

A sense of belonging

Experience, Human Nature



Belonging is an essential part of human life that is not always just a connection to a place; it is a feeling of being at home within yourself and having the patience to discover who you are. Being at home within yourself is a process that is not instantaneous and this is evident in the film *Ten Canoes* and the poem 'Digging'.

Through characters and text specific techniques, the film and poem portray processes of how developing an understanding of group dynamics and relationships allows one to gain a sense of personal belonging, deeper than merely a connection to a place. Understanding the group dynamics and laws relating to specific cultures allows one to avoid alienation and feel comfortable as an individual. The narrative voice of David Gulpilil in *Ten Canoes* invites the audience into his story of the covetous youth, Dayindi and his older brother who has three wives, Minyngululu.

Minyngululu also has a story to tell, diachronically through time to that of the ancestors, Yeeralparil and Rijimiraril, not to the audience but to Dayindi, "to help him live the proper way", however the audience is still involved through the narration of David Gulpilil, "it is Minyngululu's story for Dayindi back then, and it is my story for you now" so the audience can learn this 'proper way' too. Dayindi is introduced through the voice over as a young and somewhat naive boy who lusts for his brother's youngest wife and resents living in the single mans camp.

It is obvious Dayindi does not quite belong to this clan, despite his connection to the tribe and the land through birth, "they make fun of Dayindi, they know he is liking the younger wife of his brother Minyngululu".

Dayindi steps outside what is socially accepted as the proper way, the law and this alienates him. Dayindi is impatient and throughout the story states, “ the only thing he learned is that Minygululu take long time to tell a story”, but through this drawn out story Dayindi learns that understanding the right way is not an instantaneous process but it requires patience.

By learning the laws, the ‘ proper way’, Dayindi overcomes his wrongful desires of the young wife and achieves a sense of belonging to the tribe that comes from his own personal realisation of who is he is and what is right. The poem ‘ Digging’ also depicts how an understanding of what is morally accepted within a culture enhances how an individual belongs within themselves. The Irish poem arrests the attention of the reader with a smile, “ the squat pen rests; as snug as a gun”, hinting at the fraught context of poem, written during a time of war.

The persona then seems to escape the brutal reality of life at this time by going back diachronically in time, a technique similar to that of the ancestral story within a story, depicted in Ten Canoes. He goes back to a memory of watching his father digging, through the proud memory of the hard working men of his family, “ could cut more turf in a day than any other man on Toner’s bog” inspires within him a new determination. “ I’ve no spade to follow men like them”, however, “ the squat pen rests. I’ll dig with it”.

The pen is no longer associated with a snug gun and its unlawful violence, but the concept that ideas win wars and he will dig for ideas. He can still belong to this family of hardworking diggers now he has an understanding of how he can work hard with the other tool available to him, the lawful one,

and through this understanding a new determination and sense of home within oneself is gained. Through relationships of kinship and ancestors one can achieve a sense of belonging within themselves from knowing where they come from and what this means.

In *Ten Canoes*, Dayindi's kinship with his brother and link to his ancestor Yeeralparil allow him to overcome his lust for Minygululu's young wife and feel at home within himself. Minygululu, does not chastise Dayindi in the film for having feelings for his younger wife, but casually tells him a story to help him. This strengthens the somewhat disrupted relationship between the two brothers and Dayindi learns, "one important thing in his life. He is learning to be patient".

With the patience that his brother teaches him, Dayindi accepts his position in the tribe and knows one day he will have a wife, but he must wait and do things the right way. Through the story being told of Yeeralparil, Dayindi relates to this ancestor and in the film, the two characters are played by the same actor, Jamie Gulpilil which enhances this relationship between the two young men. Dayindi learns that for Yeeralparil, the fantasy of the youngest wife never become a reality, even when his brother Rijimiraril dies, and so he too knows within himself the same fate is for him.

Through the two relationships Dayindi learns to accept that he will never be with the young wife and this realisation allows him to lose his resentment and do what is right in the tribe in order to belong. In the poem 'Digging' the persona maintains a sense of belonging through the relationship he has with his family. "The old man could handle a spade, just like his old man." The

proud recognition of his family history is obvious through the finely observed memory with strong details that engage all of the senses, allowing the audience to be a part of this diachronic experience, “ the cold smell”, the “ soggy peat”, and “ straining rump”.

Through this detailed description and admiration of his hardworking family the audience can see that he feels a strong sense of belonging with these people. But he is not immediately apart of that group as the audience is informed at the beginning of the poem, he is an office man, an educated man with not a shovel but a “ squat pen” rested in his hand. It is only through a feeling of being at home within himself, and the feelings of home that he has held onto from his past that he can still belong to his ancestors.

Although Dayindi belongs to his tribe and the land through his birth rights he needs more than a connection to a place in order to belong. It is only when he learns the process of understanding the laws and accepting his place through a strengthening relationship with his brother that he feels he belongs within himself and ultimately his tribe. The poem ‘ Digging’ enforces similar processes of family kinship and understanding how to overcome breaking the law in order to belong within oneself. Through knowing group dynamics and having strong relationships, a deeper sense of belonging is created, a feeling of being at home within yourself.