

'Quaker Sweat' as Intangible Heritage

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ABSTRACT

In 2004, a small ritual to be held at a Quaker conference in Massachusetts stirred up a big controversy. The 'Quaker Sweat', a syncretic ritual drawing on Lakota, Cherokee and Religious Society of Friends sources, drew protests from a local Native American group. The controversy that emerged within the Friends General Conference, a national Quaker group, highlights the complex dynamics of the cultural property debate. Does the ritual belong to George Price, who developed it? Does the ritual belong to the Lakota, who taught him and gave him permission? Does the ritual belong to the Wampanoag on whose land it was to take place? In the ensuing debate, questions of syncretism and property are examined, taking into account the complex issues of personal versus cultural value, the role of history and experience in cultural property and the complexities of different cultural models of agency related to shared cultural forms. How does a cultural property debate develop between interested actors without the intervention of governments or inter-governmental bodies?

Keywords

religion, syncretism, education, ritual, sweat lodge, Lakota, Religious Society of Friends(Quakers), Wampanoag, Native American, James Arthur Ray

Introduction

Who owns the Quaker Sweat? In 1989, a man named George Price began conducting syncretic rituals he called 'Quaker Sweat Lodges'. These rituals, based on George's study with Cherokee and Lakota spiritual

leaders, were a synthesis of Native American ritual forms and Quaker philosophies. The case is perhaps of much wider interest in relation to the increasing use of traditional knowledge, cultural forms, rituals and other intangible heritage manifestations of indigenous

communities by others who are not part of those communities, whether for commercial exploitation or – as in this case – as part of another spiritual tradition.

The Sweat Lodge Tradition and the Lakota

Sauna-type ceremonies for both personal hygiene and ritual or religious purposes can be traced back to prehistoric times, and are widespread among indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, under names such as 'purification ceremonies', 'medicine house' or 'lodge', 'sweat house' or just 'sweat'. In most cases there are many traditions and rules attached to these in relation to the ceremony and its associated activities, which may include chanting, drumming, story-telling, periods of silence, or in North America, the use of tobacco, while there are often many rules as to who may participate and be let into the secrets of the ceremony and the community, and on what terms.

George Price's initial contact with and knowledge of the sweat ceremony came from his contact with communities of the Lakota tribes, who are in turn part of the Sioux languages group of Plains Indians. The Lakota were originally from the Great Lakes region, but since the

18th century have been located mainly in North and South Dakota (more than two and a half thousand kilometres from Massachusetts where George Price's Quaker Sweat controversy was to be played out). The Lakota have for a long time had rules about the communication of traditional knowledge and ceremonies to those outside their own communities, and indeed to less senior or experienced members of their own community. In particular, only tribal members with knowledge of Sioux-family languages may be trained to lead sweat ceremonies, and for both cultural and safety reasons the necessary training for prospective leaders and transmitters of the tradition requires between four and eight years' training and practice. This traditional Lakota position received strong support in the *Proclamation on the Protection of Ceremonies and the Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality*, both adopted by large representative meetings in 2003,

George Price and his Quaker Sweat ceremonies

The Quaker Sweat, from one perspective, is a ritual that arose from the life experiences of George Price.



Figure 1
A covered inipi from a new age ritual in Italy. Courtesy of *Osho Inipi Circle*
Source:http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:03_inipi-coperto.jpg
Shared under Creative Commons License.



Figure 2
George Price and young Quakers assembling the framework for a Quaker Sweat Lodge
Philadelphia yearly meeting, 2009

Thus, to understand the nature of the Quaker Sweat, one must understand what in George's life led to the development of the current Quaker Sweat Lodge ritual. By understanding the Quaker Sweat in this way, one can understand how it belongs to George.

George's practice of the Quaker Sweat Lodge draws heavily on his background in Quakerism. Quakers are members of the Religious Society of Friends, a Protestant religious organisation founded in mid 17th century England. Beginning as an evangelical Anabaptist movement, Quakers distinguished themselves from contemporary movements by practicing pacifism and preaching equality between the sexes and the abolition of slavery. Quakerism is founded on a principle of continuing revelation, as preached by George Fox -

His basic message was simple enough: first, that his own dramatic and life-changing experience of a direct, unmediated revelation from God confirmed the possibility of a religion of personal experience and direct communion with god...; and second, that this same possibility was available to every person: thus they reject the idea of any priesthood or ministry as a leader or mediator of Quaker worship.

(Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 2)

Based on this principle, Quakerism has continued to evolve through the experiences of members, often referred to as a 'member's ministry'. There are several sects of the Religious Society of Friends in the United States, represented by national organisations; prominent among these is the Friends General Conference (FGC). FGC is an organisation of 'unprogrammed' meetings in which worship is conducted very largely in silence without the use of clergy and holds a large conference (often referred to as a 'gathering') annually at various locations in the United States.

George's history with Quakerism led him to the creation of the Quaker Sweat. While he was born to a Quaker family, his family drifted away from Quakerism when George was young. However, George returned to Quakerism as a teenager, joined a meeting on his own and started attending the Friends General Conference's annual meeting. It was at FGC in 1974 that he first came into contact with Native American spiritual leaders, a group known as the 'White Roots of Peace' who visited the FGC gathering in Ithaca.

This experience proved to be influential in George's life, leading to extensive academic study, including a bachelor's degree in Native American history and culture from the University of New Mexico in 1990. However, this

contact would influence George beyond formal education. In 1984, George underwent what he describes as a spiritual awakening which brought him to the practice of the Sweat Lodge.

[This spiritual awakening] led me to some dreams, I started having dreams about going to the Black Hills. I didn't even know what the Black Hills were but I knew I needed to go there. So I quit both the jobs I had and hitchhiked out to, hitchhiked around the United States that whole summer actually, and the first place I went was to the Black Hills in South Dakota and there I met some, actually in Sioux Falls which is on the Eastern side of South Dakota... I met some Quakers who had a little meeting in their house and they directed me to the Yellow Thunder camp around Rapid City, South Dakota.

(George Price, personal interview)

This contact with Native Americans on a more personal level brought more connections between George and other Native American spiritual leaders and began George's participation in Sweat Lodges, where he began attending sweats and met native leaders such as Wallace Black Elk and Kip Two Feather.

It was not long before George brought these experiences into closer contact with his life as a Quaker by inviting native educators to the Friends General Conference to run sweat lodges. In 1986, several Native Americans from the Twin Cities Native American Center led a sweat lodge, and in 1988, Hawk Little John and David Winston came and ran two separate sweat lodges at the gathering.

This involvement between Native Americans and FGC led to George's first experiences of running sweat lodges.

In 1989 I asked David Winston if he and Hawk would like to come and lead sweats at the gathering again and he told me that they were both busy that weekend and then he said 'you been doing this, you been participating in this for five years, maybe it's time that you had a sweat' and so, in 1989, at St. Lawrence University is when I led my first sweat.

(George Price, personal interview)

George's first experience running a sweat lodge was a traditional Native American sweat. However, the contact also led to problems when George brought David Winston to run sweat lodges at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Then I'm not sure whether it was 89 or 90...but I brought David Winston to, and this was how the Quaker Sweat came about, I brought David Winston who was one of my teachers to lead a sweat for Young Friends [a Quaker youth group]... he got everyone together and he said, in a very Native American style he said, that any woman on their moon could not participate in the sweat, which means any woman that's menstruating.

So what happened was that all hell broke loose. Women were not interested in being excluded and they just took that very badly and so that incident created, and we ended up not doing a sweat.

(George Price, personal interview).

This complication led to a spiritual crisis for George which led him to explore options that balanced the spiritual power George felt in the Sweat Lodge with the testimonies of Quakerism that were equally important to George.

That incident created a crisis in me ... in terms of my spiritual path ... so I went to David Winston and talked to him about it and I also talked to Hawk Little John about it,... And they said it's alright if you do it...you can't call it an Indian sweat and you have to not get yourself involved in things you don't understand about it.

(George Price, personal interview)

After this crisis of faith and identity, George began running the Quaker Sweat regularly at FGC gatherings and began running it in other contexts, at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Young Friends gatherings and at his home in Pennsylvania. As he did this, George did research into the universality of the sweat lodge experience, adapting the lodge according to what he learned, and drawing on international traditions including ancient Celtic sweat lodges, Scandinavian saunas and Russian banyas.

As more and more people participated in the Quaker

Sweat, the needs for Friends General Conference became greater and George began training two assistants, Breeze Luetke-Stahlman and Cullen Carns-Hilliker. Breeze began managing many of the logistical issues of the Quaker Sweat at FGC. After 1989, when George began running the Quaker Sweat as a regular part of the Friends General Conference, the Quaker Sweat became more and more prominent in the gathering. While it began with a small group of interested Quakers, it grew to the point of over 100 people being involved in the sweat lodge, to the point where budgetary concerns started to become an issue.

For years and years and years the sweat lodge had happened, there wasn't a workshop, it just happened as part of the high school gathering and part of the AYF [Adult Young Friends(ages 21-40)] gathering, when that community kind of started to form.

(Breeze Luetke-Stahlman, personal interview)

At this point, pre-2000, the Quaker Sweat was an informal event at the gathering, associated vaguely with individual programmes that were part of the larger

conference, but not part of any of them. However, as attendance grew, George brought in assistance and the sweat became a workshop.

We designed the workshop in a way that each day we would talk about a different Quaker testimony and kind of what that testimony means to us as individual Quakers and then what that means to us corporately, and how it ties into the sweat...

(Breeze Luetke-Stahlman, personal interview)

After several years of performing the workshop, George and his assistants decided to apply to FGC for recognition as a 'programme', allowing them greater access to funding. This was partially based on the support given by the gathering, but was also tied to a desire to simplify the logistics of the matter.

As [the sweat programme] got more and more institutionalised within the FGC gathering it required more and more logistical organisation ... the co-ordinator of the gathering was e-mailing me digitised pictures of the proposed site after the first gathering planning committee meeting, they



Figure 3
Detail of George Price's regular Quaker Sweat ritual site.
Photo. Benjamin G. Aldred

were doing this, it was amazing.

(Breeze Luetke-Stahlman, personal interview)

Thus, by the time the controversy arose, which will be discussed more fully later, the Quaker Sweat had developed into a major part of FGC, arising from the life experiences of George Price. From its roots as a ritual performed by Native Americans for Quakers, it had changed into a ritual adapted by George for performance in a Quaker context.

Who owns the Quaker Sweat?

For over a decade, George ran his Quaker Sweat Lodge rituals at Quaker conferences around the United States and at his own home in Pennsylvania. However, in 2004 his rights to such a ritual were challenged. In 2004, FGC was scheduled to occur in Amherst, Massachusetts. One proposed workshop that year was one conducted by George about the experience of the sweat, which included a Quaker Sweat Lodge ritual. However, when news of George Price's proposed session became known, the Mashpee Coalition for Native Action, a Native American rights group based in Cape Cod, wrote a letter of protest to FGC objecting to the performance of any sweat lodge ritual at the Conference. The fallout from this protest brought into question the dynamics of the ritual as intangible heritage. Fundamentally, the question being asked was, 'Who owns the Quaker Sweat?'

A case could be made for Lakota ownership of the Quaker Sweat. It was Lakota spiritual leaders who first introduced George Price to the sweat lodge. George's Quaker Sweat is an adaptation of the Lakota *inipi* ritual, and his adaptation adheres to contemporary attitudes toward agency and tradition among the Lakota, though later controversies have presented complications.

A case could be made for Wampanoag Mashpee ownership of the Quaker Sweat. The Wampanoag also have a sweat lodge ritual (as had been noted by European travellers from the early 17th century onwards) and the FGC was taking place in 2004 on Wampanoag historical lands. From their perspective, George's practice of such a ritual weakens their cultural heritage through appropriation.

A case could be made for George Price's ownership of the Quaker Sweat. The ritual as it is currently practiced

stands apart from its genealogical roots. George has brought in elements from different cultures, notably by adapting the ritual under the influence of his Quaker roots and creative impulses in order to create something actively syncretic, distinct from the rituals practiced by others, but drawing on their forms.

Answering this question, 'Who owns the Quaker Sweat?' therefore requires an examination of the concept of responsible cultural exchange. Often, cultural exchange gets categorised as cultural appropriation. However, a more nuanced view may help us understand the nature of specific instances of cultural exchange. Understanding this situation more fully may further an understanding of intangible heritage and its contestations and lead to more responsible dialogue in the future. This case gives an unusual opportunity to see an intangible heritage debate conducted entirely without external legal authority.

So, based on the understanding of experience and history, George Price has a claim to ownership over the Quaker Sweat. Through processes of education and adaptation, George developed a distinct ritual that, while based on other rituals, arose from his needs and his life experiences and was designed to serve his community. Understanding the issue in the historical context of the ritual, the Quaker Sweat belongs to George Price.

Roots of the Sweat/ arguments for the Lakota

The Quaker Sweat, from one perspective, is an adaptation of the *inipi* ritual practiced by the Lakota people, as taught to George Price. Thus, to understand the nature of the Quaker Sweat, one must understand how the Quaker Sweat ritual relates to the form, function and philosophy of the Lakota Sweat. By understanding the Quaker Sweat in this way, one can understand how it belongs to the Lakota.

The Lakota are a Native American tribe who moved west from the Great Lakes region in the 17th and 18th centuries and practiced a nomadic, horse-based culture, splitting into smaller groups in the winter and coming together in the summer for the Sun Dance, the central ritual of the year. During the 19th century, the Lakota came into conflict with the US government and years of warfare ended in the confinement of the Lakota people to

a number of reservations in the northern Great Plains, mainly in South Dakota, with the largest concentration in the Pine Ridge Reservation. During the 20th century, a number of independent conflicts emerged between Lakota groups and the US government, including the stand-off at Wounded Knee in 1973.

Throughout their recent history, the Lakota have practiced a ritual alternately known in translation as a 'vapour bath', 'sweat bath' or 'sweat lodge'm. This ritual, generally referred to in Lakota as the *inipi* or *inipi*, is one of the cornerstone rituals of the Lakota, with multiple purposes, both formal and informal, persisting to the modern day. It was described by Black Elk as one of the seven holy rituals of the Lakota. It is primarily from this ritual that the Quaker Sweat developed, not just in structure, but also in purpose and philosophy. Parallels between the rituals make a strong case for a genealogical relation between the rituals.

Form

By looking at the different characteristics of these two rituals, it is possible to discern many similarities and differences. While the Quaker Sweat ritual is based on the Lakota, there have been several conscious adaptations that have altered aspects of the ritual form. By analysing these, it is possible to see the connection between Lakota and Quaker Sweats. For descriptions of the Lakota Sweat, I have used anthropologist Raymond Bucko's firsthand account of the Lakota Sweat ritual. For a description of the Quaker sweat, I have used descriptions by George Price and Breeze Luetke-Stahlman.

Table 1 encapsulates the basic formal aspects of the two sweat rituals. Both rituals begin with a basic gathering of people who then enter the sweat lodge, a hemispherical structure built of cloth/animal skins/ tarpaulins laid over a framework of bent saplings. Within both lodges, there are small dugout pits where rocks heated in a fire are placed to provide the heat for the lodge. The leader of the ritual pours water over these rocks in order to fill the lodge with steam.

Table 1
Characteristics of Lakota and Quaker sweat rituals

Characteristics	Lakota <i>inipi</i>	Quaker Sweat Lodge
Pre-sweat	Gathering at pre-built lodge, building the fire, waiting for the stones to heat up	Building the lodge. Orientation followed by solitary reflection by participants
Entering the Lodge	Women enter first and form inner ring, leader enters first of the men, takes position by door	Water pourer enters first and takes position by door, other participants enter in no particular order
Beginning Ritual	Herbs sprinkled in pit, pipe passed around the circle	None
Round 1	West (thunder beings)-group singing and community building	Group singing, heating up the lodge
Round 2	North (Buffalo Nation)-stones brought in, healing prayers(for community and people)	'Short Prayer' prayers for community issues, spontaneous prayer without attention to order
Round 3	South (winged creatures)-first pipe brought in, more stones brought in, water passed around, healing prayers(for community and people) pipe smoked at end	'Long Prayer' personal prayers for healing, spontaneous prayer without attention to order
Round 4	East (black tail deer)-steam built up, group singing, prayers for enlightenment and wisdom for tribal leaders	Group singing, building up heat
Breaks	None	After round 2, participants exit lodge
Exiting the Lodge	Second pipe smoked, meal eaten at the home of the leader	'Feast' eaten by all participants
Language	English/Lakota mix, formalised ritual language in Lakota (mitakuye oyas'in)	English
Props and Setup	Altar with two pipes, sometimes prayer ties	No altar, dirt from pit used to hold personal items (glasses, jewelry)
Roles	Singer, leader, doorkeeper	Water pourer, doorkeepers
Goals	Traditional-preparing individuals for matters of importance including healing, sun dances, or vision seeking. Modern-healing and larger community rituals, AA meetings	Community building, personal healing and self-improvement

As the rituals progress, key similarities emerge between the Quaker and Lakota versions. From a structural point of view the rituals consist of four 'rounds' marked by shifts in ritual action and by the addition of hot stones from the fire outside. These rounds serve similar purposes, with the second and third rounds representing a liminal space for healing, while the first and fourth rounds initiate and conclude the ritual. Both conclude with a communal meal and a chance for informal socialisation and the breaking of bread together as a community.

However, there are also differences between the two rituals. The first difference involves the use of ritual language. Both rituals have specific associated linguistic

forms, but those vary greatly, drawing on culturally specific backgrounds. In the *inipi*, much of the ritualised language is Lakota, with phrases such as *Natháka yo!* [Close it up!] used to mark the beginning of the first round, and *Mitakuye oyas'in* [to all my relations] used to conclude prayers and mark the end of the fourth round being part of the ritual form, as well as songs sung in Lakota. In the Quaker sweat, songs and ritual instructions are in English, and an orientation is held, something not done for Lakota sweats. The second key difference is the use of ritual objects. In the Lakota sweat, specific ritual objects include two prayer pipes, an altar set up outside the lodge and sometimes prayer ties. For the Quaker sweat, props are minimal, with specific tools used for utility rather than having any ritual significance. The final key difference that emerges between the two rituals is the treatment of gender in the ritual performance. The Lakota sweat divides the men and women into the inner and outer circle within the lodge, and in some lodges menstruating women are not allowed to participate in the ritual. These restrictions and divisions proved controversial in the history of the Quaker Sweat because of the Quaker tradition of gender equality.

While there are significant differences between the two rituals, the differences themselves are primarily erasures or deliberate alterations on an existing theme rather than differences that have developed. While they draw heavily on Quaker practices for the specific choices, the ritual remains fundamentally similar to the Lakota ritual, but is adapted for a Quaker context. Ultimately, this points to a Lakota origin for the ritual, which calls for some degree of ownership by the Lakota.

Dynamic ownership

The dynamics of adaptation and ownership become complicated by Lakota stances on ritual. One of the intriguing aspects of historical Lakota religious life is the lack of any central religious authority. Whether it has to do with the dispersed nature of Lakota life, dividing on an annual basis into smaller and smaller cultural units, or something else, Lakota ceremonial tradition grants a great deal of agency to individual practitioners. As Raymond Bucko puts it,

Lakota ceremonial practice is rather charismatic, fluid, and based on individuals' ongoing spiritual experiences...individual inspiration and

interpretation was and continues to be highly valued within Lakota religious practice.

[Bucko 1998, 12-13]

In applying this theory to the practice of the Sweat Lodge, Bucko uses the model of dialectic between tradition and creativity and between the forces of continuity and forces of change.

This theory of adaptability of ritual in Lakota life is borne out in other works on Lakota belief structures. In the book *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, Raymond DeMallie and Elaine Jahner observe a number of aspects of Lakota ritual practice and the nature of variation in rituals such as the Sun Dance.

A Fourth reason, more tentative, involves the greater freedom and variation that characterized the Lakota sun dance as opposed to the more structured ceremonies of other tribes.

[Walker 1991, pp.25-26]

This 'individual' knowledge is borne out in cultural exchange that has characterised the experience of many people who have worked with the Lakota such as the cultural exchange between Nicholas Black Elk and first John Neihardt, then Joseph Epes Brown. Similarly, sharing of knowledge by the Lakota was a part of George Price's background. He studied with Wallace Black Elk.

Historically, many Lakota have demonstrated a willingness to teach trusted individuals their rituals, partially in order to facilitate the individualising of those rituals, and in order to share knowledge more broadly. According to this overall philosophy, granting agency to those performing traditional Lakota rituals, George's ritual can be seen to be a Lakota ritual adapted based on his experiences with Quakerism. As agency is a major part of Lakota ritual, it is possible to see how the adaptation does not truly make the ritual into something other than itself simply because of a few changes. According to this perspective, the Quaker Sweat is still, in some sense, Lakota.

However, with the expansion of New Age practices in the 21st century, there has emerged significant opposition among many Lakota to the performance of rituals outside a strictly Lakota context. In the aftermath of a number of deaths at a sweat lodge ritual in Sedona,

AZ, Lakota elder, Arvol Looking Horse issued a statement on behalf of a gathering of Lakota elders. His statement sought to distance native practice from new age sweat lodges.

Our ceremonies are about life and healing, from the time this ancient ceremonial rite was given to our people, never has death been a part of our inikaga (life within) when conducted properly. Today the rite is interpreted as a sweat lodge, it is much more than that. So the term does not fit our real meaning of purification.

(Looking Horse 2009)

At the same time, Looking Horse sought to reserve the practice of these rites to trained native practitioners, especially condemning those who practice the sweat lodge for monetary gain. In his statement, Arvol Looking Horse allowed for the possibility of non-natives to seek assistance from natives for healing.

The non-native people have a right to seek help from our First Nation Intercessors for good health and well-being, it is up to that Intercessor.

(Looking Horse, 2009)

Ultimately, the statement by Arvol Looking Horse shows a shift in Lakota perspectives on shared cultural forms. While Looking Horse does not object to the possibility of performing rituals for non-natives, his statement is highly critical of non-natives performing native rites. However, one complexity comes in the form of Looking Horse's specific criticism of performing the ritual for profit. *When you do ceremony – you can not have money on your mind.* (2009) This perspective is complicated in the case of the Quaker Sweat in which none of the facilitators are compensated monetarily.

So, assuming that the origins of a ritual's structure tell us something about its rightful ownership, the Quaker Sweat belongs to the Lakota. On the one hand, based on the Lakota tradition of granting agency to ritual actors, George Price's Quaker Sweat is simply an extension of the *inipi* rite which he was taught. Where changes have been made, they have been made consciously and with an aim toward adapting the ritual according to George's life experience. On the other hand, the continuing controversy over sweat lodges among the Lakota questions whether George, as a non-native

performing the ritual, can have the right to perform a ritual based on the Lakota *inipi*, complicated by the non-financial aspect of the ritual performance in the FGC context.

Consequences of the Sweat/arguments for the Mashpee-Wampanoag

The Quaker Sweat, from one perspective, is a ritual that has potential consequences for Native Americans everywhere. Thus, to understand the nature of the Quaker Sweat, one must understand how the practice of the Quaker Sweat ritual can be seen to have negative consequences for groups not involved in its history. By understanding the Quaker Sweat in this way, one can understand how it belongs to the Mashpee Wampanoag.

The Mashpee Wampanoag, a division of the larger Wampanoag tribe whose historical territory extended through Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York, have lived in Mashpee on Cape Cod since 1660 in what could be considered one of the first reservations in the United States. Alternating between self-government and governance from outside, the tribe has maintained its efforts for federal recognition, finally achieving this in 2007. Historically, the larger Wampanoag tribe is remembered for their involvement with the Plymouth colony through Tisquantum, also known as Squanto, who aided the early colonists in their farming practices, and through King Philip's War, an early conflict with Native Americans. In the aftermath of this conflict the tribe experienced significant historical persecution by New England colonists.

The setting for the controversy involves theories not only of cultural property but of physical property as well. In 2004, FGC's annual gathering was scheduled to be held at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. As part of the lead-up to the gathering, programmes went out to interested parties; Quakers, Quaker meetings and others. This year, as had happened for several previous years, there was a workshop listed for the Quaker Sweat under the following description:

Since 1989 young Friends have participated in a sweat lodge at the Gathering, evolving into an experience deeply meaningful to many. This workshop offers participants an opportunity to build the lodge, sweat and discuss the history,

Quaker presence, and spiritual nature of the sweat lodge experience

(2004 FGC programme).

At the time this happened, the state of the sweat lodge in FGC had been changing. While the institutional presence had been increasing, with the introduction of the sweat lodge workshop and the involvement of the Planning Committee, this was not without internal controversy. A number of Quakers had expressed concerns about various aspects of the Quaker Sweat. As Breeze put it -

And this came at a time when there had been a couple other concerns that had been raised about the sweat and its Quakerness that had manifested in different ways.

(Breeze Luetke-Stahlman, personal interview)

Into this context, with the Quaker Sweat becoming both more accepted and more controversial among the FGC community, came a letter.

The Mashpee Coalition for Native Action, a group that had worked closely with Quakers in the past, was sent a programme booklet for the upcoming Gathering. Based on the description in the booklet, they wrote to the Long Range Planning Committee, the group that plans each gathering, about the Sweat Lodge.

The general points of their letter were as follows:

- the Sweat Lodge is a sacred ceremony, not an experience.
- offering such an event is offensive to many Native people.
- permission and training by Native people is immaterial, conducting it is disrespectful, sacrilegious and racist.

This letter, received by the Long Range Planning Committee several days before their final meeting to plan the Gathering brought about a complicated reaction. The decision was made to cancel the sweat for that year, and a long discussion began. Based on internal and external concerns, the process led to the cancellation of the sweat for the 2004 gathering and concluded in the long-term cancellation of the Quaker Sweat Lodge as part of FGC.

The basis of this controversy, from the Mashpee-Wampanoag perspective, has some interesting implications for the nature of cultural exchange. The important point of the Mashpee-Wampanoag letter is that training and permission by Native people is immaterial. From their perspective, their rights are at least as important as those of the Lakota who gave George permission to conduct the lodge, more important in this case because of the proximity of the gathering. From the perspective of the Mashpee Coalition for Native Action, no non-native has the 'power' or 'right' to conduct a sweat lodge ritual. The potential consequences of any sweat lodge ritual, specifically in terms of exploitation and profit, are abhorrent to the Mashpee Coalition. As one member put it -

Meanwhile, a short time ago Wampanoag and other native people were legally outlawed from doing the practice. They were killed and jailed etc. Now that it's chic this same general culture which even today persecutes them wants to be part of it?
(MWAC representative, personal correspondence)

Thus, in the Mashpee-Wampanoag perspective, because they may be affected by the performance of the Quaker Sweat, they should have the right to say no. According to this perspective, anyone who is likely to be affected by the cultural exchange should be allowed to forbid its use. Through this concept of intangible heritage, the consequences take priority over the genealogy. It is a future-oriented concept of intangible heritage, based not on what has happened, but on what could happen.

Who Owns the Sweat?

By these various arguments, the Sweat can alternately be seen to belong to each of these three groups. George has an argument based on the connection of the ritual to his life experience. The Lakota have an argument based on the adaptation of the ritual from their *inipi* ritual and explicit permission from some of their leaders, though opposed by later generations. The Mashpee-Wampanoag have an argument based on the potential consequences. All of these are valid arguments; however, the difficulty is that they do not correspond to one another and there is no dialogue between them. While George is arguing from the past, the Mashpee-Wampanoag are arguing from the future, and many of the Lakota who trained George are no longer alive and are thus unable to engage in discussion

at all.

In the end, the conflict is about the rights to intangible heritage. There is (or was) a group of Lakota who, according to their statements to George Price and their actions wished to share this ritual with Quakers. There is a group of Mashpee-Wampanoag who, according to their letter to FGC and follow-up statements, wish to not have this ritual shared with Quakers. The cancellation of the Quaker Sweat disrespects the wishes of the former, while its continuation disrespects the wishes of the latter. However, there has been little effort to bring these perspectives into dialogue to attempt to resolve the matter. Until such a dialogue occurs, this intangible artifact will remain in dispute and there will be no resolution.

Responsible dialogue

Fundamentally, responsible dialogue on matters of intangible heritage requires a number of things. First, it requires an understanding of the disputed actions. One of the complicating factors of this matter is the fact that the various participants cannot agree on what is occurring. Specifically, the Wampanoag and the Lakota represented by Arvol Looking Horse have expressed distaste for the potential commercial and popular applications of the Quaker Sweat, while George has insisted that the Quaker Sweat is not for profit and that he does not encourage others to practice it.

Second, it requires an acknowledgement of the perspectives of all involved. Responsible dialogue on cultural property cannot ignore the needs and desires of any of the participants. In the initial resolution by the FGC hierarchy, there was little acknowledgement of the specific perspectives of those who run the Quaker Sweat and of those who oppose it. As Breeze says,

...well, one of the things that's been really hard about this is the decision, that a lot of people have made really really important decisions about this without really knowing a lot about the sweat...

(personal interview)

As a representative of the Mashpee Wampanoag Action Coalition says,

Who has a right to say what is done in their name?

If someone asserts their right and says no why isn't that enough especially if they are saying to a group of people that they have considered friends?

(personal correspondence)

In both of these cases, the individuals whose perspectives are fundamental to this argument are not able to make their own case to each other, instead it is being mediated by individuals who are not directly involved, nor are they empowered by those directly involved to speak for them.

Finally, what is necessary for responsible dialogue over cultural property is an understanding of the effects of the decision making process. By acknowledging exactly what is being decided, a better decision can be made. One statement that sums up the complexities of the process comes from the Committee for Quaker Sweat Lodge Discernment, an ad hoc committee assembled by FGC to consider the issue.

The grace that has emerged from this conflict is that at the highest level of discussion, we are in unity. We all want to act in a way that honors and respects our Native American brothers and sisters. We all want practices that open Quakers, especially young Quakers, to a deepening engagement with God. And we want to celebrate and respect the spiritual gifts of all, including the younger members of our community

(Ad Hoc Committee 2008)

I am not going to take a side in this debate. I believe that there are firm and valid perspectives on each side of this issue. George, the Lakota and the Mashpee Wampanoag all have valid claims to the Quaker Sweat as a ritual and it is not my place to decide whose perspective wins out. Ultimately, like all such debates, the legitimacy of the claims must be determined by good faith interaction between all the interested parties. 🇺🇸

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