shamanic historical consciousness: retu(r)ning to the EcLelemental as an indigenous education

abstract

In Canada, as in much of the western world, history has traditionally been seen as the rational pursuit of knowledge of the past. More recently, however, historians have taken a historical consciousness (HC) approach, which emphasizes the significance of memory. Scholars of HC pursue their work in different ways—typically described as cognitive HC and critical HC. For the purposes of this thesis, I was especially interested in the intersubjective relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people—how we were relating to each other both past and present, and how the past impacts how the present is being negotiated. As a scholar of French and Mohawk heritage, I view history, or histoire in French, as synonymous with story, or better yet, someone’s story to which I am related. Thus, I questioned if the two current HC approaches provided a sufficient understanding of history, if the attention was not on those whose history it was we were disseminating, particularly, when the other was obfuscated, obscured, or omitted altogether from the historical narrative and/or landscape. Drawing on Thomas King’s idea that if you want a different ethic, tell a different story, I propose a shamanic historical consciousness as a way of expanding upon the two former HC strands, and in a way that falls outside many academic conventions with its emphasis on creating alliances with and not for those who have passed before us. Shamanic historical consciousness moves away from a dependence solely on rationalist principles (where reason, and not experience, is viewed as the root of knowledge); it looks to wampum belts—mnemonic devices that recorded history—as a way of knowing/seeing/reading the world. Shamanic historical consciousness dwells in the spaces of obscurity, affording the world of the apparition, the shadow, the reverse of reality. It requires a decentring of the I (or ego), and introduces a proto-ethical o/Other relationality, as a means for (re)thinking Canadian history and Indigenous education. But most of all, my thesis asks that you allow yourself to sway in the breeze like the tall grass in the field, that you allow the winds to unclutter centuries of colonial thought, and allow the wind to whisper ancestral stories that have laid dormant for too long.

Keywords: indigenous education; historical consciousness; wampum belts; Emmanuel Levinas; Canadian history; ethics