speak and contribute to this budding historical record of the Ch’iłwa:l revitalization. We begin with the “first kinahłdung,” Kayla Rae Begay.

Kayla's Ch'itwa:l, held in what would prove to be an unseasonably cold May in 2001, would be the first of many revitalized women's ceremonies that (re)write, (re)right, and (re)rite the roles and status of women in our community.

THE FIRST KINAHŁDUNG

Kayla is my younger cousin, and even though we grew up on the periphery of each other's lives, I had mostly gotten to know her in the years when her family organized and led our world renewal ceremonies—the Deerskin Dance and the Jump Dance. Her grandfather, Mervyn George Sr., is the dance leader and owner of the xontah-nikya:w, the sacred house at Ta'k'imił-ding village, where our shared family ancestor, Mary Baldy Socktish, carried on the ceremonies during the early twentieth century, and where the Hupa people continue to practice many of these ceremonies to this day. Over the past few years I have gotten to know Kayla much better as I watched her grow, graduate from high school, attend Stanford University, and finally UC Berkeley for graduate school in linguistics. She is now an assistant professor of Native American Studies at Humboldt State University. I truly admire her for the passion she displays when talking about the Hupa language. Throughout our interview she interspersed her responses with Hupa words, something that seems to come naturally to her now, and I noticed on several occasions she seemed to prefer the Hupa word to English, as she said several times, “How you say it in English is kind of like this,” because it is sometimes hard to explain Hupa using English.

When I ask Kayla to tell me about herself she smiles and immediately offers this story:

When I was little, my aunt and my grandmother bought a pony. And they had done this treasure hunt to go find the pony. Me and my sister had to go and find all these clues, and there was a pony we eventually found in this trailer. But when we got there, my sister was like, “Yay, a pony! I'm so happy,” and I was like, “What are we going to feed it? Where did you get this? How are we going to take care of it?” That's how I was. I was more practical, and I thought about these things like that. And I must have been about six. So that's me, I guess.²³

She is the oldest of the five children of her mother and father, but, as she explained in the interview, both of her parents are now remarried, and her relationships with stepbrothers, stepsisters, and half-siblings have extended

her family so that she is now the oldest of twelve. In all of my interactions with her as she was growing up, she demonstrated to me the utmost care and consideration in her actions. So in 2001 when my mother told me, “We are finally going to have a Flower Dance” after so many years of not having public celebrations for young women at their first menstruation, it was fitting that it be for Kayla.

Calling her the “first kinahǎdung” is a bit of a misnomer. Our first kinahǎdung is still very much part of each Hupa person’s world, as she has a Ch’ítwa:l performed for her, for all time, in the K’ixinay world. The story of the first kinahǎdung was shared by Robinson Shoemaker in 1901 and later published by Goddard in his book *Hupa Texts*:

Yima:ntiwinyay and his daughter lived by themselves. He used to fish for eels and when he had caught some, he would say to his daughter, “Cook plenty of them and carry them to your uncle.” And she would carry them. And Yima:ntiwinyay would take the house on his head following a trail higher up on the mountain and run ahead. He would place it where the imaginary uncle was supposed to live. He would also bring the sweat house. He used to eat the eels himself. After his daughter had started back, he would pack up the house again. He would run back, taking the house on his head again so that on her arrival she found it as she had left it. He always did that. He used to tell her not to look up as she was carrying the eels. One time she did look up and saw someone carrying a house along the upper trail. When she got to the place, the house was there. Yima:ntiwinyay ate the eels as usual. When his daughter had gone home, he took up the house and carried it back. When the girl got home she said, “I looked up and saw someone was carrying a house along the upper trail toward the south.” “It was wrong of you to look,” said Yima:ntiwinyay. “I am going to shake a stick.” He made a kinahǎdun-ts’e:y dance rattle stick. He saw no one, but after nightfall he heard the sound of many feet. The invisible people ran in until the house was crowded. They danced until morning. The next night more people came, and the night after that still more. After the tenth night they ceased dancing. Standing outside, Yima:ntiwinyay threw incense root onto the fire, praying, “May you live to be men.” When it was dawn, he did not see them. He went into the house. When they stopped dancing, the noise stopped in the house. He sang again and stopped. The invisible ones sang, and smoke came in the home. A cloud of fog enveloped her and took her away. They took the girl

with them to the world above. The girl became a perpetual kinahǎdung. They always dance there. Only when the Hupa people dance here, then they stop dancing up there. That's the end of it.²⁴

When the dance is called down by the Hupa people, the K'ixinay stop their dance and (some say) point their sticks at the dance place where the Hupa people are. Others say the K'ixinay attend our dance as we celebrate these girls who are becoming women.

Kayla would have her Ch'itwa:l when she was fourteen, in May 2001. This would be the first public community Ch'itwa:l in the Hoopa Valley for a number of generations. As the Hupa worked to bring back their women's coming-of-age ceremony, there were various opinions about what this would mean, how it should look, and whether it should happen. Lois Risling explains:

There were those who were totally enthusiastic and thought it was a wonderful idea and we should be doing it. There were those who were hesitant, wanting to watch, wanting to see, but not quite convinced that it was something we should be doing again. There were those who were opposed to it, who said, "No we shouldn't bring this ceremony back," because it was against their personal beliefs. There were those who felt we were celebrating menstruation and they thought that was a private thing and it should stay that way and we shouldn't be doing that.²⁵

For these reasons the dance had not been performed publicly for a number of years, and thus Kayla's willingness to participate as the "first" kinahǎdung for this cultural revitalization would require the fortitude and thoughtfulness she had displayed throughout her life. Kayla's mother, Hupa medicine woman Melodie George-Moore, describes Kayla at this time as having "the presence of mind to learn a lot of these things, not just have them done to her. She was an older girl, and she was not a complainer. You have to have sort of a mental toughness already to begin this, and she was a good pupil. She had an open mind."²⁶ Kayla explains, "My mom asked me if I wanted to do it, and I thought that if I could do it, it could happen for a lot more other girls who would, who could use it and need it, and that was my thought. And I thought, if I could do it, if I could be strong and I could do it, then other people who need this dance could have it too, and that was sort of an easy decision to me. And that's what happened."²⁷

That May was particularly cold. “There was ice on the water,” Lois Risling laughs, “and we were trying things and not necessarily doing them for practical reasons.”²⁸ There were many accommodations that needed to be considered as the Ch’iłwa:l was being revitalized, especially how the dance would fit into the contemporary moment, when schedules, expenses, and even changes in diet affect how the ceremony could and should be practiced. These considerations would provide many learning moments for the women who were working on this dance. For instance, the running trails, which at one time led to sacred bathing spots that were used quite often by the Hupa, were overgrown and in some cases needed to be completely re-created. Kayla remembers, “We had it in our minds that I would do this barefoot. But the trails were so unused, and there’s a lot of thistles and stuff like that; by the time I was done with my first run, my feet were just totally tore up. And it was really cold during my dance. It was May, so my feet were numb, and I didn’t really feel it, but my grandma looked at my feet, and they were really tore up, and she’s like, ‘No, you have to wear shoes.’”²⁹

Considerations like this would be made throughout the dance. This was not going to be a rote exercise, but instead was built with consideration for how the dance could and should be a part of contemporary Hupa society. This ceremonial revitalization was not treated as a static re-creation or an attempt to recapture a “traditional” ceremony from the “old days.” Instead the ceremony was being reclaimed as a dynamic and inventive building block of our culture.

Kayla’s dance, being that it was the first public dance performed in such a long time, was surrounded by an air of what Risling describes as “anticipation and excitement . . . not only for the young woman but everybody else involved. It was just as important for the mother, just as important for the grandmother, just as important for the women who were coming to sing, to be there and participate in it, as it was for the young woman.”³⁰

Kayla describes herself at the tender age of fourteen as being somewhat afraid of the dance “cause I hadn’t seen one. . . . I didn’t know what it was. I didn’t know what was going to happen, and people had explained to me different parts of it, but I didn’t know what each of those parts looked like.”³¹ But she reflects that although many parts of this ceremony are a sort of test for the young woman (running, fasting, prohibitions on itching/scratching), for her, they proved to be more like a “vacation”: “A lot of people were like, ‘What are you doing this for? You’re trying to make her tough and it’s like torturing her.’ No, for me it was a vacation because I was so used to taking care of my siblings

and not thinking of myself, and all this energy focused on me was . . . it felt like . . . I could feel it, and for me that's what I felt like—it was a vacation.”³²

Both Kayla and her mother, Melodie, reflected on how important this dance was to the entire family as well. While the dance was meant to honor and solidify Kayla's coming-of-age, by the sheer force of having to plan and come together for a dance, Kayla's family participated in healing from some of their own fissures: “I think that on a personal level, because my parents were getting a divorce, it meant that we were all still working together as a family for myself and for my other siblings, for the children. So in a big way it's family medicine. You're focusing on the girl, but in many ways there's a lot going on in her circle that is her family, and that is family medicine.”³³

Kayla's dance would set the tone for many of the conversations and experiences that followed. All of the kinah̄dung interviewed reflected on how watching Kayla run made them excited about running, watching her sing made them excited about singing, seeing her smile after she had finished her dance made them want to know what that feeling was like. Melodie reflects that this dance needed to be first and foremost about Kayla and her ties to her culture and people in a very contemporary context:

In my mind historical trauma is the continuation of unhealthy patterns of behavior. Unknowingly, we give these to our children, and I had wanted that to not happen. . . . What I had hoped I was doing was balancing her spirit, putting on what I characterized as a suit of armor so that in going out into the world, because I knew she was going to go to college and go out into the world, . . . to know who she is as a Hupa person, [so] that nobody would be able to disrupt anything. And that's held true, she's held her ground in a number of different places, in a number of different countries, in a number of different languages—that has held true. She knows who she is and can call on that strength at any given time; call on the strength that is Hupa, the land, the people, the language, [and] the ancestors.³⁴

Kayla is now the oldest of the kinah̄dung who have participated in this revitalization. She demonstrates quite clearly that her mother's hope that this ceremony would give Kayla a sense of who she is as a Hupa person so that she can “call on that strength at any given time” has been fulfilled. Toward the end of her interview, Kayla pauses for a moment to take a sip of water before she tells me: “In my spiritual life there's a lot that I can reference to that time. It's not that I'm working from base zero, just learning about my culture. My

family really gave me a lot. They taught me a lot during that time. Not that they don't teach me otherwise, but that actual experience, living that experience in my body, has given me knowledge on how to be a Hupa woman."³⁵

There is a photo of Kayla standing next to her grandmother after her dance that my mother gave me when I started this project. In it, Kayla wears a hooded sweatshirt (a very clear marker of her modern Native life) along with her bark skirt and her blue jay veil. Surrounding her, all around her, from head to toe, is a bright white light that emanates from her body. There is no mistaking the power and energy that has been captured in this photo: in this moment her smile is wide and her stance tall and powerful. This will be the image that I, and so many others, will carry with us as we watch her grow into a powerful Hupa woman, our first kinah̄dung.

ABOUT THE CEREMONY

The Hupa call the Flower Dance Ch'íłwa:l, which means “they beat time with sticks, rattle sticks.” Melodie George-Moore, a speaker of the Hupa language, explains how the term *xoq'it-ch'iswa:l*, which is translated as “a Flower Dance is held for her,” is intimately tied to the spirituality of this dance.

So the Hupa word for our dance is *xoq'it-ch'iswa:l* or *xoq'it-ch'iswa:l-te*. We are going to beat time on her (*xoq'it*). *Ch'iswa:l* means we are keeping time. The keeping time part is a euphemism for doing medicine in some way. The *ch'iswa:l*—you are making sure that they are keeping time on her, which in other aspects that piece of that word, *wa:l*, would be used in drumming, which is what we would be using trying to catch our luck to gamble with, so there is that aspect to it. There's the *ch'iswa:l* of the heartbeat, which keeps time. There are a lot of aspects to that word that are more than just keeping time or beating on her using her as a drum [*laughter*]. It's a particular kind of medicine, actually.³⁶

Melodie's mention of the word *luck* is particularly apropos for explaining the significance of this ceremony. One way the Hupa people referred to menstruating women in mixed company was to say *tim-na'me*. This term means “at the lucky spot—she bathes.” The *tim* is “a bathing spot for menstruating women” but also “any place you train for good luck or power.” During the *ch'íłwa:l* the kinah̄dung bathe in each of these “lucky spots” as part of their daily run. As Kayla remembered, in her *ch'íłwa:l* she learned that menstruation

“is a very powerful time, and what your thoughts are during your menstruation can affect things around you. And for a young girl, her first menstruations for a couple of years are especially powerful.”³⁷ The women’s ceremony is, therefore, a tangible way for young women to reflect on these new aspects of power that now form part of their lives.

Several important things happen even before the ceremony begins, as the young girl and her family must prepare by gathering and making items they will need. The work of collecting, making, and preparing these items is also an important aspect of how this ceremony shapes each kinahłdung and her family. Deja George reflects:

I remember coming home after school. . . . I was twelve at this time. I just turned thirteen for my Flower Dance. Coming home from school, you know most of my friends [say], “Oh, we got practice. We got softball practice. We got basketball practice. What are you doing?” “Oh, I gotta go home and clean my cedar berries.” It took me a while [to understand] what I was coming into . . . and so before it was kind of a dragging process of cleaning all this stuff but in the end I spent a lot of quality time with my grandmother, and she taught me a lot of lessons.³⁸

Among the items that must be gathered or made are the mock orange and hazel sticks that are used in the ceremony to “beat time” over the girl. These dance sticks can be quite elaborate. The mock orange used by women are split several times at the end and then painted. After the ceremony is over, the young girl and her family leave certain sticks that they have chosen at the *k’inahłdunts’e:y’-dahk’iswin-ding*.³⁹ These sticks are being given to the *K’ixinay*. Another important cultural item that must be made for the dance is the blue jay veil. This veil had not been made for a number of years, simply because it is mainly used in the Flower Dance and not in other Hupa ceremonies. Kayla Begay describes the blue jay veil as being “like a visor. It’s like a veil because you’re very powerful during this time, especially as a woman—you are especially powerful during the first couple of times you’re menstruating. And so the visor, during the ceremony at least, is to . . . so that people aren’t looking you directly in the eye and you’re not looking them directly in the eye—there’s a veil between you.”⁴⁰

A final item that plays a prominent role in the ceremony is the maple bark skirt. Maple bark skirts were the everyday dress of most Hupa women before colonization, but not as many have been made or used over the past few

decades. As part of the ceremony, the young girl runs in a maple bark skirt. The making of this skirt requires planning and engagement with Indigenous knowledge of the environment. In addition, the maple bark skirt is intimately tied to a strong K'ixinay woman who can be called upon to help ground people in their stories and knowledge. George-Moore calls this the “community of the bark skirt,” referring to how many women come together to assemble the kinahdung's bark skirt as they are getting ready for the ceremony, thus building a close-knit and strong community of the bark skirt.

You can actually call on the one you are emulating with the bark skirt, and she has a name—even T'oh-kya:ten, the bark skirt woman, the maker or the doer in the bark skirt. If you need or if you find yourself in trouble or you need something, you can call on T'oh-kya:ten and she would come. She's dressed in a bark skirt and she would come to you and so you would know her, *know* through your pores because the bark skirt, the maple, is on your skin. You would have absorbed her because she goes with the bark skirt, the knowledge of the bark skirt. . . . And not only that but the participants now have been able to call on that same group, and we keep adding more to this community of the bark skirt.⁴¹

The contemporary ceremony can be three, five, or ten days. Each day has a number of activities and opportunities for the young woman to learn more about her new role in Hupa culture and society. Daily activities include running, steaming, talking circles, ritual fasting, bathing, learning new skills, learning about herbs, singing, and many other activities that provide the young woman with opportunities to grow.

This ceremony is particularly important to the Hupa people as it is thought that the girl's behavior during these days demonstrates how she is going to live her life. Many aspects of the dance embody this value. Running is a significant part of the daily ritual activities. The kinahdung runs along prescribed trails that bring her to various bathing spots along the river. If she falls, she must get back up; if she gets tired, she must keep going. Young children chase behind her, sometimes teasing her, trying to get her to turn around—effectively “going back” toward her childhood.

When asked about the running, many of the contemporary kinahdung had fond memories of how difficult they expected the run to be and how surprised they were that they made it through each and every run. Deja George notes, “At first [running] was a little tiring. You kind of get this connection with earth

and with your body and with how beautiful you really are and how beautiful the earth is that is surrounding you. During your ceremony you are to be put away, to be isolated from all the nowadays stuff—TV and newspapers and stuff like that, and when you are in your own mental thoughts . . . I feel like it's just a very powerful feeling. It felt refreshing."⁴²

Alanna Nulph describes the run as being “totally zen”:

[Running is] supposed to be, you know, a metaphor for life. And you are running. and you are tired, and you are just going, and you can't look back, and you can't look to your sides, and you have a whole thing over you, and nobody can see you, and you just . . . it was one of those things where you are just totally zen when you are running. And that's pretty hard to do, for a twelve- to thirteen-year-old anyway—be just completely focused on what you are doing, and running and just plugging along at a good pace, you know, not trying to break a world record, or trying to outrun the guy in front of you, or worried about the car, you know, or look at this sort of what Facebook says, just that one thing. That's all you're worried about: just that one thing.⁴³

Bathing is a ritual part of this ceremony that is important for introducing what, prior to colonization, would have become a routine: ritual bathing in prescribed areas. On each day of the ceremony, the kinahłdung runs and does a ritual bath at various bathing spots known as tim. On the last day of the ceremony, she does a ritual bath in all seven of these bathing spots. Melitta Jackson spoke about her ritual bathing as centering her as she moved through all of the new things she had to do as part of this ceremony. It also was another moment when she learned to exercise her autonomy and decide how she would handle new situations: “[Bathing] was refreshing just because the kids couldn't go down there. And you knew they were just waiting for you to go back and run again. It was also calming, like I could take my time. At first I thought, ‘I need to get this done really quickly,’ but after a while I was all, ‘This prayer just may be long. I can catch my breath.’ It was just really nice. It wasn't so much about the prayer but about listening to the river and just being able to enjoy that moment.”⁴⁴

During the day there are also activities that family and community members are invited to, like talking circles and meals. George-Moore notes, “I've noticed that it makes a huge difference to the girl later, after the dance, that we've built that sense of community around her—that community building that we've done she's able to call on.”⁴⁵

The importance of community participation and the role of the community in this dance was remarked several times by the kinahǫdung and both Hupa elder Lois Risling and Hupa medicine woman Melodie George-Moore. Lois Risling explains:

This dance is a little bit different because everybody is participating in it in some way, unlike the other dances, where you have the people that are doing the dancing and the people that are making the medicine. Everybody is there participating in this ceremony. They are either keeping time or, even if they are sitting there, they are singing along, or they're being part of it in a way that you're not in these other ceremonies. And that really struck me as really important because when I would look out at the people and they were standing outside the house, they were praying during the heavy songs; they were facing those directions and turning and participating even though they may not have been in the house themselves.⁴⁶

The significance of how public the ceremony is and how much community participation goes into this dance harkens back to the “wisdom of the K'ixinay,” as Risling explains, but also to how important this public celebration is to addressing issues of colonization, gender violence, and continued gender imbalance in the Hupa culture and society: “I think it's very important to . . . when you have the ceremony, to have the public aspect of it, because the public aspect of the ceremony is what makes the statement to the young woman. The feeling that you get when your family is doing something for you publicly and making a statement, ‘I love this person,’ because I'm doing, I'm making this effort to put this ceremony on. And the community comes and says, ‘We support this person. This person is so important for us that I am taking time off work.’”⁴⁷

At night the community comes together to sing and dance over the girl. Both men and women are part of this dancing. This is where the name for the dance comes from—“they will beat time with sticks over her.” The people who attend sing throughout the night while the young girl sits in a corner of the house with a blanket covering her. She is supposed to remain in seclusion and meditation, so throughout the public parts of the ceremony she remains covered. The importance of these songs and of community members coming to sing over the girl was reflected in many of the kinahǫdung's interviews, where they spoke about being personally affected by the singing in this ceremony. Deja George states, “I still dream about some of the Flower Dance songs that

were sung to me, and maybe I'll wake up thinking, 'Oh maybe that was a sign of, you know, things are going to be okay. You know I'm here for you. Everything is gonna turn out.' You know, spirituals heard that song, they sang that song to me, and so everything is going to be dandy today. It gives you a connection with the spiritual world like no other. I don't think I've ever felt as much connection as I did with my Flower Dance."⁴⁸

There are two types of songs throughout the ceremonial dance. The "heavy song," which opens the community singing, is a prayer song. This is reflected in its slower tempo and the fact that the dancers do not keep time with their dance sticks during this song. The distinction of these songs as heavier prayer songs is also noted by the dancers, as they face different directions to start the dance (turning in prayer to the various directions). Light songs begin after completion of the heavy song round and constitute a majority of the songs in the dance. When light songs are performed, women and men dance along and keep time using their *kinahdung-ts'e:y'*. Light songs can serve many different roles in the ceremony. They can have practical purposes, such as keeping the dancers, *kinahdung*, and participants awake during a late-night or all-night ceremony. They also provide opportunities for the girl to hear the number of people who have come to support her during her ceremony, though she is unable to physically see the people around her as she sits in the corner underneath a blanket.

Humor is also an important part of the dance, as was consistently reflected in the interviews. Risling explains that humor is not only about shaping the experience of the young girl but also about healing and decolonization of our community: "[Humor] brings together those people who are dancing over her, men and women, but also the people who are sitting and not singing and dancing, but are sitting in the audience watching, because it brings—makes it cohesive—all of the people in the group. And it also, in the middle of the night . . . it kind of lightens up the area and what you are doing. It keeps people awake."⁴⁹

For the women who participated in the revitalization of the *Ch'iłwa:l*, it was important to preserve humor in the ceremony because of how significant humor was to the memories and histories of the elders. George-Moore says,

With the Flower Dance there's the laughter too. And the laughter is key to a lot of the lessons that are being taught, because some of these lessons are very hard core with some of these girls who have these lives that are in pieces. Like this last girl, she is a foster child and the placement that she's

at might not be permanent because of the health of the people in the family that is taking care of her. If that's the only place you've known because Mom hasn't been there, but you know these foster people, wow, that's the end of the world. Okay, so how are you going to face the end of the world? With laughter, with joy, with an open mind and an open heart. Because then you'll be open to the opportunities that are going to come that you have to reach out for on your own, because that's kind of what we're training them to do. So laughter is important—we want them to have fun and like this.⁵⁰

Humor is mainly incorporated through humorous songs. These types of obscene, satirical, and improvised-for-the-occasion songs have been noted as being a part of other ceremonies as well.⁵¹ Sam Brown notes in his Ch'iłwa:l stories that a particular humorous song must be a part of the start of a Ch'iłwa:l girl's ceremony. Brown translates *chwung'-na:xe* as “excrement floats about” (or “shit floats”), and this ritual song clearly introduces humor into the ceremony as part of the ritual.⁵² Lois Risling explains that as they worked to bring back this dance, they were conscious of how important humor would be to the ceremonial revitalization. She specifically noted that her grandmother had told her about the role of humor in her Flower Dance many years before.

The first place I heard it was from my grandmother when I was a little girl, my mother's mother. And she was talking about the Flower Dance, and she was saying, “Yeah, and they can get nasty.” And I said, “What does that mean? They can get nasty?”

“Oh, one of the guys came up, and he farted so I would laugh.”

Well, I thought, ‘I don't want to do that.’ And she said, “They are trying to make me laugh, they were trying to make me laugh.”⁵³

The Hupa believe that if a girl laughs during the ceremony, she will get wrinkles when she is older.⁵⁴ But humor also plays an important psychosocial role in the development of the young women, and also in the role of the ceremony for the Hupa community. The Hupa consider this ceremony an exercise and challenge for the *kinahłdung* to reaffirm her new role as a woman instead of a child. While participants are allowed to laugh or joke with each other during the light songs, the girl must remain in seclusion under her blanket, and she must not laugh. Natalie Carpenter explains that for her, humor helps to build a solid foundation for the *kinahłdung*, to help show her the strength and autonomy that she has in her decisions in life.

So the world is going to give you things that maybe . . . throw you off from what you're supposed to be doing and so she is supposed to be—or the girl, whoever, is supposed to be—thinking about, like, their task basically. They're becoming a woman. They're focusing on the songs, they're focusing on the prayers, all those things, and then the humor is supposed to throw them off of that. Life tries to throw you off of your path, tries to throw you off of what you're doing, and so when you're able to kind of hold your composure without laughing and things like that, it teaches you to do that in everyday life. So whatever comes at you, you're able to kind of still do what you got to do—still get done what you came there to do.⁵⁵

Natalie explains that “there's times we laughed, probably,” but this was also okay because the girl learned “to have those moments that, like, actually do get to you, but then to just keep moving forward.” I was pleasantly surprised and proud of the young women who expressed to me how they handled their own experiences with funny songs or attempts to make them laugh. Natalie Carpenter showcases here how the foundations built through the ceremony are about more than rote actions built into tradition; instead they are about supporting personal autonomy. She was okay with her intermittent laughter and considered it part of who she was and would become as a Hupa person.

Alanna Nulph echoes this sentiment: “That was one of the things in the Flower Dance. If you laugh too much you get wrinkles. And me and Natalie, when we got into the trailer together and it's just us . . . we start making jokes and start laughing—laughing and laughing, thinking, ‘Oh, God, we are gonna be wrinkly old women. Happy wrinkly old women.’”⁵⁶

Melitta Jackson also considers that humor was not only part of the ceremonial dancing and singing but also a part of the running. Young children are encouraged to tease the *kinahdung* as she runs, which can result in some very humorous moments. Melitta demonstrated during these moments her own autonomy as a woman: “I remember that every time the kids followed me, my brothers really tried to make me laugh. And I tried really hard not to, just because if I laugh I get wrinkles, but after a while it was kind of ridiculous the things they were trying to say to me. I had to smile at the time. I was like, well, wrinkles are a part of life, you are going to get them no matter what, so they might as well be laugh lines.”⁵⁷

Perhaps one reason that laughter and humor remain such important parts of the ceremony is because of the women's perception that in other ceremonies there are no longer many light-hearted interactions. The women were keenly

aware of this as they revitalized the Flower Dance: “[Humor] seems to be going away in some of the ceremonies, which is unfortunate. . . . I don’t think that should happen in the Flower Dance. We wanted to make sure that it stayed there and it is part of the community and that there is this levity because it invites people in also—it invites them into the ceremony that they feel like they can laugh and be part of it.”⁵⁸

Melodie George-Moore echoes this sentiment and reconnects the importance of humor to building a strong foundation for the young women to navigate their lives: “We’re teaching our girls to be happy. There’s a place for joy in these dances, laughter—and that’s part of the prayer I say also . . . because life is a series of trials and errors, and you carry with you joy. Joy is not a destination, but it is what you carry with you, how you experience the world, and so that makes a huge difference.”⁵⁹

The culmination of the ceremony is a large feast and giving of gifts to the young girl. During this time, she can also provide blessings to those in the community who come to congratulate her, as it is thought she is the most powerful at this time. She may also provide gifts to those who helped with her ceremony and dance. In the end, the girl is said to have all the tools she will need to become a successful Hupa person, and while this may look very different for each individual girl, the autonomy she has displayed throughout the dance will continue to guide her as she makes her own decisions about her future.

THE HUPA WOMEN’S FLOWER DANCE: DECOLONIZATION PRAXIS

As Native American people continue to negotiate colonialism and the lasting cultural and psychological effects that are passed generation to generation, they also continue to (re)write, (re)right, and (re)rite their cultural epistemologies to build decolonized futures. While the historical trauma discourse has been an important intervention in aspects of psychology, mental health, and education, there has also been a growing focus on “narratives of resilience,” which reexamine historical trauma to focus not just on the perceived deficit of inherited trauma and grief but also on inherited traits of resistance, survival, and resilience.⁶⁰ Lucio Cloud Ramirez and Phillip Hammack have worked to “examine how narratives of resilience are constructed in the midst of historical trauma” to demonstrate how individuals “find meaning and purpose in the context of historical oppression.”⁶¹ In the case of the Hupa revitalization, many of the women were intently focused on how stories of

resilience inform particular aspects of healing that must occur in modern ceremonial revitalizations. Lois Risling sees the Ch'itwa:l as an important part of healing from historical trauma that actively divorced Hupa people from their culture and ceremonies. She remarks that through this revitalization

I've seen incredible things. I've seen families who haven't participated in ceremonies for a long time . . . who feel like they can now be a part of the ceremonies and attend other ones besides the Flower Dance. I see young women who have felt like they haven't been doing anything "Indian," whatever that means, or Hupa, now feel like . . . they can make a dress, they can sing a song, they can run, they can finish school, they can get jobs, they can travel, they can weave bear grass, they can do all kinds of things. They can eat acorns, cause that's . . . we're K'iwinya'n-ya:n; we're acorn eaters and part of the requirement of the ceremony is to learn to eat acorns, and we can do that, and they can be a part of that. And I think all of those . . . you can chalk all that up to identity, all those identity-type issues are there. . . . You've achieved something physically, morally; you've achieved something spiritually. You've achieved something in your identity. You know who you are. No matter if somebody stands up and says, "You are not Hupa." You know you are because you've been through this ceremony, and it has said, "You are Hupa."⁶²

The Hupa revitalization has been intently focused on disrupting colonial impositions and embracing embodied ceremonial practices that demonstrate a decolonization praxis. Ceremony was necessarily conceptualized as dynamic and adaptable in this revitalization. And here, the women worked closely with each young girl to include moments that would build resilience through Native feminisms specifically because of the historical trauma associated with the gender violence of colonization. Risling explains that this dance has helped men "look at women in a different light."

When you dance over somebody and celebrate somebody you don't think of them just as a piece of meat or just as some kind of sexual object. Which is kind of ironic, because that's not how the miners thought—the miners thought the opposite of [Native women], just as them being a sexual object. But I think if you've danced with somebody, you've said prayers over somebody, you begin to think of women in a different way. And this is, I think, really important for our society because we have been told that women are

not equal to men, and they're not in the same position that men are in. But this ceremony definitely shows that women are important to the society and play a very important part in it.⁶³

Continuing research shows that Native American cultural practices and community support are positive indicators that can address issues of self-esteem, poverty, school performance, and resilient adaptation in adverse situations.⁶⁴ Teresa LaFromboise and her coauthors found that a supportive relationship with one's mother, an involvement with cultural practices, and a supportive social community can support resilient adaptation by youth.⁶⁵ According to LaFromboise, this finding shows that Native youth who may have stressful home situations yet seem "invulnerable" to these stressors likely accomplish this because of support from other adult community members.⁶⁶ Both Alanna Nulph and Melitta Jackson commented that the community involvement in the dance was an important part of how they expanded their circles of support.

I think the dance brings a lot of people together. That kind of dance especially, because—I mean even if. . . even if Mom is not in the picture or if Dad's not in the picture, you know that side of the family needs to come together for this girl, and the family comes together for her. . . . Who cares about if they are fighting or who cares about what somebody said about somebody two years ago or who borrowed twenty bucks and never brought it back or you steal fish out of my net or whatever. It's—who cares about that—this kid, this child, this girl needs us right now.⁶⁷

A lot of [this dance] is representation of the support you have in the community. I really appreciated the talking circles . . . it was just constantly seeing these women every day. It's like they could leave at any moment, but they're not. This is what they are here for, and I appreciated it. . . . It helped signify how I stood in the community.⁶⁸

In revitalizing ceremonial systems of healing like coming-of-age ceremonies, Native peoples are building a tribally specific decolonizing praxis. Michelle Jacob notes that this decolonizing praxis is built "by drawing from traditions to undermine settler-colonial-imposed hierarchies and reasserting the importance of spiritual relations between humans and our surroundings."⁶⁹ Women's coming-of-age ceremonies are a distinct type of decolonizing

praxis that utilizes Native feminisms as foundational to decolonizing Native communities. This ceremony, since it focuses so intently on the role of women in Hupa culture and society, has directly addressed issues of gender that continue to plague Native societies. Risling comments:

[The Flower Dance] does heal from that, because it tells you that you are not this piece of crap stuff that somebody can abuse and put down. You are being celebrated, as opposed to being demonized or looked down upon. I think that's really, really important. If all of your life you've been told that you are worthless and that you're only good as a sexual partner or somebody who is being abused or beat up or whatever, but that's all you've been told, that you're not worth anything, that you contribute nothing, then this dance comes along and says, "I think enough about you that I'm going to for ten days or five days, or whatever it is, I'm going to sing over you every night. I'm going to make sure that you have a good experience. That's very, very positive. That's very important, that I think you're worth that. You're not this piece of crap that is only good for one thing—having babies and having sex."⁷⁰

It is important to mention that this dance does not just address issues related to women's roles, but also how men should and can support and understand gender roles in Hupa culture and society. Men are also an important part of this dance, because they are an important part of the young woman's community. They participate fully in the dancing and singing; they are there for the young woman as she emerges for the first time as a woman of her tribe. A man must run with the young woman on her last day as a representation of how men can support her as she moves through adulthood. This is not only important for empowering young women, but also empowers young men to embrace Hupa epistemologies of gender balance and respect. This balance reflects a foundation of gender equality, which disrupts settler colonial heteropatriarchy. Kayla Rae Begay says, "I think that [the Flower Dance] is an important part of keeping the balance in our community, in our spirituality, basically in all the areas of our lives. . . . There's a lot there that sort of keeps that balance within our tribe, male and female."⁷¹

As a decolonizing praxis, this ceremony centers Indigenous teachings that have always valued a balanced relationship between men and women. The Hupa show how these cultural teachings center Native empowerment and resilience and engage in the process of decolonization. This ceremony embodies a decolonizing praxis informed by the modern context, demonstrating that

traditions are dynamic rather than static, and they are tied to unbroken foundations of gender equality and empowerment for self-determination provided by our First People. As Hupa medicine woman Melodie George-Moore reflects on the impact of this dance, she focuses intently on how these young women, and all of the people who have become a part of the Ch'itwa:l community, are able to utilize the positivity of this ceremony to confront the many issues that still face the Hupa people. The dance and its public celebration of young women contribute to a community healing, not just as an individual experience but instead as an embodied experience that reverberates in many aspects of people's lives: "I think we're making a dent in, or building and holding space against, negativity. There's a lot of negative things in this world. Especially in the modern world. In the modern Hupa world there are a lot of negative things that are cause for concern, and I think we're holding space against that with this dance. . . . I thought [we were only] giving the girl armor but in fact what we're doing is a lot larger than that, not just for the girl but for other people who come to participate."⁷²

CONCLUSION

Now that this dance has been reclaimed for over a decade in the Hoopa Valley, it has once again become part of the living, vibrant cultural practices of the Hupa people. Since the revitalization of the Ch'itwa:l, there have been at least one to four dances per year. Girls are now requesting and planning their Flower Dance from a very young age. My daughter Arya, who is ten years old, does not know a time when we did not do this ceremony; she does not know a time when women and men did not come together to celebrate a girl and her first menstruation. As she grows, my daughter constantly plans her dance. For her, this is who we are as Hupa people: we celebrate young women, and we believe in their ability to contribute immeasurably to our society. For Arya and many other young Hupa girls, this dance is part of their lives. Alanna Nulph, who was at one time a substitute teacher for the Hoopa Valley Elementary School, told me about the many young girls who are now excited about their Ch'itwa:l: "And I know from just being around the kids from teaching that those girls are, like, really excited for their Flower Dance. They really want to do that. They want to have it and have their friends see. You know, their friend did it and their sister did it and their cousin over there did it and they want to do it now. They want to. I think it's a good thing."⁷³

I end with Kayla Rae Begay, the “first” kinahłdung. Since we sat down for our interview together, Kayla’s life has changed. She recently got married and is on her way to completing her PhD. We are colleagues in the same department, and she continues to work on language revitalization, teaches classes on California Indians, and participates in cultural ceremonies. We ended her interview just over three years ago with this question: “And for all the young girls who are dreaming of their Flower Dance, what do you tell them? What is your advice for them?”

Kayla answered exactly as I would expect her to: in a thoughtful and straightforward way. She commented that managing to revitalize and reclaim our women’s ceremony in just ten short years, so that now it is not just part of our cultural imagination but also part of our cultural future, was nothing short of “awesome.” Whereas generations before her might not have been able to even dream about this dance or have any concept of what it would look, smell, sound, or feel like, now our young women grow up with the songs and laughter from these ceremonies echoing in their heads.

So I asked Kayla, “And for all the young girls who are dreaming of their Flower Dance, what do you tell them? What is your advice for them?”

“That’s awesome,” Kayla responded, “because I didn’t. That’s a very cool experience and I’m happy for them.”⁷⁴