

April 2020

The Voice Of Honor: Centering An Indigenous Ethic Of Protocol In U.S. Rhetorical Studies

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THE VOICE OF HONOR: CENTERING AN INDIGENOUS ETHIC OF PROTOCOL IN U.S. RHETORICAL STUDIES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
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B.A., California State University Long Beach, 2014
May 2020

Acknowledgements

In Indigenous tradition, it is customary for elders to be gifted the first fruits of labor. For that reason, this thesis is dedicated to those I consider my own elders, and especially those most influential for this project: Nana Qaum, Papa Suuq, Mom, Dad, Dr. Mack, and Dr. McCann. Words certainly do not feel adequate for expressing the significance of them or any others named below, yet words are the least I can give. My gratitude comes from deep within my heart and extends far beyond these pages.

First, Nana Qaumaniq and Papa Suuqiina, this project truly belongs to you. Your wisdom inspired my thesis, but your love has always inspired me. It is no small matter that the culminating work of my master's degree is really a lesson you began teaching me when I was only six years old. Thank you for trusting me to imperfectly share it with others. It is an honor to be your granddaughter.

Ashley, no one else has invested as much personal energy into supporting me or this project as you. Thank you for the countless hours you have spent counseling me and teaching me, and for giving me space to be constantly in process. My journey at LSU was not conventional, but your guidance became a primary reason I felt it worked out exactly as it needed to. I will always be grateful you took a chance on me. Bryan, I do not know how you physically do everything that you do, but I feel incredibly fortunate to be one of the many beneficiaries of your superhuman skills. I think the only one who does not know how cool you are is you. Billy, thank you for being so willing to support students, even when that means institutional confrontation. You practice the activism you teach and I am grateful to have been able to learn from someone who takes that seriously. To the rest of the faculty who contributed to my education in unique and invaluable ways—Dr. Berkowitz, Dr. Edwards, Dr. McDonald, Dr. Pecchioni, Dr. Shaffer, and Dr. Terry—I cannot thank you enough.

To the people who have become friends along the way, you are the treasures who brought life to even the hardest days. Katie, Mary, Rebecca, Tommi, and Matt: the only reason Louisiana ever felt like home to me is because of you. I cannot express how much of a gift that is. Mari, Kristen, Rachel, Seth, Zoe, Grace, and Christy: thank you for consistently reminding me that distance is no match for friendship and for faithfully making me feel loved even when I had little or nothing to give in return. Ariel, Ethan, Evan, Gabi, Kholo, Maggie, Montana, Rico, Taylor D., and Taylor M., I have learned as much from you as I have with you. My experience at LSU would not have been the same without you.

To my family. Grandma Hicks and Grandma and Papa Sandras, you have all provided to help make this dream of mine come true, but more than that you have given me unconditional love. When a graduate student knows there is even one person who is always proud of them, it makes a world of difference. I feel so lucky I have three. Mom and Dad, if I had no one else and still had you, somehow I think I still would have made it. You two are just that good. Thank you for consistently reminding me of my purpose and for supporting me in the often invisible ways that truly mean the most. I am so proud to be your daughter.

Lastly, I know God gets an interesting reputation in academic circles, but I have never been able to doubt the goodness of the One I believe in. I have questioned and unlearned a lot of things throughout my education, but I have never been more sure of Love. Thank you, Abba, for gold like manna, perfect timing, and the always available promise of joy.

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Abstract

This project takes seriously the pressing rhetorical questions facing the field of communication studies which illuminate opportunity for radical disciplinary transformation and demand action beyond heightened racial and cultural awareness. In response, I seek to demonstrate that centering Indigenous epistemologies might inform and advance decolonial strategies for change. More specifically, I examine the theory and practice of First Nations customs of protocol and develop what I deem an *ethic of protocol* consisting of honor, humility, and action. After observing how these core tenets function synergistically in the protocol of elders, rites of passage, and entering another's land, I argue that taking up an ethic of protocol might transform our social, rhetorical, and academic orientations by inspiring and prioritizing radical moves to affirm and center the Other. In sum, this thesis offers three primary contributions. First, it forwards a new form of rhetoric rooted in a selfless orientation toward others. Second, it embraces a decolonial lens and decenters whiteness in order to complicate and problematize traditional Western epistemologies while asserting Indigenous tradition and philosophy. Lastly, in continuation of its second purpose, this project offers critics a hopeful way to rethink approaches to scholarship and to academic processes at large.

Chapter 1. Foundations for Building an Ethic of Protocol

In recent decades, the field of communication has only slowly begun to shift long-overdue attention to marginalized perspectives (Flores, 2016). Though the ultimate aim of epistemic justice remains unmet, it is becoming increasingly difficult to remain ignorant to the discipline's racial disparity. Credit for even the slightest movement toward progress is largely owed to scholars of color who have led efforts to posit alternative ways of thinking while problematizing racist patterns of erasure and White ethnocentrism within academia and Western society at large. Molefi Kete Asante, Raka Shome, Lisa Flores, Karma Chávez, Olga Davis, Fernando Delgado, Marsha Houston, Victoria Chen and many more have helped to lay invaluable groundwork for a heightened awareness of academic and cultural inequalities. In one form within our discipline specifically, this awareness culminated in Chakravarty et. al.'s (2018) #CommunicationSoWhite article providing empirical evidence of racial disparity within the field. The article fueled subsequent conversations such as #RhetoricSoWhite as well as debate surrounding discrimination within processes connected to the National Communication Association itself. These events led to a response from the editors of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, who invited a number of scholars to contribute their thoughts in a featured forum on #RhetoricSoWhite within the final volume of 2019. Stacey K. Sowards, Darrel Wanzer-Serrano, Vincent N. Pham, Godfried Agyeman Asante, and Tiara R. Na'puti all contributed their insights to the issue, critiquing various race/ist problems within the discipline and its key publications as well as suggesting possibilities for movement forward. Collectively they vocalized that this particular moment within the field signifies both opportunity and imperative for radical disciplinary transformation that requires action beyond newfound or heightened awareness of problematic norms. As Pham (2019) put it, they "look towards a politics of liberation and justice,

not race-neutral consciousness” (p. 492). He concludes by recognizing rhetoric lies at a juncture where “it can remain #RhetoricSoWhite and retreat from a purported threat of #RhetoricNotSoWhite or [rhetoric] can refashion itself into something more rigorous and intellectually adaptable for the pressing rhetorical questions of our time and future” (Pham, 2019, p. 493). I join Pham in hope for the latter and take inspiration for this project from the same critical juncture he identifies.

Observed optimistically, this moment in our field has opened a door for countless epistemological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives to be welcomed for the first time in spaces where they have traditionally been excluded. The thought of that future is simultaneously exciting and daunting, as growth often carries with it both beautiful revelation and challenging pains. I am particularly curious to witness if and how this juncture might inspire varying forms of restoration, if recuperation from the past or a wholly inclusive future is even possible within our field or academia at large as they exist now. However, because we cannot know what lies ahead or what outcomes are possible until we attempt steps in the direction of our ideal visions, I would like to err on the side of hope as I invest my own time into projects which take seriously the possibility of transformation and liberation. For that reason, I am choosing to focus this piece on the practice I have been taught is central to that aim: protocol.

An Introduction to Protocol

By popular definition, protocol is a behavioral code or set of discursive conventions which govern processes and relationships in business, social, and cultural settings. However, its tangible articulations are almost entirely dependent on the contexts in which they are implemented. Because of its relevance to our current juncture, I will maintain my focus on protocol as it pertains to culture and discourse. In any setting, protocol is a largely symbolic

practice which occurs in the spaces and tensions between one person or group and an Other. It is simultaneously the means and mode of relating to another, functioning rhetorically to foster connection. For the purpose of this project, I forefront the Indigenous conceptualization of protocol as an act of honor (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). In Indigenous tradition, protocol is the process of examining and dignifying the principles, traditions, manners, spaces, histories, and wisdoms of a culture other than one's own (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). This definition relies on the implicit understanding that protocol takes varying shapes relative to the parties involved and can be deployed as both noun and verb. It operates with the imperatives of radical humility and genuine reverence, as protocol conducted without either of those qualities is likely far more akin to manipulation than honor (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). I contend that by centering Indigenous thought amidst processes of reimagining interactions with Others, movements happening at our current disciplinary juncture, a culture of honor might begin to take shape. By studying protocol as both heuristic and praxis and analyzing its consistent central themes, I posit an *ethic of protocol* which I argue bears power to contribute to reformation within our discipline, our institutions, and even society at large, particularly along lines of race, indigeneity, and culture. This ethic, which I will unpack throughout this thesis, consists of honor, humility, and action functioning synergistically to inform—and better yet, transform—our social, rhetorical, and academic orientations by inspiring and prioritizing radical moves to affirm and center the other. In particular, I examine how an ethic of protocol can reimagine orientations towards Others within the academic norms and cultures of the discipline of communication studies.

Academic cultures are constituted by various communicative phenomena—institutional and everyday practices including but not limited to journal reviewing, graduate mentorship, disciplinary policing, professional norms, canons, methodology, what knowledge is valued and

what is excluded, instructional praxis, whisper networks, departmental labor, evaluation, and reporting. By observing these as sites of analysis, I seek to demonstrate how Indigenous orientations offer frameworks for rethinking praxis on multiple fronts. In this thesis, I argue that we can learn from Native American practices of protocol to develop an ethic of protocol that radically decenters the self and radically centers Others. An ethic of protocol has the potential to inform rhetorical theory, methods of rhetorical criticism, and rhetorical pedagogy, informing our methodologies, research praxis, citational patterns, and text and object selection.

Before further explicating why I make these claims and how protocol might be mobilized toward a transformative goal, I believe it is important for me to first explain my own history and experience with Indigenous protocol, being especially intentional to credit those who first taught and modeled the practice to me since it is my personal witnessing of the practice that gives me hope for its potential. As I operate within what Sholock (2012) refers to as methodology of the privileged and being mindful of Indigenous priorities of interconnectivity (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Victor et al., 2016), dedication to reflexivity is essential. While self-reflexivity is not enough for White folks attempting to engage in transcultural, anti-racist, decolonial, or coalitional work, it is at least a minimum and it would therefore be problematic for me to posit scholarship of this nature without first acknowledging my own relationship to it (Heldke, 1998; Sholock, 2012; Victor et al., 2016; Mack & Na’puti, 2019). With this in mind, I find it most logical to describe my relationship to Indigenous peoples and practices, and specifically the tradition of protocol, before detailing the precarity of my relationship to this project in particular.

Reflexivity as a Practice of Honor

I was born and raised in northwest Washington state in a small town in Clallam County, which is home to four sovereign First Nations people groups—the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe,

the Elwha Klallam Tribe, the Makah Indian Nation, and the Quileute Nation. My parents, both White, were pastors of a Christian church and quickly realized that in order to genuinely engage their city and community, it was imperative for them to recognize the heritage and present influence of the First Nations population. Acknowledging their ill-preparedness to properly do so, they researched and contacted a Native couple who had dedicated their lives to educating folks on the history and healing of American land. Dr. Iglahiq Suuqiina (Suuqiina or Suuq), of the Inuit Nation, and Reverend Qaumaniq Suuqiina (Qaumaniq or Qaum), of the Cherokee Nation, came to visit us for the first time when I was six years old. As a child I was immediately enamored by them, captivated both by their physicality and their warmth. They came dressed in their full regalia and brought instruments and jewelry I had never seen outside of photographs. I still vividly remember Qaum kneeling to me and teaching me about the hidden significance of my name and its connection to the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota Peoples. My parents had invited them to lead a Sunday service and before they began they explained how it is customary within nearly every sovereign First Nations tribe to ask for permission or authority to be on another's land by gifting the chiefs, elders or spiritual leaders with purposeful, often personal and valuable gifts. They then gave each of us some of their handmade jewelry and art and this moment became my first exposure to protocol.

Our relationship with Qaumaniq and Suuqiina only grew from our first visit with them. They continued to mentor our family and in turn we were able to build special relationships with elders and leaders within some of the local Nations. When I was thirteen, Qaum and Suuq extended us the immense honor of asking if they could ceremonially adopt us, bringing us into their own family and circle. During the adoption ceremony, they presented us each with our own Cherokee names which they uniquely chose with prophetic intention—my father they called

Bridge Eagle; my mother, Standing Deer; my brother, Running Bear; and myself, Medicine Dove. They instructed us on the Cherokee Way of the Circle and described what it meant for them and for us to be welcomed into their family. Understandably, this act of protocol maintains the most significance to me and I now almost exclusively refer to them as Nana Qaum and Papa Suuq.

When I was sixteen, I went to spend a number of days with Nana Qaum at their home in Tennessee. In addition to a number of first people groups worldwide who share this belief, the majority of Indigenous cultures consider passage into adulthood to be a sacred, meaningful, and intentional process. Having reached the age for said rite of passage, I spent time with Qaum to learn about womanhood, to craft my own regalia, and to glean from her spiritual wisdom. This practice, which is predominantly absent in White, Western cultures, is a protocol which carries significant cultural influence. Rite of passage ceremonies are primary modes through which traditions, beliefs, and values are imparted to next generations, thus becoming a primary way cultures and traditions are maintained.

My experiences with Qaumaniq and Suuqiina extend far beyond those I mention here, but these particular moments are notable examples of the customs I refer to in discussion of protocol at large and because they best reveal the context of our relationship. I share my personal experience as part of this introduction for a few reasons. I do this primarily in order to situate the rest of my discussion and uncover my own positionality in regard to Native American customs and rhetoric. I am acknowledging that as a White woman, I have a unique relationship with Indigenous culture. I have benefitted from a number of privileges inherently attached to my identity and though I have been honored with a deeply special connection to the Cherokee people, I cannot and do not claim Indigenous culture as my own. By embarking on a project

which heavily relies on the description of Indigenous customs, I realize I risk a form of colonial violence if I improperly utilize or appropriate their practices as foundation for my own academic gain (Victor et al., 2016; Mack & Na'puti, 2019). I therefore want to make it clear that I am not writing to exploit this relationship, but to express its value. I asked for permission and received the blessing from my adoptive grandparents to write about the practices of protocol they have taught and demonstrated to me, but also know they do not speak for the entirety of First Nations populations and understand that an element of trust and favor is granted to me as their granddaughter. Thus, as I advocate for a practice which is not original to me, I will do so from a lens of my own positionality. Rather than writing about protocol as someone who has been born into a culture that already practices it, I am writing as someone who has experienced the value of learning its ways and as a member of the culture who arguably most needs the lesson. Much of the knowledge I will share is tradition credited to individuals and cultures outside of myself and (in proper protocol) I hope to give them the honor they are due in my words.

I am not posing protocol as a new practice, but recognize that because of the fault of my ancestors, it is unheard of amongst the majority of White settlers and is thus worthy of consideration for the first time in the White settler spaces where it has not yet existed. Qaumaniq and Suuqiina (2015) write, "Protocol has not been lost so much as it has been ignored" (p. 5) and add "Protocol is the voice of honor. When protocol is lost or ignored, that voice is silenced. In North America, the voice is being heard again but the language it speaks is unfamiliar to most" (p. 7). Understanding it as a "voice," a mode of communication, also makes it intrinsically rhetorical. Academia is just one space where the language is unfamiliar; perhaps because protocol "is the language of the heart and not the head" (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, p. 7). My hope is that it might not be too late for White settlers to learn this language of the heart from those

whose honor we breached generations ago, bowing to the authority of Indigenous traditions our White settler forefathers attempted to eradicate. Perhaps we can partake in transformative work by choosing to act in ways those before us did not. In sum, my desire is to humbly forefront Indigenous wisdom, not to claim it as my own but to advocate for its preexistent value. I believe ancient practice might have the power to build modern bridges across lines of difference and thus present a case for the relevance of protocol in places it has not previously been considered.

A Case for Protocol

As mentioned before, protocol does not take a singular shape. Almost every culture maintains its own customs and procedures in various forms and while I could organize this project according to case study, I do not think it would be possible to comprehensively do so. For that reason, I am choosing to situate this discussion within practices of Indigenous populations within the U.S. settler state and recognize protocol as an inherently rhetorical practice through which honor is communicated. Additionally, while honor is both the intention and the outcome when protocol is properly observed, the practice also relies on commitment to humility and action in the process. Protocol, taught to me as the “voice of honor,” is always born out of radical humility and is always proactive (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). To extrapolate on the central themes of honor, humility, and action within the tradition, I will call upon myriad instances of protocol in practice—some of my own and some from record—but will attempt to focus on recent narratives organized according to three primary types of observation (protocol of elders, rites of passage, and entering another’s land). The qualities the examples demonstrate—honor, humility, and action—are characteristics which I argue can be more widely adopted and applied as relations between and across people groups are reconsidered. “It may be impossible to understand every aspect of what protocol does, how it honors, why it works, and the depth of

feeling it conveys, but it is possible to learn about it and practice it when information about a culture is available to you” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, pp. 184-185). This project is a case for putting in the effort to embrace that possibility.

In addition to demonstrating protocol to my family and many others, Qaumaniq and Suuqiina wrote a book titled *Warfare by Honor* in which they detail their own understandings of protocol, its purposes, its histories, and its many articulations throughout Native culture; this book is the primary text I reference throughout my analysis. By title alone, they make it clear that protocol is a resistive act which functions rhetorically to convey the abstract notion of honor. In it they say protocol “insists on maintaining the dignity or honor of a person or group of people no matter what their place or status may be” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, p. 7). They also note, “where there exists significant racial, economic, social, and educational disparities, the root cause is generally an unwillingness to give honor where it is due” (2015, p. 8). Honor is the key characteristic of protocol and it is a glaringly absent trait within Western culture. Thus, perhaps protocol is a way it can return. By communicating honor as foundational to sociocultural relations, I agree that protocol has the potential to oppose existing forces of injustice which currently permeate both micro and macro level norms in Western culture. While the majority of my thesis will be dedicated to explicating the grounds and implications of that claim, I first want to consider its context, particularly within philosophy, communication, rhetoric, and Indigenous studies. Thus, before providing a chapter outline which details the direction of this project, the remainder of this introduction situates explication of protocol and its rhetorical implications within existing conversations about communication across difference as well as Indigenous knowing and decolonial theorizing.

Lines of Difference and “World” Traveling

To enter discussion about engaging difference across lines of race and culture specifically in academic contexts, I turn to Elizabeth Spelman’s insight presented early on amidst an important shift toward recognition of diversity within feminist theorizing. In her critique at the intersections of racism and sexism, she reminds readers, “Imagining isn’t the same thing as knowing, nor tolerance the same as welcoming; neither show curiosity and openness to learning what may be disadvantageous to one’s closely guarded position of privilege” (1988, p. 185). Specifically addressing White women, she warns against “confusing imagining women with knowing them; in priding ourselves on tolerance; and in appropriating others’ identities through our desperate rush to find similarity” (1988, p. 185). This critique follows Marilyn Frye’s (1983) germinal essay on loving versus arrogant perception. While Frye’s insights are also valuable in this regard, I find it most relevant to look to María Lugones’ (1987) extension of Frye’s ideas and her own foundational concept of playful “world” traveling since “world” traveling notably parallels what I argue for in this paper. In addition, I call on Mariana Ortega’s (2006) more recent piece on loving, knowing ignorance as she too grounds her ideas on work from Spelman, Frye, and Lugones.

Though Lugones also situates her discussion within feminist thought, her arguments can certainly be extended to broader cross-cultural contexts. For Lugones (1987), a “world” must be inhabited by at least some flesh and blood people, but it can also include the deceased or imaginary. It can be a part or a whole of a society which does or does not adhere to a dominant construction. Those who inhabit the worlds may or may not be aware and their place in said world can be complete, partial, conscious, or unknowing. One can move between the worlds and one can exist in more than one at once. In any sense, Lugones intentionally offers complicated

conceptualization of the term in order to make it clear that her description is more of experience than it is of place. She poses playful “world” traveling specifically to women of color, suggesting they might find solidarity as they learn to love each other by travelling to each other’s worlds. I want to be careful not to co-opt her theory in this case as I know her intention is for it to be a means of identity reclamation for people of color. That said, I do not think she disqualifies White folks from the effort so long as they take seriously the sacredness of the process and the humility it requires to embrace the unease of travel, being mindful to reject arrogant, agonist perception. At the very least, her insight is also incredibly important for White scholars to be mindful of in their own work, especially when making intersectional claims.

In the case of this paper, I am grateful for the wisdom Lugones’ theory provides in regard to moving forward carefully. She is correct in stating that “Without knowing the other’s ‘world,’ one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other’s presence because the other is only dimly present” (1987, p. 18). I would be making an egregious mistake if I did not make it clear that while protocol might be an aspect or method of “world” travel, it is certainly not synonymous with full immersion into Indigenous “worlds.” It is far more accurate for me to argue that protocol might be a way for one, particularly one of a dominant positionality, to knock on the door of another world, to honor a land that is not their own, and to wait to be granted authority to “playfully” share in the space. When done with honor, Ortega notes that “world” traveling is “a practice in which we are able to get to know others in their differences, to understand ourselves and others, and to be open to construction or reconstruction as oppressors or oppressed” (2006, p. 67). Quamanig and Suuqina (2015) wrote, “There is a proper way to enter a land not one’s own. We seldom give thought to this way unless we are world travelers who could experience the complications of entering and departing

nations” (p. 185). Protocol presents a way to “travel” with honor. Like what Ortega (2006) argues of “world” traveling, I am not suggesting an ethic of protocol should be considered as a “notion that will solve the problems of arrogant perception or loving, knowing ignorance” (p. 70). Rather, I suggest it might contribute to more honorable, loving travel in the first place and, as a result, might transform academic and social relations between various “worlds” and identity groups.

Within my own disciplinary home, a number of scholars have written similarly about experiencing certain “worlds” and about what it means to carefully consider the “worlds” of others. Perhaps most timely is Lisa Flores’ (2016) work advocating for racial rhetorical criticism, which she says is “reflective about and engages the persistence of racial oppression, logics, voices, and bodies and that theorizes the very production of race as rhetorical” (p. 5). She argues that “rhetorical studies is fundamentally—at its core—the study of race and to argue, therefore, rhetorical critics must participate in the expanding area of racial rhetorical criticism” (p. 6). Addressing fellow academics, she says if we are to take seriously that the force of race “has and continues to organize state, local, and discursive disparity and violence, then part of our task must be to center race as the object (or subject) of racial rhetorical criticism” (p. 16). She suggests rhetorical scholars ought to consider this in nearly every project, but particularly within a paper which addresses an undeniably raced practice, I feel the weight of her admonition. For that reason, I believe it is also crucial to situate this paper within Indigenous scholarship and conversations about settler colonialism and decolonization, a task I take up most heavily in the following chapters.

Indigenous Knowing, Settler Colonial Contexts, and Decolonial Theorizing

First and foremost I want to recognize Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's (2012) important work to clarify that decolonization is not and cannot simply be a metaphor. Especially as a White person attached to settler heritage and privilege who is attempting to engage with Indigenous scholarship and practice, I sense the severity of ensuring this project does not appropriate or encourage appropriation of Indigenous customs and that it does not operate from an attempt to restore innocence rather than an honest acceptance of incommensurability (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Encouraging the adoption of protocol is not to alleviate the responsibility of White folks (or others). Instead, it is the responsibility White folks carry which elicits its need in the first place. An act of genuine honor does not relieve the one giving it; it elevates the one receiving it. When properly carried out, protocol ought to be both inspired by and validating of incommensurability, never an attempt at compensation.

With that lens in mind, I situate this project in between and in conversation with a number of other scholars who are conducting work in Indigenous studies both from and about Native American paradigms and rhetorics. In addition to Tuck and Yang, I forefront scholarship engaging Indigeneity from Linda and Keith Goulet (2014), Cash Ahenakew (2016), Nick Estes (2019), Tiara Na'puti (2019), Aimee Carillo Rowe (2017), Patrick Wolfe (2006), Philip Wander and Richard Morris (2000), Janice Victor (2016) and others. I also take heed from fellow White scholars engaging in this space such as Mary Stuckey (2001), Scott Morgensen (2011), Ashley Mack (2019), Jason Edward Black (2009, 2018), and Casey Ryan Kelly (2011, 2018). Each of the aforementioned authors provide immeasurably valuable insight into the oppressions of settler colonialism, the challenges of decolonization, and Native resistance which is undoubtedly foundational for this project.

Chapter Outline

In my review of literature and methodology following this chapter, I first situate this project within the current juncture of the communication studies discipline and existing theory on engaging others in scholarship. After establishing that context, I describe the methodological lens I take up in my approach and discuss how I might resist *with* Indigenous groups as I carefully center First Nations thought, noting some of the risks that come with that decision. I forward perspectives of decoloniality and resistance and then explore existing works which forefront Native American rhetoric in order to consider protocol more specifically within Indigenous studies. Finally, I move into more detailed description of First Nations protocol primarily via text from my grandparents to create a working definition of the concept before focusing on its central themes in chapter three.

Asserting protocol as a rhetorical *ethic* rather than just a rhetorical practice requires that I discuss protocol as both artifact and theory. In order to develop it as theoretical, however, I have to examine it in practice. For that reason, the analysis in the third chapter of my thesis is committed to intentional examination of the three essential qualities of protocol within First Nations contexts: honor, humility, and action. These are the themes most consistent across my grandparents' descriptions of protocol at large and throughout specific instances of its observance. I explore these themes within three of the most common traditions of protocol amongst First Nations peoples: protocol of elders, rites of passages, and entering another's land. I quote stories from my grandparents at length in this portion in order to maintain the centrality of their perspectives and then extrapolate to highlight the prevalence of protocol's primary themes. My purpose in noting the consistency of said qualities across varying performances of protocol is to illuminate how protocol can be considered as an ethic of honor, humility, and

action rather than specific types of performance. This makes ways for me to suggest its relevance in additional settings.

Chapter four, then, is dedicated to imagining protocol within academic spaces. I consider the academic parallels of elders, rites of passage, and entering lands and comment on existing protocols such as land acknowledgements and citation politics. My purpose, again, is not to encourage appropriation of specific First Nations practice, but to advance Indigenous thought as one way we might rethink current scholastic processes and interactions. I ask questions to inspire how we might take up an ethic of protocol in myriad scenarios and suggest how honor, humility, and action together might be simultaneously transformative, constructive, and resistive within our discipline.

Conclusion

The current juncture of our discipline and of the social climate within the United States provides ample opportunity and necessity for radical acts of honor. Within Native culture, honor is recognized as integrity in its highest form. “To be honorable and to hold another’s honor is the greatest promise that can be given” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 14). Even with exceptional parents, outside of the “golden rule” this is a lesson I was not taught in my culture. Honor is the Native way, but it is offensive to even imagine repeating that as “the Western way.” When I stand in front of my classes of predominantly White students in a state where racial tension is certainly not foreign, I see them wanting to throw in the towel when we talk about structural racism and generational privilege; frustrated and hopeless at best, indifferent at worst, feeling unequipped to move forward. Perhaps it is because honor is not the way we have been shown and our cultural alternatives are the root of the problem. When they are not taught ignorance, they are taught problems (and often that they *are* the problem), but rarely are they shown

solutions. Thus, because maintaining the status quo is far less daunting than pursuing societal revolution, the cycle continues. But what if we learned from the wisdom of Indigenous peoples and made honor a staple within generational lessons and legacy? I realize it feels utopian to imagine an entire generation embracing a culture of honor, but it might only feel that way because we carry a Western mindset. In almost every other culture, honor is the norm. Before the violence of colonization breached the process, honor was the norm in the Americas, too. We are well overdue to see it restored. My grandparents believe it is never too late to learn or to teach honor, to embrace protocol as a standard. I have taken up this work because I share their hope, even as one still learning myself.

I realize I still have enormous progress to make in terms of my own self and cultural awareness and am doing my best to embrace the processes of unlearning and learning anew in the midst of that recognition. I am optimistic, though, that embracing an ethic of protocol might be a way for me to reimagine doing so. Rather than approaching intersectional difference with trepidation, even if only fear of “doing it wrong,” how might my own perspectives and interactions change if I engage those moments with humility, honor, and action instead? I could never flawlessly embody an ethic of protocol, but I would rather continue the slow, messy, and complicated endeavor of learning the voice of honor than to stay silent in the face of oppression and injustice.

I am not advocating for effortless change, as honor expressed through humility and action requires radical commitment and vulnerability, nor am I suggesting the process will be painless. In fact, especially for White folks, protocol will likely come with immense sacrifice. We need to be prepared to be denied the authority or blessings we seek—the authority our ancestors stole—and in turn to bow to those we honor in spaces that are not, or were never intended, to be our

own. Between any parties, the aim of protocol should never be a certain reward, permission, or outcome. Authority always lies with the one being honored and protocol with selfish intention can only be named manipulation. That said, I cannot help but maintain hope that humbly embracing costs to oneself and actively approaching another with honor, requesting to share space with recognition of its value and of the one who already inhabits it, might begin to bring healing to wounded lands.

Chapter 2. Protocol in Context(s)

The present conversation happening within the communication studies discipline makes consideration of protocol particularly timely, but this project sits in conversation with a number of other tensions, settings, and contexts as well (Rodriguez, Dutta, & Desnoyers-Colas, 2019). My aim in this chapter is to maintain understanding of protocol as uniquely sovereign outside of academia while also exploring how building an ethic from its logics might be connected to conversations happening within critical cultural, feminist, and Indigenous studies. In addition to the current juncture of our discipline, I situate discussion of protocol in conjunction with existing studies on engaging others by calling upon theory from multi-disciplinary scholarship. Then, before moving into a survey of existing research on Native American rhetorics, I carefully describe my methodological lens with particular attention to tensions associated with my positionality and with the practice of criticism in general. I close this chapter with exploration of literature on protocol itself, primarily referencing text from my grandparents, and ask questions in order to set the stage for analysis in the following chapters.

The Current Juncture

Taking into consideration racial/ist awareness within communication studies, the current juncture where we find our field now is perhaps a historical peak, but it is certainly not entirely new. A number of academics have previously called attention to racial inequalities and disparities prominent within the discipline, often recalling and sharing their experiences in order to do so. For example, specific to rhetoric, Flores (2016) reminds readers of work from Edwin Black, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Richard Jensen, John Hammerback, and Martha Solomon. She also rightfully credits early race scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante, Alberto Gonzáles, Marsha Houston, and Dolores Tanno with changing “the path of rhetorical studies in particular and

communication studies at large” in regard to centering critical intersectional lenses (Flores, 2016, p. 5). Following a linear perspective, Flores herself has offered foundational insight in regard to the discipline’s racist history and has made notable suggestions for how it might be refocused. Bernadette Calafell, Karma Chávez, and Olga Davis have been key contributors on this front as well. These scholars highlight the interconnectedness of communication studies with critical perspectives being discussed across academia in spaces such as philosophy, feminist studies, cultural studies, women’s and gender studies, African and African American studies, Chicano/a and Latinx studies, Indigenous studies (the intersection I engage most here), and other social science and humanities traditions. For example, in her discussion of theories of the flesh, which she describes to be a methodological “homeplace” for herself and other scholars of color, Calafell (2010) cites Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins as fundamental to her academic paradigm, all of whom are women of color feminists from other disciplinary backgrounds. The problems of racial disparity, erasure, and neglect are pervasive across Western academia and germinal theorization about related patterns, effects, and room for change has been born out of a number of varying fields (Calafell, 2010; Flores, 2016; Victor et al., 2016). Clearly, as scholars before me have demonstrated, it would be impossible to skillfully or honorably write about the race/ist problems within communication studies without also referring to work in other disciplines. While my ultimate aim is to posit protocol as action worthy of consideration in myriad settings, I am recognizing it as a practice with significant rhetorical influence and am situating my discussion within communication studies. However, as I have just mentioned, I cannot write about the current context of our field without also acknowledging its connection to alternate disciplines and the inspiration fueled by the wisdom of other academics and philosophers. Thus, though my intent is to keep my focus narrowed to

communication studies, I call upon a number of scholars outside our discipline in order to inform my scholarship and this project, primarily those engaging and producing Indigenous and critical feminist work.

Perhaps the key point of possibility I recognize within our discipline is not simply that there might be an increase in opportunity for work written from and about marginalized populations, but also that what follows will be an increase in opportunity to engage with it. This is especially critical for white scholars and those of us with privileged positionalities to recognize. Unfortunately, this realization is inextricably linked to the concern that those who could be said to be most in need of genuine, critical, cross-cultural reading might be least likely to do so. This concern is certainly not reason to cease efforts for disciplinary transformation, but it does lend support to the importance of reconsidering how we might engage perspectives outside of our own. I eventually advocate for a form of protocol as a framework for this kind of progress, but first acknowledge the suggestions and theorizations of academics before me. I contextualize my project with this in mind because I too need to heed the wisdom others have offered in regard to cross-cultural work and engagement in this very piece. Before I move into discussion of Indigenous thought and theory, I first consider what it means for me to be doing so as a White scholar. I also do this with the understanding that I will essentially be asking others to consider acting in a similar fashion and therefore find it imperative to set up my project with an intentional lens in mind. That said, I look first to those who have already offered invaluable insight about operating from a place of privilege, conducting critical work which centers race, and engaging and honoring the perspectives of Others.

On Engaging Others

Feminists, specifically feminists of color, have initiated and published arguably the most groundbreaking work confronting various systems of inequality (hooks, 1981; Perry, 2019). This has happened largely through the address of racism within feminist movements, but the roots and implications of this realm of criticism extend far beyond those spaces. In the second wave era, amidst numerous conversations at the intersections of racism and sexism, Marilyn Frye (1983) published her now classic essay on the loving versus arrogant eye. First recognizing the arrogant eye as the male gaze which perpetuates women's servitude and objectification, Frye (1983) then suggests that women also arrogate each other, meaning they organize and objectify the world and the Other according to their own interests. Ortega (2006) succinctly explains the argument by saying, "the arrogant eye gives the world intelligibility and thus women want to be inside the web of meaning the arrogant eye creates" (p. 59). Frye (1983) recognizes that because some women believe there needs to be unity and agreement in order to combat the patriarchal arrogant eye, they (white women) arrogate those who are different from themselves (women of color). In other words, just as the male gaze arrogates white women, white women arrogate women of color—asserting themselves as superior and objectifying the Other. In their discussion on engaging Indigenous populations, Victor et al. (2016) reiterate the prevalence of these problematic tendencies in research as well, patterns in which Indigenous folks are often stripped of their own self-subjectivity and determination as they are made mere objects of study. In direct contrast to the coercion and consumption of the arrogant eye, Frye (1983) poses the loving eye as one which intentionally looks, listens, checks, and questions in the process of perceiving another. This shares similarity to the Indigenous priorities of alliance building through mutual self-determination and openness toward others (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Victor et al., 2016). Loving

perception is mindful of boundaries and complexities, careful and generous. Unfortunately, however, Ortega (2006) recognizes more than twenty years after Frye's publication that such perspective is still a rare lens and it is from this place that she introduces her conceptualization of loving, knowing ignorance.

Ortega (2006) says those who suffer from loving, knowing ignorance are ones who "seem to have understood the need for a better way of perceiving but whose wanting leads them to continue to perceive arrogantly, to distort their objects of perception, all while thinking that they are loving perceivers" (p. 60). Whether in citation (or lack thereof), generalization, erasure, neglect, or assumption of authority, white rhetoricians like myself are particularly prone to neglecting concern for how criticism in and of itself can be an immensely violent act under a guise of loving perception (hooks, 1989; Wiegman, 2012; Flores, 2016; Mack & Na'puti, 2019). Specific to this project, loving, knowing ignorance is akin to liberal recognition politics and is a deceptive act which actually only serves the settler-colonial state because it reasserts Eurocentric authority over Indigenous epistemologies through acts of determination over what is and is not worth naming or including in Western scholarship (Ahmed, 2012; Ahenakew, 2016). Ahenakew (2016) extrapolates on Ahmed's (2012) contributions and describes within educational contexts how:

She presents racism and whiteness as a disguised systemic phenomenon where one social group has the power to define what is normal, natural, and desirable in ways that make this very power invisible because the power itself is also presented as normal, natural, and desirable. Within this logic, if this group perceives Indigeneity as desirable, it will also define what is desirable about Indigeneity. This means that undesirable aspects, such as challenging the power to create definitions or making the invisible power visible, may not be tolerated. By announcing a declared commitment to Indigeneity, institutions and individuals have an excuse to avoid talking about their systemic racism. By creating a contained and controlled space for Indigeneity to be expressed, they naturalize their alleged normality as naturally benevolent. Through strategies of inclusion created to 'welcome' the 'stranger' into educational spaces, dominant social groups reassert their territoriality (p. 331).

This is part of the risk attached to engaging Indigenous epistemologies in scholarship and it is not a danger I take lightly. Thus, I emphasize for myself and other White settler scholars the importance of prioritizing Indigenous thought not only in our scholarship, but also in how we go about it.

The maintenance and negotiation of social relationships is fundamental to work from and within Indigenous communities (Findlay, Ray, & Basualdo, 2014; Victor et al., 2016). Though similar to logics forwarded by the aforementioned critical feminist scholars, Victor et al. (2016) emphasize even further that genuine relationship building is not just suggested, but essential for scholarship in any way connected to Native Americans populations. Many Indigenous philosophies and understandings are constructed through the lens of interconnectivity, not simply inter-recognition (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Victor et al., 2016). “Relational epistemology and accountability situate relationships as the foundation of ethical research with Indigenous peoples” (Victor et al., 2016, p. 424), which means engaging others is not just a prerequisite for Indigenous research, but is of paramount importance to the entire process. This is why I dedicate so much attention to texts I have had access to because of my own relationship with my grandparents and focus on protocol as a relationship building practice between various parties. Victor et al., (2016) implore:

As we strive to Indigenize the methods we use in our research...it is important that we strive to think in similar relational terms. The development, maintenance, and renewal of social relationships, built on Indigenous concepts, are central to research with Indigenous people (p. 442).

Goulet and Goulet (2014) provide a framework from a Nehinuw (Cree) worldview on this front, describing how the relationships of *weechiseechigemitowin* (alliances for common action), *otootemitowin* (respectful openness and acceptance of others), *weechiyauguneetowin* (partnership, collaborative or shared action), and *weechihitowin* (supporting and helping each other) come together to form a fundamental lens for scholarship in this realm (Victor et al., 2016).

Though the primary sites of attention for Goulet and Goulet (2014) and Victor et al. (2016) are relationships between qualitative researchers interacting with First Nations groups, I consider their frameworks for this project too, noting the importance for me as a Settler scholar to keep notions of interconnectivity, alliance, partnership, and collaboration at the forefront. Tobias et al. (2013) argue that the relational imperative within Native American research requires non-Indigenous researchers to practice reflexive awareness to recognize their own positions of power while making conscious efforts to rebalance the power dynamic with a focus on learning, not predetermining. Ahenakew (2016) says:

unless we look carefully at the frames of reference of the schooled modern subject, the ways we are oversocialized within it, and the dynamic of grafting, we will not be able to grasp the magnitude of the task before us, and we continue to risk mistaking assimilation for resistance when we promote Indigenous practices in academia” (p. 334).

These recognitions on engaging others are fundamental to the methodological lens I carry throughout my thesis.

Methodology

The grievous reality linked to discussion of First Nations tradition is that it was at one time the way of the land in the Americas. Indeed, what I pose to be “restored,” “renewed,” or considered for the “first time” is only written in that language because of how it was violently rejected and removed short centuries ago. That rhetoric in and of itself reveals a painful history

of colonization. Buescher and Ono (1996) say colonization occurs when “colonizers appropriate land, conquer indigenous people, and found colonialist governments to oversee the efficient operation of property and labor...and [then] teach the colonized the language, logic, and history of the colonizer” (p. 131). Though achieving equality is a “definitional impossibility in the colonial milieu” and we know colonial acts cannot simply be reversed or undone (Black, 2009, p. 81), I wonder what might be the outcome if the colonizer were to be taught the language, logic, and history of the colonized instead. This is not to say that such attempts have not already been made or to suggest some form of colonial vengeance, but to reflect on the decolonial potential of a dominant group choosing to learn from rather than force upon, even if generations late. “The goal is not for everyone to merely swap spots on the settler-colonial triad, to take another turn on the merry-go-round. The goal is to break the relentless structuring of the triad - a break and not a compromise” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 31). I ponder this potentiality with an “ethic of incommensurability” in conjunction with Tuck and Yang’s (2012) admonition that decolonization is not just a metaphor, that “decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (p. 35). Whether or not settler sovereignty can or will be abolished as a result of multitudinous decolonial and anti-colonial practices, I do believe Indigenous sovereignty can be elevated despite it and perhaps as part of the process. That belief is what motivates this project.

I note Sholock’s (2012) advice regarding methodology of the privileged as well as Ahenakew’s admonition for “careful consideration of the paradoxes and limitations of translating insights between Indigenous and non-Indigenous spaces” (p. 337) and attempt to write in a way which implicates myself and other advantaged persons as “learners,” while advantageously and rightfully situating Indigenous folks as “knowers.” While I have some of my own experience

with protocol and will certainly include that, I will only do so with the recognition that I have learned and am still learning the complexities of it from those who know it as central to their identity and culture. While today protocol certainly functions as resistive, the act is not inherently decolonial because it existed among Indigenous populations in the Americas well before colonization and it has existed in other contexts and cultures. However, to center and amplify it as part of Indigenous thought and tradition within what is now a settler colonial context most certainly is. Thus, incorporating and committing to decolonial logics is imperative for this project. In regard to decolonial motivations and outcomes, Victor et al. (2016) write:

Research that is decolonizing serves to interrogate long-held assumptions of Western expertise and superiority, deconstruct practices, reveal systemic discrimination and power imbalances, and reconstruct the same in a more equitable manner that respects the expertise of Indigenous peoples. Recognizing and centralizing Indigenous knowledges, understandings, and expertise in community-based research Indigenizes and decolonizes research methods. In so doing, power shifts to a more balanced approach that recognizes the understandings of Indigenous peoples and builds the capacities of Indigenous communities to self-determine (p. 424).

Mack and Na'puti (2019) suggest witnessing as “one heuristic for approaching decolonial feminist critique that works to build deep coalitions by radically de-centering our voice as authors in favor of centering the voices of Indigenous communities” and it is the method I take up here as well (p. 349). “Such an approach illuminates colonial processes by engaging with Others at the colonial difference while enabling robust challenges to colonial violences by reasserting indigeneity” (Mack & Na'puti, 2019, p. 349). Lugones (2003) says to witness faithfully “one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression” (p. 7). She adds, “faithful witnessing leads one away from a monosensical life. One ceases to have expectations, desires, and beliefs that fit one for a life in allegiance with oppression” (Lugones, 2003, p. 7). To her,

faithful witnessing is critical to the act of “world”-traveling. As an outsider to Indigenous culture, this is the position I must take. I choose to write as witness to First Nations people with recognition of protocol as a force which functions in direct opposition to systems of oppression, being careful to recognize how it does so on its own terms (Ahenakew, 2016). Because protocol asserts humility rather than arrogance and honor rather than domination, it serves as a resistive act to settler and social oppressions. My grandparents’ book on protocol is titled *Warfare by Honor* and they recognize the practice to be one of the primary ways inequalities might be dismantled (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). Particularly as a person of privilege, I understand that maintaining my position as a witness rather than an authority is “very difficult to achieve, since there are a great many ways to entice one back to the road of collusion with power” (Lugones, 2003, p. 11). However, since “it is noticing resistance to oppressions in their complex interconnections...that we can sense each other as possible companions in resistance,” I maintain optimism that building partnership against hierarchical injustices is possible (Lugones, 2003, p. 11). In fact, I would say attention to such alliances are the only way to approach this kind of a project (Victor et al., 2016; Ahenakew, 2016).

In her own work on witnessing, feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver (2001) problematizes the popular impression that the concept can be essentialized as some form of recognition. Instead, she makes the case that witnessing must take into consideration how subjectivity is formed and sustained and that to truly bear witness, one must engage in a process of considering the complications and tensions of what exists beyond recognition (Oliver, 2001). When witnessing is reimagined in this way, Oliver (2001) notes that “relations with others do not have to be hostile alien encounters. Instead they can be loving adventures, the advent of something new” (p. 224). Witnessing as mere recognition is an inherently violent and often colonizing act,

but witnessing to honor the sovereignty of another can be transformative. Carefully treading the difference is imperative, especially within works of criticism which are traditionally dedicated to authoritarian analysis of the texts, identities, and artifacts of another. The hope of a new way born out of love and honor is why I think protocol is worthy of attention that reaches deeper than sheer recognition.

Because I will essentially be arguing for a certain implementation of protocol, a form of witnessing marked by inspired action and not just passive spectating, I want to be sure to clarify that I am not suggesting absorption or appropriation. To learn from and act upon the wisdom of another does not have to result in intellectual theft, erasure, or violence, but I am quite aware that it regularly does. I am also cognizant of the fact that this is an especially prominent danger in a settler colonial context (Morgensen, 2011; Ahenakew, 2016). Mack and Na’puti (2019) warn, “colonial translation into a dominant Western movement would reenact colonial power relations by erasing indigeneity and with it the fractured locus of the colonial difference that enables a resistant articulation of coloniality through witnessing” (p. 355). Additionally, appropriation and shallow recognition of Indigenous knowledges can obscure their oppositional and decolonial possibilities (Mack and Na’puti, 2019; Barker, 2014). I will mention this again, but it is also worth stating now that if protocol is to be practiced, and especially if it is to be practiced by white folks, it must always be explicitly credited as a First Nations tradition. No non-Native person should ever engage in protocol without first recognizing that it is not inherent to their culture and honoring those from who they learned. This imperative can also contribute to the power of the practice, as I believe there is certainly a layered beauty in the doubled humility it requires for a privileged person to affirm the sovereign wisdom of Indigenous groups while acting intentionally to honor the value of another. Protocol should not be an act of robbery; it

should be an act of amplification. Additionally, the invitation to witness it is never invitation or permission to consume (Lugones, 2003; Veronelli, 2016). Mack and Na'puti (2019) offer valuable perspective on this front and I fashion my approach to this project with a lens similar to the one they took and explained in their work on Indigenous movements against gendered violence.

After acknowledging their unique positionalities, Mack and Na'puti (2019) “recognize the various ways [their] approach can fail and how [their] engagement...can unintentionally reinforce colonial relations” (p. 354). As I recognize of myself in regard to Indigenous populations and even my grandparents, Mack and Na'puti (2019) also acknowledge that since they inhabit and embody “deeply entrenched colonial ways of knowing” in their identities, the groups they engage are in many ways “fundamentally unintelligible and inaccessible” to them (p. 354). They center Indigenous movements in an attempt to “give space and amplify their voices on their own terms,” but also know that as outsiders they do not have access to or the ability to fully understand or articulate their perspectives” (Mack & Na'puti, 2019, p. 354). I extensively quote them here because they so well articulate words which also express the feelings I have about my own identity in connection to work in Indigenous studies. They model decolonial criticism by decentering their own authority and skillfully employ a commitment I seek to imitate by “embracing plurality at the colonial difference and accepting inaccessibility and incomprehensibility” as part of transformative work and processes (Mack & Na'puti, 2019, p. 355). Recognizing intersubjective coalitional engagement as central to a decolonial project, I also note the imperative of engaging with rather than about Indigenous groups (Smith, 2012; Ahenakew, 2016; Veronelli, 2016; Mack & Na'puti, 2019). An obvious embodied tension exists throughout this project, one which exists between the seemingly unavoidable risk of replicating

harmful colonial relations and a hope that lies in coalition building and transformative potential. Though I will certainly do this imperfectly and I am perhaps risking some of my own academic credibility in doing so, I hope to be a writer who complicates Western institutional tradition and communicates as an actively learning witness, not a knowing authority. I do not think I could ethically do the work of resisting with in any other fashion or with any other lens.

With this perspective in mind, for my analysis and explication of protocol, I turn first to those whom I have learned from. I will call upon my own experiences witnessing, experiencing, and extending protocol, but will primarily maintain attention to the work of my grandparents and other Indigenous folks who have demonstrated and kept record of the tradition. I am grateful I am able to reference some written history in this regard, but also rely on personal records from my grandparents and other tribal elders and members who they mention and direct me toward. My analysis is not a traditional rhetorical criticism; instead it is a detailed account of the ways protocol functions to communicate honor through humility and action. Toward this end, I look to Indigenous writing and actions as both theory and text. I argue that within the U.S. settler state, protocol is a rhetorically resistive act because its tenets situate it in direct opposition to systems of oppression as we work towards decolonization. Because of my unique positionality, the description I include will incorporate both personal and outsider perspective. I do not claim to be presenting a comprehensive history or explanation of protocol, nor could I attempt to. However, as we witness together the potential and power of radical humility and honor in action, perhaps we will realize new ways we can build coalitions and resist with one another.

Indigenous Rhetorics

I am grateful that at the time I am entering this conversation, there are a number of scholars who have modeled how to examine Indigenous rhetoric while honoring the subjectivity

of First Nations groups and without reducing Native American discourses or people to objects of study. For example, Casey Ryan Kelly and Jason Edward Black's recent book *Decolonizing Native American Rhetoric* includes work from more than a dozen authors who are committed to "examining anti-colonial discourses that privilege indigenous narratives and question the legitimacy of state sovereignty over indigenous people" (2018, p. 12). This kind of work refuses to assimilate Indigenous epistemologies into Western structures and instead recognizes that their ways of knowing are always-already sovereign despite centuries-long efforts to displace them. This is the direction of "criticism" that excites me and is the movement I attempt to situate my own work within as well.

In recent years, critical Indigenous studies surrounding representation and mascotting (Black, 2002; Endres, 2015); protesting and coalition building (Presley & Crane, 2018); gendered violence (Mack & Na'puti, 2019; Morgensen, 2011; Wieskamp & Smith, 2020); environmental justice (Endres, 2009); identity (Kelly, 2011; Sturm, 2002); and political resistance (Kelly, 2014; Black, 2009) have all contributed to a greater chorus of Native survivance stories which Gerald Vizenor describes as "renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (1999, p. vii). "American Indians have a long and rich history of speaking back, championing their own narratives, and subverting colonial power...[and] these acts of speaking back, thwarting colonialism, and advancing Native counternarratives" are of foremost concern for a number of scholars engaging with Indigenous studies today (Kelly & Black, 2018, p. 3). The narratives we now label as resistant were once the way of the land in the Americas; they only became "resistant" once faced with the violent force of colonization. This is why engaging in work and activism which restores the original authority of First Nations epistemologies is

central to Indigenizing rhetoric and is imperative for advancing a decolonial project (Ahenakew, 2016; Kelly & Black, 2018).

In their foundational piece on the Ghost Dance Movement, Morris and Wander (1990) argue that attention to the efforts of Native Americans to “overcome the imposition of a fundamentally mistaken identity has significant implications for our understanding of Native American rhetoric and, more broadly, of how rhetoric functions externally and internally for groups marginalized by hegemonic blocs” (p. 166). By studying the context, conditions, and strategies of protesters at Wounded Knee and the Ghost Dance Movement, they trace in Native American rhetoric significant attempts to “revitalize tribal cultures by creating an ‘ethos’ capable of transcending cultural differences among different tribal cultures and of forming coalitions sufficiently powerful to resist encroachments by the dominant society” (Morris & Wander, 1990, p. 166). Their discussion of the development of an ethos of transcendence, coalition building, and revitalization parallels the work I attempt here. I seek to trace the ways protocol functions in First Nations contexts as constructive of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in order to assert how an ethic of protocol might serve as a resistive force to colonial ontologies in external spaces.

A key pattern in various study of Indigenous rhetorics is a continual *decentering* of Western, colonial principles and *recentering* of Native thought. These moves problematize the pervasive assumption among predominantly White audiences that the Americas are operating in their most evolved state and that they are better now than they ever have been, save some general human imperfection. “The notion that democratic publics work toward progressive social change periodizes colonialism as an early though misguided form of governance. Euro-American morality, as the argument goes, evolved toward more enlightened and progressive form of

government” (Kelly & Black, 2018, p. 11). Decolonial projects which reassert “old” ways of governance and morality challenge settler norms of time, thought, and order. Colonization is undeniably irreversible, but resistive acts which decenter colonial logics are certainly restorative despite its permanence. This is why genuine assertion of Indigenous epistemologies on their own terms is so important. For these reasons and as part of these conversations, I assert protocol as a resistive act of scholarship with hopes that positing its logics as an alternative to modern, Western orientations might contribute to restorative efforts within an Indigenous decolonial framework.

To be clear, I am not arguing that an ethic of protocol be merely included within academic practice; rather, I am suggesting that protocol be the analytic through which we view or engage in scholarship at all. This direction of Indigenous scholarship is particularly exciting to me. No longer are we only producing work about Indigeneity, but we are seeing more and more work being produced from and for Indigeneity, pieces which mobilize Indigeneity as an analytic rather than analyzing Indigeneity. As demonstrated in her piece on archipelagic rhetoric, Tiara Na’puti (2019) is one of the forefront emerging scholars to be approaching Indigenous work this way. The potential here and why it is arguably so important given the exigence of this conversation is that “viewing Indigeneity as an analytic rather than only an identity allows us to deeply engage the various power relations that continue to write Indigenous peoples as always vanishing” (Arvin, 2015, p. 126). Thus, I assert protocol as an ethic for reimagining rhetorical theorizing, methodologies, and pedagogy, not simply being included in them.

Indigenous Protocol

While I wish I could dedicate more of this project to deeper study of Indigenous thought, for the sake of space and focus, I am choosing to keep it narrowed to the tradition of Indigenous

protocol. Noting the imperative that decolonial projects support Indigenous self-recognition, I seek to witness protocol on its own terms. This means also recognizing that protocol is not the same to every person or in every time and place. For that reason, the following description of Indigenous protocol is focused on seemingly ubiquitous roots, motivations, and underlying purposes of the traditions, the concepts which make up what I reference as its ethic. My aim then in the analysis portion will be to detail more specific examples of protocol enacted in order to make connections between the abstract and the tangible elements of the practice.

In my grandparents' vernacular, protocol is both a noun and verb. In one sense, protocol refers to the customs, traditions, and taboos attached to a culture. Within a Western context, definition along those lines is typically the extent of our conceptualization of the term. However, while we are often limited in our understanding of protocol as code of conduct in and of itself, in Indigenous tradition, protocol is also the act of adhering to it (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). For my grandparents (and many others), protocol cannot be separated from spirituality. Because they know the Creator to have designed all cultures, they believe all cultures are worthy of the utmost respect, dignity, and honor (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). "Protocol insists on maintaining the dignity or honor of a person or group of people no matter what their place or status may be" (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 7). Note that they intentionally recognize protocol to be an act of *maintaining* dignity, as protocol inherently assumes that another person or group is always already fully deserving of honor. We diminish and dishonor the dignity of another when we either entirely neglect it or when we attempt to control or define it on our own terms through various harmful tactics. Importantly, protocol presumes that the absence of dishonor is not enough. "To simply cease dishonoring someone isn't the same as giving the honor they deserve. Honor requires investments of creativity, time, and hard work. It may require sacrificing some

things quite dear to one's life" (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 8). Intuitively, in order to protocol someone, the action conducted must be mindful of the culture and terms of the one being honored. This often requires intentional learning beforehand, time taken to "world"-travel to know the names, customs, and traditions of the land and people being honored.

Protocol is noted as one of the most long-standing traditions within First Nations populations, but its roots are immemorial ("First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory," 2019). Though protocol references a variety of traditions and ceremonies within Indigenous culture, one of the primary ways the tradition has been maintained is at events and meetings when a member of a visiting First Nation honors the host Nation ("First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory," 2019). This is a process called "gate-keeping," and territory leaders are "gate-keepers" (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). This is the first way I witnessed protocol and it is the one my family has most intentionally sought to adopt. Even now as our relatives, whenever my Nana and Papa visit and teach at our church, they protocol my parents as the gate-keepers and authorities of that "land," typically gifting them and always thanking them for the permission to talk with their "tribe." My dad now does the same when he travels to speak at other churches and conferences. In a traditional Western context, authority is asserted. In an Indigenous context, authority is requested and then granted by elders or tribal authorities. My grandparents explain it this way:

When someone entered a nation not his own, he/she would first meet with the Chief and receive permission to travel, camp, hunt, or trade within that nation. The protocol of meeting with a Chief would include a formal presentation of the traveler's name, the purpose of the journey, the length of stay, etc. Gift and honor would be exchanged, permission would be granted or withheld by the Chief. With permission the immigrant possessed a new measure of authority, not 'taken' but 'gifted,' to proceed to the destined destination (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 176).

They add, “sadly, this is not what occurred on the shores of Turtle Island (North America) when the immigrants entered the land” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 176). My ancestors stole authority on the land I now live and violently dishonored all elders and gate-keepers here before them.

The protocol of honor was breached and not only have the host people of the land suffered, the offspring of the immigrants have suffered as well. The host people were robbed of the honor of being the stewards of this continent and the immigrants were robbed of an honorable welcome to this land (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 177).

In the Americas, we have learned social order to be established by processes of domination, socialization, homogenization, and coercion. For First Nations peoples, order is established through protocol. Protocol recognizes and affirms the authorities of the land through honor. In doing so, the land is often opened and people are welcomed. It feels unfathomable to imagine how different this nation might be now had our ancestors chosen the way of honor instead of violence, love instead of arrogance. Their mistakes are indeed incommensurable (Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, even with irreconcilable and irreversible damage done, Nana Qaum and Papa Suuq teach that we can still hope. Though their faith might motivate an optimism not all Indigenous folks would share, it is that hope that makes the work worth doing. They ask:

Can we repair the damage we have done? We believe we can. We must fight to restore the values of honor to our heirs. It is an inheritance they deserve to possess. We can do it if we are willing to be pro-active. Honor does not occur by simply refraining from dishonoring others. To honor we must be purposeful and deliberate in our actions. We must look for ways to rebuild values that have been demolished. It is not too late! (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 19).

As their heir, I have been mantled with responsibility to join them in restoration of honor. As their granddaughter, I have experienced why it is worth hoping for and working toward.

Conclusion

If a culture of honor is established through radical humility and action and if an ethic of protocol becomes central to our paradigms as it still is for many First Nations peoples, I wonder just how drastically our orientations toward others might change. I ponder the countless spaces and materials which might be considered “lands” and who might be considered their “gate-keepers.” I wonder how interactions at both micro and macro levels might shift. How might we rethink our inheritance? Within academic culture, what might it look like for us to ask for authority rather than to assume it, to honor the “worlds” we cross in our work and in our being? How might our perspectives toward others, toward our histories, and toward our futures be reshaped? While this project might inspire some practical methods for expressing honor, my primary aim is that it will fuel more questions like those I have just posed. I think the outcome might be most constructive if uncertainty continually remains, if precarity secures some form of permanence in our psyches as we continually reimagine how we engage with others. Ideally the tensions will motivate us to take up an ethic of protocol, becoming increasingly mindful of ways honor expressed in humility and action might transform our heart, minds, and spaces. To build a deeper conceptualization of what an ethic of protocol entails, I transition to analysis of First Nations protocol with hopes that we might learn together.

Chapter 3. Indigenous Protocol in Theory and Practice

“The opposite of dishonor is purposeful honor demonstrated through radical humility” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 179). To engage in protocol is that act of demonstration, but questioning exactly how to do so is often a sticking point which keeps us from acting at all. There is no one answer to that question because there is no one method. In fact, an often necessary step before conducting protocol is to take the time to research, listen, and learn what actions might best communicate honor to the recipient. Because protocol is personal and situational, discovering specifics and unique answers to how it might best be carried out is part of the process. Put simply, we cannot honor another without first learning what might honor them. That said, despite its varied execution, three central themes exist across most performances of protocol, each of which can be drawn from the statement opening this paragraph and are revealed through study of protocol in practice. First, the essence of protocol is the honor of another person or land. Second, protocol is always action; it is not and cannot be passive. Lastly, the process must be marked by humility, the surrender of one’s own ego and resources for the elevation of another. Because my ultimate aim within this project is to consider the ethic of protocol as a critical orientation for engaging others, developing a deep understanding of these themes is a foundational step. Further, since I am centering the First Nations conceptualization of protocol, examining each of them within First Nations contexts is imperative. Thus, I dedicate this chapter to an exploration of protocol within First Nations settings and review examples of its demonstration in order to advance an awareness of honor, humility, and action as the collective ethic of protocol in both ideology and praxis.

To this end, some examples I quote at length from others and some I share from autoethnographic perspective. I am grateful that my grandparents have published a number of

their experiences both receiving and extending protocol. Because their insights are public record and since they are the ones who have been my primary educators and mentors on this front, I reference their narratives as key texts. Though my grandparents do not claim to be experts on protocol, the value of their teachings has been immeasurable for me and many others. In the future, I would ideally expand this to incorporate ethnographic data and field methods which take up additional perspectives, but for the scope of this project, I maintain focus on existing public knowledges, most of which come from my Nana and Papa.

This chapter is organized by story rather than by theme because honor, humility, and action cannot be separated from each other within the context of protocol. The following section headings categorize various stories according to their relation to one another. More specifically, the types of stories I include are those which address the protocol of elders, rites of passage, and entering another land. Though said categories are not inclusive of all scenarios which might entail protocol of some kind, they are representative of some of its most common performances. Additionally, I believe it might be most natural to philosophically parallel these categorical occurrences to academic contexts, a task I embark on in the next chapter. The individual stories within these categories each tell of protocol in their own ways, but collectively they advance the same three central themes as the fundamental elements of the ethic of protocol. Though the stories I include are certainly not exhaustive examples, I chose them with the hopes of revealing theoretical consistencies across rather disparate scenarios and with particular emphasis on the power of protocol in inter-tribal and cross-cultural settings. By way of introduction, I share a story from my Papa which is representative of protocol in what one might consider to be the most traditional sense. I include his story and the others as direct quotes so as not to manipulate their authenticity, but extrapolation on the presence of key themes is my own analysis.

Protocol of Elders

Teachings of “modern” protocol often acknowledge that it is rooted in the ancient practice of honoring elders (Elder Protocol and Guidelines, 2012; Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015; Engaging with Elders, 2017). My grandparents tell many stories about the practice of honoring elders, but I start with one my Papa shares that I find to be particularly educational in regard to First Nations tradition:

I (Suuqiina) was invited to speak at an Alaskan village of a tribe other than my own. We were of different cultures and stewards of different territories. I sought an audience with their Grand-chief and it was arranged for me.

Before I arrived, I inquired about the details of the protocol ceremony and what would be asked of me. I also inquired about the correct answers to the questions that would be asked of me.

At the exact time designated, I was ushered into the Chief’s home and presented to him. Although he spoke perfect English, he spoke to me in Dine and his grand-daughter translated for him. He asked me, ‘What is your name?’

Most non-natives laugh at this question because they don’t understand that if you get this answer wrong, the protocol ceremony immediately concludes.

I answered by giving my mother’s name, my grandmother’s name, and identifying my great-grandfather as the Chief of our village/tribe. A person’s identity is rooted in their heritage and if they are unaware of it, they do not really know who they are. YHWH identifies Himself as the ‘Elohim of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’

The Grand-chief asked, ‘What is your mission?’ I answered by briefly relating my work amongst First Nations peoples.

After welcoming me to all Dine lands, he blessed me with a personal prayer, and he declared protection for me amongst his tribes. What a powerful blessing it was and contributed to the success of my mission!

This Chief had been a leader for over 70 years when I met him. I asked him if other ministries had presented themselves to him as the ‘gate-keeper’ of the Athabascan Nation. His answer, both discouraging and disturbing, was ‘very few’ (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, pp. 179-181).

After sharing this story, my Papa notes that “honoring a chief, a gate-keeper, requires one to become humble. Following protocol is one expression of that humility” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 181). In this case, following protocol required multiple steps of action, all inspired by the desire to honor a people and land. First, my Papa made the decision to ask for authority from the person in leadership over the space he would be speaking in even though he had been invited,

an action of honor “very few” people had taken before. Second, he researched and sought guidance on what might be asked of him so that he would know how to communicate on the Grand-chief’s terms and then he carried out the meeting according to what he had learned. He took action and humbled himself by initiating a meeting to express honor to the Dine people and lands, by placing the authority and customs of the Grand-chief above his own, and by asking for permission instead of assuming it. This story could also be situated within the discussion of entering another land, but I find it important to acknowledge in this case because even with an existing invitation, a commitment to protocol led my Papa to honor the Grand-chief of the Athabascan Nation anyway. An ethic of protocol does not simply include the honor of elders; it requires it. This occurs across myriad other instances than entering another land. My grandparents share another story on this front from a time when they spoke at a conference in Ottawa, Canada, where one of their elders resided. They recall:

This man, now in his 80’s, was blind. He attended the conference to support our generation working for cultural restoration. This elder stood, 50 years earlier, as a lone voice supporting the right for natives to worship Yahweh with their own languages, regalia and instruments. He had been severely abused by religious people in the ‘church’ who thought everything the ‘Indians’ did was demonic. During the conference, Grand-Chief Lynda Prince called this elder to the stage. A whole generation of First Nation’s leaders, ages 30-55, knelt at his feet and repented for what the ‘church’ had done to him. We also repented to him for not showing him the proper honor that was due him as an elder and spiritual leader. He had made many sacrifices for our generation and given us large footprints to follow (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, pp. 90-91).

In this case, the protocol of an elder was partially retroactive. Instead of asking for permission, it entailed the asking of forgiveness. However, whether *retroactive* or *proactive*, it is important to note that in both of my grandparents’ stories, the acts of honor are still something *active*. A radical humility was required of the First Nations leaders at the conference to kneel to one who came before them and even more was required to admit wrongdoing, even if only on behalf of

others. They sacrificed their egos and purposefully elevated their elder, collectively demonstrating to him an extraordinary moment of honor.

In both of these first stories, the elder being recognized is one who has held notable titles and who is noticeably older than those honoring him. Those qualities, however, are not mandates for whether or not someone may be identified as one. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2001) describes an elder as:

someone who has special gifts. Elders are generally considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture and the teachings of the Great Spirit. They are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation. The community looks to them for guidance and sound judgement. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labours and experience with others in the community (p. 1).

My grandparents put it this way:

Elders are people who have weathered many of life's storms and are wiser for it. Elders are not just people who are chronologically older than we are. Because they have lived and learned, they have the ability to see things in situations that others do not. They see from many perspectives. This gives them the ability to discern options to problems of which younger, less experienced people might not be aware (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 80).

With these understandings in mind, eldership becomes complicated. Though age is often connected to one's status as an elder, it does not inherently qualify or disqualify someone from being recognized as such and nor does one's title. This is incredibly significant to ponder when taken into consideration in other contexts, thoughts I will explore further in the next chapter.

One of the lessons my grandparents teach in this regard is that there is no singular way to honor an elder, no singular type of elder, and that it is never too late to begin. In my introduction I recalled witnessing protocol for the first time as Nana Qaum and Papa Suuq honored my parents. Though my parents were the younger couple and had sought out Qaumaniq and Suuqiina in order to learn from, they honored my parents as the elders of their congregation.

They made a point to distinctly protocol my parents through the action of gifting them, exercising humility as they demonstrated how even a teacher might honor the unique eldership of their students. They emphasize, though, that honoring an elder does not need to occur exclusively via ceremony or gift-giving. Instead, they suggest that we might express honor to our elders through action as simple as asking them questions, making ourselves available, reaching out to know how they are, asking forgiveness for mistakes and misunderstandings, sharing time and hobbies, and including them in celebrations and traditions (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). Protocol of elders is often ceremonial, but it is also deeply relational. In either case, it becomes increasingly clear how and why its rhetorical purposes are so significant.

Rites of Passage

Before delving into conversation about rites of passage, I want to acknowledge that this section incorporates some gendered language and themes. Traditional First Nations and Christian perspectives—the ones I account for here—on the transition from childhood to adulthood maintain rhetoric of gender roles which I realize are exclusive of a number of LGBTQ+ and non-binary identifying individuals. For integrity of record I include this wording, but hope to clearly communicate that the purpose of this section is still to emphasize honor, humility, and action within another form of protocol, not to advocate for harmful or exclusionary practices. My purpose here is not to promote “manhood” or “womanhood” in particular ways, but to examine how rite of passage protocol involves honor, humility, and action. You will see that rites of passage are often incredibly individualized processes, which also means that in both Indigenous and even Christian circles there are certainly exceptions which do not reinforce such normative ideologies. Though the examples I include might appear to be exclusionary, heuristically the praxis of protocol itself is quite the opposite. I make the aforementioned disclaimer and offer

insight into my own narrative in order to demonstrate that though expressions of protocol are extraordinarily subjective and situational, the logics behind each scenario are consistent. In some way, this realization assuages the demands for generalizability posed by Western epistemologies despite the fact that protocol itself is most certainly not rooted in Western philosophy. Protocol is generalizable because it can be “customized,” not despite that, and because of the inclusivity of its root logics. The performative *action* portion of protocol can vary drastically across contexts and parties; my argument in recognition of its ethics is just that action in some form must be taken and that it must demonstrate the honor of another and humility of oneself. My intent is for the following examples to make this clear.

I shared earlier that when I was sixteen years old I spent a week one summer with my Nana at their home in Tennessee. The days were filled with lessons, but not an agenda. The purpose of the trip was for me to learn by witnessing, to listen to stories as they arose and to be in purposeful relationship with my Nana. It was an identity-shaping week because it was intentional and it created space for me to organically see what womanhood meant in my Nana’s culture. My time with Nana Qaum was framed both by my parents and my grandparents as part of the process toward a rite of passage which culminated in a particularly special celebration on my sixteenth birthday. My parents had asked a number of significant elders in my life to purchase a charm representative of some aspect of my character that they saw as particularly prominent in who I was and would become. My parents gifted me a bracelet and then each person presented me with their charm and spoke words of encouragement and purpose over my life. I can recall few other moments in my life when I have felt so seen, loved, and esteemed without it being attached to achievement. Throughout this process, my elders affirmed my value

and demonstrated how to do the same for others. They both served me and instructed me to serve. All of it involved action, inspired humility, and centered honor.

Encouraging the celebration or ritualization of coming of age in some form is one of the ways my grandparents suggest Western families bring a culture of protocol and honor into their homes, noting its lack in our culture is an exception to the global norm (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). My parents clearly heeded their advice, but what they did for me was certainly not traditional. Within First Nations populations, rites of passage are deeply traditional and the transition from childhood to adulthood is a meaningful and purposeful process. The protocol surrounding rites of passage varies across Nations, but its presence in some form is ubiquitous. John Blacket and Reg Yates (2001) describe the rite of passage protocol for young women within the Choctaw Nation this way:

In the Choctaw culture, when a girl comes of age, her family sponsors a coming-of-age ceremony. The girls are given three days of private instruction. On the first day, the male tribal elders meet with her and tell her how important she is as a young woman to her tribe and the importance of the role of women in the government of the people.

Next, the women of the tribe take her out into the swamps to teach her about herbs, medicine, and craft making. They teach her about foods and cooking.

On the fourth day, her father takes her to the grocery store to shop for the poor people in the tribe. She will buy food and take it to them to honor them. The poor are invited to the ceremony and asked to pray for the girl. This teaches the girl to take care of the poor and to remember them.

When the time for the ceremony comes, the girl has to wait on the elders to remind her to respect her elders. She is in her regalia that she has made herself and worked on for many years. This is comprised of jewelry, dress, and moccasins. She has been fasting and praying. She will then do an honor dance to the songs of her people. When the dancing ends, she will pray for the people who have lined up in front of her.

After this, she will go and change her clothes. She takes the regalia she has worked on for many years and gives it to different women in the tribe who have been role models for her. In so doing, she learns to hold lightly to things and to always give to others your very best. This is the native way (pp. 186-187).

My experience was entirely different than it would be for a Choctaw woman, just as Choctaw rites of passage are entirely different than Lakota or Dene traditions. Yet once again consistency

across each cultural expression is found in the purpose and power of the protocol. It requires undeniable humility for an elder to give of their time and resources in order to honor a teenager or young adult. Additionally, it requires intentional actions of planning, teaching, and service. One of the reasons I chose to highlight Blacket and Yates' (2001) description of the Choctaw tradition is because of their emphasis on the centrality of honor within various stages of the process. The Choctaw woman was first shown honor, then was instructed to show it to others. Amongst First Nations peoples, protocol is not only how honor is demonstrated, it is how honor is taught. The practice of protocol, the active expression of honor, involves multiple generations at once and as a result establishes a culture committed to dignifying life and land.

Entering Another's Land

At its core, protocol acknowledges the boundary lines of another (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). In their handbook, my grandparents assert that the recognition of boundaries is actually the very first step of protocol (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). Calling on her time as professional counselor, my Nana notes the prevalence of boundary issues and observes that within Western culture “we have not been taught the importance of boundaries nor have we have we been taught the significance of becoming people who honor others’ boundaries” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 21). They say, “in order to understand why we should practice protocol, we need to first acknowledge what boundaries are and how to honor and respect them” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 24). Taking both physical and intangible forms, boundaries are connected to bodies, communication, geographical spaces, time, emotions, finances, intellect, talent, and privacy. As a tradition rooted in the recognition and respect of both spiritual and physical boundaries, protocol is a way of honoring each of those “lands.” My grandparents add context to this by saying:

Protocol acknowledged the boundary lines of another. It added a safety net and averted conflict between people. When protocol was lost, the beauty of seeing one another with boundaries established by Yahweh was also lost.

If someone came to native land without practicing protocol it indicated imminent war. It was an invasion. Protocol was expected and was a way of life for native people. If protocol had been practiced by the immigrants to this land, many problems and much bloodshed could have been averted (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 44).

Put more simply, they state that protocol is a way of saying “this is your land or space and I would like to join you in your space” or “I am humbling myself and offering you a gift and asking to come and join you on your land. May I come and join you?” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 44). Because of how it first affirms the dignity of boundaries, protocol becomes the bridge for many Native relationships. “Learning to give honor where it’s due and to receive honor when appropriate is all part of the proper way of entering another’s land” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 194). Though a multitude of spaces both literal and abstract might be considered “land,” discussing it in the most literal sense is helpful for conceptualizing the role of protocol in this realm.

Something I admire most about my grandparents’ dedication to protocol is that they are committed to carrying it out even in what are now non-Native spaces. Anytime they travel for ministry or move home cities, they take steps to honor local leaders and ask for a blessing to be on the land. The story about my Papa honoring the Grand-chief of the Athabaskan tribe tells of a moment when the protocol of entering another land was inherently understood by both parties, though even the Grand-chief admitted to its rarity. Protocol is a restorative action in those moments because it maintains and reasserts the value of existing Indigenous tradition. Where protocol has potential to be most resistive, though, is in spaces where it is not expected or understood, when it is practiced as sovereign in lands where it has been eliminated or never previously introduced. In these moments protocol refuses erasure and extends what colonial

violence attempted to confine. My grandparents have experienced incredibly powerful moments in this regard, but even in small moments their decision to protocol leaders of new spaces they enter into has significant impact. They tell this story from when they moved to Tennessee:

When we moved to Tennessee, we traveled to Cherokee, North Carolina to meet with the Cherokee Chief and ask for his blessing to reside on their land. We shared with him our belief that:

1. The Creator has given the Tsaligi (Cherokee) stewardship over the land by sovereignly placing them in the south-east.
2. The gifts and callings (stewardship) of YHWH are irrevocable.
3. The Tsaligi continue to retain spiritual stewardship over their entire inheritance although they have been displaced and their lands invaded and divided.

The Tsaligi Chief welcomed us to the Tennessee area; said he hoped we would live in peace and prosper there, and he gave us authority to teach our message ‘in all land that was ever Cherokee land’ (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 195).

After also making a trip to visit the mayor of their new town, gifting him, blessing him, and communicating that they respect that YHWH had placed him in authority, they recall he was “overwhelmed in a good way” and that he said humorously ‘no one has ever gifted me for doing my job...could you get more people like you to move to our city?’ (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p. 195). Their action of affirming the authority of someone whose ancestors wrongfully inhabited land which would have been part of my Nana’s Cherokee inheritance required an obvious humility. They took the initiative to actively express honor to both spiritual and legal authorities and in turn received blessing and welcome. Though their aim was selfless, these actions built what would become valuable, lasting relationships for them. My Papa shares another time in an entirely different setting and context when protocol opened doors for him and a number of other First Nations people visiting Israel. The details of his account speak loudly of both the themes and the power of protocol:

In 1999 it was my (Suuqiina) privilege to visit Israel for the first time. I joined a group of 96 First Nations people from North America for the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). Our group leader was Grand-chief Linda Prince, Carrier-Sekani of Canada. She had arranged

a protocol ceremony with President Avrim Berg, leader of the Israeli Knesset. He was one of the gate-keepers of Israel as Head of State.

We were given fifteen minutes to protocol the president with our gifts. Before we were to close with an honor song, Grand-chief Prince stood and said, ‘What a privilege to be with the first of all first nations of the world. We have lost control of our governments as First Nations of North America. We have lost most of our lands. We do not control what our nations do or how we are represented. However, we are still stewards of our lands. We are responsible before the Creator for what happens on our land. Therefore, we repent and take responsibility for the incident of the St. Louis (one of 39 ships turned away by the U.S.A. and Canada with most of the passengers murdered in the holocaust). We ask forgiveness for the tragic and horrible things that your people experienced by this event.’ This was an unforeseen act of humility done by Grand-chief Prince on behalf of Canada and the United States. President Berg responded by calling his secretary over and cancelling the remainder of his schedule. He spent over an hour and forty-five minutes with us, all live on Israeli T.V. and radio (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, pp. 181-182).

As a result of this exchange and even after acknowledging their differences in faith, President Berg joined the group in their honor song, offered protection to them to ‘do what they came to do,’ and extended a standing invitation to the First Nations of North America to visit the Knesset every year. My Papa follows this by noting how many thousands of Christians visit Israel every year, “‘walking where Y’shua walked,’ singing worship songs, praying, and claiming an inheritance without acknowledging their ‘elder brother’” (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, p.184). The value of honor is made even more obvious when placed in contrast to its regular neglect. The radical act of humility initiated and expressed by Grand-chief Prince opened “gates” which countless others have not and will not get to walk through. It was not their intention nor their request to receive the blessings President Berg granted them, but honor breeds honor and a monumental bridge was built between First Nations groups that day.

Honoring leaders and lands when traveling or moving has been one of the primary ways my grandparents have taught me to incorporate an ethic of protocol into my own life. Making sacrifices, surrendering my ego, and taking initiative to bless places and people I meet is an element of embracing the unique role they have welcomed me into within the Cherokee Way of

the Circle. I certainly have room to grow in this regard, but I am especially mindful of its importance because of its rarity. My Papa explains:

Because of a history of *manifest destiny*, most Euro-Americans have a spirit of entitlement that allows them the right to go anywhere, anytime, unhindered, and to settle anywhere without opposition. This *manifest destiny* was and is a lie that has been used to create unspeakable hardships for indigenous people everywhere and to dishonor them in the most egregious ways possible.

Most immigrant people have never gifted the indigenous leaders of the land where they reside. Most religious organizations haven't been welcomed, formally, onto the land by the indigenous people of the land where they attempt their ministries. Most chiefs have never been visited or gifted by those visiting or settling on their lands. Many immigrants haven't studied the culture of the indigenous people of the lands where they reside. Most have not entered the land with proper protocol and everyone suffers for it (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015, pp. 185-186).

The opportunities my Papa notes we so often forsake do not have to be elaborate. The ethic of protocol that comes with entering another land can be carried out through acts as simple as writing letters or initiating short meetings. I am grieved that in many public offices gift giving and receiving is actually deemed unethical, but that standard alone reveals so much about the absence of honor within Euro-American spaces and because of its oppositional potential, that too is a way we might consider resisting with indigenous populations. If protocol is genuine (and an act can only be dubbed protocol if it is indeed genuine), then the “dangers” of manipulation such ordinances protect against are null. When we honor boundaries with humility and action, gates are opened and bridges are built that could never have been done so through entitlement, force, or passivity.

Conclusion

Protocol is simultaneously resistive and constructive. It explicitly addresses lines of difference, but instead of fearing, eradicating, or offending, it celebrates them. It silences the ego in the name of another and asserts that honor is perhaps the most necessary of all cross-cultural and cross-generational keys. Such assumptions underlying protocol sit in stark contrast to

patterns of coercion and erasure Whiteness often repeats in relation to others. If we become willing to humble ourselves as students to Indigenous ways, we will also begin to recognize opportunity for resisting with others against oppressions and toward social justice.

Though the ways we conduct protocol will likely look much different than the accounts of my grandparents, the heart of it is what might inspire change. When we begin to consider our own elders, our own forms of generational rites of passage, and myriad lands of others, embracing an ethic of protocol has immense transformative potential. At this moment within our discipline, I am particularly motivated to consider how a commitment to honor, humility, and action might reshape how we produce scholarship, how we educate, how we research, and how we engage in activism. For that reason, I dedicate the next chapter to critical analysis of existing disciplinary systems through a lens of protocol.

Chapter 4. Implementing Protocol Rhetorics

My effort in conceptualizing an ethic of protocol is not simply to be informative. Protocol is only powerful when it is practiced and engaged as an analytic; mere knowledge of its functions does not advance its transformative potential. I dedicated the former chapter to analysis of protocol in practice in order to develop protocol as an ethic. This chapter follows with attention to how taking up the ethic of protocol as an analytic might empower us to reimagine academic norms as well as rhetorical theorizing, methodologies, and pedagogy.

In this chapter, I want to suggest that protocol rhetorics are rhetorics which have been transformed by the ethic of protocol and thus envision the engagement of texts, oration, persuasion, and the like through a lens of honor, humility, and action. Protocol rhetorics Indigenize traditional Western forms of rhetoric by asserting modalities which radically center the Other. Conceptualizing protocol rhetorics then makes way for strategic applied analysis, and in this case, analysis of academic phenomena. I organize the sections of analysis in purposeful parallel to the previous chapter, specifically the protocol of elders, rites of passage, and entering another's land. I do this for two primary reasons. First, I want to maintain the authority of Indigenous thought throughout the entirety of this project and thus attempt to situate academic concepts within First Nations language and understanding rather than repeating the colonial violence of forcing Indigeneity into the structures of Western epistemologies and methodologies common in academic writing. In other words, I am motivated by the importance of envisioning some of our practices and systems through an Indigenous lens rather than envisioning Indigeneity through a Western academic prism. Secondly, consistent structure lends to deeper comprehension as analogy can assist with visualizing practical opportunities for action, both rhetorical and interpersonal. Further, reimagining our traditions with Indigenous perspective

makes the incorporation of an Indigenous ethic feel not only possible, but necessary. Within each section, I weave in insight from the first portion and consider how taking up an analytic of protocol might transform rhetoric in particular, namely in theorizing, in methodologies, and in pedagogical practice. My purpose in doing so is to drive the point that Indigenous paradigms ought not only be included in rhetoric, but that rhetoric might be reconsidered through Indigeneity altogether. Understandably, the juxtapositions I make are not seamless. I invite you, though, to sit with me in the tensions of the disparities, allowing differences to hold their rightful place while simultaneously considering how similarities might inspire newfound sites and modes of change.

Protocol Rhetorics

When Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin published their proposal for invitational rhetoric, they did so because they were convicted by a necessity to confront problematic disciplinary traditions. They argue that since most rhetorical theorizing relies on rhetoric defined as persuasion, patriarchal bias and control are deeply embedded in its logics. Because persuasion is rooted in efforts to change another and a desire for control and domination, “the act of changing another establishes the power of the change agent over that other” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 3). They criticize traditional rhetoric as a patriarchal force—and I would say a violent, *colonizing* force—which both perpetuates and relies on discursive strategies of coercion, as it is “characterized by efforts to change others and thus to gain control over them” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 3). Furthermore, they note that its self-proclaimed value is “derived from and measured by the power exerted over others, and a devaluation of the life worlds of others” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 3). While in many ways I would argue Foss & Griffin’s contextual claims are still true of our disciplinary tradition, they asserted a new, alternative approach motivated by the feminist

principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination which they label invitational rhetoric. In sum, they describe it as:

an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination. Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does. In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tried to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own. [...] Because of the nonhierarchical, nonjudgmental, nonadversarial framework established for the interaction, an understanding of the participants themselves occurs, an understanding that engender appreciation, value, and a sense of equality (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 5).

Though perhaps welcomed progress when held in contrast to the traditional discursive strategies of coercion, some holes have been found in Foss and Griffin's proposed alternative. For example, Nina Lozano-Reich and Dana Cloud contend "that the suitability of the invitational paradigm presupposes conditions of economic, political, and social equality among interlocutors" and recognize that "such conditions of actual equality are rare in both political controversy and interpersonal relations" (2009, p. 220).

Lozano-Reich and Cloud posit theorizing of the "uncivil tongue," critiquing invitational rhetoric for the ignorant assumption of preexisting equality and the gendered normativity of implied civility. They state that "invitation and civility are as likely to be bludgeons of the oppressor as resources for the oppressed" and thus implore further conversation about the merits of invitational rhetoric to grapple with that contradiction because "it is irresponsible to displace more confrontational models for social change in favor of a politics of civility that has been proven to leave those already disempowered in a continued state of conformity, punishment, and/or silence" (Lozano-Reich & Cloud, 2009, pp. 224-225). The rhetoric of protocol I am suggesting here, a rhetoric rooted in an ethic of honor, humility, and action, maintains the critique of invitational rhetoric detailed by Lozano-Reich and Cloud, but posits a different

modification. Traditional rhetoric is characterized by authority and coercion and invitational rhetoric is characterized by presupposed equality and mutual appreciation, but both center the self. Though it corrects for a wrongfully assumed “equal speaking field,” Lozano-Reich and Cloud’s stance advocating for the uncivil tongue does the same. A rhetoric of protocol, on the other hand, does not center the self, nor does it assume an equitably shared center; instead, it always centers the other. In order to effectively center (honor) another, one must first *actively* decenter (humble) themselves.

To flesh this out a bit more, I want to differentiate protocol rhetorics from a couple of other traditional forms of rhetorical practice and criticism, particularly those which might also be perceived as attentive to others (such as invitational rhetoric), in order to clarify how protocol functions as an overarching ethic or analytic and not simply a singular framework. Attending to some of rhetoric’s most canonical roots, I am inclined to address theories of the epideictic and decorum. Aristotle’s epideictic, for example, engages notions of praise and blame and is often referenced in instruction of ceremonial speeches. Protocol rhetorics would certainly speak to the concept of praise, but while Aristotelian logic might maintain focus on the performance of praise, an analytic of protocol would be far more concerned with the purpose of praise, perhaps begging questions regarding who, why, and how the praise is happening. Even further, teaching of the epideictic through an analytic of protocol would insist on attention to the praised, and not the one doing the praising. Decorum, then, which emphasizes the importance of the appropriateness of style to a subject, could be thought of as an original way of taking the other into consideration. However, decorum is ultimately taught for the sake of the face and persuasive potential of the speaker (or writer). Appropriateness could be equated to the absence of dishonor, but as we have already discussed, the absence of dishonor is not enough. Protocol rhetorics are

entirely focused on the radical honor of another, even if at the cost of the orator's own ego. Even the seemingly other-focused strategies within canonical rhetorical practices favor and center the authority of the speaker; protocol rhetorics do not. Oratory is not the only mode of concern for modern rhetoricians, though.

The practice of criticism, which has developed in the 21st century, is also often still inherently obsessed with the authority of a writer and their abilities to persuade readers or make judgments about certain texts. Whether ideological, cultural, political, or what have you, rhetorical criticism can be a violent act of judgement and assumption. Protocol rhetorics would note the act of criticism is in and of itself an action and would thus implore every critic to engage texts and their writing with honor and humility. This is clearly contingent on a number of factors, but an analytic of protocol would nonetheless shape how rhetoricians choose and critique a text as well as how they would write, cite, and publish. Additionally, a critic operating with an ethic of protocol would know that their scholarship is just one realm of many within their academic spheres which might be reimagined when considered through a lens of honor, humility, and action.

Honoring Academic Elders

Indigenous conceptualization of elderhood complicates traditional, Western understanding in a variety of ways, be that in regard to who an elder might be, how an elder is to be perceived and treated, what authority is prescribed to them, or other intricacies of the position. In Western culture, reverence for elders (most commonly identified by age) is sometimes obligatory but is often simply absent (Suuqiina & Suuqiina, 2015). In First Nations culture, it is inherent. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, one's position as an elder is not necessarily implied or disqualified solely by age. In English, the word "elder" is understood as a

noun, a specific person identified by their position. It is mobilized in the same way as job titles such as teacher or doctor. However, in Indigenous languages, the word “elder” is utilized much more like a verb than a noun or even an adjective. It signifies the embodied doing of an elder, the active role they play in their communities (“Engaging with Elders,” 2017). Decolonizing and unpacking the concept requires the surrender of Western assumptions and conceptualizations and a willingness to imagine elderhood as it is understood in its original context, as action rather than position deserving of recognition. These intricacies make way for transformed understanding not only of who or what an elder might be, but also of the circles where protocol might be initiated and how it might be demonstrated, thereby informing the exigence of this conversation.

The Indigenous authors of the collectively compiled “Engaging with Elders” handbook detail a number of gifts which might identify an elder. They describe the varying ceremonialists, traditional teachers, storytellers or orators, herbalists, philosophers, healers or medicine people, role models, and eminent scholars (“Engaging with Elders,” 2017). They specify that few elders embody all of those gifts, some have a few, and others may only have one. Additionally, they note some of the primary characteristics and attributes of healthy elders, listing collaborative dedication to help the whole person; encouragement and acknowledge of the work of all traditions without a sense of competition; kindness in referring those who seek help to someone else if an elder feels unable; recognition of themselves as a tool for Creator; security in their identity and clarity in their honesty; authenticity and consistency in living out what they teach; and humility to take ownership of their limited knowledge and abilities and to ask for guidance and permission from others accordingly (“Engaging with Elders,” 2017). Characterizing an elder by action clarifies how the title itself functions rhetorically to signify specific attributes rather than a specific person, simultaneously widening and limiting who might be considered an elder

in any given circle. Furthermore, being mindful that elderhood is established via the aforementioned traits and action as opposed to age or assumed authority reveals both who and what might be most worthy of honor.

Contextually, the notion of elderhood is particularly interesting to take up since the inception of our disciplinary upset began with debate over honor of a certain kind, namely the Distinguished Scholar Award from the National Communication Association, and more specifically who might be given the honor and how the recipients ought to be determined (Wanzer-Serrano et al., 2019). In this regard, First Nations perspective offers especially relevant insight. It is not an intellectual stretch to consider that a Distinguished Scholar might be labeled as an elder within the field of communication as one possessing the gifts of an “eminent scholar” mentioned above. Even Marty Medhurst, David Zarefsky, and Carole Blair—names of particular contention within the recent disciplinary conversations—might be acknowledged as elders in that specific way (though perhaps unhealthy or harmful in others). However, the crux of the issue is not necessarily that those previously awarded have been undeserving of the honor but that a great deal of other elders have been discounted, ignored, and excluded from the opportunity for said recognition. In a societal and academic culture where honor is lacking, the material and psychological value of singular awards gets understandably exaggerated. “The need for an Elder to be *recognized* as such in any community is of great importance” (“Engaging with Elders,” 2017) and academic circles are no exception. I am aware that within the current academic economy tangible honors carry significant weight and I am not disavowing their importance. The point here, however, is not to argue for a mere increase in accolades given exclusively in the form of plaques and certificates, but to advocate for a culture in which honor is extended and valued in many forms—be that gift, deed, service, or word—so that elders are consistently and

generously acknowledged as such. Within academia, not only do we need to be willing to reconceptualize who our disciplinary elders might be, but also how we recognize them as such—how we protocol them.

Rites of Passage

To be identified as an elder in First Nations culture is an utmost honor, but it is not the only classification of people for whom protocol is made a priority. As also discussed in the previous chapter, protocol surrounding rites of passage for tribal youth is deeply important for a number of Indigenous groups. Though identification of elders is notably more complicated than identification of youth as the latter is more directly associated with age, rites of passage as protocol still invite and include broadened intricacies, especially when considered across various spaces. For the purposes of this section, I want to adhere to its conceptualization as intentional generational transitioning. Then, in similar fashion to our discussion of protocol of elders, I invite us to consider who might be recognized as our disciplinary youth and how protocol might be extended to them in the process of transitioning into maturity.

As discussed in the previous chapter, rites of passage are primary modes through which culture is taught and passed on to upcoming generations. Though it takes many forms and differs between people groups, rites of passage are intentional and often ceremonial processes in which young people are shown honor and instructed on the ways of man or womanhood in their respective settings. I wonder, then, how the same is being done in our academic space. Graduation ceremonies are often colloquially referred to as rites of passage—and in Western culture are often the only rites of passage for youth—but I would argue that those are only cumulation moments and do not capture the intentional processes of cultural instruction happening for young academics. For the sake of this conversation, maintaining focus on the field

of communication studies, I would like to posit the analogy that regardless of actual age, undergraduates might be considered “children” of the discipline, graduate students and early career, non-tenured faculty considered “teenagers,” and tenured professors considered “adults.” While boundary lines between each of those academic identity groups can certainly be blurred in regard to maturity, intellect, and perspective, the parallel creates space for unique analysis of disciplinary norms in regard to cultural instruction. Carrying the analogy forward, then, graduate students and early career faculty are of primary interest for this particular topic. As a graduate student myself, this conversation feels particularly salient because the positionality is an affective, embodied experience I am currently living.

Barring rare exceptions to these plights, the overworked and underpaid condition of graduate students and the publish or perish pressure for early career scholars at research institutions has fed an increasingly troublesome path for people pursuing futures in academia, matters marked additional obstacles for women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ folks (Ahmed, 2015; Bousquet, 2008; Kelsky, 2015). Stories filled with details of unhealthy eating and sleeping habits, deteriorating mental health, lack of access to health care, accumulation of exorbitant student loans, traumatizing encounters with problematic senior faculty, poor living and working conditions, questionable labor practices, obligatory service for the sake of a bolstered curriculum vitae, and seemingly countless rejections from editors and potential employers alike are commonplace reports in the hallways and whisper networks of higher education institutions (Flaherty, 2018; Sunderic, 2019). The predominant themes that surface through even a cursory survey of the most liked photos and memes posted with #gradstudentlife on Instagram include references to dying, drowning, and premature aging; rare and fleeting feelings of happiness amidst spells of anxiety and depression; insecurities, inadequacies, and imposter syndrome; and

extreme fatigue and overwhelm. These accounts and narratives are so familiar they could go without repeating and yet it is their familiarity which makes them significant—they have become the rites of passage through which graduate students transition into scholars.

Though many faculty empathize with the younger generations of academics and handfuls come alongside them to mobilize for change, by and large surviving the toil of it all is dubbed part of learning the way of higher education like a checkbox step toward graduation or an offer letter. These norms, which are often rhetorically maintained, contrast so drastically with the Indigenous protocol surrounding rites of passage that it feels idealistic to imagine an alternative. The opportunity for honor, humility, and action to be demonstrated to the “teenagers” of the academy as they transition into more advanced roles is immense considering how scarce such behavior is now, but imagine how much might shift if they were to be granted dignity and praise rather than pressure and criticism. This is not to excuse us from hard work, but to empower it. Further, acknowledging that rites of passage are designed to reveal the ways of the academy (which are rooted in problematic racist, sexist, colonial logics), I wonder how transformed processes might contribute to transformation overall toward a culture of honor, humility, and action. Just as I urge us to consider how we might implement an ethic of protocol in order to honor our disciplinary elders, I encourage reflection on how movement might be made in order to honor the disciplinary young. I am certainly not claiming to be the first to call attention to the necessity of graduate student education reform or to suggest potential remedies to their plight; I am simply asserting that centering Indigenous ways of knowing and relating could be incredibly generative toward the goals so many of us are advocating for. An ethic of protocol would implore that in order for young academics to reach their potential, reimagining existing rites of

passage as a time when the young are to be extended radical honor rather than for them to prove their ability to survive harsh conditions and dehumanizing practices of apprenticeship is crucial.

Entering Another's Land

Though I have already briefly discussed this concept and its similarities to Lugones' notion of world-traveling, I find it a particularly notable realm of focus for this project as I consider this both literally and figuratively in a couple of different ways, dependent on varying conceptualizations of the word "land." Land can signify a specific physical space, denoting territory of earth or water and it can be owned, unowned, or complicated. Because of how physical land was acquired in the Americas and that even modern mapping is a largely colonial practice (Na'puti, 2019), considering land as physical ground belonging to a particular people group is often problematic at the outset. However, in the current context, it is our default perspective and therefore must be addressed as such. In another vein, I would also like to argue that especially in academic settings, "land" can be representative of far more abstract notions. It can be referent of intellectual property, social groups, or emotional or psychological space. In any of those segments, forms of colonial violence can most certainly take place and they are therefore worthy of the opposite—of boundary recognition and honor. In this section, I consider land both as physical ground or mapped territory and as intellectual, emotional, and social space. In any case, an ethic of protocol proves both helpful and necessary for navigating relations with others.

The colonial dynamics surrounding physical land in the Americas have been discussed and rightfully problematized at length by a number of scholars across a wide variety of fields. In this project, I want to examine attempts at progress on that front, specifically efforts which have taken the form of land acknowledgements. First, I want to state that I am fully aware the

intention behind land acknowledgements is most always well-meant and that in recognition of the incommensurability of colonial violence on Native land (Tuck & Yang, 2012), it might feel like the only ethical way to operate in academic settings. However, like many decolonial projects, the rhetoric of land acknowledgements presents a tension that feels like good effort, perhaps even *necessary* effort at this point, but still not enough, even to the ones committed to saying them at conferences and writing them in course syllabi. The reality is, we were not ever invited onto the land we are acknowledging, and I question then the value of simply restating our presence beyond combating avoidant ignorance or erasure and alerting other white folks to their complicated presence. I was struck by a poem Clint Burnham (2010) wrote in this regard, and include an excerpt here:

I'd like to acknowledge that we are on stolen land.
I'd like to acknowledge that we are on borrowed land.
I'd like to acknowledge that we are on overdue land.
I'd like to acknowledge that we are on pickpocketed land.
I'd like to acknowledge that we are on empty land.
I'd like to acknowledge that we are on full land.
I'd like to acknowledge the knowledge of like to acknowledge you like me
acknowledging.
I'd like to acknowledge that we are trespassing on someone else's property if that
someone else had property and if we are who we think we are and not, in fact, perhaps
also someone else's acknowledgement.
I'd like to acknowledge I meant that.
[...]
I'd like to acknowledge this is getting way too personal, even for me, so I'd like to get
back to acknowledging we are on stolen, native, indigenous, Indian, injun, skimo, chug,
métis, first nation, halfbreed land, we are on native land, on native carpet, on native
subflooring, on native foundation, on native weeping tiles, on native tarmac, on native
sidewalk, on native dirt, on native leaf mould, the good mould, on native mud in our
backyard, on native holes in the ground where our fence was ripped up by the landlord
not the landlord guys working for a guy working for the landlord maybe they were native
I don't know I didn't ask them we're on native highway of tears on native land
on home and native land and I'd like to acknowledge the acknowledging that we are on
stolen, ripped off, colonized, unceded, conquered, begged, borrowed, stolen native land
doesn't make a damn bit of motherfucking difference and I'd just like to acknowledge
that (pp. 39, 41).

Through powerful writing, Burnham expresses the glaring lack in land acknowledgements—that acknowledgements really are nothing more than acknowledgement—and that in some ways they even emphasize the violence done on and to the land where they are now being stated. His opinions may not be shared by all Indigenous folks, but they are revelatory of both the impossibility and the necessity for something more to be done. I want us to take seriously what an ethic of protocol might motivate us to do in this case, perhaps presenting us with the most daunting, literal implementation of the practice discussed thus far. I write this as obliged as anyone else, but wonder what might happen if instead of acknowledging that we were never invited onto a land and continually assuming the authority our ancestors stole, we allowed an analytic of protocol to reshape how envision the land we inhabit and how we address the sovereignties we mention in our acknowledgements.

In regard to less literal interpretations of land, I want us to consider how an ethic of protocol might reshape our interactions. For example, operating with honor, humility, and action when writing from, with, or about another, when affirming the sacredness of social groups (especially for marginalized populations), and when navigating the tensions that often come with academic interactions in conference, classroom, or office settings could be just as transformative as similar strategies are when crossing or inhabiting more literal lands. Learning how to surrender our own ego and the need to be superior authorities or welcomed voices in all spaces is crucial for developing humility within an ethic of protocol, both rhetorically and interpersonally. Taking action to honor those who do maintain authority of the texts, social arenas, and personal space we want to share is the next step as long as we are committed to being satisfied with either invitation or restriction to whatever land we are approaching.

Conclusion

The protocol of elders, rites of passages, and entering other lands are certainly not the only sites where an ethic of honor, humility, and action might be transformative, but my aim in sharing these parallels was to make it easier to envision expanded modes of implementation. Protocol rhetorics offer ways to reimagine not only theory, methodology, and pedagogy, but also interpersonal academic practices at large. Since the current juncture happening within the field of communication studies provided an exigence for discussion of protocol and I myself am deeply entrenched in academia, I found it most appropriate to demonstrate application of the ideas in these settings. The purpose behind my approach in this case was to suggest opportunity for Indigenizing academic practices, not a mere grafting of Indigenous ideas into Western settings. That said, I very much believe an ethic of protocol could be transformative in contexts extending far outside of higher education alone and thus move forward to conclude my thesis with a summary of the tenets of protocol and a broader discussion of how it might be mobilized as a rhetorically resistive and transgressive force.

Conclusion. Implications of Protocol Rhetorics

When Pham (2019) expressed that communication, and more specifically rhetoric, is at a crossroads where it “can refashion itself into something more rigorous and intellectually adaptable for the pressing rhetorical questions of our time and future” or it can retreat from a “purported threat,” he revealed unique opportunity for both structural and individual change (p. 493). In his statement lies the question of *how* communication and rhetoric might transform in order to welcome and advance new or formerly ignored epistemologies and what actions might be taken in support of this aim. While potential answers to these implicit questions vary (and variance is part of the point), my personal goal in this project has been to suggest just one possible orientation for adapted scholarship. In the presidential address at the 2018 Western States Communication Association conference, Hollings motioned to attending scholars that there could be much to gain might should we opt to “marginalize the center and center the margins” and my hope is that this project offered evidence supporting her claim. I have argued that by forwarding Indigenous thought and philosophy, we might be able to radically reimagine traditionally violent theories and praxis with Others.

My ultimate aim in this thesis has been to advance the practice of protocol as a form of theory, contending for an ethic derived from its central tenets of honor, humility, and action. In the first chapter, I began by situating this project within the current juncture of the field of communication studies, referencing the exigence posed by scholars in the #RhetoricSoWhite special issue in the final volume of 2019 of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* as well as slightly earlier work from Lisa Flores and Sumita Chakravarty. I then discussed commonplace conceptualizations of protocol before reflecting on my own unique relationship to the tradition, introducing readers to the elders who have taught and demonstrated it to me, my Nana Qaum and

Papa Suuq. I make a case for protocol as a hopeful response to our disciplinary crisis, arguing that its core themes might render it resistive to existing forces of injustice not only within the field of communication, but also *as* a communicative act at large. I then briefly place my work in conversation with earlier theorizing on cross-cultural orientations as well as with additional scholars who have centered Indigenous epistemologies in their work, paying close attention to dynamics of decolonization within a settler colonial context. I conclude by explaining some of my personal motivation for the project.

In the second chapter, I focus on radical contextualization of protocol as a communicative ethic and go into more detail about the exigence for the project, emphasizing its unique rhetorical significance. I call upon women of color feminist scholarship from authors such as María Lugones and Mariana Ortega as well as Indigenous scholars such as Cash Ahenakew in order to discuss the sacred boundaries that exist when engaging Others both socially and scholastically, recognizing my personal imperative to tread carefully both in what I write and in what I urge of readers. I then dedicate a significant amount of space to reflexive processing of what it means for me to be operating within what Sholock refers to as a “methodology of the privileged” and take time to affirm the dual value of Lugones’ notion faithful witnessing for both myself and the primary (white) audience I intend to address. I turn to Ahmed and Ahenakew and also borrow from Mack and Na’puti (2019) to describe the tensions I embody as a white scholar engaging in Indigenous studies and assert my desire to write in a way that resists and engages with rather than for or about First Nations groups. I describe I will do so by centering concepts and ideas which are not my own, purposefully surrendering “authority” in order to forward Indigenous philosophy. I then conduct a brief survey of other important Indigenous scholarship being conducted within the field of communication studies before narrowing my focus to discussion of

protocol. I put forward my grandparents' conceptualizations of protocol, introducing it as "the voice of honor" and describing its restorative potential. I then transition into the third chapter, where I conduct my most detailed analysis of protocol in First Nations settings.

I open chapter three by reiterating the three central themes consistent across almost all performances of protocol: honor, humility, and action. However, in order to establish said qualities as the key theoretical tenets which in turn comprise what I ultimately posit as an ethic of protocol, I realize the imperative of observing protocol in practice as well. Thus, I conduct intentional examination of honor, humility, and action as inextricably linked characteristics across various communicative performances of protocol in three of the most common settings for the First Nations tradition to take place: protocol of elders, rites of passages, and entering another's land. Though I do include some of my own personal insight in this section, I primarily analyze recorded accounts from my grandparents in order to secure the centrality of their perspectives and to maintain my position as a witness in the process. I then call attention to the ways honor, humility, and action appear to be ubiquitous across a variety of cases.

Having developed honor, humility, and action as the central tenets of protocol, I pose the notion of protocol rhetorics and consider how an analytic of protocol might transform disciplinary canon, theory, and method. I move forward to discuss how protocol might Indigenize rhetorical and academic practice at large, situating it in contrast to traditional Western epistemologies. I parallel the structure of chapter four to the one before it, inviting readers to consider how protocol of elders, rites of passage, and entering another's land might be analogically represented in academic culture as a site of communicative relations. As I make efforts to reimagine various institutional dynamics through a lens of honor, humility, and action, I attempt to dismantle the normativity of Western thought within higher education. I combine

practical vision with intentional open-endedness, so as to guide but not restrict how an ethic of protocol might inspire us to rethink our patterns, processes, and orientations within academia.

I committed the majority of my thesis to building, analyzing, and implementing an ethic of protocol and now conclude by considering some of its implications. I have sought to demonstrate how protocol functions rhetorically in a variety of ways throughout this project. However, I realize that clarifying some of the nuance in that regard is what might lend this project its most salient significance in terms of how it could respond to our discipline's current juncture and why it matters within a communication context. In that vein, I believe there are three primary contributions this thesis offers to the field of communication and to rhetoric specifically. First, it forwards a new form of rhetoric rooted in a selfless orientation toward others. Second, it embraces a decolonial lens and decenters whiteness in order to complicate and problematize traditional Western epistemologies while asserting Indigenous tradition and philosophy. Lastly, in continuation of its second purpose, this thesis offers critics a way to rethink approaches to scholarship and to academic processes at large.

Protocol Rhetorics in Practice

As explicated in the previous chapter, I argue that protocol informs rhetoric as an ethic and analytic, empowering an Indigenous reimagining of critical theory, method, and pedagogy. In contrast to traditional Western canons, protocol rhetorics radically center the other and decenter the self. I am mindful that one of the most immediate critiques which might be stated in response to a rhetoric which radically centers the other is that it could pose an inherent danger for people who are already embodying disenfranchised, disempowered, decentered lives. There is an implied risk that hegemonic power dynamics might be continually reasserted if those who are decentered take up an ethic of protocol and those who are in positions of power go on in their

merry ways. This is why I want to explicitly clarify that purposeful discernment is imperative when engaging in this type of rhetoric or operating from its ethics. A rhetoric of protocol depends on a culture of protocol, but the most significant challenge is that a culture of honor, humility, and action will not take shape if the ethic is not put into practice. Despite this precarity, I stand by my assertion for an ethic of protocol to be taken up at large, but I certainly do not equate that to mean that it is safe or necessary in all settings.

As part of its decolonial motivation, the perhaps obvious primary intended audience of this thesis is those, like myself, who hold privilege in Western contexts because one of my foremost intents was to demonstrate how dominant ways of thinking might be displaced in favor of Indigenous philosophy as we build alliances and partnerships resisting with marginalized groups. I maintain a belief that some of the most transformative potential of protocol lies in the opportunity for its ethic to be performed by people who maintain hegemonic privilege and choose to humble themselves in order to honor voices who have traditionally been ignored or excluded. However, in regard to discerning safe environments for marginalized bodies to engage in protocol, it is also helpful to consider the interconnectedness of Indigenous perspectives on authority (i.e. elderhood) to its logics. To actively honor an assumed authority who does not or is unknown to embody the qualities of a healthy elder would be a risk for anyone as it could result in the affirmation of oppressive positions and relationships. However, this is not to say authority should be dishonored (as that would counter First Nations values undergirding protocol in the first place) and this is also not to say it cannot be done. The example of my grandparents' decision to protocol their mayor is an example of this, but it admittedly needs to come with caution. Additionally, in their case, because of its more traditional performance and its direct connection to their identities, their action clearly asserted Indigenous thought in a space of

Western authority and thus carried out a more transgressive purpose than other more subtle displays of the ethic of protocol might be able to. Toward building a culture of protocol, members of marginalized populations certainly can extend protocol to members of dominant groups, but its purpose is differently constructive and its execution comes with greater risk. I contend that the one intending to protocol another in any form or setting must do the work to understand what is appropriate and safe for each of them. Only then will protocol have the capacity to be both honorable and resistive.

Toward a decolonial goal, the onus for an ethic and rhetoric of protocol to be mobilized for change lives largely on the shoulders of privileged populations because it is our perspectives which need to be humbled and decentered for the sake of honoring and elevating others. This is not to assimilate Indigeneity into our already Western ways of knowing, but to be willing to entirely replace our Western ways of knowing along lines of relating to others. My desire is that this project is supportive of that aim in two primary ways. First, I hope I effectively demonstrated the surrender of my own authority in order to advance traditionally marginalized epistemology. Perhaps that is most significant because of the weighty nature of a thesis, but I contend it would matter just as much in a “less important” project because of how it contrasts normative standards for scholarship. I believe this is consistent with decolonial strategy in that it purposefully favors Indigenous philosophy over Western paradigms and combats the ideal that good academic work must assert personal dominance or superiority. Secondly, I sought to theorize from Indigenous tradition and values an ethic which can be mobilized as resistive to current oppressive structures and constructive for reimagining cultural and relational orientations, in turn equipping people to take up a transformative ethos. Taken together, my hope

is that in process, outcome, subject, and approach, this project forwards decolonial logics and actions, offering a means for resisting with the great many people committed to transformation.

In Closing

This project is imperfect and I have wrestled over various tensions throughout the process. I have felt immense pressure to maintain in each sentence the same ethic of protocol I advocate for, knowing the imperative that my own actions reflect humility and honor. More than that, though, I understand the weight of continuing to live it. For many reasons I feel rather inadequate to be theorizing an ethic of protocol in both rhetorical and social forms, but one of the most salient is simply that I recognize the amount of work I need to do in my own life toward embracing it. I had the privilege of being taught and shown protocol at a young age, but it is still not inherent to my culture or my nature, and thus my urges in this project are as much of a challenge to me as anyone else. The work in these pages is not solely my own, but a responsibility for work after them certainly is.

In response to recognition of the persistent racism, erasure, inequality, and injustice being perpetuated in various forms in our field, in academia, and even the nation at large, numerous scholars, writers, educators, and activists have produced incredible work detailing how we might make change and witness progress. Thanks to many of them, we already have. I join them in the charge forward, not asserting that this work is any more or less or important than anything else put forth, but suggesting it might be one more opportunity for us to take steps in the right direction and even boldly believing it might breathe new life into their movements. For my grandparents and many other Indigenous folks, protocol is already a way of life. I just wonder how this land might begin to be restored if it were to become the way amongst the rest of us, too. I cannot fully envision the outcomes of a hope placed in the transformative potential of protocol,

but I feel confident that if we are willing to learn the voice of honor and to allow our orientations to be reshaped and motivated by the power of honor and humility in action, then it is a hope that is certainly worth having.

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