

**White Settler Colonialism and (Re)presentations of Gendered Violence in
Indigenous Women's Theatre**

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Abstract

Grounded in a historical, socio-cultural consideration of Indigenous women's theatrical production, this dissertation examines representations of gendered violence in Canadian Indigenous women's drama. The female playwrights who are the focus of my thesis – Monique Mojica, Marie Clements, and Yvette Nolan – counter colonial and occasionally postcolonial renditions of gendered and racialized violence by emphasizing female resistance and collective coalition. While these plays represent gendered violence as a real, material mechanism of colonial destruction, ultimately they work to promote messages of collective empowerment, recuperation, and survival. My thesis asks not only how a dramatic text might deploy a decolonizing aesthetic, but how it might redefine dramatic/literary and socio-cultural space for resistant and decolonial ends. Attentive to the great variance of subjective positions occupied by Indigenous women writers, I examine the historical context of theatrical reception, asking how the critic/spectator's engagement with and dissemination of knowledge concerning Indigenous theatre might enhance or impede this redefinition. Informed by Indigenous/feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theoretical perspectives that address the production and dissemination of racialized regimes of representation, my study assesses the extent to which colonialist misrepresentations of Indigenous women have served to perpetuate demeaning stereotypes, justifying devaluation of and violence – especially sexual violence – against Indigenous women. Most significantly, my thesis considers how and to what degree resistant representations in Indigenous women's dramatic productions work against such representational and manifest violence.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Violence against Indigenous Women and Dramatic Subversion

The truest poetic function of the theatre – to invent metaphors which poignantly suggest a nation’s nightmares and afflictions.

– Robert Brustein (qtd. in Harbin et al. 359)

If theatre is a tool of transformation, which we know it to be, then we have a responsibility that the stories that we tell will be stories of our becoming, of our becoming whole.

– Monique Mojica (“Creation” 6)

Decolonization through Dramatic Resistance: Framing the Discussion

The violent conquest that facilitated the settlement of White settler societies has been well documented not only in the North and South American contexts, but in literature from Australia and New Zealand.¹ So, too, is it widely recognized that Indigenous² women living in

¹Acknowledging that great regional variances render a continental analysis impossible, the primary focus of the dissertation’s historical and literary components is Canada, with *all* other nations and regions considered secondarily. Critics have certainly warned against the postcolonial homogenization of international Indigenous experiences of colonization. In the early 1980s, Gary Boire argued that “the superficial crime of superimposition may have been the same in all colonies, but given the specificities of history, ethnicity, gender, culture and geography, there are significant and subtle variations between each repetition and amongst the multiple reactions to it” (306). It is true that experiences of colonization and displacement were significantly different in each colony, yet, with respect to certain historical events, as well as to the production and reception of Indigenous theatre, the other nations and regions offer useful contrasts and juxtapositions to the Canadian situation. Although the Canadian experience of displacement evidently parallels the American experience inasmuch as the national border cuts through traditional Indigenous cultures and territories, Australia and New Zealand may offer closer comparisons when the postcolonial crisis of nationhood is considered in terms of Indigenous resistance and artistic production. The affinities of British imperial rule have resulted in structural similarities in the cultures of these countries. Alan Filewod has noted that in Canada and Australia the emergence of Indigenous literatures/theatre has followed a remarkably similar path, “marked by issues of cultural nationalism and decolonization”; due to shared historical patterns (notwithstanding their complex differences), Indigenous writing, for the stage and otherwise, has encountered like problems of production and reception (“Receiving” 364). See Adams 27; Sioui, *Amerindian* 100-5;

White settler societies are overrepresented as victims of gendered violence, in both intra and intercultural contexts.³ Contemporary research indicates that the “historical trauma” caused by colonization resulted in gendered “systemic and structural discrimination” that continues to place Indigenous women at “greater risk” for “sexual abuse and violence” (Elias et al. 1561). It is thus unsurprising that, in Canada, violence against Indigenous women remains “a major public health concern” (Dauod et al. 278), as national studies suggest that Aboriginal women (Indian, Métis and Inuit) are subject to gendered violence at a rate three to four times higher than women in the general population (Brownridge, “Understanding” 355; *Vulnerable* 99-100). For Indigenous women of White settler societies, violence, especially sexual violence, is a fundamental mechanism of the colonial project: when deployed in tandem with myths of racial/cultural authenticity and the coercive erasure of cultural memory through the residential school systems and the child welfare systems,⁴ sexual violence works directly as a tool of genocide. While

Moses 5; Allen, *Sacred* 155; L. Smith 21; Jaimes and Halsey 299; A. Smith *Conquest* 14; Powers, “Andeans” 44; Silverblatt *Moon* 20-31.

² When referring to the Canadian context, I use Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably, exceptionally using Métis where necessary. Aboriginal peoples, comprising Indian, Inuit, and Métis people, are recognized in section 35 of the Canadian *Constitution Act 1982*. I employ Indigenous alone to refer to other Native populations outside Canada. See A. Smith, *Conquest* 170; L. Smith 146; P. Andrews 919; Brownridge, *Vulnerable* 199; Chong 531.

³ Rather than an oversimplified definition of violence against women, my analysis employs a broader, intersectional definition used by critical race scholars, including Andrea Smith and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence Collective. Dominative axioms work in tandem and violence against Indigenous women cannot be understood without also considering the oppressive mechanisms of homophobia/transphobia, institutional racism, classism, and ableism. As INCITE! argues, the commonplace definition of violence against women must necessarily be expanded to encompass “[a]ttacks on immigrants’ rights, Indian [Aboriginal/Indigenous] treaty rights, the proliferation of prisons, militarism, attacks on the reproductive rights of women of color, medical experimentation on communities of color, homophobia/heterosexism and hate crimes against lesbians of colour, economic neo-colonialism, and institutional racism” (*Color* 2). For further reading, see INCITE!’s *The Color of Violence* and Smith’s *Conquest: Sexual Violence and the American Indian Genocide*.

⁴ Beginning with Ontario, in the 1840s, the colonial state in a burgeoning Canada implemented compulsory education in residential schools for Aboriginal children; as young as five, Indigenous children were taken from their families and placed in Christian boarding schools (Assembly of First Nations; A. Smith, *Boarding* 8; Fournier and

gendered violence is most obviously used in settler/invader contexts to uphold racialized and gendered hierarchies, less overt, though equally integral to White settler colonialism, is the discursive propagation of notions of “(racial and sexual) purity,” which function to efface Indigenous cultures entirely and which construct Métissage as “debased” (Knowles, “Rape” 247-48). Characterized by abuse, neglect, and the ceaseless undermining of pre-contact ways of life (Miller 121; Cairns 31; Rice and Snyder 49), the residential school system was designed to destroy Indigenous/Métis cultures through the forced assimilation of children (Miller 122; Milloy 45-6; Dickason, *Founding* 333), and, in the nineteen sixties, the child welfare systems in Canada came to function as an extension of these destructive institutions (Bennett et al. 18-23; Sinha and Kozlowski 1). Beginning with a discussion of the discursive and enacted violence inherent to White settler colonization in multiple contexts, I frame my analysis by exploring Canada’s particular colonial trajectory, reviewing research concerning historic and contemporary violence against Indigenous women so as to emphasize the complex set of historical and socio-economic factors that combined to perpetuate such violence. Ultimately, I aim to elucidate the complexity of the linkage between colonization, violence against Indigenous women, and contemporary Indigenous women’s literary/dramatic production.

My dissertation examines representations of gendered violence in Canadian Indigenous women’s drama as they have been used for decolonizing purposes. While the employment of the term decolonization hinges upon not only disciplinary standards, but also individual motivation,

Crey 146). Indigenous children continue to be overrepresented within the child welfare systems in Canada and, as Vandna Sinha and Anna Kozlowski note, “this extends a historical pattern of child removal that began with the residential school system” (1). For further reading, see Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey’s “Killing the Indian in the Child: Four Centuries of Church Run Schools”; Marlyn Bennett’s *A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography on Aspects of Aboriginal Child Welfare in Canada*; and Vandna Sinha and Anna Kozlowski’s “The Structure of Aboriginal Child welfare in Canada.”

by *decolonization* I refer to the outmoding and dismantling of colonial hierarchies, the rebalancing of unequal power relations between Indigenous peoples and White settlers, and the eventual forging of alternative modes of relation. These new relations must necessarily be based upon the acknowledgement of the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to land and resources, and they must be founded upon mutual recognition and the shared desire for the formation of a syncretic society built, most integrally, upon the principle of human equality. Such a dynamic social transformation would inevitably lead to the reshaping of relations between White men and Indigenous women, as well as between Indigenous men and Indigenous women, diminishing incidences of gendered violence against not only Indigenous women, but also women in the general population. Informed by Indigenous/feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theoretical perspectives that address the production and dissemination of racialized regimes of representation, my study will assess the extent to which colonialist misrepresentations of Indigenous women, such as “Indian Princess” or “easy squaw,” have served to “perpetuate stereotypes,” justifying devaluation of and violence (especially sexual violence) against Indigenous women (Acoose, *Iskwewak* 65). Most significantly, my thesis considers how and to what degree resistant representations in Indigenous women’s dramatic productions work against such representational and manifest violence. Acknowledging also that patriarchal colonial power structures – a result of “the corrosion of Indigenous women’s power in governance and the colonial imposition of heteropatriarchy” (McKegney, “Into” 7) – are deeply embedded in the social fabric of many Indigenous communities, my work investigates the manner in which Indigenous women’s plays might operate as tools of cultural renewal and intergenerational recovery.⁵ Methodologically, my study is grounded in a historical, socio-cultural consideration

⁵ Georges Sioui and Tomson Highway have written and spoken extensively on the detrimental effects of colonialist patriarchy on North American Indigenous communities. Sioui draws a direct correlation between contemporary

of Indigenous women's theatrical production. Such a method asks not only how a dramatic text might deploy a decolonizing aesthetic, but how it might redefine dramatic/literary and socio-cultural space for decolonial ends. Attentive to the great variance of subjective positions occupied by these Indigenous women writers, my dissertation examines the historical context of theatrical reception, asking how the critic/spectator's engagement with and dissemination of knowledge concerning Indigenous theatre might enhance or impede this redefinition.

Despite a recent increase in productivity amongst Indigenous playwrights, most critical and academic attention, at least in North America, has been devoted to the work of male dramatists.⁶ This is seemingly due to the expediency with which male dramatists, such as the renowned Cree author/playwright Tomson Highway and Ojibwa writer Drew Hayden Taylor,⁷ achieved fame. Addressing this critical gap in the literature pertaining to Indigenous theatre in North America and making use of feminist Indigenous theory, my dissertation focuses specifically on plays by Indigenous women written and produced in the socio-cultural milieu of

violence against Indigenous women and the dissolution of "matricentrism" (*Amerindian* 14). For further reading, see Sioui's books, *For an Amerindian Autohistory* and *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle*, as well as Highway's *Comparing Mythologies* and his interview with Judy Steed, "Tomson Highway: My Way."

⁶ For further reading concerning the gender gap in critical appraisal of Indigenous theatre, see Ric Knowles' articles, "Performing Intercultural Memory in the Diasporic Present" and "The Hearts of Its Women: Rape, Residential Schools and Re-Membering."

⁷ After completing studies at the University of Western Ontario and advanced training as a concert pianist, Highway turned to theatre as a forum for cultural recuperation, and established his reputation very quickly – becoming the first Indigenous dramatist to break into the critical mainstream in Canada – with two comedies set on an Aboriginal reserve in northern Ontario: *The Rez Sisters* (1986) and its sequel, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989). Taylor is a well-known filmmaker, humorist, and dramatist. Originally from Curve Lake First Nation, Ontario, he has written a number of popular theatre pieces, including *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* (1990), winner of the Chalmers Award for Best Play for Young Audiences (1992), and *Bootlegger Blues* (1991), winner of the Canadian Author's Association Literary Award (1992). For further information, refer to Taylor's personal web-page: <http://www.drewhaydentaylor.com/index.html>. Dawn Marpessa has commented on the "troubled state" of Indigenous drama in the United States, noting that Highway's work particularly, and Indigenous theatre generally, has been far less well received in the United States than in Canada (82).

twentieth and twenty-first century Canada. Closely analyzing dramatic texts by Monique Mojica (Kuna/Rappahannock), Marie Clements (Cree/Métis), and Yvette Nolan (Algonquin/Irish), my study will explore (re)presentations of gendered and often sexualized violence in order to determine the varying ways in which these representations are employed subversively by Indigenous women. I have selected works that most clearly demonstrate the socially transformative potential of Indigenous women's dramatic writing. These plays do not merely memorialize colonial transgressions, but they also provide an avenue for individual and potential cultural healing by deconstructing some of the harmful ideological work performed by colonial and postcolonial misrepresentations. My contention is that the colonialist project of cultural erasure, through the forced removal of children from their homes and communities, strategically attacked continuity of cultural memory and this process is related directly to assaults on the dignity and bodies of Indigenous women. Dramatic texts by contemporary Indigenous women represent gendered violence as a real, material mechanism of colonial destruction which works, in combination with propagated myths of authenticity, racial/cultural purity, and discursive misrepresentations, as a technology of ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide. Ultimately, I contend that Indigenous women's plays, especially those containing revisionist historical components, commemorate the perseverance of Indigenous women and facilitate reconciliatory understandings of colonial destruction on the part of audiences, thus creating the potential for positive social change.

The “Discovery” Myth: Colonial Misrepresentations and Violence against Indigenous Women

Anne McClintock suggests that colonial regimes share a common plight and process insofar as recurring patterns of domination of Indigenous groups are consistently present in

colonial trajectories, wherein such groups are marginalized, segregated, and eventually reintegrated as subordinate subjects, with women subject to the rule of men (25). In her analysis of imperial travel narratives, *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt describes a discourse⁸ of “anti-conquest” propagated by European bourgeois men, hoping to “secure innocence” while simultaneously forcing European rule on conquered states (9). Genocide Studies scholar Ward Churchill similarly points to a discursive denial of genocide, connecting the American genocide of Indigenous peoples with like patterns in other genocidal projects, particularly the Nazi Holocaust, suggesting that there exists a genocide “typology” (8), characterized by deliberate cultural destruction, persistent denial of historical fact, and the imposition of raced and gendered patriarchal hierarchy (85). Jack Forbes, in his text *Columbus and Other Cannibals*, draws a disturbing comparison between colonialism and cannibalism, contending that White settler exploitation and genocide can be likened to a “wetiko psychosis” – the disease of cannibalism – described by Forbes as “the consuming of another’s life for one’s own private purpose or profit” (24). The ethnocentrism at the heart of the White settler genocides was certainly innate to the ideological framework of European colonialism, demanded the subjugation of women – especially Indigenous women – and, consequently, was inherent in imperial perceptions and portrayals of all Indigenous populations (McClintock 25-30; Churchill 85). This consistent relationship between genocide and the “settler-colonial tendency” Patrick Wolfe has aptly termed “the logic of elimination” (387).

⁸ Although discourse may refer to any form of communication, I use the term to describe those communications imparted poetically/artistically via dramatic texts/performances. Through the delivery of meaning, such discourse, I suggest, has the capacity to contribute to audience understandings of the communicated subject matter and, by extension, various social phenomena. For further reading concerning the varying modes and uses of discourse, see Norman Fairclough’s *Discourse and Social Change* and J.R. Martin and David Rose’s *Working With Discourse: Meaning Beyond the Clause*.

In Canada, European conquest and colonization are often denied, largely through the propagandized myth that the country was peacefully founded and not violently colonized (Razack, “When” 2; Freeman 444). In order to distinguish Canada from the United States (Mackey 37) and to maintain a sense of national innocence (Razack, “When” 2), records of the acquisition of Canadian territory, which reveal the brutal destruction of Indigenous societies, were buried and disregarded by Canada’s government and religious institutions (Lawrence, “Rewriting” 22-23; Alfred, “Restitution” 181). Such erasure facilitates national denial of historical truths, the understanding of which is fundamental to successful decolonization (Alfred, “Restitution” 181). Dickason argues that hegemonic historical accounts of Indigenous cultures regularly obscure what actually took place during the colonization of North America (Adams 28; Sioui, *Amerindian* xx; Dickason, “Toward” 12; Trigger, *Natives* 28), disregarding histories of upheaval and displacement in favour of mythical portrayals of colonization as the just and timely introduction of European culture (Dickason, “Toward” 12-13; Thorton 13).

While it is understood today that the insalubrious interactions with European colonists drastically diminished the flourishing Indigenous populations of North America (Dickason, *Founding* 370; Sioui, *Amerindian* 3; Trigger, *Natives* 7), until the second half of the twentieth century, it was widely believed that Canada’s Indigenous populations were savage, anachronistic relics of times past (Sioui, *Amerindian* ix) and that the Indigenous impact upon the environment was so inconsequential that North America remained a “virgin land” at the time of European contact (Dickason, *Founding* 27), leaving initial “discovery” to the colonizers (Lawrence, “Rewriting” 37). In his book, *Fear and Temptation*, Terry Goldie draws upon Dennis Lee’s *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (1978) to argue that literary representations of Indigenous “closeness to nature” are regularly used to “justify an emphasis on

the [Indigenous person] as land” (19). As with colonial land, Indigenous women were viewed by early colonizers as objects of conquest, passive and open to exploitation. It is therefore unsurprising that, in the earliest hegemonic narratives of colonization, the land is gendered female; the “virginal” quality of the land connotes an empty void, attributing initial discovery to the colonizer, thereby justifying masculinist conquest and barbarity (McClintock 26-30). As Goldie notes, in colonial literature, “[t]he image of the female as receiver of the male power provides an explicit opportunity for the white patriarchy to enter the land” and, in these early portrayals, “the normative sexual relationship of the white male with the indigene female is rape, violent penetration of the indigenous” (*Fear* 65-6).

Many early accounts of northern Indigenous cultures were written by French Jesuits, the first missionaries to Christianize the Indigenous population of eastern Canada; these depictions, skewed by the religious beliefs of the Jesuits who were bent upon the conversion and assimilation of Indigenous peoples, provided the basic discursive elements for Canada’s first historians whose research, in turn, set the tone for European writing concerning Indigenous people (Dickason, *Myth* 217-21, 251-70). Subsequent studies of early historic times have thus drawn upon the *Jesuit Relations*, which tend to portray Indigenous women as corruptors of men, impediments to Christian progress, and, most disturbingly, “potential allies to Satan” (Karen Anderson, *Recognition* 56). Concerned particularly with practices relating to marriage and divorce, Jesuit missionaries expressed disgust with the “problem” of female sexual freedom, dismayed by the “libertinage to which the girls and women here abandon themselves” (Thwaites, *Jesuit* 15:107; 38: 253).

It is true that Indigenous women played a salient role in the resource extractive economy of the early colonies, especially in western Canada, were regularly wed to European men, and

thus were treated with some measure of respect (Van Kirk, *Many* 8-30; Stevenson 53-4; S. Carter, *Aboriginal* 130; Carter and McCormack 9; Ray, *Indians* xxii). However, these Indigenous brides were displaced with the arrival of White women (Van Kirk, “Marrying-In” 1).⁹ As the relentless proselytizing of missionaries exacerbated the growing tension between European trappers and Aboriginal women, Christian notions of female purity constructed Indigenous women as impure and uncivilized, juxtaposing them with White women, who were viewed as pinnacles of virtue and agents of civilization (Brown xv). In western Canada, the missionaries, particularly the Anglicans brought by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1820, firmly “denounced” interracial marriage between White men and Indigenous women as “immoral and debased” (Van Kirk, “Role” 10). By the early twentieth century, misperceptions of Indigenous women were rampant throughout North America because they were held up to a patriarchal, Christian societal model. Too often Indigenous people have been “described and dissected by white men – explorers, traders, missionaries, and scholars – whose observations sometimes revealed more about their own cultural biases” than they did about Indigenous ways of life (Barman 237-38). Diamond Jennes, for example, quotes the Jesuits and early explorers incessantly in his book *Indians of Canada* (1932), which has regularly been presented as the most comprehensive work pertaining to early Indigenous-settler relations, indicating the lack of satisfactory material available concerning Indigenous women in colonial North America.¹⁰

⁹ The destructive intergenerational impact of the displacement of the Indigenous wives of the early fur-traders is addressed in Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas* and is elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

¹⁰ Though Sarah Carter’s books *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West*, and *The Importance of Being Monogamous* are excellent sources concerning Indigenous life styles, and perceptions of Indigenous people in nineteenth-century, Western Canada, most works by Canadian scholars are principally concerned with an earlier time period, as is the case with Karen Anderson’s *Chain Her By One Foot: The Subjugation of Native Women in Seventeenth-Century New France*, Sylvia Van Kirk’s *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society*, and Ron Bourgeault’s “Race, Class and Gender: Colonial Domination of Indian Women.” The four principal analyses of perceptions of

When the improved amenities of flourishing settlement brought an increased number of White women to the North American colonies, depictions of Indigenous women as passively violable, which had previously enabled early colonists to engage in interracial sexual liaisons without moralizing reprimand – a necessity, given the virtual absence of European women – vanished, to be replaced by discursive depictions in which Indigenous women appear aggressively sexual and immoral, a danger to the very health and success of the nation (S. Carter, *Importance* 153; Roome 49; Barman 247-49; Kim Anderson, *Recognition* 86; Stoler, “Sexual” 148-49). Ann Laura Stoler contends that the arrival of White women in colonial settings generally coincided with some recently enacted or strategized “stabilization” of colonial domination (“Sexual” 148). Depictions of the vulnerable White woman in need of protection were juxtaposed with portrayals of Indigenous degenerate wantonness during periods of threat to imperial rule, whether real or imagined, so as to legitimize the coercive measures needed for control.¹¹ Because White women were symbolically aligned with the social/moral purity of imperial rule in the British colonies, images of the “ravaged white female body” became a signifier of colonial upset, suggesting that “the stereotype of the dark rapist” aligns directly with pending failure of the “civilizing mission” (Sharpe 68), which is why rape stories emerge during periods of political instability, providing a convenient rationale for oppression of Indigenous

Aboriginal people consider women, if at all, as extensions of their male counterparts; see Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*; Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*; Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*; and Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*.

¹¹ This is not to say that White women were themselves responsible for racial segregation or for the highly racialized polarization of women into the docile and malign. In imperial/colonial and national propaganda, White women may have been represented as “freedom and liberty” (Pickles and Rutherford 9), but colonial discourse has always implied that women do not share the same liberty as men. When considering the position of White settler women, it is important to keep in mind that hierarchical colonial regimes were structured in terms of race and gender, elevating White European men to a position of superiority through the discursive inferiorization of Indigenous peoples *and* women (Stoler, “Making” 366; McClintock 25).

men as well as Indigenous women, discursively represented as potential rapists and unchaste ‘squaws’, respectively.¹² As Stoler concludes, a common theme emerges in recent histories of European women and colonialism: in colonial situations, varying in historical period and location, protecting the honour and virtue of White women became a pretext for controlling and suppressing the Indigenous population; “any attempted or perceived infringement of [W]hite female honor came to be seen as an assault on white supremacy and European rule” (“Rethinking” 515).

By the late colonial period, Christian notions of purity resulted in a great deal of concern on the part Europeans over unions of White men and Indigenous women, primarily because such unions signified what was perceived to be an attempt to meld two “irreconcilable dichotomies”: civilized versus savage and Christian versus heathen. Settlers were fearful of the threat posed by miscegenation to White imperial bloodlines (Van Kirk, “Marrying-In”1).¹³ As Victoria Freeman observes, nineteenth-century Canadian discourses concerning “human difference,” rather than existing in isolation, were part of a “pan-European debate ... that was intimately connected to the global spread of empire” (“Attitudes” 197). According to Freeman,

¹² The image of the Black male rapist functioned in precisely this manner in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America. Angela Davis points out that the lawless lynching of Black men was initially depicted rhetorically as a preventative measure to stop the pending uprising of free Black males against White authority, yet by the late 1800s, when it became clear that there existed no threat of Black insurrection, the discursive rationale behind lynching evolved to portray Black men indiscriminately as rapists (186). Anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells made obvious to the Western world, in her 1892 book, *Southern Horrors*, the devious manner in which White supremacists justified the atrocities they committed against Black men in the South by contriving rape allegations (1-16), demonstrating the galvanizing capacity of false rape charges which resulted, quite often, in the horrific lynching and mutilation of innocent Black men by White mobs (4). Hodes contends that interracial unions became increasingly less tolerated towards the end of the nineteenth century because White men stood witness to the diminishment of the power monopoly they had long endeavoured to protect (*White* 1-20).

¹³ For a general discussion of attitudes towards miscegenation in nineteenth and twentieth-century North America, see Martha Hodes’ *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*.

most Europeans – and most people of British ancestry, whether in the United States, British colonies, or Britain itself shared a sense of racial superiority over non-white colonized peoples, taking for granted that there was a fundamental difference between those of European (and especially Anglo-Saxon) descent and the rest of the world’s peoples. (“Attitudes” 197)

Denigration of Métissage thus became integral to the maintenance of White settler rule. In many colonial settings, including Canada (Stevenson 51; Van Kirk, *Many* 5), there was an early phase of intermarriage which produced Métis offspring, yet in colonized regions as diverse as Mexico, Cuba, India, Indochina, and South America, prohibitions against intermarriage, whether state-sanctioned and officiated or informal and customary, eventually became a component of colonial culture (S. Carter, *Capturing* 15; Stoler, “Sexual” 515). Regulatory practices – whether formal or informal – ensuring the social control of Indigenous family life in Canada were clearly influenced by these colonial discourses of “racial and social purity” that “warned of the decline and pollution of the ‘imperial race’” (Barman 241). Prohibitions resulted inevitably in perceptions of the Métis as a dangerous source of subversion, a threat to White prestige and to the European community at large (Stoler, “Sexual” 515).

Aside from Christian anxiety over miscegenation, mid and late nineteenth-century representations of Indigenous women as forcefully licentious were influenced by rigidly moralizing Victorian discourses concerning sexuality, particularly British fervour surrounding the regulation of prostitution (Barman 241-45). Discourses of prostitution, which depicted Indigenous women as sexually aggressive “harlots” whose licentiousness posed an imminent threat to the rapidly expanding Euro-Canadian settlements (Barman 241), were particularly useful in delineating White and Aboriginal – to wit, respectable and unrespectable –

femininity.¹⁴ In *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality*, Gail Hawkes traces the nineteenth-century imperial obsession with prostitution back to Christianity, which gave it prominence and held out promise for “the redemption of the prostitute, the personification of polluting and uncontrolled women’s sexuality” (14-15). Colonial rhetoric concerning Indigenous social behaviours served to justify the connection between Indigenous women and prostitution, equating migration, gift-giving ceremonies, and (at least relatively) egalitarian gender norms¹⁵ with the sex trade (Perry 54). In early Canada Indigenous women thus came to be “wholly sexualized” (Barman 241) and were “rarely permitted any other form of identity” (Barman 264). Indeed, not only in North America, but “everywhere around the world Indigenous women presented an enormous dilemma to colonizers, at the heart of which lay their sexuality” (Barman 239). It is certainly true that sexualized misrepresentations of Indigenous women are common to colonial discourses of the Americas (Allen, *Sacred* 2-3), Australia (Kociumbas 83), and New Zealand (Denoon et al. 171-73). Despite coinciding depictions of sexual aggressivity, the connection between Indigenous women and colonial land remained a crucial component of colonial discourse, signifying what European settlers deemed the feral aspects of Indigenous women’s behaviour, a linkage that eventually resulted in a relationship of “control, conquest, possession and exploitation” (Kim

¹⁴ Judith R. Walkowitz has written extensively on power and spatial representations of gender and class in Victorian England. Though limited in locational and temporal scope, her book, *City of Dreadful Delight*, provides a telling look at the role played by depictions of prostitution in the demarcation of licentiously willing sex workers and virtuous, chaste gentlewomen. The social dynamics in the colonies demanded that Indigenous women occupy a position of lowliness reserved for prostitutes in Britain. For a discussion of the sexualization of Indigenous women in the colonies, and early Canada particularly, see Jean Barman’s “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality.”

¹⁵ Unlike European culture, in Indigenous societies, a gender division of labour did not automatically translate into a hierarchical division of power, as demonstrated by Eleanor Leacock (1980) and Karen Anderson (1991) in their studies of the Montagnais-Naskapi women. According to Anderson, “[b]efore colonization, the Huron and Montagnais tribes lived in gender-egalitarian societies” (250). Extending this argument of egalitarianism and connecting the “deference towards the woman” in North American Indigenous societies to an overall recognition of a “human brotherhood vested in the Earth-Mother” (*Amerindian* 42), Georges Sioui refers to pre-contact Indigenous ideologies as “matricentric” (*Amerindian* 14).

Anderson, *Recognition* 100). To wit, “the project of colonial sexual violence establish[ed] the ideology¹⁶ that Native bodies are inherently violable – and by extension, that Native lands are also violable” (A. Smith, *Conquest* 12).

(Post)Colonial¹⁷ Drama: Misrepresentations of Indigenous Women

Jo-Ann Episkenew aptly notes that theatre is a “particularly attractive genre for Indigenous people looking for a creative outlet for their stories” because, in part, “[u]nlike other literary forms, theatrical productions are not the creation of solitary individuals working in isolation” and “one of the values common to the many diverse Indigenous cultures is the value of community” (147-48). Some Indigenous writers take this argument even further, suggesting that contemporary Indigenous theatre is not an adaption of Western theatre tradition, but based upon traditional Indigenous performance culture. Cree dramatist Floyd Favel Starr claims that “the concept, Native Performance Culture (NPC), could be described as developing practices of our ancestors. It came about not as a clearly formulated plan based on a clear vision, but as a feeling and intuition born out of personal, cultural and universal needs” (“Artificial” 83). Native Performance Culture is instrumentally designed to “return [Indigenous] people to the sources of

¹⁶ I use the term ideology to refer to the particular set of constructed beliefs/understandings by which a society is governed. It is these broadly held notions that ultimately shape social systems and, most importantly, allow hierarchies of power to be upheld. For an interesting analysis of the relationship between human belief, action, and social order, see Eric Carlton’s *Ideology and Social Order*.

¹⁷ The concept of postcolonial art as a body of work catalyzed by European contact has been criticized for both its nationalistic implications and its periodized classifications. In his article “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial,” Thomas King expresses well-reasoned concern over the term’s application to Indigenous literature. Alan Filewod has raised similar criticisms regarding notions of postcolonialism in relation to Indigenous theatre, contending that postcolonialism is theoretically problematic because “it implies a state of emergence from colonialism,” whereas postcolonial societies find themselves “defined and often confused by intersecting and very present colonialisms” (“Staging” 3). For further discussion of these issues as they pertain to Indigenous theatre, see Quo Li Driskill’s “Theatre as Suture: Grassroots Performance, Decolonization and Healing” and, for a comprehensive interrogation of the topic as it relates to postcolonial feminism, see Gayatri Spivak’s *Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*.

[Indigenous] knowledge, and interrup[t] the colonial fragmenting processes” (Brunette ii). Geraldine Manossa compares contemporary Indigenous theatre with Western performance, arguing that “a main distinction” is that “the roots of contemporary Native performance can be traced to the lands of this country” (180). Like Episkenew, Drew Hayden Taylor acknowledges theatre as the “predominant expressive vehicle for Canada’s Native people,” arguing, in a similar vein to Starr and Manossa, that “theatre is just a logical extension of storytelling” (“From” 140).

Performance was certainly a part of Indigenous cultural interchange long prior to European contact, yet, so far as critical reception is concerned, Indigenous theatre did not enter the North American mainstream until the late 1980s (Knowles, “Introduction” v).¹⁸ In fact, critical discussion of performance across cultures has been relatively late coming to Canada. This is largely due to the fact that the policy of official multiculturalism, adopted in 1971 and entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, relegated art produced outside of the majority French and English cultures to non-professional status (Knowles and Mündel i-viii; Off 8-14; Gómez 31-33). Minoritized productions were thus funded through the Multiculturalism Directorate until as late as 1991, when the arts councils officially recognized minority (non-Western or Indigenous) cultural production as professional (fundable) art rather than merely “ethnic” folklore, to be preserved – in the terms of Bill C-93,¹⁹ the 1982 Act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada – rather than publicized, critiqued, and nurtured into evolution (Off 8-14; Yhap, “On” 19). With (albeit limited) access to public support,

¹⁸ Before colonization, North American Indigenous peoples partook in elaborate performances, often religious in nature, incorporating props, masks, and smoke effects. In Canada, many traditional performances became illegal under the federal Indian Acts of the late nineteenth century; not until 1951 was the Act revised to allow these ceremonial dramas. For further information, see James Spradley’s *Guests Never Leave Hungry* (1972).

¹⁹ For further information, see Michael Dewing’s report, *Canadian Multiculturalism* (2009).

Indigenous theatre and performance began, in the final decades of the twentieth-century, to emerge from the fringe ghettos of official multiculturalism, making its presence felt in the professional theatres from which it had been for the most part absent in the post-1967 “nationalist phase,” and where it might attract critical and scholarly attention (Knowles and Mündel vii-viii). As a consequence, the 1980s saw an astounding increase in production by minoritized writers and, particularly, dramatists. Beginning with Tomson Highway’s and Drew Hayden Taylor’s aforementioned rise to prominence, Canada became the locus of a substantial corpus of Indigenous dramatic work, including contributions by Daniel David Moses, Monique Mojica, Yvette Nolan, Marie Clements, and Margot Kane, among others.

As a response to denigrating colonialist portrayals, mid-twentieth-century North American cultural production came to represent Indigenous women sympathetically – however, problematically – with many postcolonial works, particularly pieces by male authors, returning to the trope of the virgin land so deeply embedded in colonialist discourse. These postcolonial pieces are implicitly subversive (Gilbert and Tompkins 213), yet, very often, the female body is reappropriated in these works only to be metaphorically violated again, with rape, specifically interracial rape, acting as a symbol for colonial violation of land. This is especially true of plays produced in areas of the world where the territory was considered to be empty and open to colonial discovery; rape images are used in postcolonial pieces to demonstrate the violence involved in the process of colonization, presented in a manner intended to portray the problematic mentality which accompanies the act of sexual/colonial violation, a technique that can serve, in some instances, to mitigate the “voyeuristic” aspect of White consumption and encourage recognition of complicity in the implementation of the colonial order (Gilbert and Tompkins 213-14).

The most famous Canadian example is Ukrainian-Canadian playwright George Ryga's 1967 play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. Portraying the struggle of a young Indigenous woman in the city, the play figures Rita Joe as an emblem signifying both the destruction involved in the process of colonization and the contemporary violence to which Indigenous women are subject. Because her body becomes a site on and through which the disciplinary inscriptions of imperial patriarchy are played out, her rape and murder imply "the grim triumph of the imperial project" (Gilbert and Tompkins 213). Well intended as the play was, Ryga has been critiqued for staging one-dimensional, stereotypical representations of Indigenous people (Grant, "Native" 106), especially of Indigenous women (Knowles, "Rape" 246).²⁰ Highway also employs rape emblematically in his Rez plays, *The Rez Sisters* (1986), *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989), and *Rose* (1999), as well as his nationally best-selling novel, *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* (2000).²¹ As with Ryga, despite seemingly proactive intentions, Highway has been subject to extensive criticism for his emblematic representations of women and his gratuitous depictions of misogynistic violence.²² In her text *Backlash*, feminist theorist Susan Faludi fervently contests ostensibly sympathetic depictions of sexualized victimhood, asking poignantly whether

²⁰ In his keynote address at the 1998 Canadian Theatre Conference in Winnipeg, Robert Wallace, author of the text, *Producing Marginality*, argued that the 1967 Vancouver Playhouse production of Ryga's *Rita Joe* marked the "beginning of true Canadian theatre" (qtd. in Nolan, "Aboriginal" 2). Considering both the play's subject matter and the mixed critical responses to the work, Wallace's comment is interesting in its implications for both Aboriginal theatre and theatre criticism in Canada.

²¹ In *The Rez Sisters*, Highway manages to represent the tragedy of racialized, gendered violence without incorporating scenes of gratuitously violent emblematicism. His later works, however, treat the subject far less sensitively. For an extended discussion of this aspect of Highway's work, see my M.A. thesis, *Representations of Rape and Gendered Violence in the Drama of Tomson Highway*.

²² See Marie Annharte Baker's "Angry Enough to Spit but with *Dry Lips* It Hurts More Than You Know," Marion Botsford Fraser's "Contempt for Women Overshadows Powerful Play," and Anita Tuharsky's "Play Promotes Racism, Sexism and Oppression."

audiences really need to be taught that “rape victims deserve sympathy” (151).²³ Alan Filewod suggests that Highway’s depictions of Indigenous womanhood were particularly unsettling, given that his plays were – at the time – largely accepted as “unmediated testament[s] of authenticity” (“Receiving 367). As I have argued, even if such emblematic representations – whether staged or literary – do reflect the negative outcomes of the violent colonial implementation of what Sam McKegney has aptly termed “heteropatriarchy” (“Into” 4), they might also “reify racially charged stereotypes” concerning Indigenous women, particularly when performed for/consumed by a “mixed race audience” as “spectacle” (MacKenzie 45).

Portrayals of rape, which depict Indigenous women as easy victims, have been used extensively to represent colonial destruction of Indigenous societies and, as Taylor disconcertedly notes, while rape may provide “the perfect metaphor for what happened to Indigenous culture,” it is necessary to be wary of “becoming fixated on dysfunction” (“Alive” 34).²⁴ However, such images are sensationalist to the public and, for this reason, despite the tremendous increase in Indigenous dramatic production in recent years, the “best known” scene from Aboriginal theatre in Canada is from Highway’s *Dry Lips* and it depicts a brutal rape (Knowles, “Rape” 248). Yvette Nolan argues that the success of Highway’s plays was a “double-edged sword” for Aboriginal theatre, as Indigenous theatre practitioners continue to sit on committees with non-Indigenous colleagues whose entire “experience of Aboriginal theatre in

²³ In their influential 1976 study, “Living With Television: The Violence Profile,” George Gerbner and Larry Gross also make a convincing argument that rather than encouraging social change, enacted depictions of victimhood work to dramatize preferred social relations, with the “portrayal of certain groups as victims” providing “a symbolic expression of those victim types’ social impotence” (182).

²⁴ While rape has indeed been overused as a metaphor, it is important to keep in mind that not all plays by Indigenous men portray women violently or emblematically. Highway’s work is a particular example, but writers such as Drew Hayden Taylor and Daniel David Moses have had no criticism levied against them for misrepresenting Indigenous women. Taylor, having expressly denounced the overuse of emblematic gendered violence, refuses to include portrayals of rape in his work.

[Canada] is *The Rez Sisters*” (“Aboriginal” 3). Such postcolonial works as those by Ryga or Highway are problematic because their emblematic depictions of violability are reminiscent of colonialist representations, rendering resistant representations in Indigenous women’s plays all the more important to successful decolonization. Although all literary/dramatic expression is aesthetic and representational by nature, the texts explored in this dissertation portray Indigenous women not as emblems signifying colonial destruction; rather, these plays revise such depictions, recuperating Indigenous women as indomitable and empowered leaders.

To turn to works by Indigenous women is certainly to turn to a broader range of depictions of colonial and sexual violence as, quite often – rather than emblematic aestheticizations of violence – dramatic pieces by Indigenous women draw from lived authorial experiences or the life experiences of other real women, while also making explicit the connection between personal experiences of violence and broad-based discursive/material colonial violence. A number of studies demonstrate the capacity of theatre to function as a socially transformative tool of self-representation in women’s social movements (Sethna and Hewitt 471; O’Neil 494; Driskill, “Theatre” 155). Moreover, in both activist and literary sites, the telling and enactment of personal narratives is understood to be a “means for women to employ their own autobiographical accounts as sources of knowledge” (L. Anderson 34), particularly to the extent that these accounts constitute discursive sites of what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson refer to as “coming to voice of previously silenced subjects” (27). Australian performance theorist Joy Hooton insists that “[n]o document has a greater chance of challenging the cult of forgetfulness than a [Indigenous] woman’s autobiography” (313). The narrativization of traumatic memory in text and the transference of script to stage serves as a means of turning the colonial gaze back upon itself. Literary critic Daniel Heath Justice argues that Indigenous

narratives are not only “expression[s] of intellectual agency as well as aesthetic accomplishment[s],” but these representations assist “in the struggle for sovereignty, decolonization, and . . . the healing of this wounded world” (336). “[I]n a postcolonial situation,” as Neal McLeod writes, “in the subversion of stories by the colonizer, one is able to reassert one’s narratives” (17), responding to the “settlers’ authorized collective myth [and] drawing attention to the sickness inherent in colonialism” (Episkenew 70).

In order to mount dramatic resistances to discursively violent misrepresentations of Indigeneity – clear manifestations of deeply entrenched colonialist misbeliefs – Indigenous women playwrights regularly employ surrealistic modes of representation. These depictions allow for the revisioning of dominant historical narratives, thereby enabling representational reempowerment of those Indigenous woman leaders – mothers, grandmothers, and sisters – who have been deprived of space in masculinist histories, while also assisting with the recognition of intergenerational connectedness between Indigenous women cultural activists. The surrealistic component of Indigenous women’s drama is, as Marc Maufort suggests, grounded in Indigenous “cultural roots” (1), whereby the role of maintaining ancestral ties is recognized as an important component of successful decolonization. The infusion of magical elements into these texts justifies those depictions that speak to the relevance of otherwise unacknowledged interworldly bonds for Indigenous women. It is also through surrealism that Indigenous woman writers are able to revisit traumatically violent events without staging gratuitous portrayals, which might undermine the subversion of colonialist discursive violence by reengaging a similar method of representation.

Theatre expert Mimi Gisolfi D’Aponte contends similarly that Indigenous women’s dramatic writing manages to “transcend cultural boundaries, while simultaneously transmitting

the essence of female victimization and survival of that victimization,” with the final product, the show, allowing for the “purging of pity and fear through witnessing tragedy in the theater,” rendering Indigenous women playwrights not only “transmitters” and “healers,” but also “transformers” (101-03). Canadian Indigenous theatre critic, Michelle La Flamme, for example, has described plays by Indigenous women as “Medicine... that ultimately heal[s]” (116).²⁵ Mojica postulates that dramatic representations can be “used to bridge the rupture, and impact on audiences, body to body, so that the transformation reverberates” and “changes us” (“Creation” 5). For Mojica, Indigenous women playwrights not only address colonial trauma, but envision new ways of “performing possible worlds into being” (“Creation” 2); “[w]hen we make a decision to create from a base of ancestral knowledge,” she writes, “we confront the rupture, the original wound” (3). While plays by Indigenous men are by no means less relevant to decolonial movements, Indigenous women’s works confront the gendered nature of colonial violence more directly.²⁶

Interpellation, Stereotyping, and the Perpetuation of Gendered Violence

In his seminal essay, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus,” political philosopher Louis Althusser argues that ideology functions in such a way as to secure the reproduction of extant social relations and power dynamics through a process of “interpellation” (180). It “can be imagined,” writes Althusser, “along the lines of the most common everyday

²⁵ La Flamme’s comments pertain to Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and Yvette Nolan’s *Annie Mae’s Movement*. These two works are discussed in Chapters Three and Four, respectively. Reception of Indigenous women’s plays makes apparent the healing capacity of such texts. However, for the purpose of cohesiveness, reception of particular works will be elaborated upon in the body of my dissertation.

²⁶ Previous to European colonization, many Indigenous traditions did not acknowledge sexual preference as a viable category of identity construction. For further reading concerning gender dynamics in traditional Indigenous cultures, as well as the interrelationship between Queer Theory as Critical Indigenous Theory, see Driskill, et al. *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*.

police (or other) hailing: “‘Hey, you there’ . . . [T]he hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, [s]he becomes a subject”; the subject thus “transforms” to become a particular social entity *because* she is “recognized as such” (174). Ideology, perpetuated discursively by institutional mechanisms, is therefore responsible for the construction and maintenance of present hierarchies, effectively ensuring the sustainment of existing social orders. While Althusser has been critiqued by feminist theorists on the grounds that his understanding of the role of ideology in the social construction of subjectivity is far too “functionalist,” and, more significantly, that his notion of interpellation provides little space for theorizing subversive agency (Hennessy 21), his work has also been acknowledged as extremely influential for marxist, materialist, structuralist, and linguistic feminists (Assiter vii-ix). It is clear that Althusser’s theory of dominative interpellation directly influenced second-wave feminist thinkers, including film theorist Laura Mulvey. In her now famous 1975 article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey makes the argument that the cinematic objectification of women for the “male gaze” – “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” (27) – instills within both male and female viewers faulty, sexist notions concerning gender and sexuality. Mulvey’s suggestion is very much in keeping with the Althusserian concept of interpellation as a force seemingly invulnerable to conscious resistance. However, a number of feminist scholars have, conversely, used Althusser’s theory as the basis to make a case for the existence of subversive consciousness and “reverse interpellation” (Rowe 16; Butler 163). Indeed, my adaptation of interpellation theory in this dissertation is employed, ultimately, for the precise purpose of theorizing subversive agency, realized via theatre. While it may be true, as Althusser contends, that the subject responds to “hailing” (174), inasmuch as she will understand that she is being addressed, such reception does not eliminate the possibility of subversive reaction. The validity of interpellative potential and

the existence of resistant agency are by no means contradictory: this is an important point, to which I shall return in the following section.

In her essay “The Politics of Representation,” literary theorist Barbara Godard, while acknowledging that representations evoke a range of reader/viewer responses, interprets Althusser’s theory of interpellation to argue that literary/dramatic representations present subject positions that readers and spectators are “invited to occupy” (186). Godard’s contention overtly demands that the realm of artistic production be considered a social institution, responsible for the discursive construction of ideology, shaping the society in which it is created, and which it, in turn, creates. Drawing upon the influential work of Kenyan anti-colonial scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Acoose makes a similar argument, contending that in the Canadian context, as in other White settler societies, literature “functions as ideology” (*Iskwewwak* 32).²⁷ So, too, have performance theorists long argued that it is extremely important to take into consideration the potential interpellative impact of dramatic representations, particularly when “negative stereotypes” may be “perpetuated” (Bennett et al. 10).²⁸ Ideology and discourse inevitably bear upon one another, as shifting ideological mechanisms shape discursive representations and discursive structures inform ideology; indeed, the two operate in tandem, contributing to the construction of social order and, by extension, influencing subject development. Historically, Indigenous women have been represented as promiscuous, hyper-sexual, and morally corrupt, or, at best, in postcolonial art, hapless, violable victims. When considered in terms of the production of subjectivities, the interpellative potential is extremely powerful because, as Althusser writes,

²⁷ See Wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics*.

²⁸ See also Alan Filewod’s “Averting the Colonial Gaze: Notes on Watching Native Theatre” (1992), “Receiving Aboriginality: Tomson Highway and the Crisis of Cultural Authenticity” (1994), and Knowles’ “The Hearts of Its Women: Rape, Residential Schools and Re-Membering” (2003).

and as evidenced throughout history, ideology surely “acts” as a “little theoretical theatre” (174), in a world populated by “actors” (177).

Addressing the construction of identity in alterity, Edward Said, in his now canonical study *Orientalism*, demonstrates the way in which ideologically driven discursive representations might be developed and deployed as hegemonic tools of socio-cultural segregation and domination. Analyzing a series of examples from varying media, Said reveals the insidious process by which the West/Occident managed to discursively construct an image of the Near East/Orient, in contrast to which the West itself might be oppositionally defined. Rather than a reflection of what the countries of the Near East were/are truly like, Orientalism was the discourse “by which European culture was able to produce and, importantly, manage the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively” (Said 3). Within the context of Western/Occidental domination over the Orient, there emerged a new, “complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and historical theses about mankind and the universe” (7). In creating an image of Oriental anachronous exoticism, the Occident ensured a “relationship of power” and “hegemony” between West and East (5), using representations of Oriental “Otherness” (21) to “hard[en] the distinction” between “Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (42). Although he failed to include a gendered analysis in *Orientalism*, the absence of attention to the specific position(s) of women in the original text was acknowledged by Said in his 1993 book, *Culture and Imperialism*, and has been astutely corrected by a number of feminist literary scholars.²⁹

²⁹As noted by Reina Lewis in her critical review, “Feminism and Orientalism” (2002), many feminist writers, largely influenced by the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, have addressed this problematic gap in Said’s otherwise apt analysis. See Lisa Lowe’s *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (1991), Sara Mills’ *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991), Billie Melman’s

Extending Said's argument beyond the Orient/Occident division, cultural theorist Stuart Hall contends that – perhaps seemingly benign – images function regularly in the service of upholding elitist, hierarchical status quos. Upon evaluation of a series of photos depicting racially diverse athletes, Hall found that through binaristic portrayals, the cultural hegemony establishes a dichotomous “us” and “them” relationship between “black” and “white” (“Spectacle” 243), “civilized” and “primitive” (228), or, perhaps better said, powerful and powerless, effectually “fixing difference” socially and preserving social conditions in which one group is dominant (248): this process Hall refers to as “stereotyping” (230). Of course, as Hall suggests, these dominant discursive representations – “stereotypes” (230) – are undermining constructions that do *not* reflect the true subject “position” of those minoritized (“Cultural” 394). Hall, clearly receptive to feminism's commitment to social transformation, was extremely critical of what he perceived to be a failure on the part of Cultural Studies to embrace feminist thought in the 1970s, and contemporary feminist theorists continue to employ his work in order to explain societal power dynamics.³⁰

As explicated in the preceding discussion, oppositional stereotypes of Indigenous and White women were certainly used in colonial settings to marginalize and oppress Indigenous populations. Sadly, such employment of discursive stereotypes in the colonies made it possible for those men who held power to condemn Indigenous sexuality, while simultaneously exploiting the very women they had turned into sexual objects for their own gratification.

Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East (1992), and Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (1993).

³⁰ See Hall's article, “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies” (1992), and Charlotte Brundson's piece, “A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS” (1996). Social psychologists Latrofa, Vaes, and Cadinu, for example, draw upon Hall's influential work to demonstrate the manner in which the constituents of “low-status groups” readily “self-stereotype,” as opposed to members of “high-status groups,” who tend to feel a sense of inflated self-confidence (92).

Drawing from her research on colonial Asia, Stoler³¹ astutely observes that while “elites were intent to mark the boundaries of a colonizing population, to prevent these men from ‘going native’/to curb a proliferating mixed-race population that compromised their claims to superiority and thus the legitimacy of white rule,” these same elites marketed the colonies as domains “where colonizing men could indulge their sexual fantasies” (“Between” 5). In the colonies, hierarchical dynamics of gender, power, and race converged in a manner that inevitably resulted in acts of gendered – and often sexualized – violence against Indigenous women. And, as I argue, colonial discourses of racial and sexual purity, having “long constructed” Indigenous women “as *particularly* likely to be promiscuous and immoral” (Brownlie 161), perpetuate a stereotype of uncontrollable licentiousness that causes these women to be constructed as there for the “sexual taking” (Kim Anderson, *Recognition* 109). Emphasizing the potentially tragic effects of racial stereotyping and acknowledging the capacity of literature/art to propagate such stereotypes, Acoose argues that “it is gross and deadly violations like [Helen Betty] Osborne’s³² that make the issue of Indigenous women being misrepresented ... of such vital importance” (*Iskwewak* 70).

Representations of immoral licentiousness *and* passive violability contribute to hegemonic stereotypes that work to naturalize and “fix” identities socially (Hall, “Spectacle” 258), perpetuating a dangerous cycle of stereotyping, misogyny, and violence by encouraging

³¹ Although Stoler and Cooper co-wrote this introductory essay, the insight is clearly Stoler’s, as it is her research on colonial Asia that is cited.

³² Helen Betty Osborne (1952-1971) was born on the Norway House Reserve in Manitoba. She was abducted and brutally murdered near The Pas, Manitoba, on the morning of November 13, 1971. Shortly after, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police concluded that four young White men, Dwayne Archie Johnston, James Robert Paul Houghton, Lee Scott Colgan and Norman Bernard Manger, were involved in her death. It was not until December 1987 that one of them, Dwayne Johnston, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder. James Houghton was acquitted. Lee Colgan, having received immunity from the prosecution in return for testifying against Houghton and Johnston, went free. Norman Manger was never charged (Amnesty International).

racist notions of sexual availability concerning Indigenous women. Just as colonial representations of Indigenous women as sexually aggressive corruptors have resulted in dehumanization and violence, so, too, does the contemporary overuse of rape in metonymic alignment with the colonial project risk replacing and effacing both the lived, material reality for women who are actual victims of gendered violence, and the actuality of its gendered and raced practice, during the period of colonization and today. If, as Jaques Lacan argues, “the symbol ... is the death of the thing” (104), or, as in poststructuralist and semiotic theory, the sign indicates the absence of the referent, it would seem that even those metaphoric depictions, ostensibly designed to evoke empathy for Indigenous women, more likely serve to undermine their plight by obfuscating reality. As Catherine Martin points out, “the fact that we [Indigenous women] have been raped tends to make them [mainstream society] think that we are easy. It is a way to excuse the rapist, or to ignore the race issue” (qtd. in Kim Anderson, *Recognition* 110).

Regardless of authorial intentions, colonial and postcolonial misrepresentations of Indigenous women facilitate the maintenance of masculinist, hierarchical power relations that hinge upon the oppression of Indigenous women. The interpellative impact of these dramatic/literary misrepresentations may well contribute to racialized violence against Indigenous women, yet, as my argument suggests, Indigenous women are today reimagining and subverting such harmful portrayals, setting in motion a decolonizing process of “reverse interpellation” (Rowe 16).

Reverse Interpellation, the “Decolonial Imaginary,” and Resistance

In her text *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), feminist cultural theorist Chela Sandoval reinterprets some of Western philosophy’s most prominent thinkers in order to make an argument for “resistance from below” (Davis, “Foreword” xii). Using “U.S. Third World

feminist criticism” as a mode of analysis (Sandoval 3), Sandoval resituates the varied canonized writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, Donna Haraway, and Michel Foucault, revealing the manner in which such theorists have unwittingly contributed to an ongoing philosophical/literary “decolonial” process (4); focusing on the particular position of “U.S. third-world women” (Rowe 43), Sandoval identifies the existence of a “differential” consciousness, which, enabled by an innate “form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence,” allows for movement “‘between and among’ ideological positionings” (58). According to Sandoval, it is precisely because these groups are removed from the “comforts of the dominant ideology or ripped out of legitimized social narratives” that resistance is made possible. It is thus the “process of power” itself that repositions these constituencies, provoking subversion (104). Significantly, the subversive – or “differential” consciousness (58) – is most readily engaged “[u]nder conditions of colonialization, poverty, racism, gender or sexual subordination” (104) and often works together with a radical “coalition consciousness” or resistant group mentality (78). As she writes,

The skills [dominated groups] might develop, if they survive, have included the ability to self-consciously navigate modes of dominant consciousness, learning to interrupt the “turnstile” that alternately reveals history, as against the dominant forms of masquerade that history can take, “focusing on each separately,” applying a “formal method of reading,” cynically but also un-cynically, and not only with the hope of surviving, but with a desire to create a better world. (104)

These skills, Sandoval argues, are the “Methodology of the Oppressed” developed and employed by American women of colour (2); for Sandoval, this is the praxis of “U.S. third world feminism” (4).³³

Feminist rhetorician Aimee Carillo Rowe interprets Sandoval’s methodology as a theoretical mechanism of “reverse interpellation,” whereby the influenced subject remains capable in the face of coercive interpellation and can strive for “resistive hailing” (Rowe 16). In “imagining,” or perhaps reimagining, “location,” the marginalized individual is able to subvert ideological and discursive domination (Rowe 16). As I have demonstrated, “hailing” can certainly serve to maintain and/or further oppression of minoritized social groups (Althusser 174); yet, notwithstanding the potentially negative impact of dominative interpellation, there remains the *possibility* of subversive reaction. Like Sandoval, Rowe argues that the “differential” consciousness can “shift the terms of interpellation” (18); particularly in the context of “coalition” (Sandoval 78), or community “belonging” (Rowe 16), the subject is able to engage a resistant consciousness. Judith Butler makes a similar argument in *Excitable Speech* (1997); though constituted by coercive interpellation/subjectation – the assignment of “injurious names” (such as “queer”) – the individual is able to appropriate these names as positive affirmations (163). Butler suggests, quite convincingly, that this appropriation initiates a process of “reverse interpellation,” which leads to the development of militant/resistant rather than conformist/interpellated subjects (163) and, in effect, creates the potential for subversion of “hegemonic norms” (Boucher 112). While Butler focuses on the resistant performance of identity (a process that is intrinsically imaginative), for Sandoval and Rowe, reverse

³³ While Sandoval’s argument is ambitious and clearly not without merit, identity construction does not hinge upon socio-historical position alone and it is extremely important to interrogate how such, arguably essentializing, notions of group identity bear upon representations of Indigenous identity and the role of the critic. This complicated topic, introduced in the previous section, is one to which I devote the following section entirely.

interpellation is expressly constitutive of a “decolonial imaginary” (Rowe 16; Sandoval 52-53, 188), the imagining of “agency” for those placed on the “margins” by colonialism (Pérez, “Queering” 123).

Introduced by Chicana scholar and activist Emma Pérez in her poignant text *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999), the decolonial imaginary provides a visionary “alternative to what was written in history” (*Decolonial* 5). Arguing that White settler nations have not moved into a postcolonial period, Pérez – careful not to discount the potential for the “colonized” to become “like the rulers” – defines “colonial” simply as the “rulers versus the ruled” (“Queering” 123). She contends that, in White settler societies, historical accounts, as well as artistic productions, are largely governed by the “colonial imaginary,” which works in opposition to the decolonial imaginary, implicitly reinscribing “normative” social dynamics of “race, culture, gender, class, and sexuality” (“Queering” 123). The decolonial imaginary, however, is a “rupturing space” or an “interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” through the invocation of resistant imagination (*Decolonial* 5-6). It is therefore the decolonial imaginary that enables Indigenous/Méstiza artists – historians, writers, and dramatists – to operate outside the circumscribed imaginative borders of colonialism, initiating a process of decolonization through resistant reverse interpellation.

Applying Pérez’s argument to Indigenous theatre, Cherokee scholar, activist, and writer/director Qwo-Li Driskill suggests that, while “not postcolonial,” Indigenous nations are engaged in numerous “decolonial movements” and that the development of Indigenous theatre definitely “takes place in the ‘decolonial imaginary’” (“Theatre” 155). Indigenous writers and performers are thus able to (often collaboratively) envision “decolonial ways of being in the

world” (165) and thereby “create new stories that aid us in decolonization and resistance” (167). These visionary pieces have the potential to educate many readers/spectators about colonial histories of violence, as well as about future options – a process referred to by Driskill as “relearning” – thereby facilitating reconciliatory “collective healing” (“Theatre” 167). Theatre, according to Driskill, assists Indigenous people “to engage in the delicate work of suturing the wounds of history” (155). In her book *Taking Back Our Spirits* (2009), Episkenew makes a similar argument concerning the relationship between Indigenous writing and decolonization/“reconciliation” (73). Contending that literature has the potential to “transform” (Episkenew 5) what literary theorist Allison Hargreaves refers to as the “colonized imagina[ry]” (“Shared” 94), Episkenew argues that Indigenous cultural production, when used as a socio-pedagogical tool, has the potential to “change the course of events” (5). According to Episkenew, Indigenous writing does not simply offer a “window into the daily life of Indigenous people” (190), by which settler audiences can “vicariously” experience Indigenous suffering (114), but it allows for the transmission of “empathy and understanding” (186), thereby assisting with the reconfiguration of colonial power relations. Asserting that “colonialism is a pathological condition, a sickness that requires a cure,” Episkenew claims that “taking the shared truths of Indigenous people to the settler population comprises a component of that cure” (72).

Identity Politics and “Intercultural” Commensurability: The Ethics of Criticism

In response to academic criticism monopolized by non-Indigenous scholars employing ethnocentric, essentialist analytic approaches, modern criticism of Indigenous work has, on the whole, been “intensely self-reflexive” regarding the socio-cultural position of the critic (McKegney, “Strategies” 56). Explicitly rejecting outdated notions of critical/theoretical

objectivity, most modern critics/scholars consider accentuation of Indigenous descent, or perhaps even more importantly, “confession” of lack of Indigenous ties, a crucial element of contemporary criticism (McKegney, “Strategies” 56). Given historic disservices to Indigenous artistic production, this has been a positive development in critical discussions of Indigenous literature/performance. However, it can also be argued that this increased self-awareness and cultural sensitivity in critical theory tends to culminate in deterministic and overly cautious approaches to Indigenous work.³⁴ Hall asserts that identity, even “cultural identity,” is not constituted by “shared [cultural] history and ancestry” alone (“Identity” 394), as such a contention focuses myopically on intracultural “similarities,” eliding the “critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’” (394). “We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’,” writes Hall, “without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities” (394). In this respect, cultural identity is as much a process of “becoming” as being (Rowe 16; Jefferess 229). As Hall argues:

[f]ar from being grounded in mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (“Cultural” 394)

Resistant community cannot, as Sandoval suggests, be defined by “subordinate” or “colonize[d]” status alone (104). While historical positioning inevitably bears upon identity, this contention

³⁴ For a polemical discussion of the current relationship between Indigenous literary production and critical scholarship that emphasizes particularly the difficulties surrounding the construction of insider-outsider boundaries, see Helen Hoy’s *How Should I Read These?: Native Women Writers in Canada*, Sam McKegney’s article, “Strategies of Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures,” and Rob Appleford’s piece, “A Response to Sam McKegney’s ‘Strategies of Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures.’” For a discussion of these issues as they pertain to Indigenous theatre specifically, see Anne Haugo’s article, “Colonial Audiences and Native Women’s Theatre: Viewing Spiderwoman Theatre’s *Winnetou’s Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City*.”

disregards the potential for intracultural “*difference[s]*” that ultimately determine “what we are” (Hall, “Cultural” 394). Kimberlé Crenshaw argues similarly that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite — that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (1242). Of course, such categorical determinations can also render coalition building difficult or impossible. When asked, in an interview with Janet Williamson, about forging coalitions with people of “European” descent, Jeannette Armstrong poignantly stated:

If we can connect at that [honest] level between people, between individuals, between sexes, races or classes, that’s what’s gonna make the difference and bring about the healing we human beings have to have to bring us closer, to work together, and live together, care for and love one another, and look at change passing onto the next generation. It’s not gonna be politics that will connect people. To touch and understand one another is to bridge our differences. (“What” 29)

To wit, it has become necessary to exceed the imposition of cultural boundaries.³⁵ In a globalizing, postcolonial world, we must, as Chandra Mohanty asserts, “develop more complex,

³⁵ As I do not wish to imply an oversimplification of the very complex topic of Indigenous/non-Indigenous cultural identity, I want to be clear that I am writing only in regards to the Indigenous/Western (or colonizer/colonized) colonial binary in the context of literary/dramatic critical analysis. The issues surrounding both Indigenous and immigrant rights and identity are vastly intricate and will not be a focal point of this dissertation. However, I do want to acknowledge that these issues are indeed relevant to Indigenous politics in Canada. In their controversial 2005 article, “Decolonizing Antiracism,” Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua suggest that, in Canada, people of colour, and immigrants particularly, are, in fact, complicit in the ongoing perpetuation of colonialist ideology and, by extension, the oppression of Indigenous people. Lawrence and Dua argue that, not only are Aboriginal perspectives excluded from most antiracist movements, but “antiracism is premised on the ongoing colonial project” (122). In their 2008 article, “Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States,” Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright critique Lawrence and Dua’s “conflation between processes of migration and those of colonialism,” as well as their suggestion that decolonization might come about through “the nationalist project” (121). These two important articles inspired further debate pertaining to the role of immigration policy and antiracist politics in Aboriginal struggles. For further information on the history of this topic, see Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman* (1988), Eva Mackey’s *The House of Difference* (1999), and Joyce Green’s anthology, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2007). For an interesting discussion of the effect of these ongoing conflicts and discussions on contemporary politics in Canada, see Brickner and Ibbitson’s *The Big Shift* (2013). For a comprehensive analysis of the discursive and social

nuanced modes of asking questions,” and as interdisciplinary scholarship readily comes to “address histories of colonialism, capitalism, race, and gender as inextricably interrelated, our very conceptual maps [must be] redrawn and transformed” (45). As Razack points out, “the cultural differences approach reinforces an important cornerstone of imperialism: the colonized possess a series of knowable characteristics and can be studied, known, and managed” (*Looking* 10). Gloria Anzaldúa observed, very early on, that binaristic models are too simplistic: “a counterstance,” she writes, “locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed” (78). Given the inescapable possibility of misrepresentation, an entirely ethical engagement with intercultural research material may, as Sara Ahmed suggests, be “impossible” (572), yet ideas of cultural incommensurability are clearly accompanied by far greater dangers.

Rigidly deterministic perspectives concerning Indigenous/non-Indigenous identity suggest a cultural incommensurability which results, inevitably, in intellectual reluctance on behalf of non-Indigenous critics to evaluate Indigenous work. Some critics unequivocally refuse to examine Indigenous-authored texts, particularly in a comparative, postcolonial context. Goldie, for example, avoids approaching Indigenous works in his book *Fear and Temptation*, even for the purpose of illustrating sites of literary resistance. Questioning the “right of any person to judge another’s representation of his or her own culture,” Goldie contends that comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous literature involves passing judgment and that such a move might misrepresent Indigenous intentions (217). The flaw in this argument lies in assuming that cross-cultural understanding or close reading is impossible. One might ask also how Indigenous texts could be intelligible to their readerships if Indigenous worldviews are

implications of the introduction of “identity politics” into broader feminist political struggles, see Crenshaw’s article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.”

inaccessible to non-Indigenous readers. In fact, Indigenous texts often address both non-Indigenous and Indigenous audiences. According to King's categories of Indigenous literature, only tribal works are intended particularly for tribal peoples. The other three types – interfusional, polemical, and associational – are written, to some extent, for non-Indigenous readers (86-88). Furthermore, refusal by non-Indigenous scholars to look at Indigenous texts could lead to the eventual ghettoization of Indigenous literature within the academy: “silence too – even respectful silence – can be a form of erasure” (Hoy 51). As Renate Eigenbrod writes, “[a]lthough engaging critically with Indigenous texts is challenging and difficult, non-Indigenous scholars should not abdicate their responsibility of attempting to do so” (66).

After all, while authorial socio-cultural location certainly plays a crucial role in determining understanding, experience, and political aims, it is integral that location not act as the sole indicator of critical/authorial intentions. Categorical dualisms (Indigenous/non-Indigenous) simplify the numerous positions we all necessarily occupy. Indeed, my own positions as academic researcher/critic, and my identity as daughter of a Métis mother and a first-generation, Scottish-immigrant father are by no means less relevant to my interpretive analyses than my commitment (very much in keeping with the intentions of many critics – not all of them feminist or Indigenous) to undoing historic injustices by rebalancing unequal power relations. My syncretic identity leaves me in what Homi Bhabha might refer to as an “in-between” place (13), endowed with the inherent privilege of a mixed descent. However, the assumption that Indigenous or non-Western perspectives are necessarily innocent, authentic and anti-colonial “downplays the very real possibility that such representations can be colonialist, while simultaneously obscuring the possibility of non-colonizing representations emerging from non-subjugated standpoints” (Lal 23). Privileging Indigenous/non-Western voices with unquestioned

epistemic “authority” based upon location alone results in the construction of oppositional identities (colonizer and colonized) (Bar On 96), and works against the feminist project of transforming power relations by upholding “the very distinctions they are supposed to erase” (Lal 114).

Indeed, the privileging of Indigenous critics, based primarily upon what Craig Womack pithily refers to as “intrinsic” relationship between Indigenous-authored texts and Indigenous communities (11) – “the ethics of the relationship between a text and the community it claims to represent” (149) – has led some critics to assume that Indigenous production is necessarily aligned with community and inevitably resistant: the subversive and authentic voice of the people (Hargreaves 107-08; Filewod, “Receiving” 363-66; Haugo 131-40).³⁶ Assumptions concerning “authentic” community voice discount the possibility that texts authored by Indigenous women/Two Spirit/Queer writers may, in fact, be attempts to subvert violence perpetrated by men within their own communities. Because intracultural gendered violence is a disturbingly common manifestation of the “ongoing legac[y] of settler heteropatriarchy and socially engineered hypermasculinity” (McKegney, “Into” 4), the notion of Indigenous community cohesion is overly simplistic and thus dismissive. As Rob Appleford notes, not only have misinterpretations of Indigenous works as invocations of community inspired “talismanic” discussions of resistant community representations on the part of critics, but very often, the question of what community/resistance actually means for the artist/audience remains vague (“Response” 61-62).

Anachronistic concepts of tribalism and community identity are often aligned with language, cultural heritage, and biological inheritance. As Sara Suleri points out, such “skin

³⁶ See also Jace Weaver’s *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* and Weaver, Womack, and Warrior’s *American Indian Literary Nationalism*.

deep” demarcations hinge upon conventional categories of identity that read “location” off the bodies of ““others,”” eschewing individual life experience; prefixed by an epistemological double-standard, where the Indigenous or “non-Western” voice is essentially aligned with unquestioned resistance to “Western hegemony” (335-37), location-based analyses risk reinscribing colonial power dynamics in which voices of cultural affirmation and resistance are received as testaments of “unmediated reality” (Filewod, “Receiving” 364). Fetishizing Indigenous productions, such analyses depoliticize present racial conflicts and reify a romantic stereotype of culturally “authentic” and community affiliated subversive Indigeneity (Appleford, “Response” 60).³⁷ Any such inscription of Indigenous women’s plays within previously constructed boundaries continues to define Indigenous women’s theatre by the colonial conditions in which it operates, implying an almost inescapable reaction to a dominating system, disallowing the agency of resistance itself. Rather than prescribed responses, the plays that I am considering are characterized by potent artistic agency, representing creative and strategic reconfigurations of colonial violence that empower Indigenous women and promote healing.

Indigenous Women’s Drama: Decolonization and Recovery

³⁷ This is not to say that community is to be disregarded entirely. In some instances, Indigenous artists have evidently created pieces with a specific community/cultural group in mind and, in these instances, critical analysis must engage with community representation so as to avoid portrayals of a pan-Indigenesness that disavows cultural specificity completely, a mistake Birgit Däwes (along with other transnationalist scholars of Indigenous literature) runs the risk of making in her – on the whole, ambitious, well-written, and timely – book, *Native North American Theater in a Global Age: Sites of Identity Construction and Transdifference*. Däwes makes an attempt to demonstrate that Indigenous drama is both “radically dialogic” and “transnational,” and, most significantly, that it challenges an audience’s desire for easy categories of identity (*Native* 221). Däwes’ eagerness to undermine essentialist notions of Indigenous identity, a fruitful and necessary endeavour, results in what some feminist and Indigenous studies scholars might see as a neglect of an equally necessary cultural specificity.

In order to demonstrate the varying manners in which Indigenous women playwrights address and subvert gendered/racialized colonialist violence, I have strategically selected works that contend with differing, yet equally relevant and necessarily interconnected aspects of Canada's colonial legacy. Although I have not devoted a chapter to her work, Margot Kane (Cree/Salteaux) has contributed substantially to Indigenous theatre in Canada. Her 1990 play "Moonlodge" is worthy of mention in any comprehensive discussion of Indigenous women's decolonial dramatic activism. In "Moonlodge," protagonist Agnes – removed from her family, placed in an adoptive home with a White stepmother, and educated in a Christian-run residential school – is portrayed as the victim of not only discursive media violence and institutional racism, but also gendered violence at the hands of a biker with whom she hitches a ride. As she is raped, Agnes sings "On the Street Where You Live," a song from the 1956 musical *My Fair Lady* (286-7). The depiction of an Indigenous woman referencing a musical derived from George Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion* (1913), which is, as Knowles suggests, "a story of class-cultural erasure" ("Rape" 250), refuses the essentialization of Agnes' victimhood. Actively ironizing the whole scenario, Agnes refuses the denial of personhood, which accompanies such intrinsically dehumanizing attacks. In this scene, Kane ensures that audiences/readers are aware of the use of sexual violence as a genocidal mechanism without disempowering her Indigenous woman protagonist. Also significant is the fact that "Moonlodge" concludes upliftingly with Agnes' return to the traditional values by which her early upbringing – representationally reminiscent of precontact cultural harmony – was characterized.

Although six of the seven works that I analyze in the following chapters incorporate scenes of gendered and racialized violence – an often emblematic and disturbing element of androcentric colonial/postcolonial pieces – these portrayals, constructed purposefully by

Indigenous women, are mitigated by the plays' ultimate messages of empowerment, recuperation, and survival. Because colonization is an ongoing process, and attacks against Indigenous women – both systemic and personal – are integral to this process, it is necessary that such violence be represented in decolonial texts, if merely for elucidatory purposes. While the social reality of gendered/racialized violence requires that aestheticizations of this violence be employed with a great degree of caution, Helen Thomson has aptly observed that it is nonetheless crucial to combat the “politically charged strategy” of “forgetfulness ... that has characterized white settler history” with subversive, disruptive representations of “cultural dispossession” (23-24). Razack argues similarly that it is impossible to “change the world and stop the horrors” without “first bringing them to light”: “If the solution is neither to stop looking nor to stop feeling,” she writes, “then it is clear that something else must accompany looking and feeling” (“Stealing” 389). In terms of the Indigenous women’s plays examined in the following chapters, the “something else” (389) to which Razack refers must be understood as an overarching authorial commitment to resistance, reclamation, and recovery. These artists literally strive to “transform colonized imaginaries” (Hargreaves, “These” 94) by aesthetically and performatively demonstrating “decolonization and continuance” (Driskill, “Theatre” 155). The body of my dissertation is divided into three chapters, over the course of which I aim to demonstrate the manner in which the works examined promote reclamation, empowerment, and healing, as well as the ways that these particular plays celebrate coalition building and resistance across difference. My conclusion initiates a discussion concerning the expansive, transnational implications of contemporary Indigenous women’s dramatic production.

Chapter Two discusses Monique Mojica’s two best-known works: the radio play, *Bird Woman and the Suffragettes* (1991), and the playwright’s only published full-length piece,

Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots (1991). My discussion focusses on the plays' representations of Indigenous women's roles in resistance to imperial rule and colonialist ideology throughout history. The half-hour play, *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*, reconfigures the well-known tale of Sacajawea (Lemhi Shoshone), the guide to the American Lewis and Clarke expedition,³⁸ from historical appropriation and misrepresentation of her image. In 1812, the National American Suffrage Association adopted her as a feminist figurehead, propagating the colonial image of Sacajawea as an amenable "Indian Princess" (Kim Anderson, *Recognition* 102). By no means a willing participant in the expedition, Mojica's reinvented Sacajawea is presented as a resistant victim of masculinist tyranny. Refusing to be remembered as an Indian Princess, Sacajawea struggles to break from the bronze confines of the Suffragettes' commemorative statue. *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* presents a series of famous Indigenous women in order to inspire Indigenous women to become "word warriors" and "fashion [their] own gods out of [their] entrails" (59). The play is a challengingly visionary work that engages in a sustained revisioning of stereotypes of Indigenous women, thereby empowering contemporary Indigenous women. In *Princess Pocahontas*, Mojica focuses on the journey of "Contemporary Woman" as she tries "to recover the history of her grandmothers as a tool towards her own healing" (136). The plot revolves around this search for identity, with the "blue spot" signifying "Indian blood" (141). While the play contains some disconcerting descriptions of sexual violence, the scenes are not gratuitous, but are used to relay Mojica's ultimate message of female reclamation. Mojica ensures that the coercive sexual violence involved in colonial takeover is brought to the forefront in order to remind audiences of the reality of colonial

³⁸ For an overview the Lewis and Clarke expedition, and details regarding Sacajawea's role in the mission, see Kris Fresonke and Mark David Spence's book, *Lewis & Clark: Legacies, Memories, and New Perspectives*.

violence and to recuperate Indigenous women as figures of strength and resilience, rather than mere victims.

Chapter Three explores representations of violence against Indigenous women and, most importantly, women's resistant, survivalist responses to that violence in Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (2005) and *Now Look What You Made Me Do* (1998), both of which portray raced and gendered violence against Indigenous women – whether insidious and systemic or particularized and overt – in contemporary society as but one component of an ongoing process of cultural genocide. Acknowledging the necessity for social change, the playwright nonetheless manages to “challenge representations of Indigeneity” (R. Gilbert, “Introduction” vii) by reimagining history and empowering her survival-driven characters. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* represents a series of real-life femicides committed in Vancouver's downtown eastside between 1965 and 1987, all by the same man using the same *modus operandi*. The women's deaths are nonetheless ruled by the coroner, who shockingly found ““no evidence of violence or suspicion of foul play’,” to be ““unnatural and accidental”” (Clements, *Unnatural* 8). The play, rather than representing the women as mere victims of sexualized violence, successfully depicts collective female strength, characterized by community building and radical resistance. In manifestly representing embodied memory, Clements diverts focus from the horrific murders, giving the women physical presences that allow fantastical, yet far-reaching, posthumous agency. The play is not only a trenchant critique of the systemic negligence that characterized the investigation into the women's deaths, but an opportunity to reimagine the whole tragedy, offering a sense of hope for the future.³⁹

³⁹ Though Clements reconfigures the story in a manner that empowers those women who lost their lives to Jordan, in truth, Gilbert Paul Jordan was only sentenced for one of (at least) ten murders and was released after serving a mere six years (“Predator”).

Now Look What You Made Me Do (1998) explores the cyclical nature of what is commonly referred to as domestic abuse, as well as the relationship between sexual victimization and prostitution. Coercive sex is represented as an implicit social manifestation of the systemic gendered, racialized sexual exploitation and violence that is, in many cases, disguised by such gender-neutral neologisms, such as “domestic” or “intimate partner” violence. Yet Clements’ female characters are by no means passive in their victimhood, but rather are increasingly angered by misogynistic brutality as the extent of the violence – physical and emotional – escalates as the plot progresses. Most crucially, Clements’ play speaks to a politics of inclusivity and cooperation, the fostering of community, despite difference. Madonna, a Métis sex-worker, is supported in her struggle against abuse by her friend, a much older White woman (also a sex worker). No less relevant is the playwright’s careful portrayal of sexualized violence against Indigenous women (and women at large) as a manifestation of the continued impact of misogynistic, violent colonial ideologies upon gender relations, an ongoing process of colonization that not uncommonly culminates in femicide. To this end, Clements adeptly draws attention to the prevalent racialization and sexualization of Indigenous women particularly. Before Jay, the play’s paradigmatic “abused abuser” (11), begins to assault Madonna, he is careful to learn precisely “how Indian” she is (14). In Jay’s mind, it is not only Madonna’s gender but also her race that renders her violable.

Examining depictions of Indigenous women in *Blade* (2003) and *Annie Mae’s Movement* (1998), Chapter Four explores playwright/director/dramaturg Yvette Nolan’s critical assessment of the impact of North America’s colonial legacy on contemporary media, activism, politics, gender roles, and violence against Indigenous women in Indigenous communities and society at large. Thoughtfully melding fact and fiction and past and present, Nolan’s works make evident

the role of historic colonial injustices in the struggles of contemporary Indigenous women. *Blade*, though a stylistically simple one-act play, becomes profoundly complex and poignant as Nolan weaves together the tales of two murdered women; the first, Angela, a White university student, murdered by a man killing prostitutes, is transformed into a prostitute by the media after her death; the second, Cindy Bear, an Aboriginal woman, also a university student, also murdered by the play's villain, is assumed to be a prostitute from the outset. Cindy exists, to the play's broader community, only as a contrivance derived from colonialist stereotypes, written off by media, police, and many of her peers as another Aboriginal "whore" – clearly Nolan's expression of disgust with the culture of impunity that allows vulnerable members of society to be easily misrepresented, victimized, and forgotten (16). While Cindy is denied a direct voice throughout the play's action, the posthumous figure of Angela tells her story. Cindy's silence is reflective of the silencing of Indigenous voices throughout Canadian history, yet Angela does not leave Cindy unvindicated from slander. Nolan's intricate depiction speaks to the fraught terrain of coalition building. Although Angela is clearly privileged by her Whiteness, she and Cindy are ultimately subject to the same act of violence and, posthumously, Angela is able to testify on Cindy's behalf. To this extent, the playwright presents a decolonial aesthetic founded upon cooperation across difference, while also successfully emphasizing the violent repercussions of Canada's colonial legacy. Rather than uncritically accepting the media's slander campaign, Angela emphasizes Cindy's intelligence and success as a student: "I saw her get back a test once with an 88% on it. I only got about 75 on that test... she was always prepared for class, so when did she have time [for sex-work]," asks Angela (3).

Annie Mae's Movement, a fictionalized biographical piece, is Nolan's most famous work. The play represents the life and death of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, the famous Mi'kmaq activist

from Nova Scotia, who became a leader in the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s. Nolan explores gender dynamics in AIM, exposing the patriarchy at the heart of the movement and attending to the difficult position occupied by Aquash as a woman in a male-dominated organization. The action of the play portrays the abuse of Indigenous activists by the power of state/colonial authority. Here, rape, murder, and (literal) dismemberment are represented primarily as fundamental components of the routine exertion of power by the police, who function as a repressive state apparatus. Like *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, *Annie Mae's Movement* reaches its climax with the rape and murder of its central character. Ryga's play, however, ends with an emblematic "no more," and an ecstatic, almost blessed – seemingly sacrificial – ascension-song of the heroine, turned martyr (130). Nolan's play, on the other hand, concludes with warrior-activist Anna Mae – no mere victim – reciting a list of "sisters" (49), the recognizable names of Indigenous women writers and performers and their creations, women Paula Gunn Allen has referred to as "Word Warriors" (51-52): "Gloria and Lisa and Muriel, Monique, Joy and Tina, Margo, Maria, Beatrice, Minnie, April, Colleen." "You can kill me," cries Anna Mae, dying, "but you cannot kill us all" (41-42). "You can kill me, but my sisters live, my daughters live" (41).

Eschewing colonial deprecation and postcolonial emblematicism, representations of violent trauma in these Indigenous women's plays act as reminders of the continued impact of colonization and cultural genocide. While altering the terms of colonial discourse is not easily accomplished, in scripts and performances produced over the course of the past three decades, Indigenous women playwrights have re-appropriated stereotypes and disparaging literary tropes and reimagined histories of violence, rendering apparent the colonial assumptions underlying these depictions and reconfiguring historic power relations. In a strategic resistance to

misrepresentations, Indigenous women dramatists destabilize the representations accorded authenticity by masculinist, colonizing power structures, both within their own communities and society at large. Their works not only revise colonial stereotypes, but reimagine incidences of racialized and gendered violence in a manner that empowers Indigenous women, encourages understanding on the part of audiences, and, ultimately, promotes healing. In these plays, gendered violence is represented as an embodied reminder of colonization, with Indigenous women portrayed as active agents of resistance as opposed to emblems or passive victims. Indigenous women's writings demonstrate that memory, testimony, and social ritual, including the rituals of writing and performance themselves, are mechanisms through which Indigenous cultures can form coalitions of difference and through which métissage can be reclaimed, not as an emblem, but as a powerful tool for resistance and ultimately for survival – perhaps oxymoronic for “living,” as Turtle Gals suggest, “with genocide” (24). The mounting of resistance across difference recalls the concept of subversive reverse interpellation, enabled by “differential” consciousness (58), which functions optimally in situations of radical “coalition” (78). By envisioning and, by extension, promoting the development of resistant inclusiveness-based communities, Indigenous women dramatists are able to subvert dominative “hailing” (Althusser 78) and thereby engage in an aesthetic decolonial movement, characterized by reclamation and healing.

Chapter 2

Reclaiming Our Grandmothers in Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* and *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes: A Story of Sacajawea*

Monique Mojica's "Transformational Dramaturgy"

Monique Mojica describes herself as a “half-breed,” a “woman word warrior, a mother, and an actor” (“Princess” 86). With more than fifty years of performance and writing experience, she is amongst Canada’s premier dramatists. Between 1983 and 1986, Mojica worked as an early artistic director of Native Earth Performing Arts, one of Canada’s most prominent Indigenous theatre groups. In 1999, Mojica, together with Cree/Métis actor-singer Jani Lauzon and Pequot/Carib performer Michelle St. John, formed the Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble; the Turtle Gals collaboratively created the “The Scrubbing Project” and the Dora Mavor Moore nominated “The Triple Truth.” Mojica has published two full-length plays, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991) and the brief radio play, *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* (1991). Her work, profoundly tethered to her personal and genealogical history, “reflect[s] a commitment to strengthening the continental links among the Indigenous peoples of the Americas” (Personal e-mail). The playwright began training at the age of three as a creator/performer with New York’s Spiderwoman Theatre, which then consisted of Mojica’s mother, Gloria, and two maternal aunts, Muriel Miguel and Lisa Mayo (1924-2013).⁴⁰

Mojica is particularly interested in using her work as a means to elucidate the complexities surrounding ongoing colonialism, to “bridge the disconnect” between Indigenous peoples and mainstream society, and to thereby “empower” Indigenous women with stories of transformation and healing (“Creation” 2-3). “Doing Aboriginal Theatre, and doing research for Aboriginal performance creation, means something different than it does for other communities,” she writes, “[d]oing Aboriginal theatre is about translation, building bridges, making

⁴⁰ Sadly, founding member of Spiderwoman, playwright, actor, and director, Lisa Mayo passed away on 24 November 2013.

reconnections” (“Creation” 3). While she understands that “stories of sexual abuse, of abandonment, of murder, of suicide, loss” remain a part of Indigenous histories, Mojica insists that such atrocities must not “define our identities as Indigenous peoples” (“Creation” 2). Violent retellings, she believes, are productive only in tandem with stories of survival and reconstruction/reclamation. The playwright overtly attempts to construct tales “of our becoming whole”; Mojica insists therefore that her plays “must be creation stories” (“Creation” 6).

Infusing her work with fundamental elements of her own history, the playwright makes use of both personal and cultural recollections to mobilize widely applicable representations that promote cultural recovery and transnational solidarity for Indigenous peoples across the Americas. Her most recent project, the 2008 play “Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way,” is a collaborative effort with long-time creative associate, Cree playwright and essayist Floyd Flavel Starr. The play, a product of two decades of Native Performance Culture research initiated by Starr, consists of a reconfiguration of the traditional story of Sky Woman, personalized with details and significant “colors” from Mojica’s own personal experiences (qtd. in J. Carter, “Chocolate” 171).⁴¹ Following the 2008 premier of “Chocolate Woman,” Mojica agreed to undertake an interview with *East Coast Native*, during which she described the creative impetus behind her work. While the interview concerned “Chocolate Woman” first and foremost, the playwright’s remarks extend well beyond the boundaries of a single play. As is made evident in both *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* and *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*, Mojica has

⁴¹ Significantly, in many Indigenous North American creation myths, Sky Woman, the matriarch associated with the beginning of the world, falls from her home in Sky World and lands on the back of the Great Turtle (Leeming and Page 86-87, 153). While the tale varies in many respects from region to region, Sky Woman is generally pregnant with a daughter or twins – one of each gender – at the time of her fall. The myth was distorted by Christian/colonial forces, beginning with the proselytizing missionaries in the sixteenth-century, who often omitted the story of the daughter entirely (Johansen 83). For many Indigenous women, it is important to “re-claim” the story of Sky Woman (Elder xxii). Veneration for Sky Woman’s role in the creation story thus factors into the valorization of maternity amongst contemporary Indigenous women.

managed to overcome and make use of personal/cultural hardship in order to instrumentally develop her hopeful and empowering plays. As she writes:

[It] began with me asking questions about the place on the circle where I chose to begin my work. I had become adept at telling stories from the place of my deepest victimization, my most profound wounding. After a couple of decades of crawling through massacre imagery and examining the genocide that we carry as Indigenous peoples, I asked this question: What stories would I tell if I started from a place of connectedness instead of from a place of rupture? What do I have that is not broken?. . . The elemental feminine is still intact in my cultures and if I connect myself to them, I can pick up missing fragments and create a conscious wholeness... a wholeness that propels the art of contemporary Native Performance Culture beyond the victim story. (“Three”)

Throughout her work, Mojica’s goal is to develop pieces that present transformative possibility for readers/audiences. Her plays interweave personal memory and cultural tradition, as she uses those things that remain “whole and intact” as tools of reconstruction and harmonization (“Creation” 2). Mojica’s purposeful resistance to colonialist deprecation of Indigenous women is born of a consuming awareness of her own history, an acknowledgement of the pressing need for portrayals of Indigenous womanhood that are “neither synonymous with victim, nor with the hoop of a nation that has been broken” (“Creation” 2). To be certain, the playwright’s goal is clearly reflected in her work.

Reimagining “Indian Princesses” in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*

Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, Mojica's first full-length play, was originally workshopped, beginning in 1998, by Mojica and musician and actor Alejandra Nuñez, with direction and dramaturgy from prominent Canadian dramatist, Djanet Sears. It was next workshopped as a co-production by Native Earth Performing Arts and Nightwood Theatre in May 1989, under the direction of Muriel Miguel, with dramaturgy by Sears. In November of 1989, it was produced by Nightwood as a "work in progress" at the Groundswell Festival of New York by Women, with direction from Sears (Mojica, "Princess" 13). Finally, between 9 February and 4 March 1990, *Princess Pocahontas* was fully produced at the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace, in Toronto, as a co-production with Nightwood, under the direction of Sears. The play received "positive" reviews from these early performances and has since attracted significant critical attention (Stevens 1100). In response to such positive academic and critical reception, *Princess Pocahontas* has been published multiple times: firstly, in *Canadian Theatre Review* (1990), a second time, as part of the short anthology *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots: Two Plays* (1991), and again, in Ric Knowles and Mojica's anthology *Staging Coyote's Dream, Volume I* (2003).⁴²

The performance consists of two actresses playing seventeen different roles over the course of thirteen elaborate "Transformations" which, rather than scenes, indicate plot progression (16). The Transformations, "one for each moon of the lunar year," are "inherent" to the play's structure, which, as Mojica emphasizes, is "not linear" (16). While the actresses remove layers of clothing, morphing from one character to another, so, too, do the set pieces shift to become something else, revealing "another reality" (16). Just as Contemporary Woman

⁴² Most quotations included in this dissertation are taken from the play's second publication, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots: Two Plays* (1991), in which *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* is also published. Irregularly, I refer to Mojica's comments preceding the third publication of the play, in Knowles and Mojica's *Staging Coyote's Dream* (2003).

transforms to embody her foremothers, a “pile of cloth becomes a garment, a canal, a volcano” (16). Mojica describes the complex, profound and, ultimately, “visionary” (Knowles, “Drama” 133) *Princess Pocahontas* as “something of a prophecy for [her] life’s path” (“Chocolate” 114). This stands to reason as the play follows the journey of Contemporary Woman I, a “modern, Native woman” (“Princess” 14) and “Mojica’s alterego” (Knowles, “Hearts” 245), as she traverses a vast range of temporal and geographic directions, with “no map, no trail, no footprint, no way home” (“Princess” 19), in a courageous attempt “to recover the history of her grandmothers as a tool towards her own healing” (14). Contemporary Woman does not travel alone: she is accompanied by Contemporary Woman II, a “modern Chilean woman” (14). Both women, and implicitly all mixed-blood women, are marked with a “blue spot at the base of the spine” that signifies “Indian blood” (20).

The two “faces” of the Trickster (14), Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides⁴³ and the Cigar Store Squaw, play out the disturbing, colonial “Indian Princess”/“easy squaw” dichotomy (Acoose, *Iskwewak* 65). With Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides “stuck in the talent section” of the “Miss North American Indian Beauty Pageant” (14) and the Cigar Store Squaw – the other “well known and accepted icon of Native womanhood” (15) – toting “*an over-sized bunch of cigars*” and pleading for “lots and lots of blonde hair” (49), the play’s Trickster iconography demonstrates the manner in which these polarized distortions of Indigenous womanhood do serve to “perpetuate stereotypes,” discursively encouraging racialized violence against Indigenous women (Acoose, *Iskwewak* 65). Carnavalesque parodies, the two Tricksters inhabit these common misrepresentations and, in doing so, subvert and invalidate them. The play’s

⁴³ Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides is not simply one face of the trickster. For Mojica, she is “Coyote in Drag,” a female version of the gender ambiguous North American Trickster (qtd. in J. Carter, “Blind” 11). For a critical and insightful discussion of the deployment of Trickster figures in Indigenous literatures, see Linda Morra and Deanna Reder’s anthology, *Troubling Tricksters*.

action is initiated with Buttered-on-Both-Sides/Cigar Store Squaw morphing into the Contemporary Women, all embodied by the same actress. Together, the Contemporary Women begin to travel through stories of other Indigenous women, real and fictional, with the Tricksters constantly in the background, making a grotesque, surreal mockery of dangerous, racist conventionalizations.

The Contemporary Women's journey intersects directly with the performed narratives of four Indigenous women, each of whom represent a group of women from history. Firstly, there is Mexico's La Malinche, the Nahuatl translator, strategist, and concubine of the Spanish Conquistador, Hernán Cortés. Secondly, the "Deity/Woman of the Puna/Virgin of colonial Peru," a conflation of the real Quechua women who fled the Spanish court, resisted Christianization, and forged a community of women in the mountains, with Andean goddesses and the "virgins" they were "turned into" by the Roman Catholic Church (14-15). Thirdly, the Indigenous wives of the fur traders in Canada, who served as guides, sexual partners, and translators to the early colonists. Finally, there is Pocahontas herself, the primary figure around whom Mojica constructs her tale, portrayed in several of her socially constructed guises.

Each of Mojica's central historical characters is the original mother to a mixed-blood nation, stigmatized by her own people as a corrupter and a traitor, but celebrated by the colonizer for perpetuating the destruction of her people. While condemned by their own people as "translator[s], traitor[s], mistress[es], and whore[s]" (Knowles, "Rape" 252), these Indigenous mothers of mixed-blood nations have, as Ric Knowles and Kim Anderson note, been praised by colonial entities as "Indian Princesses," but undermined and deemed traitors by those in their own communities. (*Recognition* 26, 101; Knowles "Rape" 252). Anderson argues that the production of mixed-blood peoples who can be constructed by the colonizer as impure or

inauthentic, “[n]ot really Indian,” or “only half,” is crucial to colonial success, as such peoples can be “assimilated” (*Recognition* 26). Anderson has written extensively on the cultural impact of the “Indian Princess” myth (26) and her description relates directly to both Mojica’s subversive representations of these princess figures from history, as well as to the playwright’s campy, satirical depiction of her as Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides, “Captain White Man[’s]... muffin... [his] buckskin clad dessert” (26-27). As Anderson writes:

“Indian princess” imagery constructed Indigenous women as the virgin frontier, the pure border waiting to be crossed. The enormous popularity of the princess lay within her erotic appeal to the covetous European male wishing to lay claim to the “new” territory. . . . It is possible to interpret characters like Pocahontas, Sacagawea and La Malinche as strong Indigenous leaders, but the mainstream interpretation of these mythic characters is quite the opposite: Indigenous women (and, by association, the land) are “easy, available and willing” for the white man, the “good” Indigenous woman who willingly works with white men is rewarded with folk hero or “princess status.” Racism dictates that the women of these celebrated liaisons are elevated above the ordinary Indigenous female status. . . . But not in their own communities. (*Recognition* 101-02)

The Indigenous grandmothers portrayed in Mojica’s play have been misrepresented and maligned in colonial and – in certain instances – postcolonial cultural production. This colonial undermining has had a lasting negative impact on contemporary Indigenous women. The ongoing denigration of Indigenous and mixed-blood women is a repercussion of the deprecation of these grandmothers; and, as a reflection of this, Mojica’s Contemporary Women are “wound[ed]” by the insults that inundate their foremothers (22). In *Princess Pocahontas*, Mojica

duly ensures that the coercive subservience and gendered violence to which Indigenous and mixed-blood women were/are subject is made evident. The play's female characters, historical and modern, are treated as property by men and sexually exploited/violated. However, most importantly, the playwright makes clear that this gendered violence results from colonial domination and discursive inferiorization and the text works ultimately to reimagine these legendary grandmothers and reconfigure their encounters with violence, so as to re-educate audiences/readers and to empower contemporary Indigenous/mixed-blood women.

La Malinche/Malinalli Malintzin/Doña Marina

In *Princess Pocahontas*, the defamed mother of the Mexican Nation, concubine of Cortés, referred to by her own descendants as “the fucked one,” a “[t]raitor” and a “[w]hore,” figures as the symbolic mother of Mexico's mixed-blood nation. As she forthrightly reminds a descendant who shouts abuse at her: “[y]ou are the child planted in me by Hernán Cortés who begins the bastard race, born from La Chingada! You deny me?” (22). Born around 1502 in Coatzacoalcos, a pre-Columbian Mexican province on the eastern edge of the Nahuatl-speaking region of central Mexico, La Malinche is believed to have originally been named Malinal after “Malinalli” the day of her birth (Candelaria 3). Contemporary Woman II – here aligned with Malinalli's mixed-blood descendants – calls upon her great grandmother in Transformation 3, “Invocation” (22), summoning her foremother by shouting insults at her, a list of the damning titles reserved for Cortés' translator – “Putá! Chingada! Cabrona! India de mierda! Hija de tu mala madre! Maldita Malinche!”: as she exits, Contemporary Woman “*curses*” and “*spits*” at Malinali (22). Provided a forceful and subversive voice in the play, Malinali is undeterred by

Contemporary Woman's cruelty. Appearing with the "volcano," which she holds and controls,⁴⁴ she demands to be referred to by her birth name: "Malinali. Not Doña Marina,⁴⁵ Malinche, [or] La Chingada! The fucked one!" (22).

Though the real Malinal was born into Nahua nobility, as a child she was stolen by slave traders or sold into slavery and ended up as a servant living amongst the Chontal Mayas, the Indigenous peoples of Tabasco. In 1519, she was one of twenty women servants given to the Spanish by the Chontals (Restall 82-83). As Mojica's Malinali insists, she was "betrayed" by her own people, given as a "gift" (24). Still a teenager, Malinche was baptized Marina and given to Alonso Hernandez de Puertocarrero, one of Cortés captains. But, within weeks, she was returned to Cortés who discovered that she could speak the language of the Indigenous peoples through whose lands the Spanish were travelling, whereas their language, Nahuatl, was unknown to Geronimo de Aguilar, the Maya-speaking Spaniard then serving as the expedition's interpreter (Karttunen 303). Because Malinal had learned Yucatec as a slave among the Mayas, Cortés could now communicate with Nahuatl-speaking lords and Mexica emissaries through the Maya of his two translators (Godayol 63). Emphasizing the unjust discursive deprecation of Malinal, Mojica makes clear that, already a slave, she was callously "[p]assed on" to Cortés (24), "claimed as value by [a] man in metal" (23). After only a brief spell as Puertocarrero's servant and involuntary mistress, she clearly knew little Spanish, but the clever Malinal quickly learned

⁴⁴ La Malinche Mountain, alternatively referred to as Matlalcuéytl, Matlalcueitl or Malintzin, is a dormant volcano located in the Tlaxcala and Puebla states of Mexico. Inactive for the past 3,100 years, the mountain provides a natural monument for the great Malinali. See Rodrigue Levesque's *La Malinche: The Mistress of Hernan Cortés, From Slave to Goddess*, 78-79.

⁴⁵ Malinche received her Doña title in recognition not just of her noble origins, but also because of the respect she earned among the Spaniards for her loyalty and intelligence. The Mexica and other Nahuas also recognized her status, giving her name the honorific Nahuatl suffix of "tzin," turning "Marina" into Malintzin, which the Spaniards heard as "Malinche." See Frances Karttunen's "Rethinking Malinche," 291-93.

the language of her enslavers, rendering Aguilar redundant and making herself an invaluable member of the expedition. Sometime shortly thereafter, she became a mistress to Cortés and gave birth to his first son, Martín (Restall 82-83).⁴⁶

Doña Marina was revered and placed on a pedestal, raised to “Princess” status, by the Spanish Conquistadors. Approximately 40 years after her death, in about 1527, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a soldier who took part in the conquest of Mexico under the command of Cortés, began to write his *La Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*: completed in 1584, it is not only the first text to make mention of Malinche’s role in the Spanish conquest, but also the most comprehensive colonial work concerning her life (J. Johnson 15). She is also mentioned in Franciscan friar Diego de Landa’s *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (1566), Francisco López’s de Gómara’s *Historia de la conquista de México* (1590), and Cortés’ *Cartas de Relación* (1520-25); in each text she is praised for her intellect and loyalty (Godayol 63; Cypess 9). As Doña Marina, she was a Hispanic lady, to whom the Conquistadors were indebted for their victory over the Aztecs. The birth of her son, Martín – the first “mestizo”– signified (in the minds of the Conquistadors) the unification of Spanish and Indigenous heritages and laid the groundwork for a syncretic national mythology (Chong 526-8). Her actions equated with those of a “biblical heroine,” Spanish texts of the conquest depict Marina as the ultimate Indian Princess – a “Great Mother” and a “[p]rotector of the foreigner” (Cypess 9). From the outset, Mojica’s Malinali, angry and vociferous, armed with a “*volcano*,” is represented as fierce and volatile, rather than demure and domitable (25). Though *Princess Pocahontas* certainly makes evident that she was

⁴⁶ For a description of Malinche’s role in the Spanish conquest, see Matthew Restall’s *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, pages 77-100, and Lanyon’s *Malinche’s Conquest*. For a detailed discussion of colonial misrepresentations of Malinche, see Pilar Godayol’s article “Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina: Re-Reading the Myth of the Treacherous Translator,” Cypess’ *La Malinche*, and Maura Juan Francisco’s *Women in the Conquest of the Americas*.

treated “[I]ike so many pounds of gold.... Stolen! Bound! Caught! Trapped!,” given to/snared by a captor who wanted her only for her translation skills – her ability to “speak to the Maya, to the Mexica” (23) – the play also represents Malinali as powerful and free, bringing into question romanticized colonial portrayals.

Malinche has appeared in numerous postcolonial texts, sliding from esteem, with the attributes portrayed as positive by the Spaniards and reelaborated as negative and destructive.⁴⁷ Chicana feminist theorist Norma Alarcón notes that “the development of the traitor myth and scapegoat mechanism,” which painted Malinal as a villainous deceiver responsible for her people’s downfall, “comes to fruition in the nineteenth-century during the Mexican independence movement” (64). The movement, which culminated in the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821), saw Mexican-born Spaniards and Indigenous peoples of Mexico (Mestizos/Amerindians) battling the Spanish colonial government in order to diminish the rights of the Conquistadors.⁴⁸ During this period, Doña Marina was reinvented in the literature of most Mexican nationals as a “Desirable Whore/Terrible Mother”; post-independence, she came to appear as a “snake,” or the “Mexican Eve,” a “traitor and temptress,” discursively cast as the “rationalization” for the Indigenous failure to overpower the Europeans (Cypess 9), her image the very “incarnation of the betrayal of Indigenous values” and “of servile submission to European culture and power” (Todorov 101).⁴⁹ Mojica’s reinvention of Malinal expressly

⁴⁷ Cypess’ *La Malinche: From History to Myth* is the most comprehensive bibliographical study of biographies, novels and plays pertaining to Malinche.

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the Mexican Independence Movement, see Eric Van Young’s *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810-1821*.

⁴⁹ In certain nineteenth and early-twentieth-century novels, beginning with Félix Varela’s *Jicoténcal* (1826), Malinche is represented at least in partial congruence with the texts of the conquest, as a romantic subservient, affirming “male authority over the colonial woman – Spanish imperial rule through romantic metaphor” (Harris

contests this malignant misrepresentation. “What is it they say about me?,” asks Malinal, “[t]hat I opened my legs for the whole conquering Spanish Army?” (Mojica, “Princess” 23). Rather than a traitorous seductress, or a “treacherous translator” (Godayol 61), Mojica’s reconfigured Malinal insists that she is a “smart woman,” a “strategist,” a “dangerous” figure of “power,” with the ability to “change [her] words” (23).

Rooted in the domain of Catholic symbolism, colonial/postcolonial discursive violence against Malinche has had real and lasting ramifications for Mexican women. The Indian Princess representations of early colonial Spanish texts saw women from different castes – women not of noble birth like Marina – stereotyped as “racially inferior and thus undesirable,” and, as with the North American context, these faulty notions concerning Indigenous women were generally accepted and remained influential for generations (Chong 534). Despite authorial intentions, symbolic demonization and sexualization of Malinche in the writings of Mexican nationals during the Independence Movement served to confirm Spanish moral/religious superiority vis-à-vis Indigenous inferiority. And misrepresentations certainly pervaded Mexican society long after Mexican Independence from Spain in 1821. On Independence Day of 1861, for example, politician and writer Ignacio “El Nigromante” Ramírez pointedly reminded the celebrants that Mexicans “owed their defeat to Malintzin – Cortés’ whore” (qtd. in Alarcón 58).

Disturbingly, the pervasive denigration of Malinche and her descendants in the art and literature of the Independence advocate a purity of blood, particularly for women, unascertainable to those with evident genealogical ties to Malinal. Mexican political theorist, Natividad Gutiérrez Chong, argues that discursive violence, deriving from religious and political struggles, has thus led to endemic stereotypes relating to Indigenous and Mestiza Mexican

237). For a complete bibliography and analysis of these novels, see Cypess’ *La Malinche: From History to Myth*, Chapters 4 and 5 (pages 41-97).

women, such as “the black woman for cleaning, the mulatto woman for bedding and the white woman for marrying’, which are still prevalent today in relations between the sexes” (Chong 531). Derogatory attitudes concerning Mestizaje have inevitably led to gendered violence against – and social subjugation of – Mestiza women.⁵⁰ Stigmatization has resulted also in internalized racism,⁵¹ causing Indigenous/mixed-blood women to harbour feelings of anxiety and inferiority. “[A] by-product of colonization,” common amongst colonized peoples (Hilary Weaver 250), Internalized Oppression results in the “internaliz[ation] of discursive practices” and the inevitable reproduction of racist ideology (Poupart 88). In *Princess Pocahontas*, Malinal attempts to help her descendant, Contemporary Woman II, understand the colonial history from which her subjection and shame derive. “What is my curse?,” asks Malinali facetiously, “[m]y blood cursed you with your broad face? Eyes set wide apart? Black hair? Your wide, square feet? Or the blue spot you wear on your butt when you’re born?” (22). Malinal’s pointed questions, with their sarcastic overtones, are designed to highlight and oppose the discursive violence that culminated in Contemporary Woman’s subjection and self-deprecation.

Twentieth-century Feminist Chicana writers and theorists, including Cherríe Moraga, Anna Costillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Norma Alarcón, have worked relentlessly against the

⁵⁰ In his essay “The Sons of Malinche” (1950), controversial Mexican diplomat, historian and poet Octavio Paz openly writes from the perspective of a male whose conception of women has been created by polarized representations of the Malinche figure and the Virgin. Paz argues that subjugation of Mexican women is tied directly to notions of racial illegitimacy, deriving from representational depreciation of Mestizaje. He explores extensively the connections between La Malinche and La Chingada – the fucked woman – as sexual victims and mythical mothers, violated both physically and psychologically. For further discussion of the evolution of misogyny and racial stereotyping, see Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1961), particularly “The Sons of Malinche” and “Conquest and Colonialism” (pages 65-89).

⁵¹ Internalized dominance, or privilege, is the adoption of beliefs concerning the inferiority of other social groups and/or the superiority of one’s own social/cultural group, while internalized oppression is the adoption of beliefs or ideologies regarding the superiority of other social groups and/or the inferiority of one’s own social group. See Gabrielle Berman and Yin Paradies’ “Racism, Multiculturalism and Disadvantage.”

discursive denigration of Mestizaje by constructing oppositional literary depictions that empower Mestiza women. While Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)⁵² is perhaps the best known work by a Chicana theorist to offer a subversive reimagining of Mestizaje, Alarcón has attempted to reclaim Mestizaje by focusing specifically upon the discursive derogation of the figure of Malinche.⁵³ Following in the footsteps of these scholars and activists, Mojica draws fragments from colonial and postcolonial accounts of Malinali's life in order to reinvent her as a great Indigenous leader. Overturning derogatory depictions of Malinche as devious, indirect, and treacherous, Mojica portrays her as a source of creation. Malinal demands that her blue-spotted descendants accept that they are bound to her by a "net of veins" and forever "remember... [that] anything alive here is alive because [she] stayed alive" (25). Her impassioned reminder to her descendants of their genealogical connection to her and the historical importance of her position as mother of the nation proves that Mojica's Malinal is far from beaten. She has overcome tragic treatment, both discursive and enacted, and embraced her position. Similarly, Anzaldúa's *New Mestiza* is subject to intersecting oppressions, yet she manages to break down traditional boundaries and resist subjugation. Much like Malinal, the *New Mestiza* is an intellectual traveller and she does away with many of the binaries that underwrite cultures of patriarchal domination: colonizer /colonized, Indigenous/foreign, male/female. As Anzaldúa writes:

⁵² Confronting racially driven injustice enacted by American authorities along the Texas/Mexico border and addressing intracultural homophobia and sexism, Anzaldúa mounts an ambitious social critique. Her construction of the *New Mestiza*, a fully confident Mestiza woman, pleased with her nonconformity and resistant to social stigma, is paradigmatic in Chicana feminist writing.

⁵³ Alarcón's 1989 article, "Traductora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism," maps a trajectory of misrepresentations, demonstrating the manner in which colonial and national literature transformed Malinche from woman, to subservient and, finally, to appetitive monstrosity. Drawing upon specific examples from contemporary politics, Alarcón reveals the manner in which misrepresentations of Malinche continued to pervade modern society. Most importantly, she provides an in-depth, well-researched rewriting of Malinche's story.

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. (79)

Having occupied a multitude of positions, both representationally and in reality, Malinal could easily be the mother of such a fluid, empowered Mestiza woman. Aligned expressly with Anzaldúa’s work, which she cites directly (“Princess” 12; 59), Mojica’s play recuperates the much disputed figure of Malinal, revealing her brilliance and fortitude. By extension, the playwright assists in reclaiming Mestizaje, thereby empowering contemporary women. As Mojica notes, in certain legends, Malinal turns into a “volcano” when Cortés leaves (13) and, when she last appears to the audience, Malinal is sitting “*at [the] top of [a] pyramid, whipping [a] volcano into raging flows of lava*” (25). Reciting her final lines, she raises the “volcano” and tells the audience that, should she please, she could “turn to wind” (25).

Deity/Woman of the Puna/Virgin of Colonial Peru

Mojica’s Deity/Woman of the Puna/Virgin of colonial Peru is the play’s most complicated figure. In different contexts, she represents the Quechua women, real Peruvian women who fled to the Puna (“women’s land”) so as to resist Spanish Christian patriarchy, Aztec/Inca⁵⁴ goddesses and demigods –“Nusta Huillac, Tonantzin, Coyolahuaxqui”⁵⁵ – and the

⁵⁴ The Women of the Puna lived under Inca, and later Spanish, rule. However, Mojica does not clearly delineate between Aztec and Inca deities or traditions. This is likely due, at least in part, to the fact that there existed many commonalities between the social, cultural and religious practices of the two empires.

⁵⁵ Ñusta Huillac was a famous Kolla leader who rebelled against the Spanish in northern Chile in 1780. The legend suggests that she was nicknamed La Tirana (The Tyrant) because of her cruel treatment of Spanish prisoners, though

Roman Catholic virgins into which these deities were transformed – “La Virgen del Carmen and La Virgen de Guadalupe” (14-15).⁵⁶ However, Woman of the Puna, with her human history, stands out as the most integral manifestation of this intricate character. In all forms, she is, like Malinali in Mexico, the metonymic mother of the mixed-blood Peruvian nation: “[O]f [Puna’s] membranes muscle blood and bone” Woman of the Puna “birthed a continent... whether she was... abducted or ran of [her] own free will to the Spanish miner/Portuguese sailor-man ... creation came to be” (Mojica, “Princess” 36). Having the audacity to flee to the high “tablelands” and live “without men” (Mojica, “Princess” 37), such women were discursively maligned – stigmatized by the Spanish colonizers as witches, infidels, and murderesses (Silverblatt, *Moon* 197).

she fell in love with the prisoner Vasco del Armeida and pleaded with her people for his life. The Kolla people resisted colonization for 110 years, but eventually lost their territory, known as Santiago Estate, to the Spanish. A great number of Kollas were killed during the genocide of Indigenous peoples that continued well into the nineteenth-century. See Theodore Combs’ *Columbus, Spain and the Incas*.

In Aztec mythology, and among contemporary Nahua peoples, Tonantzin (Our Revered Mother) is a general title bestowed upon female deities, but the name predominantly refers to Mother Earth. See Louise Burkhart’s *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Early Colonial Nahuatl Literature*.

Another figure from Aztec mythology, Coyolahuaxqui, often spelled Coyolxauhqui, meaning face painted with bells, in Classical Nahuatl, is a daughter of Mixcoatl and Coatlicue, a powerful magician and leader of the star gods (Centzon Huitznahuas). After rebelling and murdering her mother, Coyolahuaxqui is killed and dismembered by her brother Huitzilopochtli. Coyolahuaxqui’s murder and dismemberment served as a warning to any woman who dared contemplate subversion of Nahua social norms. See Nancy Pineda-Madrid’s “Latin-Roman Catholic Theologies.”

⁵⁶ In both Aztec and Inca traditions, there were virgin priestesses of the sun around whom devotion was built long prior to the Spanish conquest. See Karen Power’s article, “Andeans and Spaniards in the Contact Zone: A Gendered Collision” (2000). La Virgen de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) and La Virgen del Carmen (Our Lady of the Star of the Sea or Our Lady of Mount Carmel – patron Saint of Chile) are both Christian transmutations of Tonantzin (Our Revered Mother), reimagined in the image of the Virgin Mary. By 1821, the year Mexico gained independence from Spain, Guadalupe had emerged as the national patroness of Mexico. See D.A. Brading’s *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady Guadalupe*, Burkhart’s *Before Guadalupe*, Eric. R. Wolf’s “The Virgen de Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol,” and Andrew Jotischky’s *The Carmelites and Antiquity: Mendicants and Their Past in the Middle Ages*.

In her book, *Moon, Sun and Witches* – a text highly “recommended” by Mojica, and quoted repeatedly in *Princess Pocahontas* (86) – preeminent cultural anthropologist Irene Silverblatt traces the gendered history of Andean colonization, suggesting that damning representations of the Women of the Puna – also made apparent in Mojica’s play – eventually led to the complete cooptation of Andean traditions and the eventual destruction of Andean lifeways. Pre-Inca Andean communities were relatively gender egalitarian, with responsibility for land and resource management resting equally upon men and women (Powers, “Andeans” 44; *Moon* 20-31) and, under the Inca Empire, traditional rights of Andean women were, for the most part, unaltered, as gender relations remained relatively reciprocal (Silverblatt, *Moon* 40-47). Karen Powers – drawing on Silverblatt’s extensive research – suggests that the “gender parallelism” fundamental to Inca political structures of Andean communities demanded that the roles of women were valued equally to those of men (“Andeans” 512). Although women primarily occupied subordinate positions politically, the Inca Queen, or Coya, ruled over Andean women and, while the male Inca rulers were away expanding the empire, she ruled solely (Silverblatt, *Moon* 47-67). At the “margins” of the empire, some women continued to exercise paramount rulership until the arrival of the Spanish (Powers, “Andeans” 513) and Inca religion regularly featured women not only as leaders and priestesses, but also as midwives and healers (Silverblatt, *Moon* 20-31), roles that conferred a great deal of “female prestige” (Powers, “Andeans” 524).

Yet by the seventeenth century, Andean society had been completely reshaped in accordance with Spanish ideals, with imperial hierarchies of race and gender demanding the displacement of Indigenous women from positions of political authority and the instatement of men. In every arena, Indigenous men were given unchecked authority over women and, sadly, as

Curacas (local Indigenous leaders – mayors or headmen) and Indigenous supporters of the Spanish became ever more deeply involved in the colonial system, these men were “increasingly associated with that system’s illegitimacy” (*Moon* 195). So, too, did Catholic evangelisation insist on the dissolution of traditional religious practices and the eventual extirpation of all acts of worship perceived by the Spanish as idolatrous (Powers, “Andeans” 523; Silverblatt, *Moon* 197). Men were either forced or opted to disavow their allegiances to traditional cults, with their “[p]riestesses of [i]dolatry” (Silverblatt, *Moon* 198) and, because “male bias” within the colonial administration barred women from participating in politics, they were effectually encouraged to move toward “traditional” practices of healing and worship, all of which were deemed “diabolic” by the colonial regime (*Moon* 195). As was the case with Indigenous men of North America, many male Andeans continued to covertly participate in delegitimized religious practices, but women were – and continue to be – understood by their communities to be the true “defenders of ancient traditions” (*Moon* 199).

In order to propagate a patriarchal, “ethical” image of women and thereby invoke control over the colonized, traditional female deities, including Tonantzin the Earth Mother – represented by Mojica as the “Deity” (35) – were, as Salinas notes, hastily supplanted by representations of the Virgin Mary (525), the icon of White purity, proving a “sober” and “prudent” contrast to the vibrant, vital goddesses and female demigods of the Incan Andes (Salinas 526). In Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas*, the Deity, Virgin, and Woman of the Puna are different characters, yet they share one representation, as Mojica acts all three roles herself. The Virgin, a “twisted and misaligned” derivative of the Deity, presents herself as part of Puna’s consciousness (37), with the playwright’s conflation emphasizing the manner in which prohibition against gynocentric traditions disempowered Indigenous women. The Christian

gynomorphic distortion of dark, sexual, and dangerous goddesses, once the “womb[s] of the earth,” the “mother[s] to all – married to none” (Mojica, “Princess” 35) effectively served to extricate the “process of menstruation, fertility” and, ultimately, sexuality – a former source of empowerment – from Indigenous Andean women’s lives (Kuwabong 185). “No longer allied with the darkness of moon tides,” these volatile deities, “creator[s]” and “destroyer[s],” were, as Mojica writes, “scrubbed clean[,] made lighter, non-threatening[,] chaste[,] barren.... Sexless, without fire[,] without pleasure[,] without power [e]ncased in plaster[, and] painted white” (37). Mojica’s Virgin, however, one with Woman of the Puna, remains well aware of her former strength, regardless of masculinist colonial denial. She takes solace in the potential for but “one child” to see her “nostrils flare,” to recognize the “spark” that lingers in her eyes, to hear “the heartbeat... in the rattle of the snare drum” (37). And it is certainly true that the Spanish did not foresee the endurance and perseverance of the Indigenous women upon which the continuance of Andean cultural traditions, including sacred practices of worship, hinged. The Women of the Puna ensured that the goddesses – Tonantzin and her sisters – were never forgotten.

Silverblatt, emphatic of the importance of women as cultural preservationists, affirms repeatedly that – at least “[f]rom the indigenous point of view” – women were fearsome upholders of Andean tradition – the primary “defenders of pre-Columbian lifeways against an illegitimate regime” (Moon 195). Rendered desperate by the abuse enacted by male representatives of the colonial authority – both Spanish and Indigenous – these women sought relentlessly to “re-create the ‘female component’ of Andean lifeways” (Silverblatt, Moon 209). Puna-land thus became a sanctuary, a space characterized by female solidarity, where women worked collectively against the colonial regime (Silverblatt, Moon 207-08). True to history, Mojica’s Woman of the Puna, betrayed by “father[,] brother[,] uncle [,] husband,” refuses to

turn her back on the “mother ways” (“Princess” 36-37) and, despite being ostracized by the men in their communities and driven to the “high table lands,” Puna and her “sisters” gather secretly, “herd[ing] together, honour[ing] the mother, liv[ing] without men,” and demanding “purity be reclaimed” (37). Neither do Mojica’s Puna and her companions allow social rejection and disparagement to overwhelm them, but remain vital and angry – “eyes spit[ting] fire,” they “refuse to weep,” but exclaim proudly and in unison: “[w]e hung ourselves, slit our throats, cut the breath of our male children” (36). The playwright’s suggestion that these warrior-like women violently protected their sacred traditions and their right to a gynocentric space comments directly on social construction of the Women of the Puna during colonization. The earliest writings to mention the Puna are those of Franciscan monks and Spanish inquisitors and, imbued – like the writings of the *Jesuits* – with religious overtones, these early accounts portray female nonconformists as baby killers – the murderers of their male children (Silverblatt, *Moon* 208; Horswell 175). In reality, many female dissidents could not stand to bear witness to the destruction of their culture and some turned to suicide, while others murdered their children to spare them from the priests’ brutality (Silverblatt, *Moon* 208), yet, as Silverblatt contends, the monks’ and inquisitors’ embellished accounts of infanticide derived, for the most part, from the “deep disillusion which Andean women felt toward the men who had betrayed them” (*Moon* 209).

Postcolonial accounts shift – similar to North American postcolonial representations of Indigenous women – to depict the Women of the Puna (and Andean women generally) sympathetically, though problematically, as passive victims. Arguing that most postcolonial narratives concerning the Spanish Conquest are tales of “sexual conquest” (“Conquering” 8), which focus gratuitously upon “[I]ndigenous women’s rape and victimhood” at the hands of

“armed Spanish soldiers” (“Conquering” 7), Powers suggests that these unsettling representations “derive from different local historicities,” assume many forms, and have passed to the “tongues and pens of... today’s authors” (“Conquering” 8). Blatantly proclaiming that suicides and infanticides did occur during this tumultuous period in Andean history, Mojica alludes to the coercion prompting the acts, while also accentuating female agency – however volatile. Andean women were by no means pitiful victims of sexual violence, but survivalists – “betrayed” and forced to “run,” their own violence a clear response to colonial abuse (36) – and the playwright’s reinvention of Puna recuperates these women from both vilification *and* the belittlement of perpetual victimhood. “Defiant,” Woman of the Puna names herself “the leader.... The renegade” (36) and, it is at this juncture that Contemporary Woman begins to comprehend the historical trajectory of displacement with which she must contend. The damaging ideological work done by the discursive deprecation of her foremothers finally resonating, Contemporary Woman looks over her shoulder to see “*footprints*,” representing the legacy of Indigenous/mixed-blood women’s resistance (35).

Marie/Margaret/Madeline: The Mothers of the Métis Nation

As with the “Women of the Puna” in Peru (Silverblatt, *Moon* 197), discourse has failed to construct a single figure – such as Malinche – to signify the discursively homogenized Indigenous wives of the fur-traders in Canada. In *Princess Pocahontas*, Mojica represents these women as Marie/Margaret/Madeline, collectively described as the “three faces” of the many Aboriginal women who “portaged across Canada with White men on their backs” (14), only to be “systematically discarded” and “replaced” (48) by White brides – “Les filles du roi” (47). Marie/Margaret/Madeline share the same embodiment, yet Mojica defines each woman

differently, as the tethered trio draw strength from one another: Madeline is fiery and vociferous, “angry” even in the face of rejection (47); Marie is practical, stoic and hardworking; happy to “help” the traders (41); while Margaret is sensitive, poetic and appetitive, using “alcohol” to “numb” the pain of her predicament (47). The playwright manages, within the eight pages of Transformation 9 (41-48), not only to effectively draw attention to the nuanced relationship between the early fur-traders and their Indigenous brides, but also to recuperate these women – who worked alongside Canada’s first colonists as domestic assistants, lovers and cultural liaisons – as important and powerful historical actors. In keeping with historical research, Mojica affirms the significance of these Indigenous brides in their kin networks, romantic relationships, and settler communities.

During the fur trade era marriages between Indigenous women and White men were common practice and, for a brief time, French policy (Stevenson 51; Ray, *Indians* xxii; Van Kirk, *Many* 5). With respect to intermarriage, fur trade society was unique, as throughout most of Canada’s history marriage between Aboriginal women and White men has been strongly discouraged (Van Kirk, “Role” 9). Fur trade society went so far as to develop its own marriage custom, “à la façon du pays,” a combination of Indigenous and European marriage traditions (Van Kirk, *Many* 39), which, given the social/cultural context, incorporated more elements of Indigenous than European tradition (Van Kirk, “Role” 10). The ceremony, alternatively called “marriage after the custom of the country,” rendered Indigenous brides “country wives” (Van Kirk, *Many* 50), a term later used disparagingly to undermine the role of Indigenous women in the fur trade (Van Kirk, “Role” 12). In her salient feminist text – arguably, the most comprehensive social history of women in the North American fur trade – *Many Tender Ties* (1980), Sylvia Van Kirk details the familial inner-workings of fur trade society in Canada, in an

attempt to demonstrate that Indigenous women were integral to the functioning of the early resource extractive economy (45). Mojica, drawing upon Van Kirk's historical research ("Princess" 86), demonstrates the essential role played by Indigenous women in the fur trade. Marie asserts, the fur-traders "had no one to make moccasins, to cook for them [,] to show them where to pick berries, to make canoes... No one to help them. No one to help them" ("Princess" 41). For a century, Indigenous women were an integral part of the fur trade, although, like most unpaid women, their contribution has been invisibilized, "ignored," and thus overlooked in many historical texts (Van Kirk, "Role" 11), yet Mojica's play, in emphasizing the labour undertaken by these women, does much to ameliorate the effects of this strategic historiographical disregard. Marie, the perpetually industrious moccasin maker, lists some of the many duties that fell to the Indigenous brides of the trappers: "We Women/make moccasins/string snow shoes/teach them to walk in the snow/make canoes.... hunt/fish/put food away in the winter/teach them to survive" ("Princess" 42). Making explicit the laborious lifestyles accepted by Indigenous women during the fur trade, she is specific in her descriptions: "1 pair of moccasins per day per man/divided by four women/times 15 men on a one year expedition>equals 5,475 pairs of moccasins per man per year... So many moccasins!" ("Princess" 41). Marie's important labour makes evident the value of Indigenous brides to their White partners. These women were active participants in their romantic unions, as well as in the broader community.

Van Kirk's important historical work shatters myths that portray unions between Indigenous women and European men as trivial, as she overtly seeks to prove that such connections were not promiscuous, casual encounters, but were characterized by ceremony and social significance (*Many* 8). These alliances did not simply hold relevant private, emotional significance, but were the key social aspect that enabled employees of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West

Company to travel across the country, stopping safely at numerous trading posts (Van Kirk, *Many* 45; Stevenson 53). Because Indigenous women wed to White trappers operated as cultural liaisons between their kin and their husband's company, consolidating the trade network (Van Kirk, *Many* 29; Stevenson 51; Dickason, *Concise* 170), marriage to trappers conferred "prestige" (Van Kirk, *Many* 29), while also assuring familial access to trade posts and provisions (Dickason, *Concise* 170). Van Kirk emphasizes that "a major impetus for such unions came from Aboriginal groups themselves," in an effort to construct "a socioeconomic bond that would draw the Euro-Canadian male into [Indigenous] kinship networks" (Van Kirk, "Marrying" 1). It is therefore fitting that, in *Princess Pocahontas*, Marie is "sent" to her European husband by her father because, amongst her three sisters, she is the "best moccasin maker" (41).

Van-Kirk and others have argued that the relative gender egalitarianism that characterized Indigenous societies, combined with the needs of the European trappers, dictated the important social and economic role played by Indigenous women in the fur trade (Stevenson 54; Van Kirk, *Many* 29), rendering them far too socially and economically important to be regarded as mere sexual objects (Van Kirk, "Role" 11). For European men in Western Canada, marriage to Indigenous women was almost essential, given the absence of White women.⁵⁷ It may be true, as Sarah Carter contends, that fur trade society was not characterized by the "continuous conquest and violence" that defined not only the founding of the United States, but the majority of Britain's imperial projects (*Aboriginal* 130) and, as useful social agents Indigenous women could "not be reduced to mere pawns in the hands of men" (Carter and McCormack 9), at least not entirely. Yet notwithstanding social positioning, the Indigenous wives of the fur-traders were subject to masculinist ideologies and social norms, both within the confines of their marriages to

⁵⁷ After an unsuccessful attempt to bring European women into the colonies in 1686, the White wives of the traders were officially prohibited from traveling to Hudson Bay; it was not until 1812 that they regained access to Western trade territory (Van Kirk *Many* 172-3; Brown 1-23).

White European men and within their own communities – a reality clearly evinced in Mojica’s play.

As with the other female characters in *Princess Pocahontas*, these “daughters and granddaughters of the founders of this country” who “birth[ed] the Métis” (46), “translat[ing], navigat[ing],” building “alliances with [their] bodies/loyalties through . . . blood” (43), were also objects of trade: “[w]hen there is no more to trade, our men trade us. Fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands, trade us for knives, axes, muskets, liquor,” intones Margaret (46). The Métis foremothers, regardless of their social roles, were controlled by men. As Margaret cries, “we scrub the forts... and warm their beds... and their beds... and their beds,” her listless repetition implying the coerciveness underlying fur trade relations between Indigenous women and White men; “we quickly learn to love their alcohol,” she continues, “[i]t numbs not recognizing the face of one company man from the next” (45-46). While Mojica is never gratuitous in her allusions to sexual violence, she here addresses the sexual subjection of Indigenous women in the forts. Margaret, though finding it necessary to adopt Madeline’s “*haughty stance*,” remains angry, unbroken: “we die,” she shouts, “from smallpox, syphilis, tuberculosis, childbirth. We claw the gate of the fort or we starve and freeze to death outside.... we birth the Métis.... we birth the Métis,” her repeated utterances reminding audiences of the continued societal relevance of the Métis foremothers (46). Because intermarriage between White trappers and Indigenous women facilitated a cultural syncretism that allowed for the functioning of a peaceful and economically viable society settler society would never again treat Indigenous women with the same degree of esteem, but even at the height of the fur trade, Indigenous women were never deemed as culturally significant as their male counterparts. With the arrival of White women, colonial policies came to place particular emphasis on intraracial, heterosexual, monogamous marriage

(Carter, *Importance* 153) – the “white life for two” (Snell 382) and, as Mojica notes, Indigenous women were “no longer women” at all (“Princess” 47).

It was not long before the “possession of an imported [European] wife became a key marker of proper fur trade manhood” (Vibert 55), causing Indigenous women to be – the fiery Madeline accuses – “[d]isposed of, discarded, replaced” (48). By the end of the fur trade era, Indigenous kinship structures had been overridden by colonial law, and intermarriage had been transformed by settler society into “marrying-out” as Aboriginal women lost their “Indian status” if they married non-status males (Van Kirk, “Marrying-In” 1).⁵⁸ Madeline’s monologue, towards the close of Transformation 9, makes plain the destitution experienced by these displaced Aboriginal women:

I was married to James Johnston for fifteen years. He easily won my father’s favour – my father the chief Factor, hmmm...? James was a suitable match....

Two days! They left me only two days to get out. Fifteen years null and void! Null and void in two days! It’s called “turning off”. “Turned off” he said.... “The only way to tell you, Madeline, is that you have been turned off. But James has always been more than generous with you, Madeline All your belongings can

⁵⁸ With the passing of the *Indian Act* in 1876, the Federal Government was given reign over nearly all aspects of Aboriginal life in Canada, institutionalizing the formerly implicit colonial hierarchy. Under section 12.1 (b) of the *Indian Act*, status Indian women gained or lost status and band affiliation from their husbands, restructuring Indigenous bands in terms of gender and race. While the sex-based discrimination entrenched in the *Act* disallowed Indigenous women equality not only in mainstream society, but also within their communities (Moss 80), the constant monitoring of reserves by federally appointed Indian Agents – who took their role of “policing gender and sexuality quite seriously” – ensured the moral regulation of Indigenous women’s private lives (Brownlie, “Intimate” 175). For a concise, comprehensive analyses of the impact of *Indian Act* governance upon Indigenous people in Canada, and the ongoing political implications of the *Act*, see Joyce Green’s “Canaries in The Mines of Citizenship: Indian Women in Canada” (2001) and Wendy Moss’s “The Canadian State and Indian Women: The Struggle for Sex Equality Under the Indian Act” (1997). For a chronology of the *Act*’s twentieth-century amendments, see Susan Crean’s “Both Sides Now: Designing White Men and the Other Side of History” (2009) and, for a brief discussion of recent equity-related amendments, see chapter five of this dissertation.

accompany you. There is a house, where you can live with Mr. Campbell, who has been very kind in accepting your husband's offer." (46-47)

Here the manner in which Aboriginal women were transferred/traded by men, like so much chattel, is made most apparent, with Madeline alluding also to the elements of androcentrism present, though often overlooked, in Indigenous North American cultures prior to European colonization. It is evident that Madeline's father, "the chief Factor," head of the trading post – as with Marie's father – selects a husband for his daughter that serves his own needs foremost and, when James has no further use for Madeline, she is passed to "Mr. Campbell," a figure mentioned only once in the play (46). In reality, White men worked as Chief Factors. Mojica's fictionalization is designed to draw attention to the dismissal and mistreatment of Indigenous women on the part of European traders *and* the men in the own communities.

The close of Transformation 9 emphasizes the ongoing effects of "turning off" (46), as Contemporary Woman I merges with the figure/s of Madeline/Marie/Margaret and describes the connection between the colonial supplantation of the Indigenous brides of the traders and the perpetual disparagement of Indigenous women in White settler societies: "[s]o, when the White women came, 'Les filles du roi'," she says, "these granddaughters of the founders of this country – were no longer women. And though turning off is no longer practiced, it is still an essential fiber in the fabric of our contemporary lives" (47). Van Kirk explains with precision the way in which the dismissal of the Aboriginal wives of the fur traders instigated the violence (both discursive and manifest) that continues to play out in postcolonial Canada:

Incoming traders, now feeling free to ignore the marital obligations implicit in "the custom of the country" increasingly looked upon native women as objects for temporary sexual gratification. The women, on the other hand, found themselves

being judged according to strict British standards of female propriety. It was they, not the white men, who were to be held responsible for the perpetuation of immorality because of their supposedly promiscuous Indian heritage. The double standard tinged with racism had arrived with a vengeance. (“Role” 12)

Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas* certainly draws attention to this shameful history of gendered racialized mistreatment, ensuring that audiences understand not only the pain – violence, isolation and devaluation – endured by Aboriginal women in early Canada, but also the vital role of these women – mothers of the Métis – translators, guides, and liaisons in a burgeoning nation.

Rescuing the Indigenous wives of the fur traders from historiographical marginalization, the playwright portrays the Métis foremothers as crucial players in colonial resource extraction, capable and confident workers, without whom the fur trade economy might never have succeeded. Neither are the “three faces” (14) of the Indigenous brides of the trappers represented as meager victims. Marie’s reiteration – “[a]mong my sisters I am the best moccasin maker” (40; 42) – suggests that, although the labour of Indigenous women was exploited, for Marie, work is a source of pride. The volatile Madeline, though abandoned after fifteen years of marriage for a “[p]ale” newcomer, “weighted down with mountains and mountains of petticoats.... Trailing 14 trunks and piano” (47), refuses to be easily dismissed, vociferously admitting to an attempt at “poison[ing] the new Mrs. Johnston,” despite that she might rather have “slit [her] open right through the belly”: Madeline, clearly, is “angry,” rather than hopeless nor weak (46). The sensitive Margaret, while driven to the fleeting solace of alcohol, is nonetheless able to overcome her experiences of sexual violence in the fort by literally becoming Madeline and, in using her sister’s survivalist disposition to ensure her own survival, Margaret, too, becomes “*haughty...* angry” (46). When Contemporary Woman I appears at the close of Transformation 9, she

“*step[s]*” out of Madeline, rather than Margaret or Marie. We thus see Contemporary Woman’s progressive recovery take place in tandem with the reclamation of the great Indigenous grandmothers. Evolving from her initial emergence, Contemporary Woman, recognizing her own history, morphs from the fantastical distortion, Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides to become a child of the fierce Madeline, embodying the strength, perseverance and productive rage of modern Indigenous women.

Princess Pocahontas

Pocahontas (as she is commonly known) is the focal figure around whom Mojica arranges her play’s many transformations.⁵⁹ Born Matoaka (1595-1617) of the Powhatan band of Virginia, she is said to have saved the life of the Englishman, Captain John Smith, by placing her head upon his own when her father, Chief Powhatan, raised his war club to execute him (Tremblay 21-23). After the act of heroism – popular lore has it – Pocahontas fell in love with Smith, but was kidnapped by his compatriot John Rolfe – tobacco tycoon and “lesser suitor” (J. Carter, “Blind” 8). In Mojica’s play, Matoaka is similarly “kidnapped,” removed from her family, “stuck... girdled” and “left to die,” with her “heart on the ground” (29). Incorporating the ancient Cheyenne saying – “a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground” (“Princess” 12) – the playwright alludes to the abduction of Matoaka by the British and her father’s (perhaps fair-minded) reluctance to rescue her. Given that Matoaka was only twelve or thirteen when she met Smith and not much older when she married Rolfe (Kidwell np.),

⁵⁹ Because the Indigenous women of the Chesapeake Bay region wore less clothing than was traditional in Europe at the time, the British regarded them as “wanton” (Tremblay 121). Pocahontas thus translates to mean “little wanton,” used, in the British sense, to mean mischievous (Rountree 16).

Mojica's Contemporary Woman begs the insightful question: "[w]here was her mother?" ("Princess" 28).

While her birthplace and mother's name are unknown (Rountree 15), we do *know* that Pocahontas was Powhatan's daughter and, as of 1607, when the early American settlement of Jamestown was founded in Virginia, Powhatan was the leader of his people. Powhatan's two brothers and sister were the primary leaders of three nearby towns (Tremblay 121), and, in keeping with matrilineal succession, when Powhatan died, his brothers and sisters, rather than his children, succeeded him (Rountree 15). Pocahontas, of course, never became a political leader, not only due to tradition, but because, in 1613, she was indeed "kidnapped" by the British (Custalow and Daniel 80-89). Notified immediately of his daughter's capture, Chief Powhatan did not respond for a full three months, at which time he refused to fulfil the settler's demand for the return of weapons stolen by the Powhatans (Rountree 22). So Matoaka remained in Jamestown "with [her] heart on the ground" ("Princess" 29). A year later, in 1614, she was converted to Christianity, renamed Rebecca and married to Rolfe (Custalow and Daniel 79). "What owe I to my father?," asks Mojica's Lady Rebecca, "[w]aited I not one year in Jamestown, a prisoner?.... If my father had loved me, he would not value me less than old swords, guns or axes ("Princess" 31). The following year, 1615, Rebecca gave birth to a "mixed-blood" son, Thomas (Costalow and Daniel 64; Rountree 23). In *Princess Pocahontas*, Matoaka represents one of the great Indigenous grandmothers of America's mixed-blood population,⁶⁰ providing her captor not only "with the seeds to create his hybrid tobacco plants," but also with a child, "creat[ing] a hybrid people" (Mojica, "Princess" 31). In 1616, Rolfe took his wife and

⁶⁰ While the Canadian experience of colonial displacement is similar to the American experience inasmuch as the national border divides Indigenous territories, it is important to keep in mind that experiences varied greatly from country to country and region to region. It is to her credit that Mojica acknowledges both the Indigenous wives of the fur traders, in Canada, and Matoaka, and (later) Sacajawea, in America.

young son to England and, within a year, Pocahontas – by this time about twenty years of age – fell ill of a lung ailment, died, and was buried at St. George’s Church in Gravesend (Costalow and Daniel 89; Tremblay 123).

Much of what occurred between Pocahontas, Captain John Smith, Chief Powhatan, and John Rolfe remains uncertain, yet few Indigenous women of North America have garnered as much attention as the young Powhatan girl, partly because she represented, for settlers, the civilizing impact of colonization and partly because her (alleged) love for Smith/actual marriage to Rolfe became, as Gary Dyer suggests, a “metaphor or synecdoche for unions between nations” (303). Although the marriage between Lady Rebecca and Rolfe did mark an unprecedented “period of peace” between the Powhatans and the residents of Jamestown, in reality, this brief harmony resulted from a truce between political leaders on both sides, not a marriage (Rountree 23) and, despite folkloric fictionalizations, Smith’s encounter with Matoaka had no bearing on relations between the Powhatans and the settlers. Paula Gunn Allen reminds us that these fictitious “love story” versions of the Pocahontas story have derived from such precarious sources as the journals and letters of Rolfe and Smith (*Pocahontas* 59), in combination with various accounts of seventeenth-century travelers who described the Algonquian peoples through a lens skewed by ethnocentrism and clouded by old-world, patriarchal notions concerning gender roles (*Pocahontas* 2-4).

Rolfe, for his part, may well have loved and mourned his young wife, but after her death, he used images of the Christianized, refined – “stuck” and “girdled” (Mojica, “Princess” 29) – Rebecca to “market” tobacco (Tremblay 123), exploiting binary notions of civilized/savage and squaw/princess. John Smith’s testimony concerning his meeting with the Powhatan band, recorded in his *Generall Historie of Virginia* (1624) – the primary source from which the

popularized narrative of Princess Pocahontas evolved (Kidwell n.p.) – was not widely circulated until the early nineteenth century, at which time the story quickly became part of America’s national mythology (Lyytinen 79-80; Green, “Pocahontas” 699). Scholarly consensus indicates that Smith’s account does not hold up to scrutiny, particularly because he wrote several contradictory versions of his capture (Lyytinen 79; Allen, *Pocahontas* 2-5; Kidwell n.p.; Young 394-6; Gould 99; Green, “Pocahontas” 700; Rountree 14-15), only one of which mentions Pocahontas (J. Smith 243-63). While Smith suggests that Pocahontas’ loyalty derived from sympathetic attachment, “her extraordinarie affection to our nation” (J. Smith 259), Clara Sue Kidwell argues that, should the event have actually taken place, her motivations likely lay elsewhere: “considering the status and power of women among coastal Algonquian tribes” it is probable that Matoaka “was exercising a prerogative of women to choose captives for adoption into the tribe” (n.p.).

Historian Helen Rountree, noting that Smith’s “‘history’ was written seven years after [Pocahontas’] death, two years after her husband’s death, and after most of the other early eyewitnesses to the Jamestown Colony were deceased,” suggests that it is an invention, which, left “unchallenged,” became “embedded in American legend” (14-15). So far as Rountree is concerned, the story, an obvious fabrication, provided “overtly racist” Virginians a simple justification for their mixed heritages:

The solution was to make Pocahontas a “princess” as well as the “savior” of the colony and to distinguish her from other Virginia Natives. Then her almost white descendants could hold up their heads, ride in segregated “white-only” railway coaches, and avoid other forms of discrimination. This response provides a tantalizing possibility for why John Smith’s rescue by Pocahontas appeared only in

the 1624 version of his experiences in America. In 1622 the Powhatans had attacked the colony and killed about one-fifth of Virginia's white population. The English had not anticipated such violent resistance. Smith's new account of the Powhatans, published two years after the attack, suggested that Smith had long known about the Powhatans' true nature as well as Pocahontas's exceptional qualities. By casting Pocahontas as not a real Indian, her conversion was made to seem a novelty rather than the beginning of a trend. (26-27)

Importantly, Gail Tremblay (Onondaga/Mi'kmaq) points out that regardless of validity, Smith's text casts Matoaka as the "good Indian Princess," and this was the initial British version of that character "in the pantheon of European stereotypes of Indians" (Tremblay 123). Due primarily to Smith's testimony, Pocahontas remains the best known example of the "Indian Princess"; a female version of the "noble savage," she is constructed by colonial discourse in opposition to the demeaned "Squaw" (Lyytinen 79). Drawing upon Smith's tale, later works portray Pocahontas as a civilized Indian Princess, fighting against the vicious Powhatans to save the settlers of Jamestown.

Mojica engages actively with the recorded testimonies of Smith, Rolfe, and others, animating various images of Pocahontas on the page and stage, providing an alternative narrative to the romanticized version with which readers and audience have become all too familiar. In *Princess Pocahontas* the well-known folkloric figure appears in four forms: Matoaka, the free Indigenous Powhatan girl; Princess Pocahontas, the rebellious and benevolent savior of John Smith – the "good Indian," one who aids and abets white men"; Lady Rebecca, the "Christianized" wife of John Rolfe; and Story Book Pocahontas, the "little Indian Princess from the picture books, friend of the settlers, in love with the Captain, [she] comes complete with her

savage-Indian-Chief father” (“Princess” 14). Matoaka, Pocahontas, and Rebecca represent three life stages of the real-life Pocahontas, her three known “names” (14), while the Story Book figure is metonymically aligned with social constructions of Pocahontas, developed out of Smith’s popular narrative and depicted in various artistic mediums.

The demeaning Storybook figure, having moved from medium to medium over the years, represents as an amenable “Indian Princess” in the texts and plays of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a “sexualized other” in the vaudeville Wild West shows of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries (Patton and Schedlock 44) and, finally, in more recent years, a sexualized celluloid Indian Princess, scantily clad in buckskin, appearing solely “for the male colonizer’s gaze” (Lyytinen 82). Walt Disney’s animated productions, *Pocahontas I* (1995) and *Pocahontas II* (1998), created hundreds of years later, still mirror the Princess representations of the works of the nineteenth century, with Pocahontas again imagined as an Indian Princess, enthralled with the settlers, and devoted to Smith to such an extent that she is willing to disavow her culture and family. In *Princess Pocahontas*, the figure of Storybook Pocahontas underscores the continued impact of early colonial misrepresentations on contemporary depictions. Appearing as the solitary star of Transformation 5 (27-28), Storybook Pocahontas begs “*on her knees*” for John Smith’s life (27). Infused with campy sarcasm, the farcical scene pokes fun at the evident sexism and racism that characterizes contemporary misrepresentations of Matoaka.

STORYBOOK POCAHONTAS:

- 1) NO!.... He’s so brave his eyes are so blue, his hair is so blond and I like the way he walks!
- 2) Don’t! (*arms cradling captain’s head*) Mash his brains out! I don’t want to see his brains all running down the side of this stone!

3) Stop! (*in the name of love*) I think I love him.

4) Oooh (*swooning, hands at cheeks*) He's so cute. (27-28)

Describing her people as “fiendish red men,” Storybook Pocahontas is a satirical exaggeration of the Princess created by Smith in 1624 and elaborated upon in the plays, novels, and films of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries (29). Storybook Pocahontas literally embodies, satirizes and –faricically and entertainingly – undermines degrading stereotypes that deny the strength and competence of Indigenous women.

Mojica’s adaptation of Lady Rebecca, the “Christian Englishwoman” (31), operates on two levels: like Storybook Pocahontas, she reminds audiences that discursive representations of the Christian Lady contributed to a patriarchal, ethnocentric American national mythology, yet the figure of Rebecca is also employed to empower contemporary mixed-blood, “blue spot[ted]” women (14) with a final message of hope. While Rebecca speaks of devotion to her new home and husband, her profound unhappiness is evinced by apparent displays of physical discomfort. Ostensibly finding happiness in her social status and religiosity – she is a self-described “Christian” (31), the “Princess and Non Pareil of Virginia” with whom “the Queen holds audience” (30) – her movements suggest otherwise.⁶¹ Rebecca repeatedly makes false expressions of devout religiosity– “God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth” (30) – and patriotism – “for the good of country, for the good of plantation!” (31). Overtly, rejecting her father and people, Rebecca claims to desire the status of a “Lady,” to “wear the clothes of an Englishwoman” (30) and to remain with “the Englishmen who love [her]” (31).

⁶¹ When Lady Rebecca describes herself as the “Non Pareil of Virginia” (30), it is probable that Mojica is sardonically referring to George Frederic Veitt’s play, *Pocahontas: The Virginia Nonpareil* (1906). Much like other writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Veitt portrays Pocahontas as chaste and virtuous, in contrast to the majority of the Powhatans. Veitt’s Pocahontas is, in fact, rescued from the sexual advances and, ultimately, the violence of her lover Kunderwarka by Rolfe (94-97).

Rebecca did meet Queen Anne, when she travelled to England with her husband in 1616, the year before her death. See Tremblay, page 123.

Yet, in the same speech, Lady Rebecca acknowledges the “treachery” with which she was “kidnapped” (30), only to be “caught, stuck, girdled” (29). Visibly uncomfortable, she must squeeze into the “*collar and cuffs*,” the “clothes of an Englishwoman” she fains to adore, “*as if being put into stocks and pillory*” (30), the incommensurability of her words and demeanor suggesting the disingenuousness of her professed allegiance to her new home and husband. It is no surprise when, in closing, she speaks without subterfuge, revealing to the audience that she is isolated in Britain, abandoned with “no mark, no trail, no footprint and no way home” (31). Still strong, Rebecca, instead of acquiescing to her captors – the “Englishmen who love [her]” – she reaches out and “*throw[s] a lifeline across generations*”; for her, it is “enough that [her] child liveth” (31). When Rebecca finally speaks from the heart, she divulges that, despite forced assimilation, she has never given up hope for the future. Mojica’s reimagining of the Lady Rebecca created by Smith and repeatedly misrepresented in nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural production addresses and, in effect, opposes the colonial distortion.

Rebecca’s final message of – the “*lifeline*” (31) – provides an ideal segue for her prompt transformation into Matoaka, the “strong, fast” and “free” daughter of Chief Powhatan (34). Matoaka, the play’s final representation of Pocahontas, stands in opposition to Storybook Pocahontas and it is with her arrival, at the close of Transformation 6, that Mojica “ends the legend,” combatting the folkloric version of the Pocahontas story with a representation of Matoaka, vital and free (32). Because she will soon “be ready to be a wife” (34), Matoaka is seen dancing in a “nubile” ceremony; a part of “Deer clan” tradition, the ceremony connotes a formal public transition from girlhood to womanhood. For Matoaka, this by no means suggests a relinquishment of power, but an “important” life-stage, furthering her feminine empowerment

(34). Matoaka, with her closing words indicates that she is now both “woman [and] child,” a composite figure of pure strength:

MATOAKA:

strong, fast, free woman/child

strong legs, brown skin, woman/child

Look all the way around you.

Look around your world, woman/child

Dark skies, the moon is mine

stars travel

woman’s time. (34-35)

“*[D]ancing*” beneath the “stars,” looking gleefully upon a natural world that she perceives as open and full of possibilities (34-35), the final image of Matoaka diffusing colonialist interpretations of her existence amongst the Powhatans as violent and oppressive. Here, she is shown in stark contrast to Storybook Pocahontas, while Lady Rebecca is imagined as something of an intermediary between the two polarities, with the final inspiring representation operating to empower Indigenous/mixed-blood women. In bringing the Story Book Pocahontas and Lady Rebecca tropes to the page/stage and successfully deconstructing them, Mojica undoes a great deal of the insidious discursive violence perpetrated by false portrayals, leaving Contemporary Woman a vital “*lifeline*” with which to reclaim her history (31).

Reimagining Sacajawea⁶² in *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*

The half-hour radio play, *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes: A Story of Sacajawea*, was originally produced by CBC for the 1991 “Vanishing Point” series, “Adventure Stories for Big Girls,” and was subsequently published as a supplement to *Princess Pocahontas* in the mini-anthology *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots: Two Plays* (1991) (Mojica, “Birdwoman” 66). Given the play’s brevity and congruence to the lengthy *Princess Pocahontas*, *Birdwoman* might be read as a final Transformation or, at least, a companion piece to its full-length predecessor and in the following analysis I thus treat the text as such. Using the same “transformational dramaturgy” employed for the creation of *Princess Pocahontas*, the play reconfigures the legendary tale of another great Indigenous grandmother (Mojica, *Staging Vol I* 135). In an attempt to reclaim for Indigenous women the story of Sacajawea (1788-1812), the Lemhi Shoshone guide and translator to the American Lewis and Clarke expedition (1804-06),⁶³ *Birdwoman* – like *Princess Pocahontas* – invokes surreal, historical memories and modes of representation in order to reimagine discursive colonial constructions of Indigenous womanhood.

⁶² Linguists and Hidatsa traditionalists write her name Tsakakaweish, but Sakakawea, deriving from the Hidatsa original, is also formally accepted. Newer spellings, including “Sacagawea” and “Sacajawea,” are common in fiction and academic essays. Contemporary Shoshone activists and advocates regularly refer to her as Sacajawea (sak’-aja- we-a). While the traditional Hidatsa spelling means “bird woman” and Sacajawea means “boat launcher,” I nonetheless opt to use Mojica’s spelling – Sacajawea. For further discussion of the etymology of Sacajawea’s name, see Irving Anderson’s “Sacajawea? – Sakakawea? – Sacagawea?: Spelling– Pronunciation– Meaning” (1975).

⁶³ Departing in May 1804 from St. Louis on the Mississippi River and travelling westward through the continental divide to the Pacific coast, the Lewis and Clark Expedition – also known as the Corps of Discovery Expedition (the Corps were a special unit of the U.S. military) – was the first American expedition to cross the western portion of the United States. Commissioned by Thomas Jefferson following the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and led by Captain Meriwether Lewis and his friend, Second Lieutenant William Clark, the purpose of the expedition was to study the geography, flora and fauna of the west. For further reading, see Kris Fresonke and Mark Spence’s collection, *Legacies, Memories and New Perspectives* (2004), Ella Clark and Margot Edmonds’ *Sacagawea of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (1983), and James D. Fenelon and Mary Louise Defender Wilson’s article, “Voyage of Domination: ‘Purchase’ for Conquest, Sakakawea for Savagery” (2004) .

A century after her death in 1812, the National American Suffrage Association “adopted” Sacajawea as a symbol of female strength and chose to erect various statues and plaques in her memory (Knowles, “Drama” 132), which, however well-intended, further propagated the colonial image of Sacajawea as an idealized Indian Princess, subservient to heroic explorers Lewis and Clark. Notwithstanding ostensibly womanist aims, the suffrage movement relied upon racist, nationalist ideals and images to bolster the position of White women. In *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*, Mojica explores such appropriative (mis)representation, focusing on the role of these portrayals in maintaining patriarchal historical narratives. Disregarding chronology, the playwright draws fragments from historical records to interrogate the employment of historical documentation and memorialization, demonstrating the manner in which androcentric Western historical records stable the polarized inscription of the Indigenous woman as either “Indian Princess” or “easy squaw” (Acoose, *Iskwewak* 65) – amenable ally to masculinist nationalism or violable object of disdain. Striving to supersede false records by reimagining Sacajawea as a resilient political leader, able to overcome the racialized, gendered violence to which she is subject, Mojica provides Sacajawea a subversive voice with which to contest the colonialist/nationalist adoption of her transmuted image, overriding colonial and postcolonial depictions, most particularly those created by the Suffragettes. Equally surreal to *Princess Pocahontas*, the play moves between 1905 Portland, Oregon, a 1926 reservation, and the 1804-1806 Corps Expedition, as Sacajawea addresses, often in tandem, three disparate audiences: the first, the overzealous group of twentieth-century Suffragettes from Oregon, who are in the process of erecting their ridiculous statue in her “honour” (68); the second, a group of Grannies and Grandpas on the “Wind River Indian Reservation” (80); and, finally, Lewis and Clark themselves. In reconstructing Sacajawea, the playwright, once again, boldly refutes stereotypes

of Indigenous women, resisting discursive violence and thereby working against real, enacted violence.

Although the figure of Sacajawea, like Matoaka/Pocahontas, has been used to forge America's national mythology through the "narrat[ion] of U.S. history and identity" and has more monuments "honouring her" than any other woman from American history (Pillow 1), there exists little reliable historical information concerning the real-life woman. The only texts to document her life in any meaningful way are the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Nearly omitting her presence, rarely referring to her by name, and labeling her a "savage" or "that Indian woman" (Thwaites, *Original 5*: 250; 2: 162-63), the Corps logs clearly undermine the significance of Sacajawea's role in the expedition, with Lewis going so far as to refer her as a "poor object," dismissing her humanity completely (Thwaites, *Original 2*: 162-63). While Clark, who condescendingly renamed her "Janey" (Clark and Edmonds 51), exceptionally, writes of the "great service" undertaken by "the Indian woman" who worked as a "pilot through this country," the tone taken by the European explorers is, on the whole, both patronizing and demeaning (Thwaites, *Original 5*: 250-60). The lack of viable information concerning her life, in combination with such trivial accolades as offered by the journals of Lewis and Clark, made it especially easy for later texts to shape a myth around Sacajawea's existence.

Just as John Smith's Pocahontas story was disregarded until it was required to build America's national mythology, Sacajawea's role in the Lewis and Clark expedition was basically overlooked for a century. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that proponents of the Indian Princess stereotype quickly turned her into the "idealized woman" (Barbie 60), a "Romantic Mythical Indian" (Dion 56) and, importantly, an aid to territorial "expansion" (Pillow 6). Although less than a dozen nineteenth-century texts mention Sacajawea's involvement in the

Corps Expedition, approximately two hundred works published between 1905 and 1976 tell the – largely fabricated – tale of Lewis, Clark, and their Indian Princess guide (Pillow 4). At the turn of the century, the violence of conquest came to the forefront of the American consciousness, necessitating further rationalization of genocidal expansionism and, following the brutal 1890 massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee,⁶⁴ American society desperately needed to relieve the guilt associated with the destruction and violence inherent in the theory of manifest destiny.⁶⁵ Literary works of this period thus “justified western quests and upheld the bifurcation of savagery and civilization” (Barbie 71). Along with a proliferation of texts, the twentieth century saw an eruption of images featuring Sacajawea, poised and pointing, as though leading Lewis and Clark through the western territories.

It is true, as Wanda Pillow argues, that the twentieth-century version of Sacajawea’s tale provided a “romanticized image of a colonizing expedition that ultimately led to the near decimation of [Indigenous] peoples,” thereby “alleviat[ing] guilt from the white imagination” (5). Regardless of the facts surrounding the expedition and Sacajawea’s role in it, she quickly became an American cultural icon: “an emblem of manifest destiny,” writes Donna Kessler, “her

⁶⁴ Wounded Knee, South Dakota, was the site of the last battle of the Indian Wars. The “battle,” which took place on December 29th, 1890, was a preconceived massacre, with an estimated Sioux death toll between 150 and 300. Characterized by unchecked military brutality on the part of the U.S. 7th Cavalry, Wounded Knee set the stage for future hostilities between Indigenous peoples of America and the U.S. government. The second incident at Wounded Knee began in the third week of February 1973. The conflict consisted of a seventy-one-day stand-off between Indigenous activists, on one side, and Bureau of Indian Affairs agents, F.B.I. and Police on the other. The firepower of the Federal agents eventually overpowered the activists who had occupied a church. The occupation resulted from a longstanding dispute between the government and the Independent Oglala Nation over treaty rights. No substantial gains were made. Each Wounded Knee conflict – or a conflation of the two – functions, for some contemporary Indigenous writers, as a metonym for the clash between White and Indigenous cultures. For further reading, see Francis Paul Prucha’s *The Great Father, the United States Government and the American Indians* (1984).

⁶⁵ In America, Manifest Destiny was the disturbing, yet widely held, belief that expansion across the continent was the divine destiny of European settlers. Manifest Destiny derived from wrongheaded notions of the exceptional virtue of America and its institutions, in combination with ideas of divine mission. For an in-depth examination of the colonial/imperial origins of Manifest Destiny, see Reginald Horsman’s *Race and Manifest Destiny* (1981), and, for a study of the impact of Manifest Destiny on Indigenous peoples of America, see Robert Miller’s *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark and Manifest Destiny* (2006).

life and actions signifying the progress of civilization” (6; 17). One of the texts that serviced Sacajawea’s “transfiguration” was Oregonian Suffragette Eva Emery Dye’s historical novel, *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark* (1902) (Beck 179), in which Dye, describing Sacajawea as the “Madonna of her race,” fosters the notion that Sacajawea was indeed a “heroine of Western expansion” (Pillow 6). Romanticizing Sacajawea’s role in expansion and nation building, Dye writes, “she had led the way to a new time. To the hands of this girl not yet eighteen, had been intrusted the key that unlocked the road to Asia” (290). Paula Gunn Allen, in *The Sacred Hoop*, concisely summarizes Dye’s inappropriate and discursively dangerous employment of Sacajawea’s image:

Dye... went looking for a heroine to embody her vision of feminism. She wanted a historical figure whose life would symbolize the strengthened power of women. She found Sacagawea (or Sacajawea) buried in the journals of Lewis and Clark ... and through Dye’s work Sacagawea became enshrined in American memory as a moving force and friend of the whites, leading them in the settlement of western North America. (215)

In Dye’s novel (and others),⁶⁶ Sacajawea is glorified, elevated above the average Indigenous woman, and made palatable for patriarchal, nationalistic early-twentieth-century America. Dye figures centrally in Mojica’s *Birdwoman*, as leader of the cabal of Oregonian Suffragettes attempting to encapsulate their twisted, romantic vision of Sacajawea in a bronze statue. Incorporating Dye into the play, Mojica is able to address most directly the appropriation and misrepresentation of Sacajawea on the part of early feminists.

⁶⁶ Suffragist Grace Raymond Hebard’s *Sacagawea* (1932) is very much in keeping with Dye’s hyper-romantic elaboration of Sacajawea’s role in the Corps Expedition.

In the play's opening scene, Dye ("Suffragette #1... chairman of the Oregon Equal Suffrage Association"), Anna Shaw ("Suffragette #2"), and Susan B. Anthony ("Suffragette #3") address the audience while preparing to raise their statue (67-68).⁶⁷ The real-life speeches by Dye and Shaw, recounted in Mojica's play, make obvious that Sacajawea was, perhaps unwittingly, constructed by the Suffragettes as less an emblem of the "power of women" (Allen, *Sacred* 215) than an icon of "attractive femininity," overarchingly subservient and maternal (Beck 185). Dye describes Sacajawea as the "trusty little Indian guide who led the first white men over the Rocky Mountains and to the Pacific shore" (Mojica, "Birdwoman" 67), while Shaw depicts her as an "enduring little Shoshone Squaw," the "eternal womanly[sic]... a patient, motherly woman" (Mojica, "Birdwoman" 83). In reality, the Suffragettes, relying heavily upon Dye's fictional, romantic prose, used the Sacajawea story to market their cause, with little regard for the impact of their expropriation and pandering upon the lives of Indigenous women. As Gunter Beck argues, novels like Dye's allowed an inauthentic Sacajawea saga to be "musealized and safely stored" (185), upholding the Princess/squaw dichotomy.⁶⁸ In Mojica's play, Dye, anachronistically, reads from her fictional book so as to ensure the accuracy of her representation of Sacajawea:

⁶⁷ Shaw and Anthony were eminent figures in the Suffragette movement, both of whom spoke, along with Dye, at the raising of Sacajawea's statue in Oregon, in 1905. See Kathryn Cullen-Du Pont's *Encyclopedia of Women's History in America* (2000), page 224. See also, William R. Swagarty's *The Indianization of Lewis and Clark* (2012).

⁶⁸ Beck argues that the Suffragettes' romanticization and misappropriation of Sacajawea's image – the "substitution" of "wishful thinking" for "facts" – resulted from an "inappropriate longing for male dominance" (185). However, this is a clear oversimplification of the Suffragettes' motivations. Women like Dye, Shaw and Anthony worked against what they perceived to be sex-based inequality, in a period when patriarchy was openly institutionalized. What might today be interpreted as a desire for "male dominance" was more likely a mere recognition, on the part of the Suffragettes, of the parameters of early-twentieth-century society. Without the acceptance and assistance of men, the movement was unlikely to succeed. For further reading, see Lucinda Hawksley's *March Women March: Voices of the Women's Movement from the First Feminists to Votes for Women* (2013) and Doris Weatherford's *History of the American Suffragist Movement* (1998).

In order to ensure that the identity of Sacajawea is known to you and above all, that veracity itself is upheld, I will now read from my historical novel, “The Conquest: The True Story Of Lewis and Clark.” “Sacajawea, modest princess of the Shoshones, heroine of the great expedition, stood with her babe in arms and smiled upon [Lewis and Clark] from the shore”.... (68)

Mojica aptly demonstrates that Sacajawea was posthumously “[c]aptured ” not only by the rigid confines of the bronze statue erected by the Suffragettes, but by historical narratives that frame her life in a manner continuous with essentialist, depreciative, colonial depictions of Indigenous womanhood. Implicating the Suffragettes and their contemporaries in the perpetuation of discursive violence against Indigenous women, the playwright, most crucially, works against false narratives and the manifest violence for which such misrepresentation is, in part, to blame (83).

Reviving Sacajawea: Transforming History

The sparse details provided by the journals of Lewis and Clark tell us that, in 1800, as a child of twelve, the real Sacajawea was kidnapped by the Hidatsa – also known as Minnetarees – in a raid and taken from the home of her Lemhi Shoshone band, near present-day Lemhi County, Idaho, to a Hidatsa village near Washburn, North Dakota (Clark and Edmonds 147-148). Clark, in his journal, denies that Sacajawea felt any “sorrow in recollecting the event” of her capture, nor any pleasure in being “restored to her native country,” suggesting that she would be “perfectly content anywhere” (Thwaites, *Original 2*: 283). Mojica’s interpretation of Sacajawea’s sentiments concerning her abduction and enslavement is quite the opposite. Like the playwright’s other historical characters, Sacajawea is evidently unnerved and angered by the

thought of her kidnapping. In *Birdwoman*, the heroine tells Lewis and Clark, along with the seemingly ever-present audiences of Elders and Suffragettes, of living as a “[c]aptured. . . slave girl”(60). Her recollections reflect the fact that she was not – as Clark suggests – “content” in any respect (Thwaites, *Original 2*: 283). Visibly distraught, the heroine cries out:

no tears for the slave girl
earth houses, skin boats
slave girl of the Mandan. (69)

About a year after being kidnapped, the real Sacajawea was sold into marriage – or, as Mojica’s Sacajawea angrily tells her three antithetical audiences, “won gambling” (73) – to a French trapper, Toussaint Charbonneau, who also purchased another young Shoshone girl (Pillow 3). “A well known trapper,” spits an enraged Sacajawea, “[w]ell known for raping Indian girls,” her words implying the sexually exploitative relationship between Charbonneau and his Indigenous child-brides (72), yet Sacajawea, in spite of her victimization, remains steadfast. She states frankly: Charbonneau “likes his Indian wives very young. His beard stings like nettles on my skin” (73). Instead of a passive, pitiable victim, the playwright envisions the young Sacajawea, in keeping with her portrayal of the Indigenous wives of the fur traders – Marie/Madeline/Margaret – looking upon her husband with scrutiny, even disdain, aware of her moral and intellectual superiority: “my husband... Charbonneau,” she “*shouts*” resentfully from her canoe, “I am his woman” (73).

Sacajawea, like the Indigenous grandmothers in *Princess Pocahontas*, did, in reality, give birth to a child of mixed-blood, and in *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* her story is fundamentally linked with those of the other great Indigenous grandmothers reclaimed by Mojica. Sacajawea, like Pocahontas, is one of the famous foremothers to America’s mixed-blood

populations. On the 11 February 1805, several weeks after her first encounter with the White men of the Corps of Discovery, Sacajawea went into labour and gave birth to a son, Jean Baptiste, whom she later nicknamed Pomp. Two months after the birth of her son, she and Charbonneau, along with a string of other Indigenous translators, embarked on the westward journey with Louis, Clark, and their compatriots (Clark and Edmonds 14-15; Pillow 4). Although historical fiction has portrayed relations between Sacajawea and the men of the Corps as friendly – even “roman[itic],” in the case of Clark (Pillow 5) – as patriarchal European traditions demanded, the White explorers dealt primarily with her husband, Charbonneau. Historians Ella Clark and Margot Edmonds⁶⁹ note that Clark, then an Indian agent, designed to take charge of Baptiste and raise the child; although Sacajawea would have “kept” Baptiste (130), he was eventually left to live in St. Louis, where he was educated “in whatever way Clark thought proper” (82). True to life, *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* sees Sacajawea’s child taken by Clark, in an agreement with Charbonneau, to be “educate[d]” (Mojica, “Birdwoman” 79) in the “ways of the colonizer” (Knowles, “Rape” 252). The removal of Pomp is the result of yet another unjust deal between men. Mojica, in Sacajawea’s response to her loss, draws attention to the intolerable suffering that such forced separation might inspire, compelling audiences to consider that coercive separation of Indigenous families, in the name of education, has been an institutionalized, systemic component of colonialism in North America for hundreds of years. Sacajawea pines for her son and, fighting through hysteria, she articulates her sadness and rage:

[b]etween my ribs a knife
stabs - and I cannot speak!

⁶⁹ Clark and Edmonds’ *Sacajawea of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (1983) is, to date, the most comprehensive, feminist historical study of Sacajawea’s life. In her play, Mojica draws upon Clark and Edmonds’ substantial research.

my heart drums:
MY child, MY child
I hold him against my chest
MY child, MY child
I brush my lips against
his hair, the smallness of his head.
To hold him always so,
that he never can be taken away! (79)⁷⁰

Lividly shouting the word “MY” over and over again, Sacajawea, though the restraints of her predicament render her unable to “speak,” internally contests the removal of her child (79). Her monologue is marked by desperate longing for her baby boy, yet Sacajawea’s unquenchable desire to escape the control of men and fashion her own destiny shines through. Here, in Mojica’s play, Sacajawea is given a posthumous voice with which to cry out against masculinist violence and oppression, including the theft of her child.

From open to close, *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* draws parallels between Sacajawea’s captivity as a “slave girl of the Mandan” (69), her subjection to the will of her husband and the men of the Corps, and her final “[c]apture” in misrepresentative cultural production (83). Mojica’s reimagined Sacajawea nevertheless manages unwaveringly to overcome the violence of her childhood, the oppression and abuse of her adult life, and – in death – the discursive commandeering of her image by twentieth-century historians, writers, and artists with their “statues, paintings... [and] poems made of fog and lies” (84). In each instance,

⁷⁰ Another Indigenous translator travelling with the Corps expedition later related the exchange between Charbonneau and Clark in a conversation with physician and writer Dr. Charles Eastman. When threatened with the loss of her child, Sacajawea would “throw out her arms, then clasp them to her breast, saying ‘I want to hold my baby right here’” (Eastman, qtd. in Clark and Edmonds 130).

she exhibits anger against those who would abuse her, or misuse her image. Rather than a willing traveler, diligently guiding Lewis and Clark into the west, or a figurehead for the racializing, nationalistic feminism of the early twentieth century, Mojica's Sacajawea is presented as a resistant and, ultimately, powerful figure. Like the Indigenous foremothers liberated in *Princess Pocahontas* – “Malinali” (22) and “Matoaka” (34) – Sacajawea reclaims her proper name, demanding that she be referred to by her birth title. Refusing not only the nickname of Janey, forced upon her by Clark, but also the names attached to her by the Mandan and, later, the Suffragettes, Sacajawea insists that she is “Pohenaif, from where the tall grass dances” (69). Unflinching in the face of violence and domination, the heroine commands that she not be remembered differently from how mainstream history would have it:

remember a child fighting to stay alive
remember a slave girl gambled away
remember a mother protecting her child
remember a wife defying the whip
remember an old one who loved her people
remember I died at home on my land. (84)

Sacajawea is offered considerable assistance in the telling of her true life story by the Grannies and the Grandpas who use their memories to revitalize her personhood. In Mojica's play, the recollections of the Elders work to oppose the false icons and narratives created by the Suffragettes. While Dye, Shaw and the rest may have “hunted down every fact... they could find about Sacajawea” (76), such records do not compare to the Elders' living memories. The Suffragettes make the mistake of assuming the two-year Lewis and Clark expedition to be the most important and formative event in Sacajawea's life. Mojica's Elders, on the other hand,

“never thought too much of [Sacajawea] taking the white men over the mountains to the big water. It was not important to [them]” (77). Drawing attention to Sacajawea’s political savvy, Granny #3 exclaims, “[y]ou know, she was always looked upon by the women as the band leader” (70); “[s]he knew the ways of the whites,” Granny #3 continues, “so when it came time to make the treaty that made this reservation, Sacajawea stood and she spoke up for us here, to make sure things went right for us” (83). “She spoke French as well,” adds Granny #2, emphatic of Sacajawea’s multifaceted talent for communication (70). As opposed to the “enduring little Shoshone Squaw” (81) claimed by the Suffragettes, the Elders recall Sacajawea’s political intellect and assertiveness. Towards the play’s close, Grandpa #1 puts her to rest, informing audiences that the real Sacajawea does not dwell with the “medals” and monuments attributed to her by the Suffragettes – “strange sisters” (83) – or Lewis and Clark. Instead, “[s]he is here on the hill in the cemetery’,” he says, “[s]he can only be buried in one place.” (81).⁷¹

Sacajawea, empowered by the support of the Elders, struggles relentlessly to break from the bronze confines of the statue raised to commemorate her. All the while, the Suffragettes recite the name of each park, museum, and monument bearing her name:

Sacajawea mural in Montana
Sacajawea Park in Washington
Sacajawea Camp in Wyoming
and Sacajawea Museum in Idaho.
and that’s not all... (84)

Contesting disingenuous commemoratives, Sacajawea insists that statues “cannot contain the spirit”; she will escape the “cag[e]” and fly, “so, high above the clouds,” (84). The play ends

⁷¹ Interestingly, Grace Hebard’s *Sacagawea* (1932) suggests that Sacajawea was buried on the Wyoming Reserve. However, Hebard’s narrative has since been discredited.

with the Suffragettes trying to drown Sacajawea's cries of victory with their chant, as Mojica leaves the audience with an uplifting image of female power and endurance. Sacajawea has fought her way to freedom:

the Birdwoman beats her wings,
sounds her voice,
soars,
and is free. (84)

While inscriptive historical documentation has preserved false depictions of Sacajawea and other legendary Indigenous grandmothers, Mojica's approach to historical memorialization rempowers contemporary Indigenous and mixed-blood women, keeping the memory of strong Indigenous women, grandmothers to modern nations, vivid and vital.

Recuperating Our Grandmothers and Reconfiguring Sexual Violence: "Una Nación"

In one troubling scene, towards the end of *Princess Pocahontas*, the connection between historic derogation of Indigenous women and contemporary violence is made most explicit as, in the words of Contemporary Woman I, we cannot escape "the weight of our history on our backs" (Mojica, "Princess" 53). In Transformation 11, "Las Ratas," the Contemporary Women discuss brutal acts of violence inflicted upon Indigenous women. The narratives combine in a fast-paced, frenetic dialogue, in which the Contemporary Women describe the horrific death of Anna Mae Aquash, the famous Mi'kmaq activist from Nova Scotia; one of only a handful of female leaders in the American Indian Movement, Aquash was, as Mojica writes, "murdered at the bottom of a cliff...beaten, raped, shot in the back of the head" (53). "[H]er hands," cries Contemporary

Woman, “The FBI lost her hands” underscoring the savagery of Aquash’s murder (54).⁷²

Immediately following this unnerving divulgence, the Women relate the tale of a thirteen-year-old Chilean girl who was interrogated and tortured “by inserting a live rat into her vagina” with the tail of the rat “connected to. . . [an] electrical system. . . . With every question there would be an electric shock” (53). “And the rats,” says Contemporary Woman II, “are really big in Chile” (53).

While such depictions are disconcerting, the scene, driven by dialogue as opposed to enacted violence, is not gratuitous and the placement of this dialogue – a brief, intense and critical “rupture” (Knowles, “Rape” 251) – preceding the play’s conclusion makes certain that the coercive sexual violence involved in colonial takeover, and inextricable from the tales of all the women in *Princess Pocahontas* – as well as of Sacajawea’s story – is brought to the forefront. Otherwise, the playwright’s activist conclusions – the marshalling to arms of Indigenous woman “Word Warriors” in *Princess Pocahontas* (59) and Sacajawea’s final escape to freedom (83-84) might supersede the works’ message of anti-colonialism. While Mojica clearly intends that audiences respect the indomitability of her female characters, bent on reclamation, throwing their “words” in the “faces” of their enemies, it is also pertinent that audiences understand that there exists a continued need for action (“Princess” 59). It is thus essential that the pervasiveness of sexual violence in the lives of Indigenous/mixed-blood women be openly confronted. With Contemporary Woman II repeatedly voicing her fear of “public washrooms,” the “hand” that might reach out and “grab” her (53), Mojica urges her audience to consider the gendered violence faced disproportionately by minoritized women.

⁷² Both Aquash’s role in AIM and the circumstances surrounding her murder are discussed at length in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

By alluding to sexual violence at numerous points throughout her plays, Mojica ensures that its use as a technology of colonization is made apparent, yet it remains necessary that the continued reality of the gendered violence to which Indigenous women are subject is visible so as to inspire ongoing action against such violence. It is no accident that Mojica leaves these blatant accounts of gendered violence until the end of the play. Upon making known their ongoing subjection to sexual violence – “the tiredness of the struggle” (53) – the Contemporary Women, having experienced the catharsis of testimony, are able to enter Transformation 12, “Una Nación,” and connect with their fellow “Word Warriors,” from “Gloria Anzaldúa” and “Diane Burns,” to the “The Kayapo Woman of the Rainforest” (59). Together, the women “embrace and rub the wounds” (59), uniting as a nation – “una nación” – of women united against violence (60). In *Princess Pocahontas* and *Birdwoman*, rather than connoting pure victimization, sexual violence – represented as an atrocious, but surmountable ramification of colonialism – is employed productively as an agent of collective recollection and cultural renewal, reminding readers/spectators of the strength of Indigenous/mixed-blood women, living and dead.

Jill Carter astutely contends that “the displacement of the contemporary [Indigenous] woman is a direct result of the displacement of her grandmothers” (“Blind” 11). Mojica’s recuperation of the famous Indigenous grandmothers in *Princess Pocahontas* and *Birdwoman* – Malinal, the Women of the Puna, the Indigenous wives of the fur traders, Matoaka, and Sacajawea – thus has the potential to contribute to the empowerment of Indigenous/mixed-blood women. Both works set out to recover Indigenous foremothers from across the Americas as leaders and icons, liberating blue-spotted descendants to reclaim the legacy of their ancestors and in reappropriating the stories of these legendary figures, the playwright duly attempts to use

“theatre [as] a tool of transformation” (Mojica, “Creation” 6), in order to subvert misrepresentation and violence and assist the Indigenous/mixed-blood woman to move from “victim to victory” (Mojica, “Chocolate” 6).

Princess Pocahontas’ final “call to arms,” initiated with the loud beating of a drum, “begins in Spanish to an Andean rhythm and evolves into a round dance... [a] contemporary Native song with English words” (60). Invoking Indigenous/Mestiza women from North and South America, and communicating across language groups, Mojica incites a transnational resistance to discursive and enacted violence. While both *Birdwoman* and *Princess Pocahontas* begin from places of “dislocation” (Mojica, *Staging* 136), with Contemporary Woman I lost, having no “map” or “way home” (19), and Sacajawea “[c]aptured” (69), Mojica ends each work with a sense of reinstatement. Just as *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* closes with Sacajawea “soar[ing]...free” (84), *Princess Pocahontas* ends with the image of a strong, reempowered Contemporary Woman demanding the “freedom to carve and chisel [her] own face.... To fashion [her] own gods out of [her] entrails” (59). No longer lost, Contemporary Woman now “deliberately mak[es] footprints” for women of the future to follow (59). Finally, with the curtains closing on Contemporary Woman, “whole and intact,” no longer “broken” (Mojica, “Creation” 2), “[b]lind faith leaps in the dark” and the playwright issues a final reminder: citing the traditional Cheyenne saying, she writes, “a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground” (“Princess” 60).

Chapter 3

Community and Resistance in Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and *Now Look What You Made Me Do*

We must believe in a sense of life renewed by the theatre, a sense of life in which [wo]man fearlessly makes [her]self master of what does not yet exist, and brings it into being. And everything that has not been born can still be brought to life....when we speak of the word "life," it must be understood that we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach.

-Antonin Artaud (12)

Marie Clements: Performing "Interconnected Subjectivities"

Prolific playwright, actor, and director Marie Clements eloquently and aptly describes her work (and herself) as "reflective of the interconnected subjectivities so obvious in Canada: amalgams of influences, histories, educational backgrounds, performance styles, races, and genders" (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Introduction" vi). This description is particularly fitting, given that her works engage, to varying degrees, with Canada's fraught "multicultural" social landscape. As an artist, Clements has been influenced by her own diverse "Métis, Dene, Swiss, Irish, and French heritage," along with her eclectic educational background (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Profile" 147).⁷³ Born 10 January 1962, in Vancouver, the playwright began her formal education by attending a school for the arts where she studied singing, piano, dance, music, and speech with a variety of teachers but, as she shrewdly suggests, "none of these skills were necessary to [her] career fantasy as a foreign correspondent" (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Profile" 147). Clements thus departed Vancouver in the 1970s in order to study broadcast journalism at Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta. After successfully completing a second degree in Arts Management at

⁷³ Clements has noted that "[m]ost of [her] Native family are Métis from the north" (qtd. in Ratsoy and Hoffman 475).

Simon Fraser University, she spent a number of years working as a television assistant and radio beat reporter for CBC (Ratsoy and Hoffman 474).⁷⁴ However, her desire to address North America's "reality of [colonial] historical dislocation" compelled her to return to the arts so as to dramatically represent the experiences of Indigenous/Métis peoples (R. Gilbert, "Introduction" vi). "Ultimately, I never left the country as a foreign correspondent," says Clements, "but did return to my roots by attending Vancouver's Spirit Song Native Theatre School" (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Profile" 147). Working closely with actor/director, then Artistic Director of Spirit Song, Margot Kane, Clements evidently developed a deep fascination with the capacity of Indigenous theatre to problematize and subvert the cultural "residue of colonial trauma" (R. Gilbert, "Introduction" v) – what Ric Knowles succinctly describes as the "ultimately genocidal versions of one-sided, appropriative interculturalism" constructed by colonialist representations of Indigenous inferiority ("Introduction" v).

While touring northern Ontario in 1993, motivated by what she wittily refers to as "sheer cold boredom" in combination with a pre-existing "desire to understand and integrate the elemental connections between Greek mythology and Native thought," Clements began to write her first play (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Profile" 147). The product, *Age of Iron* (1993), is a fantastical revisionist account of the Trojan War, represented originally by the ancient Greek poet Homer in

⁷⁴ Clements has worked extensively in radio, film, and television. Her radio play, *Women in Fish and Hours of Water*, winner of the Jack Webster Journalism Award, premiered nationally on CBC Radio and her work on *Copper Thunderbird* and *Women in Fish* have been broadcast on CBC and APTN. She has worked as a writer on the popular television series, *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Notably, Clements wrote the script for the film adaptation of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. Titled *Unnatural and Accidental* (2006), the production was directed by Carl Bassai and premiered in New York at The Modern Museum of Art. The award-winning film, to which I shall return, went on to screen at 16 film festivals, including the Toronto Film Festival and Vancouver Film Festival. Founder of her own production company, Working Pajama Lab, Clements has also written a number of shorter documentaries and dramas, including the docu-drama *Pilgrims for Bravofact*, the documentary *The Language of Love*, and the eight-part mini-series *1491*. For further information concerning her current multi-media projects, visit her web-page: <http://www.mariecléments.ca/>.

The Iliad.⁷⁵ Prominently featuring Indigenous characters in place of Homer's Trojan warriors, the play is a clever blend of Greek and Indigenous mythologies, as well as the merging of Homer's original tale of war with the trials experienced by Indigenous peoples in settler/invasor nations. To date, Clements has written twelve original plays, including *Now Look What You Made Me Do* (1998), *The Girl Who Swam Forever* (2000), *Age of Iron* (2001), *Urban Tattoo* (2001), *Burning Vision* (2003), *Hours of Water* (2004), *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (2005), *Copper Thunderbird* (2007), *The Road Forward* (2010), *The Edward Curtis Project* (2010), and, most recently, *Tombs of the Vanishing Indian* (2012).⁷⁶ She has worked as a playwright, director, and artistic director in theatres and universities across British Columbia and parts of the United States and her plays have been staged at prominent national and international venues.⁷⁷ Significantly, Clements' *Copper Thunderbird*, the biographical tale of famous Ojibwa

⁷⁵ Traditionally attributed to Homer, *The Iliad*, alternatively referred to as *The Song of Ilium*, is an ancient Greek epic in dactylic hexameter. The poem is set during the final week of the Trojan War, the end of a ten-year siege of Troy (Ilium) by a plethora of Greek states. The narrative focuses on a dispute between the Greek king Agamemnon and the warrior Achilles. See Robert Fagles' translation, *The Iliad*.

⁷⁶ Clements' music video adaptation of *The Road Forward* premiered at a number of film festivals and won two Best Music Video awards: one at The American Indian Film Festival and the second at The Southeastern Indian Film Festival 2010. See her web-page: <http://www.mariecléments.ca/>.

I date Clements' plays in accordance with publication dates, rather than premier dates. In cases of multiple publications, I use the most recent text. Only if the work mentioned is unpublished, do I indicate the year of premier.

⁷⁷ In North America, Clements' plays have been staged at number of prestigious venues, including the Festival de Theatre des Ameriques in Montreal (*Urban Tattoo*, 2001 and *Burning Vision*, 2003), the National Arts Centre and The Magnetic North Festival in Ottawa (*Burning Vision*, 2003, *Copper Thunderbird*, 2007), Minneapolis's Playwright's Center (*Now Look What You Made Me Do*, 1996), the Native Voices Retreat (*Tombs of the Vanishing Indian*, 2010) and the Push Festival in Vancouver (*The Road Forward*, 2013) ("Theatre Bio" n. pag.). In 1998, *Urban Tattoo* premiered at The Women in View Festival in Leeds, England (Ratsoy and Hoffman 475). Clements' plays have also been featured at the Women, Text and Technologies Festival in Leeds and The Literature Festival in Germany (Sullivan 65). Between 1994 and 1996, her one-act puppet show *Dirty Dog River* – designed to educate children about HIV – toured more than fifty communities across Canada (Ratsoy and Hoffman 475).

Clements' work has received numerous awards, including the Canada-Japan Literary Award for *Burning Vision* in 2004, and the Jessie Richardson Award for *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* in 1998. She has been nominated for two Governor General's Literary Awards, once for *Burning Vision* in 2003 and once for *Copper Thunderbird* in 2007. Clements has worked as a playwright-in-residence at theatres and universities

artist Norval Morrisseau, was the first Aboriginal-authored work to be staged at the National Arts Centre's "mainstage" (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Introduction" vi). Stylistically, Clements' work is complex, poetic, and scenically rich or "painterly," transitioning quickly through "time and space" (R. Gilbert, "Introduction" v). The playwright uses altering visual patterns and sound effects to create surreal aesthetics that render her works both visually striking and extremely difficult to interpret.

Clements' work indicates the playwright's commitment to not only human and animal rights, but also environmental stability: "I do feel it's part of what living here means," she states, "some site-specific work, for instance... really puts us 'inside' these [human/environmental] issues, and brings us face-to-face with what it means to have a theatre practice in an environment" ("Yes" 22). Clements' plays tend to aesthetically conflate violence enacted against humankind with violence enacted against non-human animals and the natural world. So, too, does the playwright regularly feature multiple female protagonists, at odds with various dangerous environments. As she notes, "we live in a time of a political movement, and not only a political movement – you can look at rights, human rights, land rights, and things are, I think, all connected in a struggle forward" ("Yes" 27). Tethered by an overarching commitment to combatting the pervasive colonialist violence (both manifest and discursive) to which Indigenous peoples are subject – to end the "silencing of [Indigenous] voices," as she says (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Introduction" vi) – and reflective of the playwright's devotion to environmental stewardship, Clements' works address a vast range of topics and issues. Whether particularized

across Canada, including the National Theatre School in British Columbia, the Banff Centre for the Arts, the Firehall Arts Centre (Vancouver), Ottawa's National Arts Centre, Rumble Theatre (Vancouver), Playwrights Workshop Montreal, and, most recently, at Simon Fraser University as The Ellen and Warren Tallman Writer in Residence (2012-2013). Despite her own success, the playwright "remains concerned by the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal writers," particularly in light of what she believes to be "general 'leveling off' of interest in theatre" (qtd. in R. Gilbert, "Introduction" xii)

(however surreal) character studies, or far-reaching depictions of diverse societies and cultures, her plays seek to reinvent colonial legacies of deprecation and disregard.⁷⁸

Ideologically driven and often disturbingly elucidating, her plays, when taken together, (re)present destruction – historical and contemporary – of bodies and land, implying that this destruction has diminished the potential for harmonious intercultural syncretism. Of great relevance is the manner in which Clements’ plays reimagine colonialist legacies in ways that are informative for contemporary readers/viewers, generally, and empowering for Indigenous/Métis women, particularly. Considering several interrelated themes simultaneously, her works often represent similarities and differences between genders, races, and political groups and environmental issues in a layered “semiosis” (R. Gilbert, “Shine” 29). Such work, I suggest, is of particular significance to intercultural solidarity, facilitating dialogue across and between cultures and communities, and is thus integral to Indigenous/Mestiza/Métis women’s artistic and activist work – the envisioning and creation of a culture free of gendered violence. In this chapter, I explore depictions of racialized, gendered acts of violence against Indigenous and minoritized women in Clements’ work. Focusing particularly on *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and *Now Look What You Made Me Do*, I assess the extent to which Clements employs subversive representations of gendered violence, both broad-based and specific, so as to assist audiences/readers to imagine a reality beyond such violence. Ultimately, I argue that the

⁷⁸ In *Copper Thunderbird*, for example, she traces the “powerlines [among] Objibway cosmology, [a] life on the street, and [the] spiritual and philosophical transformations” that allowed Morrisseau to become not only “The Father of Native Contemporary Art,” but also (for Clements) “a Grand Shaman” (qtd. in R. Gilbert, “Introduction” xii), while *Burning Vision*, inspired by the playwright’s “desire to trace her family’s history in the Northwest Territories” (May 6), creatively depicts the impact of Uranium extraction and nuclear armament on a diversity of landscapes and populations, from Canada, to New Mexico, to Port Radium. *Burning Vision* is considered by a number of critics to be a primarily ecocritical text (May; Annie Smith), while others suggest that the play speaks most strongly to a politics of intercultural connectedness (Knowles, “Introduction”). The piece thus serves to demonstrate the multivalent, educative character of Clements’ poignant dramatic work.

playwright's imaginative, revisionist historical content works together with her portrayals of female solidarity and resistance to assist with reclamation for Indigenous women and to promote coalition building across difference, thereby furthering potential for positive social change.

Revisiting and Revising Violence in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

The Unnatural and Accidental Women – first drafted by Clements in 1997 (La Flamme 112) – derived from a series of earlier readings and was developed into a script at the Playwrights Colony and the Playwrights Theatre Center in Vancouver, to be performed as a staged reading, directed by Kate Weiss, at the Women In View Festival (Vancouver) in 2000 (R. Gilbert, “Profile” 149; Ratsoy and Hoffman 473). The finished work was first staged on 2 November 2000, at the Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver. Opening to positive critical reception (Birnie C7), the original production was directed collaboratively by Donna Spencer, founder and long-time Artistic Director of The Firehall Arts Centre, and Clements herself. The original cast included both Michelle St. John, a former member of The Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, and Muriel Miguel of Spiderwoman Theatre (Clements, *Unnatural* 4). The play was later produced by Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto in 2004 (R. Gilbert, “Profile” 149). *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* has been published five times since its premier at the Firehall Arts Centre. While I refer to the Talonbooks (2005) version, the piece also appears in *Canadian Theatre Review* (2000) (Ratsoy and Hoffman 475), *Playing the Pacific Province: An Anthology of British Columbia Plays, 1967-2000* (2001), and *Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English* (2002). Finally, in 2014, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* was published as an e-book by Alexander Press.

Inspired by Clements' background in journalism, the play is a provocative and, ultimately, empowering two-act revisitation of the real-life murders of at least ten women, committed in Vancouver's East Hastings Street district – the city's "Skid Row" – between 1967 and 1985 (Clements, *Unnatural* 5). All but one of the murder victims, mainly street-based sex-workers (R. Gilbert, "Introduction" ix), were Indigenous women of middle-age (Clements, *Unnatural* 130), rendered vulnerable by social lack of regard. The killings, overlooked by authorities and sensationalized by media, were committed by the same man, using the same *modus operandi*. The women died of alcohol poisoning, after being forced to consume toxic amounts of alcohol. Despite a great deal of evidence against the killer, the women's deaths were dismissed as "*unnatural and accidental*" (Clements, *Unnatural* 8) by coroners Mary Lou Glazier, Larry Campbell, and Glen McDonald (Rose and Sarti A1), each of whom found "*no evidence of violence or suspicion of foul play*" (Clements, *Unnatural* 8). It took more than twenty years for Gilbert Paul Jordan, a local barber, represented in the press as the "Demon Barber," to be arrested in connection with the horrific femicides (Beatty A1). Not until 1988 was Jordan charged with only one count of manslaughter.⁷⁹

Clements began writing the play upon reading an article pertaining to the women's murders, published after the arrest of the killer. Concerning her initial motivation, she states:

It came from the four-page spread I read in *The Vancouver Sun* in 1988. It was quite a detailed story of Gilbert Paul Jordan's career and of these events... I guess what really put me over was that it was a huge spread on him and maybe half a

⁷⁹ The killing of Vanessa Lee Buckner (1960 – 1987), Jordan's final victim, was the only murder with which he was officially charged. See Michelle La Flamme's "Theatrical Medicine: Aboriginal Performance, Ritual, and Commemoration."

page of all of his victims and very little of them as human beings – just basically their last traced days. (qtd. in Ratsoy and Hoffman 475)

Released from prison in 1994, Jordon was again charged in June 2000: this time, the allegations included administering a “noxious” substance (alcohol) and sexual assault (Ratsoy and Hoffman 473). When the judge stayed proceedings in the autumn, the killer gave an “extensive” interview, which appeared on the front page of *The Vancouver Sun* the very evening *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* premiered at the Firehall Arts Center. By the time the play closed, Jordan had once again been arrested, caught in violation of his parole, drinking in a hotel room with a woman who was attempting to escape him (Ratsoy and Hoffman 473).

Although the killer served no further substantial prison time and died a free man on 7 July 2006, at 73 years of age (Rabillard, ““Being”” 198), for inhabitants of the East-Strathcona district, Clements’ play prompted the galvanization of a feminist community, able to speak out against such violence. Neither is the venue of the premier insignificant in this matter, as the Firehall Arts Center is located centrally in the very area where the play’s events occurred and, as Clements notes, the neighbourhood is a character in the play:

It is, in the sense that the land and the evolution of this specific area is the environment of the play – from the trees to the hotels and to the old timers who felled those trees. In that way, it goes to this place and time where these women are now standing where the trees used to stand. (qtd. in Ratsoy and Hoffman 475)

Throughout the play, audiences are familiarized with the Hastings Street neighbourhood geography, as the playwright – with documentary-like accuracy – represents the area’s various establishments, including the Empress and Beacon Hotels and the old Woodward’s Building. In this respect, the play’s first act is a tribute to the women’s ability survive in a harsh and

sometimes brutal urban environment. It is therefore of great relevance that Firehall, an integral structure in East-Strathcona, has always been a venue which sought to prioritize the staging of works reflective of the neighbourhood's demographics – mainly immigrant and minoritized individuals (Ratsoy and Hoffman 474-75).⁸⁰ After the premier of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, audience members phoned, faxed, and e-mailed Clements and Spencer, initiating an expansion of the “community outreach aspect” of Firehall, a response which resulted in the institution of neighbourhood “talk back” sessions (Ratsoy and Hoffman 476). This outcome, a direct effect of the play's staging, serves as a powerful example of Indigenous women's theatre employed adeptly as a tool of social message, promoting the enhancement of community dialogue.

Jarring in its analysis of human cruelty, the play certainly emphasizes the despicable treatment of Jordan's victims – primarily drug-addicts, prostitutes, impoverished women of colour – abandoned by society and forced to live on the streets, yet *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* far exceeds such a myopic message. Rather than a reaffirmation of defeat, Clements' play directly contests both the contemptuous treatment of the women by authorities and media and the social script of victimhood into which Indigenous women are far too often cast. The women are not represented as mere victims, but an empowered community, uniting to resist misogynistic violence and social dismissal. The astounding, change-provoking audience response proves that Clements' proactive gesture was not in vain. After attending the play's premier, reviewer Peter Birnie duly noted “[h]ow strange it was to read Jim Beatty's interview with Gilbert Paul Jordan in last Saturday's *Sun*, then see this play about the ‘demon barber’ and his Downtown Eastside victims,” yet, as Birnie argues, “*The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

⁸⁰ For further information concerning the history and mission of Firehall Arts Center, see the venue's web-page: <http://firehallartscentre.ca/>.

rightly asks us to focus less on Jordan and more on the victims of his vicious ways” (C7). Far more than a saddening, defeatist interrogation of the negligence which characterized the investigation into the women’s deaths, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* is an intricate, emancipating refiguring of the tragic tale in which the “faceless and nameless” women who lost their lives to Jordan are recuperated as women, mothers, lovers, and powerful Indigenous leaders (Stone 230).

Community, Witnessing, and Empowerment

Act 1 is staged as a detective story, as Rebecca, the daughter of one of the murder victims, desperately seeks to discover what happened to her mother. “A writer searching for the end of a story” (Clements, *Unnatural* 5), Rebecca lives and writes in the present. Clements, working to fully humanize the murder victims, represents their stories surreally, interjecting the women’s narratives, set in the past, amidst Rebecca’s dreams and memories, allowing Rebecca to transcribe them for readers/viewers. Early in the play, the spectral women – save Rose, the “English immigrant” switch-board operator who occupies a liminal space, striving to maintain a connection between women and worlds – remain beyond the grave (5). Throughout Act 1, Rebecca is a partial narrator, seeking her mother, Aunt Shadie, while bearing witness to the dead women’s testimonies.

The authorities’ handling of the murders evinces the extent to which Indigenous women dwelling in White settler societies are subject to marginalization and disregard. “White people look up and down without seeing you – like you are not worthy of seeing,” Aunt Shadie tells Rebecca, “[e]xtinct like a ghost ... being invisible can kill you” (82). Anne Cubilié contends that minoritized women, after subjection to sexual violence, become increasingly “voiceless,” even

when given the opportunity to speak out against the crimes enacted against them (13), suggesting that such women are constructed as “ghosts” by the mainstream (xi). However, Cubilié conclusively argues that when the testimony of “ghosts” is unimpeded by social restraint and comes to fruition in fraught contexts (xi), as occurs in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* – between Rebecca and the murdered women, and, later in the play, between and amongst all of the women communally – “difference” can be mobilized as a “site of resistance” (Cubilié 12). Italian philosopher, Adriana Cavarero has argued similarly that “narration” of one’s “story,” functioning most usefully as a tool of “feminine” subversion (122), is, in sum, a “verbal response,” a “definitive” reply to the broad (very political) question of “who” one is (73). Because “invisibilized” individuals are subject to heightened levels of social dismissal, the importance of sharing testimony in the company of witnesses is more difficult, but also more politically relevant (Claire Cohen 129). The stakes of self-representation are thus rendered far greater for Indigenous women, making Clements’ play, in which Jordan’s victims are given an opportunity to speak, all the more politically important. In *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, the playwright reimagines history, removing these women – discursively “obscured” by hegemonic culture (Phelan, *Unmarked* 19) – from “the margins of history” (La Flamme 108), with the women’s public self-representations amounting to “political action” (Kottman x).

From the outset, the play contests the invisibilization of the women – the effectual relegation of those violated and silenced to a spectral plane. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* opens with the sound of a tree falling – “[a] loud crack – a haunting gasp for air that is suspended” – as Aunt Shadie awakes and speaks to Rebecca – the former in the spirit world, the latter still part of the living world. Aunt Shadie, naked, depicted in association with the “spirits

of the trees” chopped down by the loggers (Sugars and MacKenzie 5),⁸¹ emerges from a bed of leaves and “walks through the forest, covered by the leaves / branches in them,” a powerful figure, rising in the face of violence (Clements, *Unnatural* 10). While Clements makes the connection between misogynistic, colonial violence against women and destruction of the natural world clear, Aunt Shadie is portrayed as indomitable, resisting destruction: she is “*unfallen*,” naked, and refusing erasure (10). Just as the play’s opening scene expressly connects environmental destruction and gendered, racialized violence, so, too, does the introduction suggest a direct linkage between mother and daughter, and spirit world and living, as Rebecca and Aunt Shadie come to complete one another’s sentences:

Aunt Shadie: Fingers ...

Rebecca: ... chopped down to the palm.

Aunt Shadie: Legs...

Rebecca: ... chopped up to the thighs. (11)

Notwithstanding the violent – however purposeful – conflation of female limbs with branches, Clements’ hopeful portrayal of this interworldly maternal bond between mother and daughter is vast in its implications, an overtly recuperative representation, undermining colonialist malignment of Indigenous motherhood. The profound connection between Rebecca and Aunt Shadie recalls the everlasting link between Mojica’s Contemporary Woman and her foremothers – Princess Pocahontas, La Malinche, the Indigenous wives of the fur traders, and Woman of the Puna – all of whom she comes to embody at different points in *Princess Pocahontas*.⁸²

⁸¹ While this quotation is taken from a paper authored by Cynthia Sugars and Sarah MacKenzie, entitled “Short-Circuiting History: Rechanneling Memory in Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*,” the insight is Sugars’, based on her work relating to Canadian literary Gothicism, a topic elaborated upon in her book *Canadian Gothic Literature*.

⁸² See chapter 2.

As with a number of her other plays – prominently including *Now Look What You Made Me Do* – Clements infuses *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* with maternalist themes in order to combat ongoing derogation of Indigenous maternity.⁸³ It is important to note that, for many Indigenous women, pride in maternity derives not only from “matricentric” historical traditions (Sioui, *Amerindian* 14), but also from an overarching awareness of state-sanctioned, non-consensual sterilization of Indigenous women, federal and provincial government abduction of Indigenous children, in conjunction with Canada’s highest infant mortality rates, rendering all representations of motherhood extremely complex (Udel 44; Boyer 7; Huhndorf and Suzack 7-8; Kim Anderson, “Affirmations” 87).⁸⁴ The unbreakable connection between Rebecca and her mother is reflective of Aunt Shadie’s role as the embodied maternal; throughout the play, she acts not only as mother to Rebecca, but as mother to all the “unnatural and accidental” women (9). As such, she is as an emblem of Indigenous motherhood redeemed, functioning as a figurative Sky Woman, reminiscent of playwright Tomson Highway’s description of a

⁸³ The maternalist motif is also present in *Tombs of the Vanishing Indian*. Set in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, the play details the story of three Creek sisters, estranged after the death of their mother and striving to reconnect with their Indigenous roots. Politically charged, the play contends with the eugenics-based practice of sterilizing Indigenous women in Canada – an insidious program of extermination that was not entirely abolished until 1981.

⁸⁴ While sterilization programs were fervently debated in a number of provinces, such programs were only implemented in Alberta and British Columbia. Sterilization of Indigenous/Native American women was also a regular occurrence in a number of American states. For further reading concerning sterilization programs in Canada, see Yvonne Boyer’s *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Women’s Health* and Jana Grekul, Harvey Krahn, and Dave Odynak’s “Sterilizing the ‘Feeble-minded’: Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929–1972.” For further information concerning sterilization of Indigenous women in the United States, see Suzack et al. *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture* and Jane Lawrence “The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women.”

There remain dramatic inequalities between rates of Infant mortality in Indigenous communities and mainstream society. For a discussion of recent statistics concerning the elevated rate of infant mortality in Aboriginal communities in Canada, see Janet Smylie’s collaborative 2010 study, “A Review of Aboriginal Infant Mortality Rates in Canada: Striking and Persistent Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Inequities.” See also, Statistics Canada’s 2008 report, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis, and First Nations, 2006 Census*.

“benevolent female God” (*Comparing* 46).⁸⁵ Karen Bamford rightly argues that in “gratifying a mother’s desire for reunion and reconciliation,” Clements configures a “feminist, maternal romance,” effectively “transform[ing]” tragedy (143).

Most integral to this transformation is Rebecca’s conscious and subconscious, dreamlike witnessing of Aunt Shadie’s resistance. As she says, “I’ve come to find her story. My mother. My mother’s one story” (54). However, while roaming Main and Hastings, Rebecca also “walk[s] through” the narratives of Jordan’s other victims (54). Guiding and assisting Rebecca, it is the motherly Aunt Shadie who brings the women together, initiating subversion characterized by coalition. Once summoned by Aunt Shadie’s “song” (58), the spectral women become an active part of Rebecca’s living world, inviting not only the protagonist, but also audiences, to witness their narratives, creating – as Erin Wunker suggests – a “community of witnessing” and thereby diminishing the potential for discursive dismissal and social disavowal of their stories (165). Cubilié likewise asserts that when the witnessing of narrative testimony is revealed to a broader audience, as occurs in theatre, where outsiders behold the very act of painful “witnessing,” transmission becomes an “ongoing process,” the efficacy being that readers/viewers are brought, through empathy, to acknowledge the hardships experienced by speakers, while also assessing their potential culpability in fostering and sustaining a culture of denial and disregard (15).

Mobilizing this emancipatory “ongoing process” of witnessing (Cubilié 15), Clements, using a combination of poetic dialogue and surreal effects, purposefully avoids focusing on the women’s brutal and untimely deaths. Rather than representing such violence directly, the

⁸⁵ For details concerning the legacy of Sky Woman, the divine matriarch described in a number of North American Indigenous creation myths, see Chapter 2.

playwright uses bleak slide projections, documenting news clippings and segments of the coroners' official reports to indicate that the women have been killed. These disturbing reminders make apparent the blatant disregard for evidence on the part of investigative authorities, coroners, and judiciary, while also serving as markers honouring the women:

Slide: Rose Doreen Holmes, 52, died January 27, 1965 with a 0.51 blood-alcohol reading. "Coroner's inquiry reported she was found nude on her bed and recent bruises on her scalp, nose, lips and chin. There was no evidence of violence, or suspicion of foul play. (Clements, Unnatural 18)

When Aunt Shadie awakens in the opening scene, strong and enlivened, a projection appears, reading, "*Rita Louise James, 52, died November 10, 1978 with a 0.12 blood-alcohol reading. No coroner's report issued,*" as Clements continually asks audiences to consider the social significance of the events upon which her play is based (9). With the slides operating as monuments, the play itself becomes a textual/performative commemorative monument, ensuring that Jordan's victims are granted space in collective public memory.

In her article "Breaking the Framework of Representational Violence," Julia Emberley argues for a "fundamental transformation" in representations of violence against Indigenous women, suggesting that, when portrayed victims, "these women must be given names and personhood, in order for testimony to elicit "a range of affective responses," outweighing and thus subsuming the dehumanizing brutality of the (real) violent enactment upon which such depictions are based (Emberley, "Breaking" 82). Clements artfully answers Emberley's valid and timely call in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, not only providing her female characters with names, but also imbuing the murdered women with humor and warmth. Although Clements may be alluding to some of Jordan's victims by name, she is far from overt, fictionalizing most

names and locations entirely in order to protect the identities of the women involved.⁸⁶ In the play's second act, the murdered women manifestly gather around Rebecca to guide her on her journey, making humorous interjections, provoking action, and driving the plot forward. At first, these figures can only "*be vaguely seen*" by audiences, while Rebecca "*cannot really see or really hear them*" (Clements, *Unnatural* 66), but, as the plot progresses, the spectral women gain increased agency and vividness, as they gather together, leading the protagonist towards the end of her story. It is most crucial to the reclamative function of Clements' play that the women are depicted as enlivened, complex, and impassioned. Aunt Shadie is appropriately attributed with "*mother qualities of strength, humor, love, [and] patience,*" while Verna is depicted as "*sarcastic, but always searching to do the right thing, the right way*" (6). Violet is "*an old spirit who grows younger to see herself again*" (6) and Mavis is represented as "*a little slow from the butt down, but stubborn in life and memory*" (5). Rose, Jordan's only non-Indigenous victim, is "*thorny,*" but "*soft-heart[ed]*" (5). Endowing each woman with a specific charisma that translates easily to audiences/readers, Clements subverts realistic violence by skillfully seating the action of the play in the women's respective narrative/consciousness. As she writes,

Scenes involving the women should have the feel of a black and white picture that is animated by the bleeding-in of colour as the scene and their imaginations unfold. Colours of personality and spirit, life and isolation paint their reality and activate the particular landscape within each woman's own particular hotel room and world. (7)

In uniting communally, the women, characterized (perhaps oxymoronicly) by vitality, listen to and assist one another, upsetting the negating process of invisibilization to which they

⁸⁶ For a list of the women killed by Jordan, see Tim Harper's "B.C. Man on Trial."

have been subject in life and death. When Aunt Shadie describes “becoming invisible” in the “eyes” of her former husband – a White logger – it is Rose who assertively opposes his disregard, while Aunt Shadie, responding reciprocally, provides Rose with support and reassurance.

Rose: I see you, and I like what I see.

Aunt Shadie: I see you – and don’t worry, you’re not white.

Rose: I’m pretty sure I’m white. I’m English.

Aunt Shadie: White is Blindness – it has nothing to do with the colour of your skin. (82)

The exchange between Aunt Shadie and Rose suggests the importance of female solidarity in resistance to violence, while also acknowledging the necessity of forming coalitions across socio-cultural difference.

In one particularly unnerving, albeit recuperative, scene, Violet, with great pain, narrates and thereby reclaims her death in front of a chorus of “sister[s]” (60). At the “*Niagara Hotel*,” she “*sits on the floor... Her focus upwards, while “[t]he shadow of a man casts itself long on the walls*” (59). The Barber is unseen, a figure contrived of shifting darkness. Accompanied by a supportive, radical community of “the women,” Violet is at last given time and opportunity to relive and relate her final moments in a space of physical and emotional safety (60). It is only posthumously that she can give testimony to a group of likeminded witnesses whose presence assists her to “*see herself again*” (6).

Violet: I've swallowed it all. I've swallowed it all ... downtown, right between my lips. I didn't know if it was the neck of the bottle I was swallowing or his penis.

Both have that musty kind of smell at the opening of it. Like it has been around for

a while, waiting for the next set of lips but not cleaning in between deaths. Musty – you never know where it's been. I swallowed. Man's fingers weaved in my hair pulling down and up, down and up, down and up so many times I didn't know if it was the salt that filled me or the sting of the vodka. I don't even drink usually. (59)

Just as Violet's "*head falls down*" (59), a slide appears, reading "*Violet Leslie Taylor, 27. Died October 12, 1987 with a 0.91 blood-alcohol reading. 'She had the highest blood-alcohol reading of all the women.' No coroner's report has been issued*" (60). Yet the profoundly disturbing image invoked by the slide's message is upended by the celebratory Bacchic chorus of spectral women, who gather protectively around Violet – quite alive in death – and chant soothingly:

I hear you sister like yesterday today Ke-peh-tat-in/jee/ne-gee-metch Das-goots/o-tahg-gos-ehk Ahnotes/ka-kee-se-khak

Hear your words right next to mine

Ee-pee-ta-man/ke-ta-yaur-e

Win/me-too-nee/o-ta. (60)

With the ghost women functioning centrally as resistant observers and the murderous barber rendered obsolete, the scene undoes conceptions of Violet as victim.

In his text *Fugitive Poses*, Gerald Vizenor argues that Indigenous people are regularly conceptualized – and thus discursively represented – as victims of a lesser heritage. Since colonial hierarchies of power hinge upon gender, as well as race, Indigenous women are subject to two-fold misrepresentation, "victims" of both lineage and (inherently violable) female embodiment (85). Vizenor asserts that portrayals of Indigenous victimization imply that Indigenous people "offer the world nothing but their victimization" (85). However, for such inferiorizing depictions to be viable, it is essential that "the victim never talks back" (85).

Adamant in her refusal to reify this cycle of “victimry,” Clements unwaveringly contests reinscriptions of defeat that depict the women killed by Jordan as victims, ensuring that – even from beyond the grave – they “talk back” and therefore “stop being victims” (Vizenor 85).

Revenge, Reclamation, and Remembrance: The End of the Story

Once freed from the confines of silence, the women are fully equipped to guide Rebecca as she travels towards the “*end of [their] story*” (7), which culminates in uncovering the mortal fate of Aunt Shadie and, most importantly, seeking vengeance against the Barber. Coming together in order to face down the man who ended their lives, the women take on fully embodied presences. In Rebecca’s apartment they gather, go through her things, try on her clothes and makeup, and, in effect, become – for audiences – fully animated, vitalized women. The preparatory scene, in which they unite to get ready for their audacious revenge, works especially to accentuate the women’s humanity, which figures in opposition to the Barber’s debased savagery:

Valerie is going through Rebecca's laundry that's lying in a basket. She's pulling out different pieces of underwear and trying them on. Mavis is sitting at Rebecca's desk playing with the phone. Violet has been in Rebecca's bedroom swinging on her swing and playing with Rebecca's pretty things. Gradually, the women pick what they want of Rebecca's clothing and make-up and put them on. (100)

As Wunker argues, the play’s “[s]ubject(s)” (164) is unquestionably “*the women*” (Clements, *Unnatural* 100). Jordan, conversely, is given little space in Clements’ subversive refiguration: “[h]e’s in and around things,” says the playwright, “but he’s certainly not the main point of the

story” (qtd. in Ratsoy and Hoffman 475).⁸⁷ Clements makes the killer’s lack of human empathy apparent by depicting him – quite literally – as furniture in several scenes. Portrayed as Valerie’s violent three-drawer “dresser” (28-29) and Mavis’ dangerous “chair” (55-56), Jordan is represented in polarization to the women’s vibrance – a “*manipulative embodiment of... human nee[d]*” (7), corporeal (in the end), yet less alive than the spectral women.

Having affirmed an intimate connection with Rebecca – and the rest of the living world – the women gather in the Barbershop to assist the protagonist in a final confrontation with Jordan. In one of the Barber’s drawers, Rebecca finds the braids belonging to Jordan’s many victims. Picking up her mother’s braid, she “*buries her face in it and sobs*” (121).⁸⁸ Overcoming her heartache, the emotionally steadfast Rebecca cleverly attempts to seduce Jordan in his chair, in hopes of slitting his throat with a straight-edge razor. The act of retributive vengeance, however, is not carried out by Rebecca, or at least not by her alone. Emanating strength, Aunt Shadie, now transformed into a trapper-woman from the north, speaks to her daughter through the mirrors in the Barbershop, sharing recollections from her youth:

Aunt Shadie: I used to be a real good trapper when I was young. You wouldn’t believe it now that I’m such a city girl, but before when my legs and body were young and muscular I could go forever. Walking those trap lines with snow shoes.

⁸⁷ Carl Bassai’s award-winning 2006 film the thriller *Unnatural and Accidental*, conversely focuses almost exclusively on the killer, at the expense of representing Clements’ radically empowered community of women. Although she was credited as a writer, Clements did not find the celluloid adaptation of her play “gratifying as an artist” (qtd. in R. Gilbert, “Introduction” xi). The events of the play were also represented in the early episodes of the popular television series, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* (La Flamme 117), which, much like the Bassai’s film, refocuses the narrative, fixating on the barber’s violence rather than on the women’s strength and resilience.

⁸⁸ In some Indigenous cultures, “long hair holds special significance” and wearing a long braid can be “considered performing part of Indigenous identity” (Kathleen Fitzgerald 177). The Barber’s cutting of the women’s hair suggests broader cultural destruction inflicted upon Indigenous cultures by colonialist patriarchy.

The sun coming down, sprinkling everything with crystals, some floating down and dusting that white comforter with magic. (124)

Guided by her mother's empowering words, Rebecca, as in the play's opening scene, completes Aunt Shadie's sentences. Taking the powerful image of the northern hunter into herself, she, too, becomes a trapper like her mother:

Rebecca: I would walk that trapline...

Aunt Shadie: ... like a map, my body knowing every turn, every tree, every curve the land uses to confuse us. (124)

Rebecca, closing the exchange, inflects her statement with rage against misogynistic violence:

"like a map, my body knowing every turn, every lie, every curve they use to kill us" (125).

Encouraged by the nurturing, maternal presence of Aunt Shadie, the heroine attempts to move against Jordan, but he "*grabs the blade*" and the two "*struggle*" (125). Here, Aunt Shadie, along with the other women – all dressed as trappers now – makes a timely emergence from "[a] *beautiful crystalized snow scene*" reflected in the Barbershop mirror (124). With the other women standing behind her, Aunt Shadie guides Rebecca's hand. Positioning Jordan as "*an animal caught*," the women, the hunters, together "*slit his throat*" (125). With the Barber dead, Rebecca "*hands each woman her braid*," a token of survival and triumph (126). Most importantly, the ceremonious killing of the Barber is the only murder shown on stage.

As the play comes to a close, the murdered women, all dressed as trappers, sit together at a long table, as a slide appears, announcing: "*The First Supper. Not to be confused with The Last Supper*" (126). Devoid of the darkly morbid connotations associated with Christ's Last Supper, this is a feast celebrating vitality and victory. In the background, the sound of "*trees moving in the wind*" amplifies to become the sound of "*a tree, falling*" (127). In the "[a]partment area,"

Rebecca and her boyfriend Ron, a police-officer, are having a “*somewhat romantic dinner*” (126).⁸⁹ In presenting this portrayal of Rebecca and her lover, Clements (with cautious reticence) implies that loving, egalitarian relationships between men and women can exist. However, the depiction also suggests that gendered violence must first be overcome. In the “*Barbershop area*,” Jordan lies dead (126). The final, resounding sound-effect is that of “*a tree hitting the ground with a loud thud*” (127). The murderer is dead – “*thud*” (127). Clements, overturning binary positions, renders the predator prey – “[a]n animal caught” (125) – and all the women powerful hunters. In the background, the sound of “[t]ree[s] falling” recalls the play’s opening scene (126), yet the sound is no longer representative of the “*falling of women*” (7). Jordan’s victims are finally delivered to their “*happy hunting ground and/or heaven*,” as promised in the play’s introduction, and so does solidarity and community resistance triumph over violence and dehumanization (7).

Clements’ play, I contend, is, in itself, a commemorative monument, a transformation of tragedy, in which Jordan’s victims are recuperated, provided embodied presences and agency, and thereby posthumously reempowered. In their incisive article “Feminist Memorializing,” Christine Bold, Ric Knowles, and Belinda Leach examine the extent to which the “memorializing [of] intimate femicide... enable[s] feminist activism” (126). Suggesting that subversive “enactments” can work to combat “hegemonic cultural memory” by performatively constructing an “archive” of “cultural countermemory,” Bold, et al. conclude that memorializations can revise dominant conceptions of history that circumlocute incidences of violence against women (as was the case with the barbershop killings) effacing and trivializing

⁸⁹ In representing Ron as a police officer, Clements alludes to the role of authorities in fighting violence against women. While the barbershop killings were, in part, the result of police failure to readily attend to violence against marginalized women, the relationship between Ron and Rebecca suggests, optimistically, that there is hope for the future. Clements also addresses the connection between policing and gendered violence in *Now Look What You Made Me Do*.

the experiences of the women involved (126). Critical race scholar Patricia Hill Collins has noted that “[d]efinitions of violence lie not in acts themselves but in how groups controlling positions of authority conceptualize such acts” (922). In life, Jordan’s victims were disregarded and the violence against them ignored. In fictionalizing the women’s narratives, providing the women with space for testimony, and, most crucially, constructing a community of witnesses, Clements’ far-reaching, reconfigurative gesture is both celebratorily redemptive and educative. Operating to redress the power imbalances that led to the Barber’s unchecked violence and to the negligent dismissal of the women’s deaths as “*unnatural and accidental*” (8), the play – far from mournful – joyously celebrates the reclamative power of Indigenous women.

(Re)presenting Victimhood in *Now Look What You Made Me Do*

Like *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Now Look What You Made Me Do* derived from a series of readings performed in the early nineties. The script was first workshopped at the New Play Festival, in Vancouver, and later, at A Festival of Native Playwrights, in Illinois, and Ottawa’s National Arts Centre. The final product, Clements’ third masterful full-length play, premiered 10 November 1995, at Illinois State University’s Allen Theatre, in Chicago, directed by Randy Reinholz. *Now Look What You Made Me Do* was first staged in Canada on 8 March 1996, at Big Secret Theatre, in Calgary, under the auspices of Maenad Theatre Company, directed by Carol Larson Thew (Clements, “Now” 10). Later that year, Clements was awarded the Minneapolis Playwright’s Center’s Fellowship Award for her script. Despite a great deal of disturbing content, *Now Look*, full of Clements’ surrealistic, captivating theatrical imagery, was well received by audiences. The play was shortlisted for the Praxis Screenwriting Competition in 1997 and ranked as a finalist in the 1998 Sundance Screenwriting competition (Noell 147-48).

Now Look was eventually published in 1998 by Blizzard Publishing as part of Canadian theatre scholar Ann Wilson's anthology, *Prerogatives: Contemporary Plays by Women*. The collection, which also includes works by dramatists Toby Rodin, Kate Miles, Vivienne Laxdall, and Kelley Jo Burk, was put together by Wilson in an – arguably successful – attempt to archive the diverse “aesthetic[s] of women's writing,” which can work, Wilson argues, to communicate “anger,” thereby contesting the diminishment of “control” that results from patriarchal domination (“Preface” 7-8).

Now Look represents the varied reactions of women to gendered violence, examining the complicated relationship between domestic violence, sexual agency, and female empowerment. The play ultimately depicts violence against women as a manifestation of broader social inequalities resulting from an insidious, ongoing process of colonization, a process, Clements implies, which regularly culminates in violence against women.⁹⁰ In depicting this systemic nature of gendered violence, Clements makes obvious that the women in her play are victimized precisely because of their gendered social positions in a masculinist, racist, and classist society. The play focuses on the relationship between Madonna, a Métis woman in her twenties – a former “Catholic school” girl (16) – and her lover and eventual murderer, “older boyfriend” Jay (11). Although she is a namesake of the Virgin Mary, Madonna, idealistic” and “strong,” is no parody (11). With the narratives of other women, Madonna's friends and neighbours, all victims of misogynistic violence, played out simultaneously, the piece, interwoven with memory, dream, and song, is appropriately described by Wilson as a “lyrical fusion of reality and memory” (8).

⁹⁰ In the early 1990s, while Clements was writing the play, “wife abuse” was amongst the leading causes of injury to Canadian women and, while rates of domestic violence have diminished, social workers are concerned about the fact that violence against women is “no longer a priority for most politicians” (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 231). For information concerning current trends in Canada, see Lucie Ogrodnik's *Family Violence in Canada* and Walter DeKeseredy and Molly Dragiewicz's “Woman Abuse in Canada: Sociological Reflections on the Past, Suggestions for the Future.”

Characterized by short overlapping scenes and mesmerizing special effects, *Now Look* features a stark, “white” set made of “bathrooms, kitchens, [and] bedrooms,” implying erasure, while also building a mood of apprehension (12). The colourless “environment” occupied by the women indicates “intensified detail of memory or fear” that is invoked by “touch and sound” (12), while the white walls “reveal shadows that are below and behind the surface,” creating a sense “of isolation, of being watched” (12). Though Clements certainly demonstrates the problematic social dynamics leading to violence against women in varying contexts, *Now Look* is not merely a bleak portrait of female subjection. The play’s female characters are not overcome by their experiences of violence: rather, these women are enraged. In a similar manner to *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Now Look* presents a portrait of female solidarity and survival in the face of violence and invisibility, concluding with an empowering decolonial message of comradery and resilience.

Sisterhood, Sex-Work, and Self-Representation: The Women’s Group

However victimized, the women in the play are portrayed as persistently subversive and supportive of one another, as Clements intersperses the plot with scenes from a “women’s group” (21). The group, open to female survivors of gendered violence, is a space where the abused women convene to share their stories and make plans for future happiness, finding community and love.⁹¹ Centering the play’s action in the collective unconscious of the women, through memory/dream sequences, the playwright allows the respective tales of the “women’s

⁹¹ After conducting an extensive, interview-based study with “support group” participants, sociologists Lisa Larance and Maryann Porter found that group sharing “facilitates trust and network formation indicative of social capital,” allowing female “survivors” to “challenge the isolation imposed by their dominant partners” and, in doing so, to develop personal “agency” (Larance and Porter 676). Gale Wood and Ruth Middleman argue similarly that the “small group” creates a “supportive agency,” leading to “empowerment” through the “recasting [of] perceptions” (82).

group” – each incorporating scenes of resistance – to unfold in tandem, the actors occupying separate stage spaces (11). By sharply defining her distinctive characters, the playwright makes these women intimately understandable. With friends as witnesses, the women in the group comment, explicitly and obliquely, on the circumstances of their abuse, while Clements, once again, asks audiences to engage in the “ongoing process” of “witnessing,” disallowing the erasure and silencing of victims of violence (Cubilié 15). Jennifer, a “[h]ousewife,” is “[s]elf deprecating” and demure, her actions marked by continual struggle for “[p]erfectionis[m]” (11). Subject to violence inflicted by her husband – “Mr. Jennifer” (11) – for decades, she describes the intricacies of her victimization, telling the other members of the women’s group that she has come to “feel guilty when he hits [her]” (26). As the women reach out to Jennifer, they come to speak in unison, sharing her pain: “*I have a problem of falling,*” chants the chorus (25). When the collective trails off, Jennifer continues, “[h]e says – he says, my hair looks like a piece of shit,” while the chorus concludes with a frustrated, but supportive, “*I wonder why?*” (25).

Heather, Madonna’s neighbour, “[s]omewhat religious” and also a “housewife,” is forced to practice devout Catholicism by her abusive husband – “Mr. Heather” (11). Typically addressing multiple themes and issues, Clements alludes throughout the play to the manner in which colonially implemented Christian belief systems have operated coercively, relegating women to a lesser social tier and undermining female sexual agency. Of course, racist colonial ideology constructed Indigenous women’s expressions of sexual freedom as particularly “dangerous and sinister” (Roome 49).⁹² Notably, the cultural/racial identity of the women in the play – save Madonna – remains ambiguous. However, as Wood and Middleman contend, “the enduring impact of Christian dogma,” has led to “male domination” of “social, political, and

⁹² See Jean Barman’s “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality,” and Adele Perry’s *On the Edge of Empire*.

economic institutions” and must thus be considered a “root” cause of intimate partner violence in both interracial and intraracial contexts (82). Clements employs representations of Heather’s struggle in order to overtly contest the instrumental employment of Christian ideology for strategically exploitative ends. “I am a bad woman and God has sent [my husband] to punish me,” Heather tells the women (25). The chorus, turned campy Baptist Choir, begins with a boisterous and sarcastic “*punish me for my sins,*” but closes the scene with a final affirming word: “[*l*]istening” (25). Members of the women’s group “*follow each other’s stor[ies],*” empathizing and encouraging one another to speak openly about their experiences (25).

Dee, “an older prostitute,” is the most outspoken of the women, the leader of the group, and an obvious foil to the naive Madonna (11). She has “a great sense of humour,” a strong presence, and a great deal of “knowing, and know-how” – particularly concerning sex/sexuality (11). Powerful, “[p]roud,” and very “[s]exual,” Dee strives to educate and empower her female friends, especially the young Madonna (11). While portrayed as a survivor of incest, raped as a child by her abusive “Daddy,” Dee’s career as a sex-worker is presented non-essentially (15). Unashamed of her unconventional sexual exploits or her history of subjection, she uses her sexuality subversively, sharing her narratives and “know how” with the other women, catalyzing resistance to violence (11). Although she is not a focal character in each scene her words pervade and influence the direction of the play. In scenes from which Dee is absent, she remains – seemingly omnipresent – situated in a removed stage space, while “biker chick” Motor Mama acts as her counterpart (11). Also a survivor-turned-self-abuser, Motor Mama – “[t]ough,” though endowed with a “[l]arge heart” – works as an enforcer of sorts, assisting, to some extent, in the liberation of the other members of the women’s group. Throughout the play, Dee, with the help of Motor Mama, functions as emancipator, enlightening and aiding her friends. Early in the

play, Clements portrays an exchange between Dee and Madonna, the former educating the latter about sexual performance. The whimsical dialogue, in which Dee uses a “*banana*” as a prosthetic penis (16), demonstrating correct prophylactic application, is conducive to Madonna’s empowerment. “Get serious,” says Madonna initially, “I went to Catholic school,” as Clements not so subtly references the sex-negativity inherent in Christian dogma.⁹³ Madonna is, however, rendered able to protect herself against unwanted pregnancy as a result of Dee’s (humorous, but useful) instructions. The scene closes with Madonna losing her virginity pleurably in the context of “love” and affection (18). Meanwhile, Dee, in another area of the set, “*picks up a vibrator and begins to masturbate*” (17), actively expressing her sexual freedom.⁹⁴

In his intriguing book *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, Kenneth Plummer maps the trajectory of social progress perpetuated by the public narration of what he refers to as “sexual stories” (3). Focusing on “coming out stories” (50) of “rape and recovery,” Plummer contends that the sharing of personal suffering renders “pathologized” experiences destigmatized (110), while also suggesting that sexual narratives, both violent and otherwise, can lead to empowerment, as women come to view themselves as either survivors or sexual agents (1-10). Most important is the profound effect these airings have on social dynamics. Bringing formerly “*private*” narratives to a “*public*” arena (110), boldly reliving personal experiences, narrators “surpass” and shift social discourse (49). Propagating the importance of “consciousness raising” groups, Plummer insists that the expression of private

⁹³ Despite contemporary intrasect subversion, Western Christianity’s longstanding traditions distinguish between virtuous sex – sex for procreative purposes – and illegitimate, forbidden, recreational sex. For further reading, see Lori Beaman’s anthology, *Religion and Canadian Society: Contexts, Identities and Strategies*.

⁹⁴ While I read Dee’s sexual openness as a subversive act of empowerment, it is important to note that interpretations vary and, in live contexts, the meaning of her action depends entirely on the way in which the role is performed.

experience is essential to the liberation of women, racialized minorities, and LGBTQ individuals (50). This list requires the addition of individuals with disabilities, a group omitted by Plummer. Critical disability activists, including writer, speaker, and activist Eli Clare, have worked extensively to amend medicalized, discriminatory hegemonic discourses surrounding sexuality and disability. Through the impartment of life-narratives, Clare and others have mobilized a subversive discourse, rightly inspiring reconsideration of dominant conceptions of normalcy.⁹⁵ The transformation of typically private stories into narratives acceptable for public sharing is a highly political process, given that such deliveries require the collective creation and maintenance of safe spaces in the broader society, including women's groups (Plummer 120-22). Dee's brave, sometimes violent, often vulgar, and occasionally erotic depictions of her sexual undertakings bring the other, less emboldened women to share their own stories. In one such narrative, Dee describes an (invited) attempt to defecate on a client. "He didn't want me to just sit on his face," she laughs, "[but] it's hard to shit just like that you know," her young friend Madonna, responding wittily, "[m]aybe he was Catholic?" (28). After listening to Dee's scatological narrative, Madonna, feeling capable, proceeds to divulge her own sad secrets – the loss of her dear father, abuse at the hands of her lover, and a precarious pregnancy (28-29). Dee, with her openness, provides Madonna space for airing her problems, as well as consolation, effectively rendering the "pathologized," formerly "private" experience of domination "public" (Plummer 110).

While far less vocal, Motor Mama, like Dee, serves as empathetic witness, assisting both Heather and Jennifer to make subtle attempts to subvert the violence and degradation enacted by their husbands. Heather, well aware that Mr. Heather detests make-up, is inspired by the

⁹⁵ See Clare's *Exile and Pride* and *The Marrow's Telling*.

collective agency of her new-found friends in the women's group to put on lipstick. "I'm sorry, I forgot," says Heather, as her husband "*squeezes her lips together*" (31). Here, Motor Mama enters, "*butts her cigarette on her arm,*" and "*screams*" in protest and pain (31), but Heather is not able to stand up to her husband's domination: "Lipstick is for Mary Magdalenes," she repeatedly intones, "[l]ipstick is for Mary Magdalenes," until Mr. Heather "leaves," with Motor Mama still "[s]cream[ing]" empathetically (31). Despite the pleasure she gains from wearing cosmetics, Heather placates her husband by mirroring his misogynistic, patriarchal sentiments, her fleeting reference to Magdalene indicating this saddening loss of control. Although Mary Magdalene has been reappropriated by feminist scholars and theologians as a powerful companion to Jesus, she was long depicted as a "repentant whore" by Western Christianity, devoted to Christ after receiving his forgiveness (Schaberg 82).⁹⁶ Invoking the emblem of Magdalene, Heather – with Motor Mama watching, listening, and supporting – is quietly overcome by her husband's violence, yet her apologetic acquiescence does not diminish her original act of resistance: Heather, empowered by her friends, has made an attempt at happiness. The complex representation thus demonstrates the importance of solidarity among survivors, while also implying the difficult nature of resisting gendered violence.

Upon Mr. Heather's exodus, the play shifts to a scene of confrontation between Jennifer and Mr. Jennifer, the former begging her husband for "money" (31), as Clements makes evident the role of economic domination in domestic abuse. Equally integral to Christian dogma in the etiology of intimate violence is social/structural inequality, which places women – especially Indigenous women – at a disadvantage, creating a "fertile breeding ground for aggression"

⁹⁶ For further reading concerning feminist interpretations of the figure of Mary Magdalene, see Jane Schaberg's *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* and Birgit Breiningner's *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities: Rewriting Mary Magdalene, Mother Ireland and Cú Chulainn*.

(Lenton 306).⁹⁷ Denying her request, Mr. Jennifer demands his wife “[d]o something with [her] fucking hair” (30). He then “*picks up [a] hand brush on the table and throws it at [Jennifer]*” (30), grabbing her hair and “*drag[ging] her over to the counter,*” where he attempts to “*cut her hair*” (32). However, Heather, temporarily free from her husband, joins Motor Mama as the two women come to bear witness, “*listen[ing]*” and enabling Jennifer with their supportive presence, enhancing her strength (32). Jennifer, empowered by the presence of her friends, “*grabs her hair*” in return, engaging Mr. Jennifer in a tug-of-war, which ends in “*a deadlock*” (32).⁹⁸ As he releases her, Jennifer, still speaking “*softly,*” says, “don’t you think that’s enough?” (32). Mr. Jennifer, though he leaves the scene on the heels of Mr. Heather, is still disturbingly “*confiden[t]*” (32). Like Heather, Jennifer has striven to resist, yet there is no surety that Mr. Jennifer’s violence will not persist in the future. The scene closes with Motor Mama’s “scream,” which manifests as a relieved expulsion of air: “[a]aaah” (32).

Together, Dee and Motor Mama, though portrayed very distinctly, empower the other women through displays of strength. Motor Mama’s intimidating presence is her primary tool of resistance. Dee, however, employs unabashed relations of personal experience, not only assisting the group members to “talk back” and subvert victimhood (Vizenor 85), but also to problematize hegemonic narratives concerning prostitution. Until recently, narratives of sex-worker agency,

⁹⁷ Criminological studies have confirmed that intimate partner violence is a “product of a system of social relations” that render underprivileged or minoritized women especially vulnerable (Lenton 308). In Canada, occurrences of domestic assault are far more common in “low income” relationships, particularly when the male partner has a “low status occupation” will violence be “legitimized as a means of coping” (Lenton 306).

Women living in disadvantaged areas are more regularly subject to violence at the hands of their partners and mortality resulting from intimate partner violence occurs most often amongst those living below the poverty line. For further reading, see Donna Ansara’s “Exploring the Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: A Latent Class Approach” and Donna Ansara’s and Michelle Hindin’s “Exploring Gender Differences in the Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence in Canada.”

⁹⁸ This scenario recalls the Barber’s cutting of the women’s hair in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, particularly the scene in which he and Marilyn struggle over her braid.

imparted directly by practicing sex-workers, have been excluded from the history of Western feminism. Although many second-wave feminists tended to dismiss the profession as anti-feminist and anti-womanist, third-wave activists have sought to recuperate sex-work as a site of potential resistance. “[W]riter, educator,” and self-described “slut,” Kathryn Payne argues that feminism has long required the intervention of sex-workers’ stories which implicitly (and inevitably) contest dated, essentialist stereotypes of sex-work (53).⁹⁹ Rather than a homogenous horde of drug-abusing, oppressed, victims of violence, Payne (also a former sex-worker) asserts that the women with whom she interacted while practicing comprised a “diverse, tough-assed, independent and unapologetic” group of survivalist activists (53). In her article “Deviance as Resistance,” Cathy Cohen argues, in the same vein as Payne, that the narratives of sex-workers, when received publically, can be socially transformative. As she writes,

[T]hrough observation of “deviant” practices we are witness to the power of those at the bottom, whose everyday life decisions challenge, or at least counter, the basic normative assumptions of a society intent on protecting structural and social inequalities under the guise of some normal and natural order to life. (33)

Dee’s revelations, often infused with humour, contribute to this process of problematization, overturning popularized conceptions of sex-work: “I laugh a lot,” Dee tells Madonna, “if you’ve seen what I’ve seen, you’d laugh. I laughed once for twelve days” (23). In detailing narratives of her strength and – literal – domination, Dee makes obvious that she is not constituted entirely by

⁹⁹ After interviewing a number of sex-workers, labouring in diverse regions and fields, Anna Hulusjö found that most women wanted to participate expressly to “challenge dominant narratives about prostitution and ‘the prostitute’” (388). By expressing their “individual uniqueness” and “narrating themselves and their experiences,” Hulusjö contends that the women made a political commentary, countering the “‘victim of patriarchy’” or “‘whore’” dichotomy established by dominant discourse (388). Hulusjö’s findings are thus very much in keeping with the salience of testimony throughout Clements’ play. See Hulusjö’s “The Multiplicities of Prostitution Experience: Narratives of Power and Resistance.”

her experience of incest. She has come to use her sexuality as a site of power.¹⁰⁰ “Money in the pocket,” she tells the women/the audience, proceeding to jokingly discuss her occasional role as dominatrix:

Oooooooo. Ohooo.

Great. Thank you very much. Come again...

I’m thinking... handcuffs...

whips,

chains,

leather...

Bad boy, big girl routine ...

Come here right now and show me how sorry a bad boy can be.

Spanky. Spanky. (27)

While defining her own position as one of power, Dee, through self-representation, makes discussions about sex “public” (Plummer 110), facilitating the “creation of a space of reciprocal exhibition” (Cavarero 60). The only woman in the play who has access to a “record player,” Dee brings colour and music to the abused women, leading them to the “safe space” of the women’s group (Clements, “Now” 12).

Cultural Impunity and the “Abused Abuser”: Narrating Resistance

In an intricate semiotic process, Clements uses the depiction of an empowered sex-worker, along with representations of “battered” women, in order to demonstrate the generally problematic handling of gendered violence on the part of authorities in North America. Despite

¹⁰⁰ Heather’s reference to Mary Magdalene therefore resonates not only with Dee’s repeated demonstrations of sexuality, but also with the empowering capacity of sex-work generally (Clements, *Now* 31).

strength and agency, Dee remains subject to legal tyranny. Still laughing, regardless of the severe subject matter, she describes her unjust incarceration:

I got arrested. I got locked up... [the police] thought I was laughing at them. Men hate to be laughed at, especially men in uniforms. As if it's the only thing women have to laugh at... Men... Well? I guess it didn't help that I was pointing. I got arrested for laughing. When they figured out they were just too fucking funny for me they sent me to Riverdale. And more laughs.¹⁰¹ (23-24)

Although Dee maintains a lighthearted tone, the political implications of her statement are poignant. Contemporary research indicates that police presence, ostensibly designed to facilitate the safety of women, furthers violence against sex-workers. While shifts in Canadian policy have led to fewer arrests of practicing sex-workers, police still “target clients,” forcing street based sex-workers into unsafe areas, thereby increasing risk of violence (Allan et al. vi).¹⁰² So, too, do North American sex-workers, particularly Indigenous women, report experiences of violence at the hands of police (INCITE!, “Policing” n. pag.).

¹⁰¹ Clements may be obscurely referencing the historic Don Jail, located in Toronto's Riverdale neighbourhood. The prison – open between 1864 and 1977 – formerly reserved the tiny cells of the west-wing for female convicts. Before closing to be refurbished as a hospital, the prison was deemed a human rights atrocity. See Christopher Hume's “No Tears as Don Jail Addition Torn Down.”

¹⁰² On 20 December 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada, presiding over the case of *Bedford v. Canada*, amended Canadian law pertaining to adult prostitution. The court ruled to dissolve three provisions in the *Criminal Code*, “the communication, bawdy-house and living on the avails laws,” resolving that these three provisions are in violation of section 7 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Allan et al. 1). However, the striking down of the laws did not take effect immediately, as the Supreme Court gave the Federal Government of Canada one year. There has been no meaningful reshaping of Canada's legal framework to date. For further information, see Sarah Allan's *My Work Should Not Take My Life: The Case Against Criminalizing the Purchase of Sex in Canada* and Power Ottawa's webpage: <http://www.powerottawa.ca/powerdocs.html>.

The abused members of the women's group, apparently prompted by Dee's indomitability, elaborate upon the role of authorities in policing gendered violence, making obvious the manner in which intimate partner violence, like violence against sex-workers, is sustained by broad based social dismissal.¹⁰³ The dialogue begins with Heather, recalling her childhood, the fear of an abusive father, and the love of a desperate, devoutly religious mother. "When I was a kid I used to snuggle up to my mother some nights and listen to the police radio before we fell asleep," says Heather, while the other women chant in the background, "[i]t would be dark," creating a sense of foreboding (25). "The radio all tinny and breathless would screech in local crime," Heather continues, "[w]e would lie quiet and in fear"; all the while, the chorus of women sings hauntingly, "*listening... [l]istening*," indicating their attentiveness (25). Clements juxtaposes the women's nurturing reception – "*listening*," witnessing – with societal disregard for victims of domestic violence (25). The chorus continues, the women's words shifting to reflect the mind-set of "*all the people listening on the police radio*," all the people with power who do nothing to intervene, including the "police" (25). "[S]peaking quietly" at first, they chant:

I do not see.

I do not look.

I do not want.

I do not feel.

¹⁰³ While victims of in-home violence have the lowest reporting rates of any violent crime, the decision to call the police represents an "expectation that the mere physical presence of a police officer may redefine the nature of the violence from a private conflict to a societal wrong that will not be tolerated" (Simon et al. 306). Arrest and subsequent prosecution return power to the victim by sending a clear message to perpetrators that their actions are illegitimate and punishable. However, research indicates that police are less likely to arrest intimate partners than strangers or acquaintances in assault, sexual assault, and rape offences. See Leonore M.J. Simon, Steven J. Ellwanger, and John Haggerty's "Reversing the Historical Tide of Iatrogenic Harm" and Eva Schlesinger Buzawa's *Responding to Domestic Violence: The Integration of Criminal Justice and Human Services*.

I do not hear.

I do not question.

I do not ask. (26)

Engaging their collective frustration with the patriarchal culture that facilitates misogynistic domination and “invizibaliz[ation]” (Claire Cohen 129), “[t]hey speak louder, building”:

I do not look.

I do not want.

I do not feel.

I do not hear.

I do not question.

I do not ask. (Clements, “Now” 26)

The scene, while closing on an uplifting note, with a representation of female solidarity and anger, points not only to systemic disavowal, but also to the cyclical nature of violence, depicting Heather as a survivor, returned to a destructively violent environment.¹⁰⁴

Clements thus ensures that audiences understand the patterned, repetitive nature of abuse, carrying the motif of recurring violence into the play’s denouement – the end of Madonna’s story. The protagonist’s tale, reflective of her mental state, transitions between two temporal spaces: the world of May, Madonna at 12, endowed with “the quality of hope,” despite “dealing with the death of her father,” and the present day, with Madonna regressing to a “childlike” state during scenes of duress (11). Madonna, while “strong,” is driven by romantic “idealism” to love easily and forgive without question (11). She is thus compelled to fall deeply in love with

¹⁰⁴ Research suggests that female survivors of childhood abuse are, in fact, more likely to enter into relationships with abusive men than women in the general population, just as male survivors are more likely to enact physical violence upon female partners than their non-abused counterparts. See Lenton’s “Power vs. Feminist Theories of Wife Abuse,” and Louise Dixon’s and Nicola Graham-Kevan’s “Understanding the Nature and Etiology of Intimate Partner Violence and Implications for Practice and Policy.”

Jay – the paradigmatic “[a]bused abuser” (11) – despite Dee’s savvy warnings. “Women have the power of seeing,” Dee cautions Madonna, “they can look at a perfectly fucked up loser asshole and see something nobody else can. Something gentle, or funny, or childlike. Something, any one thing that can be loved” (24). Madonna, to her own detriment, remains impervious to her older friend’s prophetic dissuasion.

Significantly, Clements insists that the actor playing Jay embody Mr. Jennifer and Mr. Heather, the play’s two-dimensional abusive “husbands,” as well as Jay’s own violent “father,” indicating, once again, the patterned nature of domestic violence (11). Like *The Unnatural and Accidental Women, Now Look* emphasizes female survivalism rather than male domination, with the likeness of the abusive men affirming the play’s focus. It therefore stands to reason that the “husbands” and “father” remain nameless, detached, and without personality (11). However, in an obvious effort to simultaneously present the particular “cycle” of domestic abuse, Clements depicts Jay anomalously as passionate, volatile, and very human, regardless of his propensity to violence. The play opens with a memory scene, in which Jay – having killed his lover – revisits the beginning of their relationship, mournfully singing his selfish regrets to the dead Madonna in a vaudeville serenade:

She believed she felt the earth under her feet
She believed the rain baptized her
She believed a promise was a promise
She believed love was love. Forever.
I wanted to believe.
I wanted to believe in anything for a change. (14)

Clements ensures that audiences are (from the outset) aware of both Jay's supposed love for Madonna and his tormented past. Jay, too, is a survivor of physical and emotional abuse, labelled "[f]ag boy" and beaten by his monstrous, homophobic father (20). Forced to endure countless acts of violence, witness the abuse of his mother, and, finally, the killing of his childhood dog, Jay eventually becomes the monster. "He kicked Patch straight up," recalls Jay in a monologue derived from tragic memory, "[h]e landed. Boom. Dead dog... Head down" (21). Lost in memory, Jay begins to conflate violence against Patch with violence against his mother, an apparent allusion to the "connected[ness]" of all living things (Clements, "Yes" 27). Critical animal theorists have long argued that "routine, widespread, and socially acceptable" abuse of animals creates a climate that fosters intrahuman violence (Beirne 39). As animal historian Susan Nance has duly noted: "what we do to animals, we do to people" (n. pag). "My father raised his boot," says Jay, "raised his boot, raised his – raised his boot. Her eyes down. Her head down" (21). While Clements, careful to avoid gratuity, ensures that *all* scenes portraying abuse are abstract and surreal, the representation successfully relates the destructive nature of family violence.

Jay's transformation, his gradual transition to abuser, is displayed visually as Clements uses bruise-like lighting effects projected onto Madonna's body and "clear pipes of exposed liquid," revealing blood, to abstractly – rather than gratuitously – portray the progressive escalation of violence. Notwithstanding the incremental character of Jay's abuse, it is very early in the relationship that he asks Madonna "[h]ow Indian [she is]" (15), making clear the inextricable connection between racialization and violence: Madonna is considered violable because of her gender *and* her Métis heritage.¹⁰⁵ Jay's sexual demands and abuse increase in

¹⁰⁵ In recent surveys, one-quarter (24%) of Indigenous Canadian women reported abuse at the hands of a current or former partner, while only 7% of non-Indigenous women reported an experience of intimate partner violence (Scrim

proportion to Madonna's diminishing affection, the protagonist outlining verbally the trajectory of violence, from "[t]he first time he hits [her]" (20), to the very last "pounding" (40). Yet Madonna remains reluctant to leave the relationship, despite Dee's encouragement. "They say when you get hit and hurt bad you see black lights ... the black lights of unconsciousness," Dee tells Madonna, gently mocking her friend's ("unconscious[ly]") blind acceptance of abuse (22).

Before Madonna is able to break free, she becomes pregnant with Jay's child. Here, Clements returns to the theme of disrupted Indigenous motherhood, also present in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. Madonna desperately invests hope in her unborn child, optimistically asking Dee, "if I'm going to have a little baby? Do you think he would stop?" (24). Dee, in typical fashion, responds with astute cynicism – "[o]nce a guy hits you he never stops. Can't get enough I guess" – but Madonna's "idealism" is pervasive (11) "I think he couldn't help but love it," she trails off (24). Clements ends the scene, however, with a final quip from Dee, foreshadowing the play's outcome: "I hope not. At least not in the same way he loves you" (24). In the two dreamlike scenes that follow, Clements represents the forced miscarriage of Madonna's unborn baby, followed by the death of the protagonist. Emphasizing the links between violence against non-human animals and violence against women, the playwright first stages a particularly unnerving, however surreal, memory scene of abstract violence. A product of Madonna's and Jay's combined recollections, the scene – as with other scenes of violence – is a display of light and "shadows" (11), exposing audiences to the shattering effects of abuse. Unprovoked, Jay flies into a rage and wraps a towel – or "*towel-leash*" – around Madonna's neck, "*twist[ing] it tighter,*" strangling her, while reciting the words of his father: "I said dead

n. pag.). For further reading, see Brzozowski et al., *Victimization and Offending Among the Aboriginal Population in Canada*. Of late, such studies data has served as rationalization for failure on the part of Canada's federal government to address violence against Indigenous women in any meaningful way. See, for example, Andrew Kurjata's article "Focus on 'family violence' in cases of missing, murdered aboriginal women misguided."

dog. Head down. Lie still” (30), until, eventually giving in to Madonna’s relentless struggles, he “kicks her in the stomach,” terminating her pregnancy (30). The protagonist is nonetheless undefeated: in the background, the transparent, vein-like pipes gush with increasingly “red” water, signifying Madonna’s lost blood (33).

Refusing to further reify victimhood, Clements shows Madonna, motivated by the united resistance mounted by her friends Heather, Jennifer, and Motor Mama, overtly contesting Jay’s abuse, the heroine’s naivety replaced with “[s]arcas[m]” (34). Because the play is a loose tethering of the women’s dreams and memories, it moves quickly and fluidly between various temporal and geographic spaces. As a result, the chronological order of the group members’ respective subversions is ambiguous. It is clear, however, that the collective, having formed a community, like the women in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, work together to resist misogynistic violence. The solidarity among the group members, despite varying socio-cultural positions, demonstrates the importance of coalition building, the forging of bonds across difference. Overcoming their husbands’ attempts at “brainwashing,” the women build a radically resistant, visibly united front (Wood and Middleman 82). As Sandoval argues, the development of “differential” consciousness (58) – the formation of agency outside of dominative interpellation – is most readily mobilized via “coalition consciousness,” resistant group mentality (78).

With Jay’s exit, the scene of Madonna’s miscarriage “turns red,” while the protagonist, joined by Heather, “wipes the area where she laid with the towel” (33). Rather than surrendering to tears, Madonna, enlivened by Heather’s timely appearance, “starts singing softly,” inciting her friend to “joi[n]” in song (33). Shortly afterwards, Motor Mama and Jennifer enter and begin to sing and “[t]ogether, singing,” the chorus performs a farcical resistance song (33-34). With the

stage becoming, as in the opening scene of Jay's serenade, a vaudeville spectacle, Motor Mama stands in centre stage, accompanied by Mr. Motor Mama. The two engage in an impromptu slapstick exchange: "you look weird," says her husband, while Motor Mama responds wordlessly by "*slap[ping] him upside the head*" and singing, "[i]f I beat up on my Papa and he don't call no coppa, ain't nobody's business if I do" (33). Galvanized by Motor Mama's audacity, the chorus of women sing a show tune in the background, the carnivalesque quality of the scene subsuming Jay's previous enactment of violence:

Nobody's business...

Ain't nobody's business...

Nobody's business if I dooo. (33)

In her stage directions, Clements makes apparent that the women's scene of subversion is profoundly "*cartoonish and huge in exaggeration,*" each figure coming to embody an idealized physical form of resistance, a combination of independently developed self-perceptions and insults levied against them by their husbands:

[t]here are mirrors everywhere. Their appearances have changed to accommodate their state of mind. Heather's boobs and lips have become huge. Jennifer's hair is permed crazy and her body has become more male than before, complete with a big crotch.... Motor Mama's appearance has become more menacing and her face is swollen. They set up in front of their individual mirrors with a personal choreography that reflects how they see themselves, how they feel.

(34-35)¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Clements' use of mirrors in this scene recalls the penultimate scene in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, in which the spectral women, emerging from the mirrors in the Barbershop, gather together to take vengeance on the murderer (121-25).

Performing their insecurities – primarily manifestations of their husbands’ disparaging words – and narrating their anger, each woman reaches a point of catharsis, allowing the other members of the group, as well as the audience, to witness their most intimate thoughts and feelings. Heather speaks first, venting her frustrations and indicating her willingness to resist, to “talk back” (Vizenor 85):

He says my tits are too big. [I]like what the hell am I supposed to do about it? Cut them off? He says God must have made my tits big for some good reason. Guess the reason? Because I was born a slut.... Do you know how many times a week we go to church? Five times a week. I hardly have time to work, look after the kids, cook, clean ... never mind becoming a slut.... I got him back though. I cut the prongs of his zipper so when he was standing up in front of all the good people preaching his little pecker would flop out. He came home all flushed saying how they don’t make things like they used to. (35)

While Heather’s description of “get[ting] him back” furthers the scene’s campy farcicality, her words also suggest that, encouraged by the other women, she can exact revenge – however seemingly benign. Motivated by Heather’s empowerment, shy “[p]erfectionist” Jennifer also gains the courage to express herself (11).

He says I’m built like a man.... He doesn’t like my hair, my nose, my ass.... Some days I would just like to tell him to shut up.... Shut up.... Just like that. Shut up! You big slob.... I do hope every once in a while that he would get hit by a big truck. I’d go to the funeral dressed in Jackie Onassis black. (35-36)

Ending with her own sarcastic, embellished, and long-overdue statement of subversion, Jennifer proceeds to behave as though “*at a funeral*,” satirically acting out the role of mourning widow,

“[y]es it will be hard,” she says, sarcastically, “*but that’s the kind of woman I am*” (36). All the while, the other women make supportive, witty interjections, portraying the tightly knit bond forged amongst the group members. “I’ll stick a big knife in ’im till he can’t do nothing but scream” (36), says Motor Mama, ever “*menacing*” and protective (35), “[t]hen I’ll [have a] drink” (36). Having performatively and narratively purged their insecurities, the women close the scene with a hardy, collective, and excited cry of “[c]heers!” (36).

Breaking “Cycles of Violence”: The End of Madonna’s Story

While the other women embody their insecurities, Madonna’s body remains “*red and blue blotched*,” lighting effects revealing the injuries incurred during Jay’s last assault (35). She stands before her mirror, surrounded by the other women. Heather, attempting to console her friend, hands her a “*cover stick*,” asking, “[w]hy don’t you try this honey?,” applying “red lipstick” to her own enhanced lips – “[m]mmm. I love red-lipstick,” she says, encouragingly (35). No victim, Madonna, embracing her anger, makes a dramatic gesture: grabbing the “*coverstick [she] whites out her face slowly*,” then, using Heather’s lipstick, she “*paints red strips across her face like Tonto[’s] war paint*,” readying herself for battle (36).¹⁰⁷ The exchange between Heather and Madonna indicates the protagonist’s ability to dismiss her undue affections for Jay and resist his violence. Empowered, for a time, by “coalition” (Sandoval 78), a newfound sense of community “belonging” (Rowe 16), Madonna is finally able to engage subversive consciousness. “*Coldly, methodically*,” she speaks to the other women:

¹⁰⁷ Tonto, a fictional American Western character, is the Indigenous/Native American partner to the White Lone Ranger. Both characters were developed by George W. Trendle and Fran Striker in the 1930s. Today, Tonto has been adopted by Indigenous activists – mainly in the United States – as an emblem of both colonial oppression and “postcolonial” subversion. For further information, see Michael Fitzgerald’s *Native Americans on TV: Stereotypes, Myths, and the “Good Indian”* and “The White Savior and his Junior Partner: The Lone Ranger and Tonto on Cold War Television (1949–1957).”

I watch him. Every move.

The man showers in the morning. Towels himself just so. Brushes those teeth.

Smooths shaving foam on his hands. Those hands. That face. Takes the razor....

Watches himself in the mirror. Glad his face turns just so towards the light.

I love him.

I watch him. Every move.

I wish the razor would slip. (36)

As her anger mounts, the protagonist gradually comes to identify with the perpetually enraged Motor Mama, who chants, contradicting Madonna's professed "love" for Jay, "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you" (36). Working against the masculinist "trope of the angry feminist," Clements' portrayals of women's anger suggest the political usefulness of fair-minded rage (Tomlinson 114), with the women's coalescence of anger liberating each group member from her emotional constraints. In her essay "The Uses of Anger," Audre Lorde espouses the transformative potential of rage, arguing that "[e]very woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger, potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being" (127). The women's group, drawing on the strength of Dee and Motor Mama, employ anger to such an end, subverting their husbands' domination. As Lorde writes, "[f]ocused with precision, [anger] can become a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change" (127).

The play's lengthy, surreal climax commences with Madonna, safe in the care of Motor Mama, who continually whispers "*I hate you*" (in the direction of Jay) (37). Passing her mirror, Madonna's face "*becomes the distorted face of Motor Mama,*" as the two women "*stare at each other and touch each other,*" reaching a point of complete identification, while Jay, isolated, "*stands in seclusion, whispering 'I'm sorry,' over and over*" (37). Once Madonna has truly come

to embody Motor Mama's warlike characteristics, her altered form implying increased strength, she confronts Jay, making him aware of his culpability in the death of her unborn baby and simultaneously disavowing her affection for him. "I had a child grow inside me," she cries, "[s]mashed... knocked.... The child left just like liquid" (38). When Jay can only respond apologetically – "I'm sorry" – Madonna tells him that "[he has] died inside [her]" (38) and with typical volatility the "[a]bused abuser" (11) becomes violent, demanding Madonna "take [her] clothes off" (39). However, the protagonist, now infused with Motor Mama's "[i]ntens[ity]" (11), refuses to acquiesce to his violent demand and responds with a terse, "no" (39).

Avoiding the inclusion of unnecessary enactments of violence, Clements does not stage Madonna's murder, but alludes to her death through a convoluted dialogue, with Madonna, Dee, and May speaking, effectually, as one:

smashed
slowly
softly
pounding
maybe I'm dead. (40)

As she speaks, lights on Madonna/May's body "*become spotted and look like bruises mixed with blood,*" while in the background the sound effect of "*water pumping increases [,] overflows.... [and] stops*" (40). Standing together, witnessing Madonna's narration of her own death, the women's group, "*some more audibly than others,*" mouth "*I hear you*" (39), voicing their support, engaging audiences in the vitally necessary "ongoing process" of witnessing testimony (Cubilié 15).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ The scenario is similar to Valerie's description of her own murder in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (100).

Although Madonna has evidently died, she – like the women in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* – continues to have an active, embodied presence and posthumous agency. “I lov[e] you,” says the spectre of Madonna, as the “*light bruises fade*” from her body; this time, however, it seems to be Dee to whom she speaks (41). Clements, representing a radical form of feminist resistance, the subversion of misogynistic violence through interworldly coalition, depicts Jennifer and Motor Mama, in their own separate narratives, choosing to escape the confines of violence. Motor Mama – unsurprisingly – “*leaves in disgust*,” while Jennifer “*packs her things*” (41). Heather, on the other hand, “*kneels to begin praying*” (41). There is a degree of ambivalence in Heather’s decision, given that the “husbands” are no longer involved in the play’s action (11). However, the fact that she retains Mr. Heather’s religious ideals suggests that she does not follow the actions of her friends, but remains in her abusive relationship. As the play comes to a close, Madonna, Dee, and May exit the stage “*in unison*,” followed by the other members of the women’s group, save Heather, who simply continues to “*pray*” (41). Jay stands in isolation, “*bruises*” having formed on his body; he “*sits in the doorway rocking himself*” and repeating the words “I love you” (41).

Providing the members of the women’s group a degree of power and agency, Clements’ play, albeit unsettling at points, is deliberately designed to re-empower female victims of violence and to raise awareness concerning the potential outcome of unchecked domestic violence. The playwright purposefully and imaginatively employs surrealistic stage techniques in order to reposition the women as figures of strength rather than meek victims of misogynistic domination. While Jay and, by extension, the “husbands” do have their power threatened and diminished, the final image of tempered female defiance suggests that – at best – domestic abuse may be *resisted* through coalition. After all, Madonna, while strong-willed, is still murdered, and

Heather, despite the interventions of her friends, refuses to leave her abusive situation. Although *Now Look What You Made Me Do* implies that intimate partner violence might be subverted, to some extent, by collective female resistance – the fostering of diverse coalition – Clements' intricate allusions also point to the (very real) difficulty involved in eradicating gendered violence. In this respect, the play testifies not only to the plight of women attempting to overcome subjection and abuse, but also to the social problematics related to stopping sexualized violence – particularly as it manifests in domestic contexts. Most significantly, Clements' play invites audiences to problematize masculinist social hierarchies that allow for the dismissal of violence against women.

Chapter 4

Media, Gendered Violence, and Dramatic Resistance in Yvette Nolan's *Annie Mae's Movement* and *Blade*

Yvette Nolan: (Re)educating Canada

Born and raised in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, renowned playwright, director, dramaturg, educator, and author Yvette Nolan is the child of an Indigenous (Algonquian) mother and an Irish immigrant father. Like many Irish immigrants, her father left his birth country to escape impoverishment and persecution and, like so many other Indigenous children, her mother was forcibly removed from her family – at the age of 7 – and sent first to a sanatorium, and then to residential school (Nolan, “Hopeful” 33). “[My father] was her math teacher,” says Nolan, “I am the product of the residential school system. Quite literally” (qtd. in Dempsey 23). Nolan’s cultural position – as a “white” looking Algonquian/Irish artist (Nolan, “Her” n. pag.) – is reflective of the critical struggles related to Canadian national identity and the playwright has strived, over the past 30 years, to find a balance in her art between recognizing her heritage and her own personal history. “How does a kid from middleclass Winnipeg speak for a group of people with both a diverse history and current reality?” she asks wryly (qtd. in Shantz 73). Nolan’s fraught cultural identity has unsurprisingly played a prominent role in shaping her career: “I’m never enough [of] either,” professes the playwright, “[a]s a Métis I’m never Indian enough for the Indian community and I’m never white enough for the white community. I stand in both worlds. Or both communities try to claim me at the same moment” (qtd. in Shantz 73).

While a number of writers and critics – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – have, over the past several decades, contested the essentialization of cultural/racial identity,¹⁰⁹ when Nolan’s career was burgeoning in the late 1980s, the theoretical polarization of Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity and cultural production had yet to be adequately problematized. Identity politics relating to the socially constructed divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art/criticism thus proved both vexing and formative for the playwright, given the (then) particularly contentious notion of Métis – mixed lineage – identity.¹¹⁰ Nolan formally launched her theatre career at the 1990 Winnipeg Fringe Festival, with the premier of *Blade*, an extremely successful one-act production (Prokosh, “Celebrating” D1) with a completely Aboriginal cast (Shantz 65-73), later to be criticized for its failure to represent strictly Aboriginal concerns, an issue to which I will return in my analysis of the play.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ See Anzaldúa 78; Lal 23; Razack, *Looking* 10; Armstrong, “What” 29; Mohanty 300; Hall, “Identity” 394.

¹¹⁰ I use the term Métis in order to refer individuals of mixed lineage who self identify as Métis, rather than to refer to one specific Métis community.

Métis writer and critic Maria Campbell describes the precariousness of Métissage in Canada during the 1980s and 1990s aptly in *The Book of Jessica*. See Griffiths and Campbell, 20.

While the *Indian Act* demands that all Aboriginal Peoples register to claim status, there remains no comprehensive national definition of Métis identity and, until the case of *R v. Powley* in 2003, there existed no broad definition. Steven Powley and his son Rodney, both members of the Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario Métis community asserted their ancestral hunting rights, prompting the Supreme Court of Canada to determine three (very broad) identification factors: self-identification as a Métis individual, ancestral connection to an historic Métis community, and acceptance by a Métis community. See Chris Andersen’s *Métis: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, 65-70.

¹¹¹ Preeminent Cree dramatist Tomson Highway has commented extensively on the manner in which Indigenous playwrights have been compartmentalized by audiences/critics demanding essentialistic depictions of Indigeneity portrayed by exclusively Indigenous actors. See Jennifer Chung’s “Native Theatre: More Than Just ‘Poor Me’ Stories.” Canadian theatre critic Alan Filewod has also criticized the rigid boundaries constructed around Indigenous theatre in Canada in the late 1980s, elaborating on the (implicitly problematic) position of non-Indigenous spectators: see his article “Receiving Aboriginality.”

Refusing to be held accountable for representing a “voice” specific to Métis community (Nolan, “Driest” 8), Nolan did not seek official Métis “status” until 2013 (Nolan, “Her” n. pag.).

As she writes,

For me, the decision not to seek status was one of resistance, and of pride. I knew where I came from, who my people were, and a government telling me that I was an Indian would not make me any more so. I was raised in the city, I never lived on the reserve, and I did not need support from my mother’s band to pursue an education. (“Her” n. pag.)

Nolan instead chose very early on to adopt a brave and emancipatory “Pan-Native” approach to representation (qtd. in Lachance 23), focusing on broad-based education concerning Canada’s – regionally variant – colonial history. “Everything I do is attached to teaching,” she asserts, “in what I write, there’s always a point.... There’s always a moral” (qtd. in Aboriginal Media Society 13). Over the past three decades, Nolan has worked relentlessly to educate the public, increase Indigenous representation in the arts, and thereby outmode Canada’s colonial legacy – particularly the legacy of violence against Indigenous women – with dramatic portrayals that illuminate while they entertain. “Sometimes I wonder if we can ever get over colonization and tell other stories,” the playwright ponders, resolving that there “is no such thing as post-colonization at this point” (qtd. in Dempsey 25).

Overcoming discouragement after being reprimanded by “angry” audiences following several productions of *Blade* (Nolan, qtd. in Shantz 66), Nolan, well aware of the significant reclamative function of Indigenous drama, waited only one year before bringing herself to mount another play. *Job’s Wife*, also a one-act piece, was produced by the small Manitoba-based company, Theatre Projects, in 1992 (Shantz 4-6). Commenting directly on the (often) detrimental

impact of Western Christianity on Indigenous communities, *Job's Wife* features an Indigenous man as God. Representing the relationship between a White Catholic woman and the Indigenous God figure, Nolan unsettles accepted notions of an inconceivable, omnipotent Christian deity, while also bringing to attention the misogyny/androcentrism inherent to Christian dogma. Nolan, like Mojica and Clements, regularly employs her work as a means to remind audiences of the damaging effects of coercive religious indoctrination upon Indigenous peoples – especially women. According to the outspoken Nolan, “[b]eing a non-Christian.... is tied up with being Native” and, for her, “[t]here is no way to teach Native theatre without dealing with Christianity as much of theatre is about colonization” (qtd. in Aboriginal Media Society 13). However subversive, *Job's Wife* was well received by critics and later published in the (now out of print) *Theatrum Theatre Journal* (Shantz 4-6).

Following *Job*, Nolan's early productions included *Smaller* (1992), her first full-length play, also a Winnipeg Fringe Festival production, and *Some of My Best Friends Are ...*, a piece written for Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba (PTAM) and performed throughout Manitoba and Ontario in the early 1990s (Shantz 6; Dempsey 25). Also commissioned by PTAM, *Everybody's Business*, an AIDS education play, was staged at various venues in Manitoba and Ontario between 1990 and 1993 (Dempsey 25).¹¹² The 1992 play, *Common Ground*, written in collaboration with Shawna Dempsey, Kris Purdy, and Margo Charlton – yet another PTAM production – was an environmental piece, intended as an outdoor performance. The prolific playwright also wrote several shorter plays during the early 1990s, including *Guernsey*, performed by dancer D-Anne Kuby (1992), *Video*, produced by Manitoba's Theatre Projects for

¹¹² Interestingly, Clements' one-act puppet show, *Dirty Dog River*, also designed to educate (specifically children) about HIV, toured a number of communities across Canada between 1994 and 1996 (Ratsoy and Hoffman 475).

the Short Shot Series Festival (1992), and *Child*, produced initially by the 3rd International Women's Playwrights Festival (1993) (Shantz 6-8).

While continually productive throughout the early 1990s, the audacious Nolan has been subject to her share of criticism, particularly during the first decade of her career. The full-length play *Smaller*, a dark comedy concerning a feminist troupe of actors, portrayed an extramarital affair between one member of the troupe and the husband of another. The play, staged only at the Manitoba Fringe Festival (1992), rendered Nolan the subject of harsh criticism by (arguably prudish) audiences offended by the play's central action, which included the depiction of a shrinking penis – an adulterer's punishment for infidelity: the play was staged only once (Shantz 6).¹¹³ Nolan's next project, her second full-length play, *A Marginal Man*, though highly anticipated, was similarly subject to a great deal of criticism.¹¹⁴ The play's action follows the relationship between the male protagonist (Adam) and a female co-worker (Claire) who is being stalked by an abusive ex-partner. As Claire becomes increasingly distressed, Adam – against the will of his colleagues – initiates a white ribbon campaign at work. The tension culminates with Claire accidentally shooting Adam, whom she mistakes for her stalker. While Nolan clearly intended to represent the cyclical nature of violence, the playwright was condemned by local critic Kevin Prokosh for attempting “to score ideological points” (Prokosh, “Play” B9) and undermined by then Artistic Director of Winnipeg's Prairie Theatre Exchange, Kim McCaw,

¹¹³ Valerie Shantz, dramaturg for the original production of *Annie Mae's Movement* and friend to Nolan, suggests that such criticism “overshadowed potentially constructive criticism” of the piece (6). See Shantz's “Yvette Nolan: Playwright in Context.”

¹¹⁴ Nolan was given airtime on a CBC AM radio program, hosted by Vicki Gabereau, which broadcast nationally during the afternoon until 1997, as well as *The Arts Tonight*, another popular CBC program. See *CBC Digital Archives*: <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/arts-entertainment/>.

Despite criticism, the script was published by Playwrights Canada Press in 1994 and, later, as a digitized text by Alexander Street Press in 2012.

who suggested that Nolan’s “critical eye was disappearing” and her work “moving away from being successful theatrically” (qtd. in Shantz 16).

Undeterred, Nolan has continued in recent years to make a diverse and substantial contribution to Canadian theatre, unabashedly engaging with poignant, controversial issues. Not only has she written thirteen original plays, all of which comment, either expressly or obliquely, on relevant feminist/Indigenous issues, but Nolan has also directed and dramaturged numerous productions in Canada and the United States. Some of her more recent plays include *Annie Mae’s Movement* (2006); the libretto *Hilda Blake* (2008); the radio play *Owen* (2008); *From Thine Eyes* (2011), a one-man performance by dancer Michael Greyeyes; *The Birds* (2013), an ambitious adaptation of ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes’ original; the short film, *A Common Experience* (2013), a collaboration with Shane Belcourt; *Scattering Jake* (2014); and, most recently, *The Unplugging* (2014) – winner of the Jessie Richardson Theatre Award.¹¹⁵ Nolan is also the editor of *Beyond the Pale: Dramatic Writing from First Nations Writers and Writers of Colour, Volume 1* (1996), *Beyond the Pale: Dramatic Writing from First Nations Writers and Writers of Colour, Volume 2* (2004), and *Refractions: Solo* (2013), a collection of monologues, co-edited with Donna Michelle St. Bernard. Her newest book, *The Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* (Playwrights Canada Press) was published in April 2015.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *A Common Experience*, a beautiful juxtaposition of visual images and stark typed prose, represents a woman filling out a bureaucratic form – the Canadian government’s “Common Experience Payment” application for residential school survivors. The work ultimately relates Nolan’s mother’s story, suggesting an emotional weight that has been carried through generations.

I date Nolan’s plays in accordance with publication dates, rather than premier dates. In cases of multiple publications, I use the most recent text. Only if the work mentioned is unpublished do I indicate the year of premier.

¹¹⁶ For further information concerning Nolan’s recent projects, see the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance’s web-page: <http://ipaa.ca/members/membership-directory/yvette-nolan> and the Playwrights’ Guild of Canada’s web-page: <http://www.playwrightsguild.ca/playwright/yvette-nolan>.

Nolan’s directing credits include Leonard Linklater’s *Justice*, Clements’ *Tombs of the Vanishing Indian* and *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Café Daughter* by Kenneth T Williams – a Gwaandak Theatre

Despite the difficulties and criticism faced during the early part of her career, Nolan's greatest challenge to date has been the remounting of George Ryga's¹¹⁷ 1967 play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, a joint production by Western Canada Theatre and the National Arts Centre, staged at the NAC in May 2009.¹¹⁸ Representing the hardship endured by a young Indigenous woman in a fictionalized urban environment, Ryga's play depicts Rita Joe as an emblem, signifying the violence involved in colonization, as well as contemporary violence against Indigenous women. Although it premiered originally at the NAC in 1969, the contentious play remains timely considering that Indigenous women living in Canada are still overrepresented as victims of gendered/racialized violence: "we can't talk about Rita Joe in the past tense," intones Nolan, "[w]e have to acknowledge she's still here" (qtd. in Dempsey 25). Nolan did not revise Ryga's original script, which she aptly describes as "an odyssey through hell of an Indian woman" – the "hell" being the pervasive racism and violence of a "Canadian city" (qtd. in Dempsey 25). She did, however, put together an ensemble cast constituted entirely by Indigenous performers.¹¹⁹

Nolan first saw the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's adaptation of *Rita Joe* as a child living in Winnipeg (Dempsey 25). While the Royal Winnipeg adaptation did not feature any Indigenous

production – for which she won the Bob Couchman Award for direction, Melanie J Murray's *A Very Polite Genocide* (Native Earth), *Salt Baby* by Falen Johnson, Darrell Dennis' *Tales of An Urban Indian*, The Turtle Gals' *The Only Good Indian* and *The Triple Truth*. As a dramaturg, she has (in the past several years) worked in Orono, Maine, on Donna Loring's *The Glooskape Chronicles* and on Raven Spirit Dance's *Ashes on the Water*, and in Toronto on *Signal Theatre's A Soldier's Tale*. The playwright has worked as Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts (2003 to 2011) and served as playwright in residence at Brandon University (1996) and the National Arts Centre (2007-2008). Importantly, Nolan also held the position of president of the Playwrights Union of Canada (1998-2001), of Playwrights Canada Press (2003-2005), and of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance (2007-2008). In 2007, Nolan was awarded the Maggie Bassett Award for service to the theatre community.

¹¹⁷ Ryga (1933-1987) was raised on a subsistence farm outside Athabasca, Alberta, where his parents moved from the Ukraine in the 1920s. Bordering a Cree reserve, the farm employed Indigenous labourers, with whom Ryga worked closely on a regular basis. The playwright was thus given a glimpse – at a young age – of the devastation resulting from colonization. See James Hoffman's *The Ecstasy of Resistance: A Biography of George Ryga*.

¹¹⁸ See her Shawna Dempsey's interview-based article, "Yvette Nolan Takes Centre Stage."

¹¹⁹ There were no Indigenous performers cast in Ryga's 1969 NAC staging.

actors, it was nonetheless the first time that Nolan saw “a representation of someone like herself” – an Indigenous girl – on stage (qtd. in Dempsey 25). She and her mother developed a “secret language” based on the script, referring to an attractive Indigenous man as “Jamie Paul” – a main character in the play (Dempsey 25). As with Ryga’s protagonist, Nolan found transitioning to urbanity difficult; she recalls how, like Rita Joe, the “concrete made [her] feet hurt” (“Interview” 9). Continuing, Nolan elaborates upon the extent to which Ryga’s original subtle analogy resonated with her own experience:

It’s something my mother and I always said to each other, because it is such an apt metaphor for everything we have lost: the connection to the land, a known and hospitable landscape, community. The city is hard, and it is easy to become lost and desperate, even though you have come from another place. (“Interview” 9)

Viewing the play during her formative years helped Nolan understand – very early in life – the way in which systemic violence against Indigenous women functions in White settler societies.

As she states:

The weakest are always the most at risk. In the hierarchy of the dominant culture, Native women are at the very bottom, so Rita Joe faces so many challenges. She is victimized by men, the johns, the cops, the murderers. She is seen as a whore right from the start, which puts her at a disadvantage, making it almost impossible to get out of “trouble.” (“Interview” 10)

Having her experiences represented on stage and “reflected back” was both “powerful and formative,” cultivating a “commitment to indigenous and feminist live art,” a commitment evinced in all of her subsequent work (qtd. in Dempsey 25).

Nolan's experiences have compounded to instill in the playwright a deep determination to refute deprecating, racializing stereotypes of Indigeneity by delivering socially transformative narratives. Describing herself as "[a] playwright first" and "a prairie playwright at that," she believes that playwriting is a mechanism of "voice" ("Driest" 8). However, Nolan is disconcerted by the fact that Indigenous voices are not yet adequately represented in Canadian theatre, a problem she strives, through her work, to rectify. "The idea of Aboriginal people in the abstract is so much more appealing than the reality of us," she observes (qtd. in Dempsey 23). This representational imbalance is particularly unsettling for Nolan who believes that – for Indigenous peoples – theatre is "about memory or, rather, about the act of manifesting memory, about becoming whole again through the very act of remembering, and then being able to move forward" ("Hopeful" 31). According to Nolan, subversive revisionist historical accounts, when narrativized and performed, operate to "free the ancestors who have been trapped by the circumstances [of colonization]" ("Hopeful" 32). Focusing on *Annie Mae's Movement* (1998) and *Blade* (1991), this chapter examines depictions of racialized/gendered colonialist violence in Nolan's poignant work, demonstrating the way in which these plays function to recuperate Indigenous women as strong leaders, "un-silencing" (Doty 42) voices quieted by unjust "circumstances" ("Hopeful" 32) and thereby empowering Indigenous/Métis women and educating audiences generally.

Anna Mae Pictou Aquash: "Warrior"/Activist

After I realized how you people live, I didn't want the things I had before. I left everything because I wanted to show you I love you people and want to help you.

Nolan wrote *Annie Mae's Movement* – her best known play – while working as Brandon University's (first) writer-in-residence in 1996 (Aboriginal Media Society 13; Dempsey 25). The play was first workshopped in 1998 as part of Native Earth Performing Arts' Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival for New Plays, held at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. This initial staged reading was directed by Anne Anglin and dramaturged by Valerie Shantz (Nolan, *Annie* ii). The premier of the finalized 1998 version was produced by Hardly Art and staged in White Horse, Yukon, in early September 1998. Later that month, *Annie Mae's Movement* was produced jointly by Red Roots Theatre and Hardly Act and staged at the Gas Station Theatre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and, in May 1999, the play was produced by Eastern Front Theatre and performed as part of the On the Waterfront Festival, in Halifax, Nova Scotia (*Annie* 1). Well received by critics and audiences, *Annie Mae's Movement* was published by Playwrights Canada Press in 1998, the very year of its premier. A (slightly) revised version of the text was published in 2006 by Playwrights Canada Press and, in March of that year, the play was remounted by Native Earth at Factory Studio Theatre in Toronto. This time, Nolan directed *Annie Mae* herself and Michelle St. John – former member of the Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble – was featured in the starring role of heroine Anna (Nolan, *Annie* ii).¹²¹ The play, consisting of a series of short vignettes, fictionalizes the last year in the life of Mi'kmaq activist Anna Mae Pictou Aquash (1974 to 1975), a tragic year that ended with the rape, murder, and dismemberment of the young

¹²⁰ In this quotation, taken from a conversation between Anna Mae Pictou Aquash and Roslyn Jumping Bull, Aquash is attempting to explain her desire to become involved with activism on the Pine Ridge Reservation. See Merna Forster's *100 Canadian Heroines* 34.

¹²¹ While I use the name Anna when referring to Nolan's fictional character, I employ the activist's actual name – Anna Mae or Anna Mae Pictou Aquash – when discussing the real-life woman. Of course, Anna Mae's last name is Pictou, but, because she was married at the time of her death, she is most commonly referred to by her married name, Aquash.

activist. Nolan's play – a tribute to the Annie Mae's strength and persistence – asks audiences to assist in the historical recovery of “warrior” Anna Mae (*Annie* 15), “manifesting memory” in order to “free” the real-life heroine from the confines of history (Nolan, “Hopeful”).

Anna Mae Pictou Aquash (27 March 1945 – December 1975) is certainly a historical figure worthy of such remembrance and commemoration. She grew up on a Mi'kmaq reserve outside of Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, and her family – she had two older sisters and a brother – lived in poverty, residing for most of Anna Mae's youth at Pictou Landing reserve in an abandoned army house with no electricity, running water, or heat (Johansen, *American* 37). Because of poor access to nutritionally viable food, she and her three siblings were often ill (Brand 32-35; Forster 31-33; Johansen, *American* 37). Anna Mae suffered from tuberculosis in early childhood, an illness from which she barely recovered (Brand 33; Mihesuah, “Anna” 205). She attended church on Sundays and was educated in a one-room school up until the age of 11 when she was bussed to an off-reserve Catholic school. The same year (1956) Anna Mae's father died and, abandoned by her mother, who was overcome by the loss, she was raised by her older sister Rebecca (Forster 31-33; Johansen, *American* 37). Anna Mae left school in grade nine and, in 1962, travelled to Maine, then Boston, where she met her future husband Jake Maloney – also Mi'kmaq from Shubenacadie. In 1964, when Anna Mae was nineteen, she gave birth to their first child, a daughter, Denise. The following year, her second child, Deborah, was born (Brand xi; Johansen, *American* 38; Mihesuah, “Anna” 205-06).

In 1969, the couple divorced and, later that year, Anna Mae, having developed an increased awareness of the political struggles of the Indigenous peoples of North America, became involved in social activism, helping to organize the Boston Indian Council. She next began teaching at an Indian cultural center in Maine – Teaching and Research in Bicultural

Education (TRIBE) – where she studied Indigenous histories and culturally specific teaching methods (Brand 43; Forster 33). Inspired by her experience with TRIBE, she enrolled in the New Careers program at Wheelock College in Boston and was offered a scholarship at Brandeis University in Waltham, which she declined because of her commitment to her young daughters, in combination with a growing desire to further involve herself with Indigenous activism (Brand 43; Forster 33-34; Mihesuah 206). Now partnered with Nogeeshik Aquash, a Chipewyan artist from Walpole Island, Ontario, who was involved with the American Indian Movement (AIM),¹²² Anna Mae gained information concerning the – newly founded – organization’s political undertakings and, after hearing captivating AIM cofounder Russell Means speak, 20 year Anna Mae became active in the organization (Johansen, *American* 37). Yet the young activist would quickly discover that the patriarchal AIM did not necessarily welcome female involvement (Maracle 19). While media coverage of AIM activism focused intently upon “telegenic” leaders like Russell Means and Dennis Banks (Konigsberg n. pag), women – despite disregard – played a salient role behind the scenes – a role which hegemonic (androcentric) historical accounts have largely ignored (Maracle 19-22).

Together, Nogeeshik and Anna Mae nonetheless became deeply involved in AIM activities, participating in the Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972 and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, during which the couple were married in a traditional Lakota ceremony (Johansen,

¹²² The American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in July 1968 – the same year as the Black Panthers – was an Indigenous/Native American advocacy group, prominent in the United States throughout the 1970s. The group came together to contend with issues pertaining to American Indian sovereignty, treaty rights, and incidences of racialized violence – most particularly, police harassment. See Johansen’s *Encyclopedia of the American Indian Movement* and Richard Erdoes *Ojibwa Warrior Denis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement*.

American 38).¹²³ Over the next several years, Anna Mae became closely allied with AIM leadership, befriending Leonard Peltier, Dennis Banks, and Russell Means, all of whom were arrested and charged in connection with Wounded Knee and various other AIM activities across the United States (Johansen, *American* 38), and, shortly before her disappearance, she began a love affair with “charismatic” AIM cofounder Banks, despite the fact that both were married (Konigsberg n. pag.). Following the June 1975 murders of FBI agents Ronald Williams and Jack Coler at the Jumping Bull Compound on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, Anna Mae was pursued and twice arrested by the FBI as a possible material witness to the crime, but was quickly released on bail because she had not been indicted on any previous charges (Mihesuah 212; Johansen, *American* 38; Brand 124; Forster 33). However, after the arrests, rumours spread within the movement that Anna Mae was an FBI informant and, after being questioned by AIM leadership in December of 1975, she was forced into hiding (Forster 33).

Anna Mae spoke on the phone with her family only in Mi'kmaq during this trying period for fear of wire-tap (Mihesuah, “Anna” 213). The last time she was heard from, she requested that her sister Mary care for her two daughters should “anything happen to her” and, on 24 February 1976, Anna Mae Pictou Aquash’s decomposing body was discovered in the northeast corner of the Pine Ridge Reservation – she was 30 years old (Mihesuah, “Anna” 213; Forster

¹²³ The Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan, also known as the Pan-American Native Quest for Justice, was a cross-country caravan organized by a number of Indigenous/Native American organizations, including AIM. However, the Trail of Broken Treaties is generally represented as an AIM protest as the organization was considered by authorities to pose the greatest threat. The caravan was designed to draw attention to the way in which colonization rendered Indigenous peoples of North America at a social and political disadvantage. Voicing their concerns over treaty issues, poor access to housing and adequate living standards, protestors travelled from the west coast of North America (in October), reaching their destination – Washington, D.C. – in November, the week before the American presidential election. Such demonstrations were considered excellent political tools during this period and a similar protest occurred in Canada around the same time: the Native People’s Caravan travelled from Vancouver to Ottawa in 1974. For further reading concerning Indigenous caravan demonstrations, see Deloria Vine’s *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*, Bruce Johansen’s *Encyclopedia of the American Indian Movement*, and David Ticoll and Stan Persky’s “Welcome to Ottawa: the *Native People’s Caravan*.” For further details concerning the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, refer to Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

31). A pathologist from the Bureau of Indian Affairs hastily determined that she died of exposure, taking the unusual measure of severing her hands, placing them in a container, and giving them to the FBI for analysis in Washington, D.C. Apparently, there was a consensus among the federal agents present on the scene that Anna Mae's body was too badly decomposed to establish identity standardly (by fingerprint), yet Ken Sayers – Pine Ridge's then BIA police chief – would later state (perhaps accidentally) that no coroner was given access to the body prior to dismemberment (Johansen, *American* 38). The BIA arranged for a quick burial, despite lack of a death certificate (Mihesuah 213-214; Johansen, *American* 38). On 3 March 1976, a fingerprint analysis by the FBI proved that the corpse was indeed that of Anna Mae. Distressed friends and family demanded a second autopsy and, this time, a Minnesota coroner determined that Anna was killed by a 32-caliber bullet shot at close range, suggesting that the bullet was in fact quite easy to find (Mihesuah, "Anna" 213; Johansen, *American* 38). When questioned about the bullet, BIA coroner W.O. Brown replied – according to an account published in the *Washington Star* on 24 May 1976 – "A little bullet isn't hard to overlook" (qtd. in Johansen and Maestas 106). A week after her body was found, Anna Mae was buried at Holy Rosary Catholic cemetery in Pine Ridge.

The events following the recovery of her body suggest that there was a conspiracy surrounding the killing, but it was not until March 2003 – 27 years after she was brutally murdered – that two men were indicted for the rape and murder of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash: Arlo Looking Cloud and John Graham were both AIM security guards in the 1970s (Johansen, *American* 39). Looking Cloud was convicted in February 2004 and, on 23 April 2004, he was sentenced to life in prison. No concrete physical evidence linked Looking Cloud to the crime, but a videotape was recovered in which he admitted to having been at the scene of the murder

(Johansen, *American* 39; Konigsberg n. pag.). Recounting the execution-style killing, he said that Anna Mae “started praying. It was so quick” (qtd. in Konigsberg n. pag.). Five years later, in September 2009, John Graham was charged with the kidnapping, rape, and murder of Anna Mae by the State of South Dakota. Thelma Rios, a Lakota activist from Rapid City, suffering from cancer, was also charged in 2009. Rios pled guilty to the charge of being an accessory in November 2010, but was granted a plea bargain and sentenced to a mere five years in prison for her involvement in the events leading up to the murder, but most of her sentence was suspended. Rios died of lung cancer in February of 2011 after serving only a year in prison. While Graham was convicted in December 2010 (Johansen, *American* 39; Konigsberg n. pag.), after waiting 35 years, Denise Pictou – Anna Mae’s daughter – continues to lack confidence that justice was actually served. Many continue to believe that Anna Mae was raped and murdered by FBI agents (Pierre n. pag.), yet, according to Denise Pictou, there was a broader conspiracy within AIM and, in reality, it was a number of Anna Mae’s fellow activists that got away with murder rather than federal agents (Poliandri 246). When asked about the outcome of the prosecutions, she stated that her mother’s “questioning of the movement’s treatment of women and humans in general... provid[ed] an opportunity for those in the movement to snitch jacket and silence her” (qtd in Poliandri 246). Nolan’s play reflects much of the uncertainty that continues to surround the case. Although originally scripted long before the convictions, *Annie Mae’s Movement* aptly depicts the factious, masculinist nature of AIM, while also addressing the authoritarian pressure placed on activists by the FBI, and the disturbing circumstances relating to both Anna Mae’s murder and the investigation into her death.¹²⁴ Demonstrating Anna Mae’s integrity and strength, Nolan,

¹²⁴ Nolan, to her credit, diligently revised her play based on the emergence of new details pertaining to the murder. After Looking Cloud was brought to justice, the playwright altered the conclusion, so that Anna’s killer – originally identified as an FBI agent – is now a “composite” of some of the male characters in the play (Copeland 96).

despite contending with extremely difficult subject matter, manages to reconstruct the heroine in a manner both enlightening and empowering.

(Re)membering Anna Mae in *Annie Mae's Movement*

Drawing directly from biographical accounts, Nolan's play examines the way in which intra and intercultural misogyny worked in combination with race and gender-based discursive violence in the media so as to silence and dismiss Anna Mae Pictou Aquash. Mapping the trajectory of events that culminated in Anna Mae's brutally violent death, the playwright draws attention to the role of Indigenous feminist activism in perpetuating positive social change, as well as the gender-based exclusion within certain activist movements, including the American Indian Movement.¹²⁵ Featured centrally is the Rugaru, a consumptive, cannibalistic Windigo figure.¹²⁶ Haunting the play, shadowing Anna, the creature's presence represents – as Nolan suggests – “the self-devouring elements within a Native political movement under extraordinary

¹²⁵ In her book *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*, Devon Mihesuah suggests that the patriarchy entrenched in AIM resulted in the marginalization of Indigenous women within the movement, as well as contemporary disregard for the role of Indigenous women members of AIM. She also argues that such problems continue to plague Indigenous communities. As she writes, “misogyny, colorism, ethnocentrism, and physical abuse are sad realities among Native people, and unless Natives do something about these problems no one else will” (*Indigenous* xiv). The Black Panther Movement was similarly rife with misogyny and women in that organization were subject to similar marginalization and, occasionally, violence. See, Robyn Ceanne Spencer's “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California.”

¹²⁶ Nolan's depiction of the Rugaru is reminiscent of Maria Campbell's representation of a similar man/beast in her story “Rou Garous,” included in the collection *Road Allowance People*. Campbell's Rou Garou derives from French/Franco-Canadian/ Franco-Métis mythology, a creature more commonly known as loup garou – werewolf – and conceived so as to encourage the observation of certain Catholic practices. Because Campbell uses language strategically, it is entirely possible that a reader from outside the aforesaid cultural groups may have difficulty recognizing the religious/cultural ideology behind the figure of the Rou Garou. Nolan's Rugaru differs only inasmuch as the creature is seemingly somewhat less specific in origin. See Pamela Sing's “Intersections of Memory, Ancestral Language, and Imagination; or, the Textual Production of Michif Voices as Cultural Weaponry” and Peter Bakker's *A Language of Their Own: The Genesis of Michif*.

pressure” (Nolan, qtd. in Moser 293), while also creating a sense of foreboding. The play opens with Anna “*curled in a foetal position*” (Nolan, *Annie* 3) – the position in which her (real) body was recovered from the Pine Ridge Reservation in February 1976 (Forster 31). Awakening, the heroine begins to “*crawl*” along the “*red road*” (Nolan, *Annie* 3). The red road, a turn of phrase circulated widely by activists in the 1960s and 1970s (Pritchard xi), is often used in dramatic and literary sites as a metaphor for the correct life path.¹²⁷ Yet Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, in her struggle for social justice, was brutally murdered, and Nolan’s reference to the “road” (3) immediately suggests the precarious position occupied by Anna Mae – a woman working within the limiting parameters of a masculinist movement.

In the opening scene, the playwright thus sets the stage for the following action, which sees Anna subject to gender-based discrimination and, ultimately, misogynistic violence at the hands of those she considers comrades. The play – as Michelle La Flamme contends – artfully poignant demonstrates the “contours of patriarchal oppression within the American Indian movement,” as well as “other Aboriginal community contexts” (110). However, Nolan is cautious from the outset to remind audiences of the broad-based colonialist violence that resulted in the entrenchment of “heteropatriarchy,” not only within AIM, but within Indigenous communities generally (McKegney, “Into” 7). Rising from the road, Anna speaks candidly to audiences – in a lengthy opening monologue – of the colonialist violence, historic and contemporary, inflicted upon Indigenous people in multiple colonial contexts, while also emphasizing the sexism inherent to AIM:

¹²⁷ Although the origin of the term is vague, it was brought to non-Indigenous audiences by John G. Neihardt in his 1932 book *Black Elk Speaks*. Used temporarily to refer to naturalistic health or healing practices, the phrase remains popular among Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. For a discussion of contemporary circulation, see Shari Huhndorf’s *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. For an etymological discussion, see Evan Pritchard’s *Native American Stories of the Sacred: Annotated and Explained*.

There are all kinds of ways of getting rid of people. In Central America they disappeared people. Just came and took them away in the middle of the night, whoosh gone, and then deny everything. Very effective. Well, here they disappear too. They disappear them by keeping them underfed, keeping them poor, prone to sickness and disease. They disappear them into jails. In jails they disappear their dignity, their pride. They disappear our kids, scoop 'em up, adopt em out. Our leaders - the leaders of the American Indian Movement - said that we should learn to fight. And because we'd never get enough firearms, we had to use the only thing that they couldn't take away from us. We had to train our bodies, turn our hands into weapons. Alright, I said, right on, and I got up at dawn to train with the rest of them. Well, they didn't mean me, did they? They meant the men, the warriors, the dog soldiers. Not you, girl, fighting's not for you. (Nolan, *Annie* 3)

Foreshadowing the play's conclusion – and referencing the sad historical dismissal of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash – Anna Mae's monologue closes with a plea for remembrance: “it's so easy to disappear people,” she says, “[t]hen just deny everything.... Anna Mae? Anna Mae Who? Never heard of her.... She is gone” (4). Lee Maracle, commenting explicitly on misogynistic disregard for women within AIM, asserts that the movement, inherently chauvinistic, was monopolized by male leaders, all of whom considered female involvement irrelevant:

How often have we stood in a circle, the only female Native, and our contributions to the goings-on are not acknowledged? – as though we were invisible.... It is not for want of our ability to articulate our goals or lead folks, either. We have been erased from the blackboard of our own lives. (Maracle 21)

Speaking directly to Indigenous women activists, she asks that we “[l]et Wounded Knee be the last time they erase us from the world of the living” (19). Nolan’s play, answering Maracle’s call, refuses to allow Anna Mae’s story to be obscured by historical disregard. Infusing her protagonist with indomitable vitality, Nolan ensures that Anna Mae is not forgotten. Aware from the beginning of the contestation she will face within the movement, Anna remains dauntless and, despite being discouraged by the (entirely male) AIM leadership, she is fiercely devoted to her beliefs.¹²⁸ “We have to fight, even if seems like we’re fighting ourselves,” asserts Anna, “[o]r else we will disappear, just disappear” (4).

Just as Anna completes her opening monologue, the emblematic red road vanishes and the Rugaru appears before the audience. A hybrid, he is “*part man, part creature, big and hairy, obviously not of this world*” and his presence implies the dangers involved in Anna’s forthright attempt to follow the road (4). The Rugaru’s “*supernatural*” ability “*to be here, and then suddenly there*” renders Anna constantly surveilled, reminding audiences of the pending threat to her safety (4). Interestingly, Rugaru, Lawrence, Dennis, Doug, FBI Guy, and Law – the complete male cast – are played by one actor (ii). Much like Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and *Now Look What You Made Me Do*, the focus of Nolan’s play is clearly female strength, rather than male violence. The inclusion of the Rugaru, a visible representation of fearsome male violence, makes the terrifying quality of the – less obvious – misogyny instilled in the other male characters readily apparent. When the Rugaru first appears, “*he raises his head and scans the audience*” (Nolan, *Annie* 5), as Nolan engages her audience in the integral and “ongoing process” of “witnessing” (Cubilié 15), asking those present to play an “active” role and heed the damaging effects of misogynistic violence (Stanlake 145). Portraying her male

¹²⁸ In reality, AIM leadership was – unsurprisingly – entirely male. See Johansen’s *Encyclopedia of the American Indian Movement*.

characters as an amalgam, the playwright implies, as Christy Stanlake suggests, the similarly patriarchal nature of AIM and the FBI – seemingly disparate organizations – demonstrating that “both factions share similar characteristics” and thereby constructing a motif of “men in high places fearing powerful women” (145- 46).

Nolan’s Anna is indeed powerful. Represented as an enigmatic teacher and a would-be leader within AIM, the heroine, though she struggles throughout the play to refigure AIM prerogatives in accordance with Indigenous American needs – proper access to nutrition, health care, and amelioration of environmental problems on reserves (22) – is seen as threat (rather than a worthy ally) to the male leadership. In keeping with reality, Nolan’s play aptly depicts the trajectory of Anna’s involvement in AIM. Early in the play, she is portrayed as a teacher and AIM sympathizer rather than a full-fledged, deeply embroiled activist, yet, even early on Anna subverts AIM ideology, recognizing and attempting to impart to her students the value of knowledge transmitted through literature – even White-authored literature. So far as Anna is concerned, if Indigenous peoples are to overcome colonialist subjection, “libraries and law books” are useful weapons (7). However, the protagonist is met with vociferous contestation from her student Lawrence – also an AIM sympathizer: “Books and white words! This is how we are going to change?” asks Lawrence, angrily, “[t]rying to change me into *wasicu*,” he shouts at Anna (7).¹²⁹ The exchange indicates the extent to which Anna’s notions of learning and leadership conflict with those of AIM leadership, who seek to set themselves apart from all *wasicu* knowledge frameworks. Historically, AIM ideology deemed European educative methods – the reading of “white words” (7) – to be in contradiction to Indigenous values,

¹²⁹ The term *wasicu* is a derivative of the Lakota and Dakota (Sioux) word *Wašiču*, meaning non-Indigenous person. See Neihardt’s *Black Elk Speaks*, 42. However, the word is – in contemporary popular culture – employed pejoratively to refer to White people of European descent.

favouring instead “alternative” means of understanding (Erdoes 64). Anna, acknowledging that Westernized educational systems tell tales of “poor explorers risking their lives to bring God to the ungrateful savages” (Nolan 8), by no means endorses coercive Residential School-style education, but she does see value in book-learned socio-historical understanding. This seemingly minor ideological incongruence positions her at odds with AIM leadership from the outset.

Importantly, Anna is resistant to male domination from her very first encounter with AIM leaders. When first they meet, Dennis – Nolan’s fictionalization of AIM co-founder Dennis Means (Anna Mae’s real-life lover) – accuses Anna of inventing Indigenous histories. Indomitable, the protagonist responds with assertiveness: “This is the real history of my tribe, it’s all there in the libraries, if you just take the time” (15). Becoming ever more deeply involved in AIM, and commencing her love affair with Dennis (16-17), Anna’s capability and insightfulness are repeatedly undermined and dismissed as inconsequential. When activist Doug is hired as AIM “chief of security,” Anna is instantly mistrustful (21). Doug, crude and dishonest, figures in metonymic alignment with a conflation of Looking Cloud and Graham, the two AIM security guards implicated in the rape and murder of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash. The protagonist, engaging her curiosity and quick wit, becomes aware that he is defrauding the movement by smuggling fundraising earnings for his own purposes and makes numerous attempts – all of which are rebuffed – to inform Dennis (26). “We can’t run a political movement on women’s intuition,” says Dennis; yet Anna, steadfast, responds astutely: “We can’t run a political movement totally ignoring 75% of its members because they are women” (31). Anna’s outspokenness increases resentment on the part of the men in the movement, all of whom disregard her ambition, a historically evinced scenario that resulted in the final (fatal) infliction of misogynistic violence. Nonetheless, in bringing “warrior” Anna Mae Pictou to the page and

stage (15), Nolan commemorates her bravery, an intricate recuperative gesture that empowers Indigenous women particularly and reminds audiences generally of the importance of Anna Mae's activist undertakings.

Masculinism, Maternalism, and Feminine Resistance

Despite her desire to “fight” (3), Anna is situated “[a]mongst the [w]omen” and forced to invest herself in fundraising for the movement, “sewing” shirts to sell to AIM enthusiasts (18). This task – feminized and diminished by the men in the movement – is evidently not the duty of choice for fiery Anna, yet the words and actions of the male leadership suggest that she ought to feel privileged to sacrifice herself to their cause.¹³⁰ When Anna completes her first shirt – intended for sale – Dennis enters the women's circle and “takes” it from her (19). Although Anna, true to character, is resistant – “not unless you have thirty bucks,” she says haughtily – Dennis is impervious, responding by telling her that she should consider herself “lucky” that he wants to wear her shirt (for free) (19). The exchange suggests that the “labour-intensive” activities undertaken by women in AIM are trivialized, considered menial, and, as a consequence, their labour is exploited (18). As Dennis announces, women make shirts because “[t]hat's something useful [they] can actually do” (17).

Directly tethered to masculine dismissal of female industry is the conflation of maternity with weakness – the undermining of motherhood – a wrongheaded linkage, which leads, in the

¹³⁰ I use the word feminized strategically to refer to the masculinist dismissal of female work, as well as the relegation of women to particular (generally low-waged) industries. Scholars of globalization have long noted that feminized labour – the global influx of women into paid labour sectors – is generally underpaid and devalued. See Jeanne Gregory, et al., *Women, Work and Inequality: The Challenge of Equal Pay in a Deregulated Labour Market*. For Indigenous women in Canada, such disparity has resulted, especially in urban contexts, in the “feminization of poverty” (Williams 75).

case of Anna, to the (arguably) coerced denial of maternalism. Speaking to the audience, the heroine expresses devout attachment to her children, emphasizing her sadness at their separation:

Funny how I'm always sewing for other people, but I never sewed for my girls. In Boston, I sewed for two years in a factory, boat cushions and toboggan pads. Well, they couldn't've worn those, but in a way, I guess I was sewing for them, 'cause that's how I paid the rent, put food on the table, bought their clothes. Growing girls need a lot of clothes. I guess it's good that they live with their dad, and his new white wife, in a nice suburban home. Better than on the reserve where everybody's always hungry, there's no jobs, and the alcohol ... At least with their dad in Halifax there's a chance they'll get vegetables and fruit, and not just a steady diet of frybread. White flour, white sugar and lard. White food, making us fat and giving us diabetes. Still, it would've been nice if I'd sewed for them. Dresses, maybe, matching jumpers. Or navy for Denise, and pale blue, robin's egg, for Deborah.

(18)

Trailing off, Anna returns to her – unvalued – fundraising endeavours, as Nolan comments directly on the patriarchal, colonialist erosion of Indigenous motherhood. The protagonist understands that her impoverishment would make the lives her children difficult, but she nonetheless pines for them. While Anna later suggests that she would make “a better warrior” than “a mother” (26), her comment is precipitated by Dennis’s renunciation of child rearing as feminine which (for him) automatically translates to ineffectual. Claiming that he has “fifteen” children, none of whom are aware of his paternity, Dennis asserts that he is a “warrior” and pleased to “leave the kid raising to others” (26). Anna, however, responds adversely: “I miss my two so much. Maybe it’s different for mothers” (26). Avoiding the essentialist “idealization of

nurturing/motherhood,” a presupposition that has contributed historically to the relegation of women to a devalued domestic sphere (LaRocque, “Métis” 55), Nolan, in the same vein as Mojica and Clements, alludes to the salience of maternity for many Indigenous women, acknowledging also the fraught relationship between activism and motherhood.

Although Anna is forced to sacrifice her children and her life as a mother, she is never considered a valuable AIM member. Anna, like the other women in the movement, is silenced and disregarded, her ambition quashed. Women, the protagonist is informed, “should know that their roles are different from men’s, they shouldn’t try to become something they aren’t” (24). According to AIM leaders, women like Anna – women “interested in ‘taking glory’” – are an affront to the “natural balance” (24). While AIM was ostensibly founded in order to set in motion a process of social change, centered around notions of equality and justice (for both genders), the ultimate goal being to provide Indigenous peoples of North America with social recognition and required amenities, Nolan’s play suggests that, in reality, the movement furthered social unrest and perpetuated endemic misogyny. Coming to recognize the injustice rampant within AIM, the temporarily demoralized protagonist says, “you lose all sense of who you are except in the context of the Movement... It’s insatiable” (18), her words implying the manner in which misogynistic violence can lead to the complete “obliterat[ion] of [one’s] very identity” (qtd. in *The Cultural Memory Group* 208). So, too, does Anna’s characterization of AIM politics as consumptive rather than productive – apt considering the systemic disregard for procreation – recall Jack Forbes’ concept of “wetiko psychosis” (cannibalism), the colonialist exploitation of land/resources for “one’s own private purpose or profit” (34). Disturbingly, in this context, AIM men are the monsters, the Rugaru appearing as a visible manifestation of their combined illness.

While she faces frightening enemies, warrior-mother Anna refuses to bow to male domination, standing by her convictions, assisting the other women, and persevering in her struggle for pan-Indigenous emancipation. Forming a tightly-knit community with the other women, the protagonist makes repeated attempts to subvert the silencing to which all AIM women are subject. Nolan renders the female comraderie fostered by Anna and the other women particularly apparent in those scenes, entitled “Anna Amongst the Women” (18), featuring the enactment of collective female labour. As she writes,

[Anna] is sewing a ribbon shirt and laughing uproariously at something that one of the other women has said. Someone else says something, to which she listens intently, nodding.¹³¹

It is obvious that Anna, unlike the men in the movement, who have little appreciation for female interjections, attends to the perspectives of the other women – “listening.” Significantly, Nolan also engages audiences in Anna’s struggle for female solidarity and collective resistance. While speaking to the other women, Anna “*sits on the edge of the stage, making the audience her circle.*”¹³² Here, Nolan – as Stanlake contends – offers “an extended perspective that links the issues of Anna Mae’s life to issues faced by contemporary Native American women” (145), demanding that audiences consider the continued relevance of the plight of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash.

¹³¹ This particular phrase was cut from the 2006 publication of *Annie Mae’s Movement*. The quotation is taken from the 1999 version of the play, published by The Playwrights Union of Canada, page 13.

¹³² The quotation – part of Nolan’s stage directions – is taken from the 1999 version of the play, published by The Playwrights Union of Canada, page 13.

Heroism vs. Martyrism: The Rape and Murder of Anna

Towards the play's close, gendered tensions within the movement are exacerbated by state intervention in the form of FBI surveillance, as the AIM men come to vent their (misplaced) frustrations on the movement's women, especially outspoken Anna, a scenario which culminates in the interrogation of the protagonist. However, before she is subject to tyrannically violent treatment by AIM men, she is interrogated by a (nameless) FBI agent seeking information concerning those who fled for fear of arrest after Wounded Knee. Not unlike the men of AIM, the FBI interrogator responds with overt anger to Anna's forthrightness. "Will you shut up?," he yells, "Christ you're a mouthy woman," referring to the protagonist's gender and omitting her name, the implication being that Anna has too much to say – for a "woman" (43). Nolan's representation of the FBI agent affirms the implicit tethering of AIM and state ideology. Both institutions, structurally male-centered, rely, in part, on the diminuation and ultimate subservience of the opposite sex. Most disturbingly, after "FBI Guy" intimidates her, Anna, unsupported by the Indigenous men in her (presumed) community, "*is silent*" (43). While temporarily overwhelmed by collective male domination, Anna manages to galvanize herself to fight, as the scene quickly transitions to a surreal trial, in which the protagonist is again forced to speak of the FBI shootings.

Released, she is able to seek solace in family, placing a series of phone calls to her siblings, speaking (of course) in "Micmac" (49). However, Anna is allowed only a brief interim before she is subject to yet another, final, interrogation. This time, it is her student, Lawrence, who stands as accuser, convinced that Anna is working as a double agent, feeding information to the FBI. Horrified at the accusations, she asks her interrogator – a grotesque caricature of her former student – "Lawrence? It is you, isn't it? Lawrence, look, can we just talk like human

beings?” (51). Lawrence, however, is unsympathetic, his character having shifted to represent the misogynistic nature of AIM. In a final plea, Anna asks, “[w]hat has happened to you, Lawrence? Is this what you have learned in the service of the Movement? Does it make you proud?,” as Nolan implies the inherently corruptive nature of power structures that hinge upon inequality and oppression (51). Lawrence is not the person he once was: now embodying the violence of the Rugaru, he is no longer entirely “human” at all (4). When the exchange comes to a close, Anna has made no ground and the scene closes with Lawrence redundantly stating “[t]ell me again” (51).

Prior to the play’s conclusion, the Rugaru appears briefly. Closing in on Anna, “[*h*e lowers his head to her neck and smells. Lick? Nip?,” the creature’s presence foreshadowing encroaching evil (53). In an effort to remind audiences of the life’s work of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Nolan opens the “End Scene” with the heroine standing center stage, speaking to the audience, describing her transition from educator to activist:

I started survival schools in the States. The idea was, if we could give kids the tools to live in the white world, but not let them lose their Indian-ness, give em a sense of pride in who they were, where they come from, we could help to rebuild an Indian Nation that was self-sufficient, autonomous, healthy and whole.

I started survival schools. Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach. Those who can't, can't. Don't. Don't. (53)

Reflective of the great integrity with which Anna Mae Pictou undertook her endeavours, the monologue emphasizes the injustice of her treatment by AIM leaders. However, Anna’s monologue is interrupted with the entry of the “*man*,” an undefined figure “*with elements of Lawrence, Dennis, FBI Guy*,” and, yet again, her voice is silenced by misogynistic intervention

(53). Invasive, he approaches, “*watching her, smelling her,*” though seemingly human, “*he moves like an animal*” (53). Nolan, in final affirmation, highlights the dehumanizing effect of violence – for both victim and perpetrator.

As the animal-like man – a conglomerate of the worst characteristics of the men in the play – moves closer to Anna, her “‘*dont’s*’ *become more agitated, pleading, angry, anguished,*” yet while “*he rapes her, she stops begging*” (53). Rather than acquiescing, the protagonist asserts herself as a woman with a name, identity, and interiority. Emberley has argued that it is only by endowing female characters with personhood – a “name” and a unique “voice” – that representations of gendered violence can function usefully, causing audiences to take the infliction of violence personally (“Breaking” 82). To this extent, Anna’s personhood increases the potential elicitation of a “range of affective responses” on the part of audiences, furthering the play’s educative potential (Emberley, “Breaking” 82). “My name is Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Micmac Nation from Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia,” Anna says, “[m]y mother is Mary Ellen Pictou, my father is Francis Thomas Levi, my sisters are Rebecca Julien and Mary Lafford, my brother is Francis. My daughters are Denise and Deborah” (53). Even in the face of such extreme gendered violence, warrior Anna refuses to have her identity “obliterated” (Cultural Memory Group 208). Continuing to make herself heard, Anna fights, resisting her attacker’s attempted domination with words, calling out the names of well-known Indigenous women writers – “Word Warriors” (Allen, *Sacred* 51-52) – as well as several of their artistic creations:

You cannot kill us all. You can kill me, but my sisters live, my daughters live. You cannot kill us all. My sisters live. Becky and Mary, Helen and Priscilla, Janet and Raven, Sylvia, Ellen, Pelajia, Agnes, Monica, Edie, Jessica, Gloria and Lisa and

Muriel, Monique, Joy and Tina, Margo, Maria, Beatrice, Minnie, April, Colleen...

You can kill me, but you cannot kill us all. You can kill me. (53)¹³³

While the scene clearly recalls the conclusion of Ryga's *Rita Joe*, which also reaches its climax with the rape and murder of the protagonist, Rita – “sacrificial” and “emblematic” (Knowles, “Rape”) – is an amenable martyr, ascending with an ecstatic “no more” (Ryga 130). Nolan's play, by contrast, closes with Anna, still angry and resistant – no meek victim. Engaging with Ryga's well-meaning (however problematic) depiction of violence against an Indigenous woman, Nolan adeptly juxtaposes Rita – blessed, emblematic martyr – with Anna, mother, warrior, activist, and relentless seeker of justice. On the verge of death, the protagonist is proud and heroic, not allowing her voice to be silenced by misogynistic violence. Immediately before the curtain closes, “[t]here is a gunshot” and Anna “falls” and returns, as at the beginning of the play, to “a foetal position,” with the “good red road emanating from her” (53).

In this final moment of bravery, audiences become, as Stanlake argues, the “immediate witness[es] to the rape and murder of Anna Mae,” rendering the attack “personal and, therefore, relevant to the members of the audience” (148). Most integrally, audiences are witness not only to the violence involved in Anna's death, but also to her subversion, the representation functioning in direct opposition to the silencing and dismissal of Indigenous women. La Flamme has noted that in many Indigenous communities, “the role of the audience as witness and the naming of the deceased have traditionally been powerful means to alleviate grief” (111). The closing scene thus works commemoratively, ensuring that the salience of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash's life and work is provided space in the “archive” of “cultural countermemory,” as

¹³³ Nolan is referring to Gloria Miguel, Lisa Mayo, and Muriel Miguel (Spiderwoman Theatre), Monique Mojica, Margo Kane, Joy Harjo, Tina Mason, and Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, and Agnes Grant, along with several of these writers'/actors' better-known characters, including April, the main character in Culleton's award-winning *In Search of April Rain Tree*, and Jessica, the central figure in Maria Campbell's play, *Jessica*.

Nolan works against hegemonic denial of the young activist's story (Bold, et al. 126). "You can kill me, but you cannot kill us all," cries Anna, dying (53), her final words refusing denial and ensuring that audiences are aware of the connection between Anna Mae's struggle and the plight of contemporary Indigenous women activists. Nolan's recuperation of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash is informative and empowering, rendering visible the significance of her work and thereby accentuating the importance of contemporary Indigenous women's activism.

Blade: Identity Politics and Reception

Blade, Nolan's first play, which details the stories of two women – one White and one Indigenous – murdered by the same serial killer, premiered at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival in 1990. The play, while subject to minor criticism due to its simple one-act structure – an apparent anomaly at the festival – was, for the most part, well received by critics. Described by Randal McIlroy of the *Winnipeg Free Press* as "one of the most intriguing productions" at the festival, *Blade* later inspired Winnipeg critic Kevin Prokosh to hail Nolan as "one of the most exciting [new] playwrights to watch" ("Celebrating" D1). The piece was similarly praised by members of Winnipeg's artistic community, with then director of Prairie Theatre Kim McCaw applauding the play:

It was a good story well told. It was well controlled as a piece of theatre in terms of its scale; as a relatively new writer she wasn't trying to do something she couldn't handle. Its goal as a piece was really clear and the dramaturg on it was pretty solid. It was successful as a piece of snappy, driven drama. (qtd. in Shantz 4-5)

Given the largely positive response to Nolan's debut play, it is no surprise that *Blade* was held over for Winnipeg's Best of the Fringe (1990). In January 1992, Nolan was commissioned by the organizing committee for the Women in View Festival – an annual Vancouver event – to remount her popular piece.

While the play obviously features two main female leads, one White and the other Indigenous, in drawing up the program, the organizing committee (unintentionally) misrepresented *Blade* as the tale of a young Indigenous girl only. Audience members thus attended with expectations of viewing an Indigenous-authored play featuring an Indigenous cast. When *Blade* opened with White, blond-haired actress Maria Lamont playing the leading role of Angela, viewers were appalled and Nolan was rendered the subject of a heated “debate about Native voice(s)” (Shantz 70). Nolan attended the play's opening and, in conversation with Valerie Shantz, she recalls the awkwardness and discomfort she experienced as viewers became increasingly perturbed:

Two or three scenes into the play people started getting very anxious because this was obviously not a Native woman. You could feel it in the audience. The performers could feel it and I could feel it ... It was like the only reason they came to see the play was because they were going to see some Native woman victimized. (71)

After the curtains closed, Nolan was approached by members of the audience and interrogated about her casting choices. The audience had assumed that she would necessarily cast only an Indigenous woman in the starring role. Upon informing her inquisitors that the play was not designed to have a strictly Indigenous cast, she was subject to further criticism: “they wanted to know why, as a Native woman, I didn't write about Native women,” says Nolan, “[t]hey were

very, very angry. I was supposed to be writing one way and I wasn't fulfilling their expectations of that" (qtd. in Shantz 71). For Nolan, "to be Métis is to be half white and half Aboriginal" and, in the case of *Blade*, she made a conscious – though highly controversial – choice "to let the white woman speak" (Shantz 75). In dismissing *Blade* based upon essentialist, racialized notions of identity, these early audiences elided the playwright's important messages: Indigenous women are subject to heightened levels of violence – manifest *and* discursive – and the only way in which this violence can be subverted is through coalition building. Given that the organizing committee's presumptuous predetermination of Nolan's creative goals raised such hostility among viewers, it is only logical that the playwright responded adversely, refusing thereafter to speak for but one community.¹³⁴ Despite the Women in View controversy, after its initial positive reception, *Blade* went on to be published thrice: firstly, in 1992, by *Theatrum Magazine* (1992), secondly, by Playwrights Guild of Canada in the 1995 collection *Blade, Job's Wife, and Video* – today available only digitally – and, most recently, in 2012, as a digital Alexander Street Press publication.¹³⁵

Race, Representation, and Coalition Across Difference

When the curtain rises on Nolan's first (and most hotly debated) play, a young White woman in her twenties stands center stage, under a "pool of light" (2). Like *Annie Mae's Movement*, the play's dialogue begins with a long opening monologue delivered by the protagonist. However, in this case, the speech does not involve the detailing of a personal narrative. Rather, here, Angela Erhart recounts the death of her classmate, and Indigenous

¹³⁴ For further information concerning audience reaction at the 1992 Women in View Festival and Nolan's sentiments concerning the situation, see Valerie Shantz's "Yvette Nolan: Playwright in Context."

¹³⁵ Quotations in this dissertation are taken from the Alexander Street Press publication.

counterpart, Cindy Bear, brutally murdered by a man rumored to be killing prostitutes – a serial killer represented by the press, with typical sensationalism, as the “hooker killer” (2). “I knew that hookers were being killed,” begins Angela, “everyone in the country knew it and we here knew it better than anyone because it was splashed all over the front page – with pictures usually” (2). In the very opening lines of *Blade*, Nolan alludes to the manner in which violence against women, especially minoritized (racialized/impooverished) women or sex-workers, is regularly used by media as a form of exploitative, degrading, entertainment, implying a lesser significance of such violence. This theme, carried throughout the play, demands that audiences heed the rampant trivialization of gendered violence in all its manifestations. In this respect, the text parallels Clements’ portrayals of gendered/racialized violence in both *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and *Now Look What You Made Me Do*, as both playwrights encourage audiences to consider why violence against minoritized women is so readily rationalized and dismissed.¹³⁶ Indeed, when discussing her motivation for writing *Blade*, Nolan decries “85% of everything [propagated/displayed by media] to be crap,” suggesting that her first play was written, in part, to draw attention to media sensationalism/exploitation. Moved by an ambiguously sourced media narrative which falsely represented a victim of femicide as a “prostitute,” the playwright cites the refutation of media sensationalism as a chief concern (“Yvette Nolan”). Of course, the employment of depictions of violence as marketable empathy “porn” is, as Razack notes, enhanced when victims are racialized (“Stealing” 384). Arguing that such representations are used problematically in order to illicit broad-based emotional audience response, Razack asserts that gratuitous media portrayals become “sources of moral authority

¹³⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of violence against sex-workers, refer to pages 33-34 of this dissertation. For a summation of the current state of prostitution laws in Canada, see Sarah Allan, et al. *My Work Should Not Cost Me My Life: The Case Against Criminalizing the Purchase of Sex in Canada* and Power Ottawa’s web-page: <http://www.powerottawa.ca/powerdocs.html>.

and pleasure, obscuring the process of our own participation in violence” (“Stealing” 374). The profoundly damaging effects of this mechanism of disregard are made most obvious in Nolan’s play.

As her monologue continues, Angela divulges that her murdered acquaintance was posthumously degraded in a manner very much in keeping with Razack’s notion of the “spectacle” (“Stealing” 378), her image used with profound insensitivity, “splashed all over the front page – with pictures usually” (Nolan, *Blade 2*). Representations of this nature are, as Razack asserts, all too often mobilized purposefully to evoke a sense of “empath[etic]” superiority from dominant audiences, depictions of minoritized physical “pain” operating to “disappear” the humanity of the victim (“Stealing” 377). In *Blade*, however, Nolan’s White protagonist, rather than professing detached, condescending, sympathy, unwittingly implies her involvement in the derogation of Cindy Bear. Angela, speaking candidly to the audience, does not dole pity upon Cindy. Her statements – almost crude – instead suggest oblivious participation in the cultural hierarchy that has allowed Cindy, defenceless in death, to be defamed so cruelly:

I actually knew one of the girls who had been killed. Well, not really knew her....

Cindy Bear, her name was – you know, like Yogi Bear’s girlfriend. She was native, and very quiet.... Cindy Bear got herself killed in the usual way (shivers).

Oh it was ugly, I guess the photographers got there a lot faster than they normally do because there was a gruesome picture on the front page of the paper, in colour.

The body was all covered up and everything, but still it was really disturbing.

Beside the covered up body were these dots, that looked like someone had spilled a box of smarties around Cindy Bear, except bigger, you know, like Loonies.

Those dots really bothered me, you know, and I looked at them and looked at them

until I finally realized that they weren't dots, they were drops, drops of blood,
Cindy Bear's blood. (2)

Angela's vivid description renders obvious the role of media in creating dangerous, dehumanizing visual documentation of gendered/racialized violence. Although clearly unsettled by the murder, as well as the despicable social reception of her colleague's death, in mocking Cindy Bear's name, Nolan's protagonist implicates herself, albeit indirectly, in the stigmatization and sexualization of her dead classmate.

While Angela's speech makes apparent the discursive violence to which Cindy, as a racialized woman, is subject in life and in death, so, too, does the narrative become reflective of the importance of intercultural coalition. Serving as Cindy's voice, Angela, despite her initial insensitivity, becomes a loud contestator, speaking out against media misrepresentation, as well as the particularized insults levied against Cindy by her peers:

[S]he was in my intro History class at University.... I think she did quite well in that class because I saw her get back a test once with an 88% on it. I only got about 75 on that test. It was about colonialism in South Africa and I just couldn't get interested. So anyway, when Cindy Bear – no one ever called her just Cindy, it was always Cindy Bear – when Cindy Bear got killed by the hooker-killer, some people at school said "Oh, I never knew she was a prostitute – I never would have guessed" and others said "I always thought she was a whore – where else would she get the money to go to school? They usually are, you know." I thought it was a little funny that Cindy Bear should be a hooker because I knew she was going to school through some special program, and she was always prepared for class, so when did she have time? (2)

From this point on, Angela evolves to become an adequate vocal agent for Cindy, the latter's silence reminiscent of the systemic silencing of Indigenous women victims of violence throughout colonial history as Nolan makes evident the representational divide existing between the two women. It is true that Angela's White appearance allows her space to speak. Yet as the plot progresses, audiences are made aware of an intimate connection between the two women, with Angela becoming an unlikely advocate for female victims of sexualized violence broadly. Pointing to the widespread, institutional disavowal of gendered violence, particularly in cases of violence against Indigenous women, the protagonist ultimately faults social dismissal – acceptance within a culture of impunity – for Cindy's murder. "The cops were desperate to catch the guy, and they were on the news every other day saying how hard they were working to catch the killer," she begins, but as the dialogue moves forward Angela speaks overtly of race-based police negligence:

[The police] sure cared a lot more about those girls when they were dead than when they were alive, that's for sure. I mean, most of the girls who had been killed were young native girls, 14, 15, runaways, mostly, and....well, I don't know if you're from around here, but natives are sort of the low guys on the totem pole in Winnipeg. (2)

In Angela's statement, Nolan not only positions the protagonist as an ally to Cindy, prepared to speak out against broad-based racial inequality – as well as the distinct injustice to which her classmate has been subject – but also draws attention to the pervasive reality of sexual violence against Indigenous women in Canada and the discriminatory representational practices characteristic of most media. By setting *Blade* in Winnipeg, the playwright also confronts and

overtly contests racialized violence (and police dismissal of such) in the city where she spent her formative years.

After revealing Angela's complicated role as interlocutor, speaking for herself *and* Cindy, Nolan proceeds to make her audiences aware that the two women are tethered not only in (fraught) solidarity, but also by their sadly similar fates. Angela, we learn, is also a murder victim as she, too, falls prey to the "hooker killer"– Jack (2). Immediately after introducing Cindy's tale, the playwright represents the murder of Angela and, only at this point are audiences made aware that Angela is speaking from beyond the grave – "not really here" (6). Walking home after a fight with her boyfriend, Angela, distracted briefly from the threat of the "hooker killer" – an "ugly" threat with which the media has made her all too familiar – fails to notice the "warning signals, all the things [she] should've noticed, and would've, normally, except [she] wasn't paying attention" (2). In part, Angela lets her guard down because Jack – a married "family" man – has a "baby seat" in the back of his car (2). Portraying the villain as a seeming everyman, an ostensibly "good guy," the playwright veers away from sensationalism, begging audiences to contemplate the (often racialized) stereotypes associated with violent offenders (2). While the playwright tempers the frightening exchange between Angela and Jack by positioning the actors with their backs to the audience, the scene, which closes with the (visually obscured) rape and murder of the protagonist, is nonetheless unsettling.

In Angela's revisitation of the lead-up to her own death, the playwright poignantly demonstrates the manner in which female victims of violence (especially sexual violence) are held accountable for failure to foresee danger, failure to heed the "warning signals" (2). This shameful social response to gendered violence and femicide – commonly referred to as "victim blaming" (Raphael 58) – assumes female ineptitude, removes focus from the systemic nature of

misogynistic violence, and, ultimately functions to maintain Rape Culture, a society in which women cannot be safe. Although the term has, particularly in recent years, been used in varying contexts, Rape Culture is defined succinctly by Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth, editors of the ground-breaking 1993 anthology, *Transforming a Rape Culture* as,

A complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm....In a rape culture both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, inevitable....However... much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change. (xi)

In a Rape Culture, violent crimes enacted against women are received far differently than those enacted against men. Literary scholar Carine Mardorossian has aptly emphasized that only “gendered crimes” (756) – domestic violence and rape, specifically – are responded to with the suggestion that the victim “should now know better” (753).

Nolan’s play certainly highlights this pervasive, disturbing, and long-standing social pattern. While Cindy, as a racialized victim, is presumed a “whore” from the outset – entirely responsible for her own rape and murder – Angela merely blames herself (at first) (Nolan, *Blade* 2). However, in a short time, she, like Cindy, becomes the subject of media misrepresentation and deprecation. With the press connecting her tale to the previous string of “hooker” murders (2), screaming headlines demanding that the “Ripper has Claimed his Fourth Victim,” Angela, too, is discursively transformed into a “prostitute,” despite lack of evidence to suggest that she

was ever employed in the sex trade (6). Through alterations to her costume and demeanor Angela gradually begins to perform her newly shaped identity, becoming a media-contrived “after image” of her former self (6). Nolan, despite creating a sense of comraderie among the murder victims, does not elide the racial dynamics at play: unlike Cindy, Angela is never *presumed* by colleagues and acquaintances to be a “whore” (2). Describing the community’s reaction to her murder, the protagonist makes the dichotomy clear:

The media coverage was full of denials. The police said there was no evidence that I was a prostitute, classmates they interviewed said they had no idea I was hooking for a living, my boss at work flat out denied that I could possibly be a prostitute but.... Well nothing works like denial, does it? (6)

Nonetheless, it is at this juncture in the plot that the link between Angela and Cindy is cemented, the former lingering in a liminal space, observing the day-to-day activities of her friends, family, and killer, while imparting the story of her classmate and she, as Nolan, through an intricate, though concise, process of character development, constructs a coalescence of resistance. The “powers that be” have let Angela “hang around a little bit” in order to speak posthumously for both women (6). Forcing the audience to bear witness to the retrospective narrativization of their parallel tragic testimonies, Angela and Cindy, together, subvert the violence to which they have been subject. Very much in keeping with Clements’ recuperation of the spectral women in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, as well as her own *Annie Mae’s Movement*, Nolan instrumentally engages the audience in an educative and emancipatory process of witnessing.

Stereotyping, Sexualization, and Communal Resistance

The play's second half, which focuses entirely on the fallout of the killings, sees Angela's best friend, Connie, attempting – with little success – to vindicate the protagonist and, by extension, Cindy, from slanderous media malignment. Although a local social-affairs columnist does eventually express interest in divulging the “truth” behind the media charade, the story of the “Ripper” is (somewhat ironically) subsumed by breaking news pertaining to the investigation into the killing of J.J. Harper (4). John Joseph Harper, a prominent Indigenous activist from Manitoba, was shot by White Winnipeg police constable Andrew Cross on 9 March 1988, prompting the implementation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the first formal inquiry into the relationship between the Manitoba justice system – particularly the Winnipeg police force – and the Indigenous community. For Indigenous people living in Manitoba in the early nineteen nineties, the governmental approval of the Inquiry was an unprecedented acknowledgment of the systemic racism entrenched in the Winnipeg police force, as well as the justice system generally.¹³⁷ Unabashedly invoking a piece of recent history, Nolan draws attention to the ongoing racial tension in her city, adding an unnerving layer of authenticity to all aspects of her play. While *Blade* premiered only a few short years after Harper's death, the reference remains extremely pertinent.¹³⁸ The fact that Harper's tale usurps Angela's not only demonstrates the speed with which the media cycle moves from one (unverified) story to another, regardless of

¹³⁷ For further information concerning the J.J. Harper case, see Hamilton and Sinclair *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*.

¹³⁸ In her February 2015 article, *MacLeans'* writer Nancy Macdonald suggests that Winnipeg is Canada's most racist city, citing tensions between Indigenous peoples and “non-Natives” as a pervasive problem requiring immediate attention (16). Macdonald's article, while factually questionable, served to draw attention to the continued infliction of racialized violence upon Indigenous people in Winnipeg. Refer to Macdonald's “Winnipeg: Where Canada's Racism Problem is at its Worst.” Recent research indicates that such racial violence has been complicated by immigration-related struggles for intercultural solidarity between Indigenous and immigrant populations. See Gyepi-Garbrah, et al. “Indigeneity, Immigrant Newcomers and Interculturalism in Winnipeg, Canada.”

journalistic integrity, but also brings the broad-based stereotyping of Indigenous people – both men and women – to the audience’s attention, with the seeming normalcy of Jack, the real criminal, accentuating the issue of racialized stereotyping.

Giving Jack a voice and identity, Nolan skillfully portrays the representational chasm between Indigenous men and White men, while also – however subtly – suggesting that the narratives of women (both White and Indigenous) remain relegated to a lower tier of social significance in race and gender-based colonialist hierarchies. Harper was assumed a criminal, just as Cindy is assumed a “whore” (2), yet it is not irrelevant that his story overrides and removes focus from the tales of both victims of femicide. Angela is extremely upset that the true narratives of she and Cindy Bear never reach newsprint:

So my reputation, or what was left of it, was almost saved by the champion of the Relax page.¹³⁹ Almost. And it would have done the trick too, boy, it was a moving article about....tarnished virtue. In another time and reality, it would have moved me to tears but... But no one saw the article. (13)

All the while, Jack is, of course, perceived as “easy” and “charming,” a race-contingent social perception that enables him to enact unchecked violence against women (14). In *Annie Mae’s Movement*, Nolan represents her misogynistic villain/s as a conflation, completely devoid of humanity. This is also Clements’ approach to the subversion of misogynistic violence in both *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and *Now Look What You Made Me Do*. In *Blade* Nolan opts conversely to allow the killer his own monologue, in which he describes his wife and son sentimentally. In this way, the playwright represents the ubiquity of masculinist violence in Rape Culture, while also addressing the unfortunate, yet common, polarization of sexualized women

¹³⁹ Relax page is a colloquialism used to describe newspaper sections such as “Life Style” or “Arts and Entertainment.”

(ie. sex-workers/racialized/exoticized) and women who are considered chaste/pure, ultimately problematizing the archaic and misogynistic “Madonna-Whore Dichotomy” that underpins Rape Culture (Tumanov 507). The binary misrepresentation, rooted in Christian ideology, derives from polarized depictions of the Virgin Mary and Eve and constitutes – as Biblical/ literary scholar Vladimir Tumanov points out – “two opposite sexual poles in the way Christian discourse has approached women since the time of the church fathers” (507). Because in Nolan’s mind, being “non-Christian” comes part and parcel with “being Native,” the playwright makes a strong effort in her play to demonstrate the way in which this ancient trope has infused Western literature and thus permeated contemporary culture (qtd. in Aboriginal Media Society 13). Jack has clearly embraced the conception of binaristic femininity and his actions must therefore be considered violent manifestations of this mindset. “I met my wife, Helen, in college,” says the serial killer, “[s]he was so beautiful to me, fresh, you know. She's still a beautiful woman, but she's older now...” (*Blade* 14). Jack, placing his wife on a pedestal, has come to believe that she – “beautiful” and “innocent” Madonna – exists in opposition to his victims, all of whom he perceives as sex-workers (14). As his monologue continues, the killer’s fetishization of what he perceives to be female purity becomes increasingly obvious:

I still see her exactly the way she looked the very first time I laid eyes on her.
Long blond hair, those big innocent eyes, the little bounce in her step....She
carried her books like a schoolgirl, hugging them up against her chest, she looked
like she couldn't have been more than fifteen years old. (14).

Fixating on Helen’s youthful innocence, Jack decidedly removes his wife from the category of women against whom he enacts violence. Proceeding, finally, to discuss Helen’s pregnancy and the birth of his son, Jason, the murderer effectively conflates his wife with the Virgin Mary. Yet

however saddening Jack's misogyny, in representing Helen as his betrayer, the one who, in the end, turns him in and stops the killings, Nolan once again depicts female solidarity in action against violence, rendering the scenario somewhat more hopeful.

When Jack completes his monologue, the scene promptly returns to Angela. The murdered protagonist stands center stage, under a pool of light, facing the audience and "putting on big earrings" – a final phase in her transformation (15). She hastily describes the outcome of Jack's incarceration: "[b]efore he could go to trial, he managed to get ahold of enough rope to hang himself," she says, listlessly, "sealing my fate and Cindy Bear's forever" (15). After Angela finishes speaking, she "[u]ndoes her skirt, pulls it off. Underneath [is] the rest of her 'hooker dress,' stockings with the garter belt showing" (15). Her physical transformation progressing rapidly, she proceeds to "stan[d] there" and stare at the audience "a bit blankly" (15). Angela, believing that truth has been subsumed by media sensationalism, grows increasingly hopeless. After the killer's suicide, she assumes that the truth concerning Jack's many victims is lost "forever" (15). Angela was allowed to "hang around for a bit" only in order to narrativize the violent trauma to which she and Cindy were subject and, in bringing these tales to light, to resist/work against further violence (6). Throughout the play, Angela lingers in an isolated, liminal space seeking living witnesses, equipped to carry the truth into the future. However, with the killer dead and her mission seemingly left unaccomplished, the protagonist descends into a spiral of despair which, effectually, compels her to adopt the undermining, media-constructed image she has so long resisted.

Yet the incredibly bleak portrayal of Angela's disheartenment is promptly complicated and, to some extent, ameliorated by the entrance of her mother, "Mrs. Erhart," who, after "pick[ing] up Angela's skirt" in a protective, maternal gesture, stands silent at first, "waiting for

quiet to happen” and, when it does, begins to address the audience (15). Although she is “blinking” and “nervous,” Mrs. Erhart’s voice is “firm” as she undertakes her lengthy monologue – the play’s final speech (15). “I have been trying to pray, I have been trying to find some comfort in prayer,” she begins, “but.... I just can't seem to believe that I am getting through to God” (15). Here, the playwright again addresses the problematic nature of much Christian ideology, the overarching implication being that Mrs. Erhart’s time might have been better spent advocating socially – coalition building – rather than “praying” in solitude (15). Nonetheless, the playwright’s insertion of this (easily overlooked) statement by no means characterizes Mrs Erhart’s monologue, the remainder of which not only speaks to a politics of coalition, but also reminds audiences of all the real-life mothers who have lost daughters to femicide. However, Mrs. Erhart is neither passive nor beaten, her anger and frustration palpable:

I know you're all so willing to believe that my daughter was a whore, that she was taking money for sex, makes a better story I know....but now, the police are saying it looks like this last girl was not a prostitute either¹⁴⁰... So I've been thinking about this, very early mornings when I wake up and realize my daughter is gone, and I'm beginning to think that maybe if the police had been looking for a man who was killing women, instead of a man who was killing whores, maybe he'd have been stopped a lot sooner.... And now that man who did this, that crazy man with the knife, he's hanged himself, so there will be no trial. (15)

It is of great significance that the protagonist’s mother – ever her daughter’s advocate – speaks against the manifest and discursive violence inflicted upon both Angela *and* Cindy. Nolan thus continues to rightly promote interracial/intercultural solidarity in resistance to misogynistic

¹⁴⁰ Here, Mrs. Erhart is referring to Cindy Bear.

violence, with Mrs. Erhart's advocacy of Jack's victims bringing the playwright's theme of interconnected subversion to full fruition in the play's conclusion.

Despite her mother's continued desire to save Jack's victims from media misrepresentation, Angela, unable to share her own story, remains despondent and, when her mother finishes speaking, the downtrodden protagonist "put[s] on her makeup" and "high heels" (16). "Her transformation complete," she leans towards the window of a car – formerly Jack's – parked center stage as the killer appears from beneath the stage "and sits in the car seat" (16). At this crucial and frightening moment, Connie and Mrs. Erhart enter in tandem and stand with Angela as figures of strength and support – the spirit world and the living world merging briefly – while Jack, still predatory in death, "leans out of the car window" and speaks to Angela, just as he did on the day of her murder: "Wanna ride?" (16). Although Angela's previous actions – her altered appearance and posture – suggest that her former self has been replaced entirely by the media's construction, the "prostitute" (6), Nolan clearly does not intend the final suspenseful interchange between Angela and Jack to leave audiences completely hopeless. After a "[l]ong pause," Angela, apparently aware of the presence of Connie and Mrs. Erhart, comes to "comprehend" the salience of her choice and, instead of joining Jack in the car seat, she "turns" (16). Following this final dramatic gesture, the curtain closes. Although (in her own mind) she has been unable to redeem herself (or Cindy) in the public eye, Angela seems to realize, just in time, that, with the ongoing proactive advocacy of Connie and her mother, all is not lost. Neither Angela's story nor Cindy's have truly been "forever" obscured by media misrepresentation (14). This is not to suggest that Nolan's conclusion is wholly uplifting: after all, misogynistic violence continues to pervade the spirit world, suggesting that even in liminal spaces women are not free from the threat of gendered violence. Notwithstanding this implication, the play certainly serves

to emphasize the highly detrimental impact of media obscuration/effacement of women's stories, while also – with the intricate inclusion of Harper's narrative – drawing attention to the intersectional nature of discursive violence. To this extent, *Blade* is an extremely elucidating work, which begs for social change. Most important, however, is Nolan's portrayal of the socially beneficial effect of communal resistance and coalition building. While Angela may have been unsuccessful in her attempt to free herself and Cindy from social stigmatization, Mrs. Erhart and Connie remain (living) activists, working against manifest *and* discursive gendered violence. In the portrayal of Angela's "turn" (16), Nolan leaves audiences with an positive, proactive message: activist solidarity and coalition building across difference can truly perpetuate social change.

Conclusion

Indigenous Women's Theatre: A Transnational Mechanism of Decolonization

The theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it.

– Augusto Boal (122)

Decolonization, Collective Creation, and Dramatic Subversion

Indigenous women's theatre has come to operate as a crucially important site in the collective feminist and intercultural struggle against racialized gendered violence. Indigenous women playwrights represent gendered violence as an express reminder of colonization, thus functioning in opposition to colonial tropes, which have misrepresented Indigeneity generally and Indigenous women particularly and, in doing so, have perpetuated broad-based social dismissal of Indigenous peoples, as well as racialized and sexualized violence. Because, as Yvette Nolan so aptly asserts, there is "no such thing as post-colonization at this point" (qtd. in Dempsey 25), it is essential that "much of [Indigenous] theatre is about colonization" (qtd. in Aboriginal Media Society 13). While it is in the service of traditional Western scholarship to keep the "dead dead" and "the victims of history victimized" (Knowles, "Creation" 6), these texts by Indigenous women often counter one-sided, appropriative colonialist interpretations of historical figures and events, opposing the ongoing discursive deprecation of Indigenous women and setting in motion an essential and long-awaited process of decolonization. In this manner, the works analyzed in my dissertation serve to re-empower Indigenous women who have been undermined, displaced, and physically/culturally diminished by discursive and enacted colonial violence, thereby contributing extensively to numerous decolonial initiatives. While such change cannot be facilitated by representational artistic resistance alone, Indigenous women's plays, I

contend, work in combination with other sites of Indigenous women's activism, and are important modes of decolonial expression.

I have attempted thus far to demonstrate the manner in which dramatic works by Indigenous women function socially in the service of education and empowerment. Up to this point, I have focused, for the most part, on productions by specific Canadian playwrights, who have constructed works – with the exceptions of Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*, and Nolan's *Annie Mae's Movement* – that incorporate local, Canadian settings and themes. Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and Nolan's *Blade* most directly contend with real-life national events, as Clements' adeptly refigures Vancouver's horrific barbershop killings and Nolan addresses the disturbing events surrounding the famous J.J. Harper case. Although wishing to avoid a myopic scope, my choice to focus on works produced in a particular White settler nation was purposeful. Firstly, a doctoral dissertation is by no means lengthy enough to provide ample space for the extensive analysis required to engage in a thorough, cross-cultural, transnational, comparative discussion of Indigenous theatre and, secondly, throughout my doctoral studies, I have maintained a strong desire to address relevant political issues within my home nation. This desire, deriving initially from my longstanding interest in Canadian history, in combination with that fact that those dear to me are directly touched by Canada's unique colonial legacy, was only strengthened as my doctoral research progressed. By the time I completed my comprehensive exams, my pre-existing motivations had compounded with the understanding that for Indigenous women writers, artists, and activists generally, grassroots movements are incredibly important. It is certainly clear that the writers whose works I have analyzed in the body of my dissertation are invested in perpetuating social change at the national level. Katrina Srigley – along with other scholars

working in the field of Indigenous studies¹⁴¹ – has duly noted that for many Indigenous women, land-tethered, nation/band-specific identity, while once a “source of alienation,” can today function as a “powerful tool for belonging” (242). It is my belief that this shift in perception is directly related to the fact that community-based activism has led to visible, immediate improvements in the lives of Indigenous women¹⁴² and has been essential in creating a national and, by extension, international space for not only Indigenous cultural/artistic production of all varieties, but also for Indigenous feminisms.

Yet it is also the case that Indigenous women’s theatre speaks to a social dynamic that exceeds the parameters of commonly recognized national borders. After all, while connected to specific geographic territories by cultural allegiances and the bonds of lineage, Indigenous women, for social and political reasons, do not recognize state-sanctioned borders. While I am by no means suggesting homogeneity in Indigenous cultures, Indigenous women do share a common colonial history that entailed the imposition of colonialist patriarchy and the immediate diminishing of Indigenous women’s status and power. Today, Indigenous women have formed intercultural networks and built resistant alliances, a trend that is evinced in contemporary

¹⁴¹ See also, Elizabeth Kalbefleish’s “Bordering on Feminism: Space, Solidarity, and Transnationalism in Rebecca Belmore’s *Vigil*,” Aída Hernández’ “Zapatismo and the Emergence of Indigenous Feminism,” and Suzack et al.’s *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*.

¹⁴² Consider, for example, the activist endeavours undertaken by Indigenous women of Canada surrounding the implementation of Bill C-31. *The Indian Act* originally demanded that a status Indian woman who married a non-status Indian man – regardless of his cultural heritage – lost her legal status. Were she to marry a status-Indian man from another band, she lost her own band membership and become a member of her husband’s band, with her status hinging on the status of her husband. After much effort on the part of Indigenous women activists, Bill C-31 was passed in April 1985. Designed to bring *The Indian Act* into accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, C-31 addressed gender discrimination by restoring Indian status to those women forced to enfranchise and providing bands with control over their own membership – implicitly a step towards self-government. For further reading concerning activist solidarity among Indigenous women of Canada, see Srigley’s “I am a proud Anishinaabekwe’: Issues of Identity and Status in Northern Ontario After Bill C-31.” For further reading pertaining to the effects of C-31 on Indigenous women, see Joan Holmes’ *Bill C-31, Equality, or Disparity?: The Effects of the New Indian Act on Native Women*.

dramatic production. Although the texts evaluated in the preceding chapters do address the specificities of Indigenous women's circumstances, when taken together, they also reflect the similarities that unite Indigenous women across national, social, and cultural boundaries, thereby creating the potential for broad-based, far-reaching collective feminist political action. The emphasis on female coalition – a direct invocation of intercultural feminist resistance – in plays by Indigenous women indicates the importance of a cross-cultural, transnational¹⁴³ examination of Indigenous women's dramatic writing. It is therefore significant that my future research moves beyond a localized, national study and engages in a comparative, cross-cultural analysis of Indigenous women's employment of theatre as a strategically designed instrument of decolonization and reclamation.

Scholars of literature and theatre – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – have long recognized the significance of drama as a tool of decolonial activism. As early as the 1970s, social theorists, including literary scholar Joan Rockwell, began to argue in favour of the interpellative potential of literary/dramatic works. In her 1977 article, “A Theory of Literature in Society: The Hermeneutic Approach,” Rockwell suggests that “what we read does affect us as a sort of persuasive experience,” arguing definitively that even fictional portrayals have “influence on people's beliefs” and “on their social behavior” (34). Janice Acoose draws upon Rockwell's concept of literary “persuas[ion]” (Rockwell 34) in her ground-breaking 1995 book *Iskwewak—Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*, intricately demonstrating the manner in which deprecating literary tropes – specifically the age-old “Indian

¹⁴³ Transnationalism, as I use the term, refers not only to international and intercultural cultural alliances, but also to artistic practices that transcend the boundaries of nation and culture, as well as to global processes, such as capitalism and colonialism. Focusing on the links that tether Indigenous women's dramatic works rather than on the representations and contexts that divide them will allow me to raise, in future writings, questions concerning colonialism, gender, and class, which are essential to the analysis of the increasingly globalized circulation of cultural production. For further reading, see Huhndorf's *Mapping the Americas*, Suzack et al.'s *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, Däwes' *Indigenous North American Drama: A Multivocal History*, and Solga and Hopkins' *Performance and the Global City*.

Princess”/“easy squaw” dichotomy – have resulted in particularized and systemic violence against Indigenous women (65). The damage resulting from demeaning, discursively violent cultural production is evinced by heightened rates of gendered violence against Indigenous and minoritized girls and women, yet, considered conversely, this demonstrated interpellative potential of cultural production also affirms that ideological damage can be challenged by Indigenous women’s acts of subversion – artistic and otherwise. Susan Bennett has argued specifically that, in regards to imagining violence inflicted upon female bodies, writings from political subject positions – necessarily including the complicated socio-cultural position/s occupied by Indigenous women writers – “endeavor to destabilize the complacency of spectators” (“Radical” 39), prompting the elicitation of audience/reader empathy and victim reempowerment through “reverse interpellation” (Rowe 16; Butler 163), the implicit efficacy being the perpetuation of positive social change.

Episkenew argues similarly that literary representations have the capacity to “transform” and “change the course of events” (*Taking* 5), suggesting that theatre, because of the collective “community” solidarity required in order to transfer written narrative to stage, is a particularly useful mode of self-representation and subversion for Indigenous women activists (*Taking* 147-48), with the performative aspect of these dramatic pieces contributing substantially to both audience comprehension and emotional catharsis for playwrights and actors alike. Qu Li Driskill, writing from the perspective of an experienced grassroots theatre practitioner, argues that, for Indigenous peoples in multiple colonial/postcolonial contexts, playwriting and performance are powerful tools of resistance, enabling recovery from the “kinesthetic reality” of “historical trauma” (“Theatre 155). As he writes,

We carry the wounds of the past in our bodies, and it is through our bodies that we find ways to mend them and continue our lifeways [and] tell our stories and understand what it means to be Native people enacting decolonization and continuance. (“Theatre” 155)

According to Driskill, the final staged production works as a conduit to the construction of Chicana scholar Emma Pérez’s “decolonial imaginary” (Pérez, *Decolonial* 6) – the creative envisioning of a future beyond racialized/gendered colonial violence – an integral “decolonial” mechanism (Driskill, “Theatre 155”). Importantly, Driskill, by engaging with Pérez’s far-reaching concept of the “decolonial imaginary” (*Decolonial* 6), acknowledges also the transnational employment of drama as a tool of resistance to racialized/gendered violence. For, as Pérez contends, any viable revolutionary movement must be “envisioned to be a transnational one, in which women along with men” (*Decolonial* 60) mount resistance and attempt to reorganize unjust race and gender-based social hierarchies, “not only in Mexico, not only in Texas or California, but throughout the world” (*Decolonial* 72). Concerning the employment of theatre as a means of transnational, intercultural resistance to colonization, historians Scott Proudfit and Kathryn Syssoyeva argue that in “trac[ing] the history” of such subversive “collective creation,” it is fundamentally necessary to acknowledge that artistic practices “are rarely developed within a single country,” but require “significant cultural exchanges among artists across national boundaries” (“Crossroads” 120). It is therefore unsurprising that Monique Mojica attempts, in the same vein as Driskill and Pérez, to emphasize the importance of the transnational character of Indigenous women’s dramatic resistance. As is evident in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, in which the playwright calls to arms Indigenous women

activists from across the Americas – “Una Nación” united in solidarity against violence – Mojica overtly endorses transnational coalition in Indigenous feminist subversion (60).¹⁴⁴

While Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas* most expressly promotes not only syncretic intercultural resistance, but transnational solidarity, the other texts discussed in this dissertation are by no means less overt in their respective positive invocations of strategically formed, coalitions of resistance – the forging of connections across difference – as each playwright clearly demonstrates the significance of feminist collectivity and alliance building. As Nolan’s Anna insists, colonization has caused the “disappear[ance]” of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas and implicitly around the world: “whoosh gone, and then deny everything” (*Annie* 3). Taken together, Indigenous women’s plays mount resistance to ongoing colonialist violence and misrepresentation – a shared reality for Indigenous women in various colonial contexts – especially the misogynistic control over Indigenous communities through sexual violence and the often insidious regulation of women’s bodies.¹⁴⁵ By dealing with issues of political urgency across cultures, Indigenous women playwrights render their works a crucial component of transnational activism. These artists acknowledge that the modern globalized world cannot, as James Clifford points out, “be spatialized into stable cores and peripheries” and is therefore open to “profound reconfigurations” that can ultimately create spaces of resistance for those once considered vanquishable (Clifford 211).

¹⁴⁴ Mojica suggests that her investment in transnational resistance derives from her own mixed lineage as well as from her belief in the connection between Indigenous womanhood and the great matriarch Sky Woman – represented in various forms in different nations and regions. See her article, “Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way.” For further details concerning the transnationalist scope of Mojica’s work, see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁵ Historically, these included state-sanctioned sterilization programs implemented by several Canadian provinces and American states in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marie Clements’ *Tombs of the Vanishing Indian* directly addresses the issue of sterilization in Canada. For further reading concerning these programs, see the sources cited in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The Transnationalization of Indigenous Feminisms

Historiographic accounts suggest that Indigenous women's issues have only recently come to the fore as a prominent part of political discourse in Canada and other colonized territories, with mass-scale, international movements such as Idle No More¹⁴⁶ garnering extensive media attention, demanding the emergence of Indigenous people "from history's blind spot," and rendering Indigenous women particularly significant "visible actors in local, national, and global arenas" (Clifford 13).¹⁴⁷ However, historiographical Indigenous feminist issues have, in fact, been present in the Canadian national political dialogue since the mid-twentieth century, and the cumulative work undertaken by Indigenous women writers/activists has been the primary source of the recent increase in visibility – in both national and international forums.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ The focus of much national and international media attention, Idle No More is an ongoing grassroots political movement initiated by four Canadian women – three Indigenous women and one non-Indigenous ally – in January 2013. Grounded in longstanding historical struggles to define Indigenous identity and nationhood, the ultimate objective of the movement – in Canada – is to unite individuals in intercultural solidarity, engaging diverse groups in a productive political relationship so as to allow for the recognition of First Nations sovereignty and to foster social justice and environmental sustainment. Reaching its climax in January 2012, with Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence undertaking a hunger-strike and furthering media coverage, the outcome of Idle No More has been somewhat anti-climactic, consisting of a commitment by government leaders to hold further talks to recognize the terms of historical treaties between First Nations peoples and the crown. However, it is significant that the movement continues today with a number of world-wide political actions. See Wotherspoon and Hansen's "The 'Idle No More' Movement': Paradoxes of First Nations Inclusion in the Canadian Context," Henderson's "Transparency, Spectatorship, Accountability: Indigenous Families in Settler-State 'Postdemocracies'," the Kino-nda-niimi Collective's *The Winter We Danced*, and Idle No More's web-page: <http://www.idlenomore.ca/>.

¹⁴⁷ Although activists of both sexes partook in Idle No More, it is of great relevance that the movement was both woman-founded and woman-headed.

¹⁴⁸ Following the 1951 amendments to the Indian Act, which eliminated regulations regarding women's political leadership, Indigenous women in Canada moved to take part in band politics, holding the position of chief and sitting on band councils. These women have initiated a great deal of positive social change by voicing their concerns through organizations such as the Native Women's Association of Canada and Indian Rights for Indian Women and have played integral roles as leaders and activists at important conflicts, including the Oka Crisis (1991). For further reading, see Srigley's "'I am a proud Anishinaabekwe': Issues of Identity and Status in Northern Ontario After Bill

Notwithstanding the transnationalist bent of burgeoning Indigenous women's movements, because of the physical removal of many Indigenous communities from their traditional lands – territory that remains unrelinquished – during the colonial settlement process, land and borders, both imagined and actual, continue, as Elizabeth Kalbfeleish points out, to “hold particular significance” for many Indigenous peoples and thus “figure strongly in the production of many artists working today” (278). Negotiating a cultural identity that is tethered to land with concepts of individual identity constructed, in part, by current socio-cultural politics presents a challenge for contemporary Indigenous women, while Indian Act regulated band membership provisions and matrimonial property rights continue to be important nation/band-specific issues around which Indigenous women of Canada organize.¹⁴⁹ Many activists – subject to masculinist pressure within their own communities – feel torn between two increasingly polarized allegiances: race and gender. As Andrea Smith and Luna Ross assert,

Native women who are survivors of violence often find themselves forced into silence around sexual and domestic violence by their communities because their communities desire to maintain a united front against racism and colonialism.

(1)¹⁵⁰

These experiences of limited choice and marginalization span borders, forcing Indigenous women activists to maintain what Chicana theorist Aída Hernández terms a “double militancy” (R. Hernández 42; Huhndorf and Suzack 9) and, beginning in the 1970s, Indigenous feminist

C-31,” Joyce Green’s “Canaries in the Mines of Citizenship: Indian Women in Canada,” and Bonita Lawrence’s “Rewriting Histories of the Land: Colonization and Indigenous Resistance in Eastern Canada.”

¹⁴⁹ For further reading, see Huhndorf and Suzack’s “Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues,” and Joanne Barker’s “Gender, Sovereignty, and the Discourse of Rights in Native Women’s Activism.”

¹⁵⁰ Rather than referring specifically to the Canadian context, Smith and Ross are discussing Indigenous women’s issues in North America generally.

politics naturally began to focus intently upon gender-related causes and issues.¹⁵¹ This move away from a culture/race-based agenda has pushed Indigenous feminist activism – artistic and otherwise – beyond the boundaries of culture and nation. As Huhndorf and Suzack argue, the acknowledgment of common women’s issues has facilitated a shift in Indigenous feminist engagement in Canada and elsewhere, placing focus on “women’s shared experience of the collusions between colonialism and patriarchy” (Huhndorf and Suzack 1), with the movement of many Indigenous people to urban spaces increasing the transnationalization of Indigenous writing and performance across cultures.¹⁵² To this extent, Indigenous feminism has, in the past forty years, become transnational in scope, prompting Indigenous women writers and dramatists to place increased focus on pan-tribal connections and the generalized critique of colonialism.¹⁵³

In recent years, Indigenous women have certainly worked cooperatively across cultures to challenge hegemonic domination within community, nation, and transnational capitalist networks by making their presences felt in global politics and culture, through various forums, ranging from local performances and cultural festivals to the United Nations. These globalized resistances suggest that the artistic endorsement of intergroup/intercultural cohesion indeed works to further woman-headed decolonial movements on a broad scale. While it remains

¹⁵¹ Important to consider in the development of transnational Indigenous feminism is the ungendered transnationalist Indigenous movement which, initiated in the 1980s, began to draw world-wide attention to Indigenous concerns that extend well beyond band, tribe, or nation. See, Niezen’s *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity*.

¹⁵² For an in-depth discussion of the effect of urbanization on the transnationalization of Indigenous performance, see Solga and Hopkins’ *Performance the Global City*.

¹⁵³ Beginning in the 1980s, many theorists working in the areas of Indigenous literary studies and Indigenous performance studies came to adopt a transnational approach to evaluation of Indigenous artistic cultural production. For a thorough discussion of this trend across literary genres, see Daniel Heath Justice’s “Currents of Trans/national Criticism in Indigenous Literary Studies.” For a theatre specific discussion, see Huhndorf’s *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* and Norman Denzin’s “The Politics and Ethics of Performance Pedagogy.”

important to acknowledge differences between – and within – Indigenous communities, approaching resistance from a non-categorical perspective works more successfully to engage diverse factions. Although intercultural solidarity is fraught, particularly because, as Kimberlé Crenshaw notes, dominant liberal discourse continues to hinge upon hegemonic notions of “identity politics” that “exclude or marginaliz[e] those who are different” (1242) by regularly employing analytical practices that rely on binaristic dualisms, such uneasy alliances are nonetheless crucial to social “connect[ion]” and “change” (Jeannette Armstrong, “What” 29). Since territory and cultural difference continue to carry special import for Indigenous women in Canada and globally, any feasible transnational Indigenous feminist praxis cannot demand the dismantling of the “border,” but must follow Mohanty’s strategy for inclusive intercultural network building, as related in her seminal 2004 book *Feminism Without Borders*, in which she ultimately suggests a means by which connections might be forged within existing parameters. As Mohanty writes,

Feminism without borders is not the same thing as borderless feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent. It acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities are real, and that a feminism without borders must envisage change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division. (2)

Mohanty’s words make obvious the integral role of transnational feminism in theorizing Indigenous political movements, both local and international. By engaging with not only the changing socio-cultural landscape that Indigenous women must navigate, but also the economic hardships – often a result of the emergence of global capitalism – experienced by Indigenous

peoples in multiple contexts, while also paying heed to the continued relevance of territorial borders, transnational feminism provides the ideal lens through which to explore burgeoning trends in Indigenous women's activism and art.¹⁵⁴

Spiderwoman Theatre: Enacting Intercultural Resistance

While I do not intend, in this brief concluding section, to engage in an in-depth international analysis of multiple dramatic works, I would like to use the final pages of my dissertation to initiate a discussion, drawing upon the transnationalist feminist performance practices of Spiderwoman Theatre as but one example that serves to indicate the need for further investigation into this burgeoning global movement.¹⁵⁵ Founded in New York in 1976 by Muriel Miguel (Kuna/*Rappahannock*), her two sisters, Gloria Miguel – also Monique Mojica's mother – and Lisa Mayo, along with a collective of other women representing various “races, sexual orientation[s], and worldview[s]” (Spiderwoman, “Spiderwoman” n. pag.), Spiderwoman is not only the longest-running Indigenous theatre collective in North America, but also one of the continent's oldest feminist theatre collectives.¹⁵⁶ Employing a unique approach to dramatic

¹⁵⁴ Emerging in the 1970s, transnational feminism favours international, intercultural analysis and addresses economic, social, and political circumstances developing as a result of imperialism, while remaining extremely attentive to the intersectional oppressions resulting from sexual orientation, ability, race, gender, and religious and national allegiances, in the context of colonialism, nationalisms, and the global spread of capitalism. Emphasizing the connections between imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism, the movement works to develop equitable relations between women across cultural/national borders, fostering expansive, inclusive resistance to economic and social hegemonic domination. See Kaplan et al.'s *Between Woman and Nation*, Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders*, and Swarr and Nagar's *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*.

¹⁵⁵ For further reading concerning the decolonial role of Indigenous feminist theatre and performance globally, see Swarr and Richa's *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, Denzin et al.'s *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Suzack et al.'s *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, Hopkins and Solga's *Performance and the Global City*, McLaren and Kincheloe's *Critical Pedagogy*, Proudfit and Syssoyeva's *History of Collective Creation*, and Dailey's *The Future of Performance Studies*.

¹⁵⁶ See Carter's “Repairing the Web” and Spiderwoman's web-page: <http://www.spiderwomantheater.org/index.htm>.

performance referred to as “Storyweaving” (Carter, “Repairing” ii), the collective focuses their efforts on internationalized Indigenous feminist resistance to colonial violence. Born out of the “radical” political movements of the 1970s, Spiderwoman, by performing their socially transformative works “throughout the world,” contends with the transnational concerns of Indigenous peoples – particularly “violence against women” (Spiderwoman, “Spiderwoman” n. pag.).

From the outset, Spiderwoman Theatre was deeply invested in establishing writing and performance practices that contribute to female empowerment and, more broadly, the eventual decolonization of North American gender relations. Spiderwoman’s very first production, the (yet unpublished) 1976 play, “Women in Violence,” was designed to bring to light the “diverse experiences of women” with violence (qtd. in Carlson, *Performance* 174). In the words of Murielle Borst, to speak of Spiderwoman’s legacy is also to “talk about feminism, about ‘herstory’ versus history” (76). Borst recalls viewing the “Women in Violence” workshops as a child: it began with a group of women “sitting in a circle... talking about men and violence and why violence happens to women,” and then each woman “started to tell their story” (76). For Lisa Mayo, the play was tremendously significant because “violence in women’s lives, in their home or in a marriage, as children, in the workplace, anywhere.... [was] not discussed” at that time (“Theatre” 169). Using staged “storytelling” (Borst 76) and, whenever possible, “slapstick” humour (“Theatre” 169), Spiderwoman addresses the destruction of Indigenous cultures and the normalization of gendered violence, while also evidencing the need for (and potential means to) reclamation in a communicable, educative manner. As articulated by Lisa Mayo: “[i]n almost all our work, there is a theme of survival. That layer is there. It’s not only survival for us, but survival for the future” (“Theatre” 179).

Spiderwoman has, over the past four decades, proceeded to develop pieces that attempt to assist women, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to achieve personal and social empowerment. By the 1980s, Indigenous women, “nationally and internationally,” had come to recognize Spiderwoman Theatre “as a powerful voice for their concerns” and the group thus “emerged as a leading force for Indigenous women” globally (Spiderwoman, “Spiderwoman” n. pag.). By adopting a “pan Indigenous” approach to resistance, reflective of the all-inclusive Kuna concept Abya-Yaya, which translates as “Continent of Life” (Däwes, *Indigenous* 5), the collective purposefully scripts performances that speak across borders, promoting solidarity and “healing” (Spiderwoman, “Persistence” 42).

To this end, Spiderwoman uses theatre as a means of reshaping our understandings of colonial history, thereby “enact[ing] a politics of possibility” (Denzin, “Politics” 129). The 2009 play, *The Persistence of Memory*, which consists of a series of abstract vignettes relating to the evolution of Spiderwoman’s dramaturgy, addresses the role of memory in artistic creation and international Indigenous cultural revitalization. In *Persistence*, Gloria Miguel speaks explicitly of overcoming “the traumas of loss and grief, danger and fear, hatred and chaos” resulting from colonization through the collective “restoration of the hoop” (49). This restoration, she argues, demands that “we connect our stories of our past to our future” and, laterally, bring to light the unnuanced and often racist/misogynistic character of many colonial historical narratives (“Persistence” 42). For this reason, Spiderwoman’s interventions and historical reimaginings, much like the representations analyzed throughout this dissertation, regularly demonstrate the connection between the colonial institutionalization of patriarchy and gendered, racialized violence, imparting the relevance of “global relationships that defy containments by categories of nation” (Huhndorf, *Mapping* 28). The group’s 1995 play “Daughters from the Stars: Nis

Bundor,”¹⁵⁷ for example, arises out of a particularly intricate network of transnational influences and makes a clear attempt to bring together Indigenous peoples around the world. Derived from Lisa Mayo’s solo performance, “Voices from the Criss-Cross Bridge,” “Daughters” – Spiderwoman’s twenty-first original piece – is based upon the sisters’ trip to the San Blas Islands, their father’s birthplace. Pertaining to the trio’s attempts to bring together and unite family members from the North with family from the South – their mother was Rappahannock from Virginia – the yet unpublished play is a moving exploration of history and identity, configured purposefully to establish alliances across boundaries.¹⁵⁸

Considered broadly, “global [I]ndigenous theatre” responds, as Norman Denzin asserts, to “global colonial theatre,” constructing a “transnational, yet historically specific, critical race, and class consciousness” (“Politics,” 129), a pattern illustrated clearly by the ongoing dramatic work of Spiderwoman Theatre. Indeed, by addressing Indigenous women’s issues that exceed national and cultural borders – real and perceptual – contemporary plays by Indigenous women, produced in North America and elsewhere in the world, suggest the existence of an expansive dramatic movement, whereby Indigenous women mount dramatic resistances to gendered colonialist violence. Although the sociocultural positions and (literal) territorial spaces/places occupied by these artists are not the “same” (Huhndorf, “Indigenous” 184), by presenting a diverse, but cohesive transnational perspective, Indigenous women playwrights reveal the consistent link between masculinism and colonialism that has historically underwritten the

¹⁵⁷ In Kuna mythology, Daughters from the Stars are five celestial sisters who help to govern the human life cycle. For an analysis of the varying versions of the myth, see James Howe and Lawrence A. Hirschfeld’s “The Star Girls’ Descent.”

¹⁵⁸ See Spiderwoman’s 1996 interview with Larry Abbott, “Spiderwoman Theatre and the Tapestry of Story.”

displacement of Indigenous women within dominant society and within traditional community. Most importantly, these pieces are cartographical, mapping a hopeful trajectory that implies – whether overtly or subtly – the significance of collective resistance in decolonial activism and encourages Indigenous women around the world to “pick up their medicine” and work in solidarity towards collective reclamation (Art Solomon, qtd. in Mojica, “Princess” 20). Founded upon cultural and performance practices that “embody love, hope, care, and compassion” (Denzin, “Politics” 129), these texts – produced in multiple colonized nations – can, I argue, assist with the envisioning and evolution of transnational cultural resurgences in the increasingly globalized realm of Indigenous women and thus warrant significant attention from not only social justice activists, but also from critics and scholars.

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