“Acts of Resistance”:
Reclaiming Native Womanhood in Canadian Aboriginal Theatre.

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract.

This study investigates the representation of Aboriginal womanhood in Aboriginal women’s theatre in Canada. Using five core case studies to explore Indigenous women’s self-representation, I demonstrate how Native theatre engages in acts of resistance that promote the decolonization of Aboriginal womanhood. Drawing on concepts of Aboriginal storytelling, I attempt to weave the connections between the personal story and the collective history to demonstrate how these plays use theatrical presence to rebuke historical and contemporary absences of Native women. Each play does this by taking aim at political policies, stereotypes in popular culture, and sexual violence, which all sustain negative constructions of Native womanhood. Chapter one establishes the context(s) in which these plays exist and explores a history of legislation and policies that contributes to the negative representations of Aboriginal women. Chapters two and three demonstrate how Native women's theatre confronts stereotypes of Aboriginality and deconstructs them as a form of personal and collective healing. Chapter two explores how culture jamming and humour are used to disrupt the re-circulation of
stereotypes in order to challenge the cultural currency stereotypes maintain in film, television, and other medias. In chapter three I explore the connection between the stereotypes and sexualized violence. I identify strategies used to represent violence, specifically around concepts of “presence” and “absence.” The function of violence in these plays is not one of (re)victimization, but one that evokes concepts of testimony, witnessing, and storytelling. It will also deal with the problematic perceived trajectory of healing and identity formation through violence in some of the plays. Chapter four looks to the relationship between identity and community and signals how a return to “home” and community can help rebuild positive Indigenous identities and becomes the final act of resistance. Chapter five examines the relationship between storytelling (in the theatre), history, and witnessing trauma. It proposes that Native storytelling, especially in the theatre, is an act of survivance that challenges historical absences. Finally, in chapter six, I look forward to the transnational applications of my research and gesture to Indigenous eco-theatre as one avenue that promotes the decolonization of Indigenous peoples globally.
For Cecilie, du er puslespillbrikken min.
Acknowledgements.

Standing where I am now, standing up at all
I was used to feeling like I was never gonna see myself at the finish line
- Tegan and Sara, Heartthrob

I never thought this day would come, but I did not arrive at the end of this journey alone. This dissertation would not exist if it were not for the many people who have helped me along the way.

A thousand heartfelt thanks to my tremendous thesis committee. Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Bruce Barton, and two committee members, Dr. Rauna Kuokkanen and Dr. Kim Solga. You were my guides during this long process and your support, questions, answers, comments, criticisms, and astounding dedication of time and expertise to helping me through this project is appreciated more than I can express. Your mentorship and advice has helped me navigate my degree with relative ease.

I would like to acknowledge the inspiration and support of my colleagues, cohorts, and co-conspirators at the University of Toronto, especially those at the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies (the “DC”): Steph “Stephbot” Berntson, John Greyson, Sasha Kovacs, Shelley Liebembuk, Natalie Mathieson, Dalbir Singh, and everyone whose path I have crossed during this trip. Additionally, I would like to thank Heather Desserud, Renée Gregor, Sorouja Moll, Jason Ryan, Jessica Barnett-Robinson, and Rikke Solem who took the time to copy edit and provide feedback on my writing.

A special thank you to Dr. Lisa Zeitz, who passed away during the writing of this dissertation. Lisa was, and continues to be, an inspiration. She encouraged me to be a more effective and inspiring educator; she challenged me to better my writing; and with
a genuine confidence in my abilities, she pushed me in a way few people have. I will miss our discussions of Restoration and 18th century theatre, travel adventures, landscape gardening, and “hall camping.”

I would like to acknowledge the financial support from the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama and the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto which helped me throughout the course of this degree. I would also like to thank the FAS Fund for allowing me the opportunity to study language in Norway. Without this opportunity I would still be fumbling my way through a Norwegian-English dictionary. Thank you also Beaivváš Sámi Teáhter for allowing me access to plays in their archive.

To my friends, in Canada, Norway, and beyond: thank you for the encouragement, pats on the back, and willingness to listen to me ramble on and on while I tried to work through my ideas. Thank you for your support and laughter; I owe you one (or maybe several)! Thank you to Maggie Makar, Bridget Whittle, Claire Mastrangelo, Abigail Borland, Ashlee Beattie, Donia Sawwan, Kelsie Acton, Irene Arntzen Gjengaar, Susanne Skipnes and my cocker spaniel Lucy: without your multitude of opportunities for fun-inducing procrastination, this project would certainly have been finished much sooner, but without the experience and fun of the journey.

A thank you to my families in Canada and Norway for your support and unbridled belief in me and for your understanding during the many, many, many years of school. To my parents, Theresa and Brian Campbell, you can stop asking “when are you going to be finished?” right about . . . now!

Finally, I would like to thank Cecilie Arntzen Gjengaar. Hvordan skal jeg begynne? Du er mitt anker i rolig og røff sjø, og du har gjort denne reisen utrolig mye morsommere. Du har feiret mine seiere og hjulpet meg opp fra mine nedturer. Du har heiet når jeg har trengt oppmuntring og vist forståelse når jeg brukte timer med nesen stukket dypt ned i bøker og datamaskiner. Du har vært en klangbunn for ideer og alltid villig til å engasjere
deg i debatter og diskusjoner. Alt dette gjorde du med tålmodighet, godhet, og kjærlighet. Tusen takk Cecilie, for uten din hjelp med oversettelser, dine spørsmål, din støtte, din uhemmet tro på meg, og din kjærlighet, har jeg ikke kunnet skrive denne boken. Jeg elsker deg, og mer enn til noen andre, er denne boken til deg.
“Acts of Resistance”: Reclaiming Native Womanhood in Canadian Aboriginal Theatre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A note on terminology

INTRODUCTION: Staging acts of resistance ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE: Introducing the Histories ............................................................. 39

CHAPTER TWO: Identity and the Media: the Formation of a Stereotype ............ 70

CHAPTER THREE: Violence and Performance ...................................................... 136

CHAPTER FOUR: Coming Home Through Theatre ........................................... 203

CHAPTER FIVE: Memory and History – Storytelling as Memorial .................. 235

CHAPTER SIX: Looking Forward: The Transnational and the Theatrical .......... 289

Works Cited ........................................................................................................... 319
A Note on Terminology

The use of the word “womanhood” throughout this thesis is intended to be a placeholder term. I am borrowing it specifically from Kim Anderson’s work *A Recognition of Being*, and also from a larger body of feminist research on womanhood and self-representation and from a pool of Native scholarship on identity and culture. I believe Anderson’s use of the term, and certainly my borrowing of this term, is aimed at trying to name a complex idea of Indigenous women’s (self) representation (on and off the stage). By using the term Native womanhood, I am neither suggesting that there is one, essentialized or homogenized sense of Native womanhood nor aiming to speak for all women’s experiences, but I do want to suggest that there are many, often very different, but all equally important, depictions of womanhood that may fall under the rubric of Native women’s self-representation/self-created identity. I am using the term womanhood to speak of specific women’s experiences that can translate to a wider appeal. I look, therefore, at the microcosm before expanding to the macrocosm. I start by looking at the individual (as represented in the performances) and apply that to ways that these positive self-representations can benefit whole communities and nations.

The term womanhood itself may appear dated; it resonates with sentiments of early feminist scholarship and the search for feminism’s place in both theory and praxis.
I agree with these sentiments; however, I also recognized that the progress witnessed by feminist scholars during the last few decades of the twentieth century has not always been accorded to those who lie outside the margins of white feminist discourse. Long after subjectivity played its part in the white middle-class feminist circles, coloured and Indigenous feminist scholars began to borrow from these older theories and apply them anew to their own situations. Furthermore, womanhood has, historically, been a pejorative way to signal a degraded, debased, and devalued sense of identity for women, especially for “Other” women. It was used as a colonialist and sexist term in combination with racist overtones in order to continue the colonization process with all the negative associations attached to it. To be a woman was to be a devalued person in comparison to a man. I use the word conscious of its history and I am proposing that Native women and Native cultures are challenging these historical uses and using the term in an empowering, positive, and historically subversive way. Where possible, I will use the more individual “self-defined identity/representation” or other similar phrases; however, it may be necessary at times to speak generally and this is where “womanhood” will be the most useful term. I use it for the ease of the term, but always aware of the problems with its use.

Many scholars, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, struggle with issues of nomenclature when it comes to identifying Canada’s Indigenous population. In Canada terms have come in and out of popular use and range from Indian, First Nation,
Aboriginal, and Native, most of which, as Janice Acoose points out, were “words [that] name the white-christian patriarchy’s constructs of Indigenous peoples” (13). While names and naming are difficult, I am left in a position where naming the cultural groups I study is important to avoid pushing these groups to the margins of my research. The terminology used in recent publications has run the spectrum of terminology to identify Indigenous populations, and the diversity of the terms used in these publications indicates that there is an on-going critical debate on this topic and that continued discussion is necessary. While some recent titles suggest a movement towards the use of Indigenous (see, for example, Birgit Däwes’s *Indigenous North American Drama* (2013), Mary Rose Casey’s *Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre* (2004), Suzack et al.’s *Indigenous Women and Feminism* (2010)), many have continued to use the term Native (or less frequently Aboriginal) (see, for example, Stanlake *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective* (2010), Däwes *Native North American Drama* (2007), Simpson and Smith *Theorizing Native Studies* (2014)). It is important to note that frequently Indigenous is used in works where more than one country is discussed thus requiring a more transnational/international term to be inclusive of the differences between the various Indigenous groups discussed. Däwes’s work (2013), for example, uses a variety of terms including Indigenous, Native, and Aboriginal.

With this in mind, I will follow precedents set by several prominent scholars when it comes to naming and try to identify each individual by affiliation where it is possible
to do so. When speaking more generally, I will use the words that are available to me, but I do so conscious of their history. I will use the term “Indian” only when it is historically appropriate to do so. Since my project is primarily focussed on Canadian Indigenous theatre, I will use “Aboriginal to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures where no distinction among them is intended” (MJ. Miller 17). “Native” is the term which I will employ the most in this work. “Native” has been a contentious term in the past and has a “historical connotation of a generalized imperial usage” (MJ. Miller 17); however, it is a term most commonly used/heard at the community level, it is a term frequently found in historical as well as contemporary scholarship on both Native self-determination and Native theatre, and is a term with which many Aboriginal persons in Canada have expressed an affinity. It is also found frequently in the field of theatre studies, both by the theatre companies themselves and the scholars who write about them. Many of the theatre companies associated with the works of theatre I am exploring opt to use the terms Native (De-baj, Native Earth) or Aboriginal (Full Circle, De-baj) and less frequently First Nations (Full Circle). My use of Native also establishes that the Indigenous populations of North America were “native” to the continent long before European settlers arrived, and thereby marks a claim to that history. For variety of writing, I will use Aboriginal and Native interchangeably, and without prejudice (that is, regardless of their band/nation affiliations, status/non-status) as umbrella terms to identify Indigenous persons in Canada (First Nations, Inuit, Métis). Finally, I have made
a conscious decision to reserve the term Indigenous for identification of Indigenous populations beyond the Canadian borders or when seeking a more international/transnational signification.
INTRODUCTION

Staging acts of resistance

In *Acts of Resistance*, I explore the dramaturgical strategies of decolonization and reclamation of Aboriginal women's identities used in the last decade of the twentieth century. The 1990s was a formative decade for Aboriginal theatre in Canada, and I turn to this specific historical moment in order to highlight how the performative strategies found in these plays support Native women’s resistance to the negative social construction of Native womanhood. As I worked my way through each chapter, I came to the realization that *Acts of Resistance* was about more than just reclaiming Native women’s identities from the grips of false representation and historical accounts; it was about issues of absence and the resistance created through Native women’s presence.

I use Margo Kane’s *Moonlodge* (1990), Monique Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1990), Shirley Cheechoo’s *Path With No Moccasins* (1991), Marie Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (1997), and Yvette Nolan’s *Annie Mae’s Movement* (1998) as my foundational texts. Each playwright stages resistance to

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While I recognize that there are debates about the use of Aboriginal, Native, or First Nations to identify Canada’s Indigenous population, I am using the terms that are available to me and do so understanding the debates and problems of these terms. For further explanation on my terminology, please refer to the note on terminology at the beginning of this dissertation.
historical, cultural, and political absences of Native women, and so their plays serve “two transformative functions—healing Indigenous people and advancing social justice in settler society—both components in the process of decolonization” (Episkenew 15). I explore the ways these Native women playwrights writing and performing near the turn of the twentieth century have used performance to deconstruct oft-recycled stereotypes that breed racist and sexist understandings of Aboriginal womanhood. In her book, A Recognition of Being, Kim Anderson (Cree/Métis) proposes that “Native women engage in a process of self-definition that includes four steps: resist, reclaim, construct, and act” (2001, 15). This process forms the basis of the decolonization of identity, and it is this process that also forms the basis of my intervention into Native women’s theatre. The playwrights under discussion pull at multiple threads of resistance in order to challenge the systemic racism in Canada that contributes to discrimination and mischaracterizations of Native womanhood.

This project is concerned with the ways that Native women’s theatre engages in this process of decolonization. How do the plays and the playwrights challenge the negative construction of Indigenous identity, and how do they reimagine identity formation post-trauma? This project seeks to explore the shift from cultural stereotypes to positive self-identification in Moonlodge, Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, Path With No Moccasins, The Unnatural and Accidental Women, and Annie Mae’s Movement. Each chapter will investigate a dramaturgical strategy used to stage not just
the decolonization of Native women’s identities, but also the push-back against the trauma of representational, colonial, or physical violence. The three chief objectives of this study are to:

1. Explore how theatre, by foregrounding issues of the presence and absence of Native women, is actively engaged in the decolonization of Native women. What dramaturgical strategies are used to cull common and harmful stereotypes that circulate by and through various technologies of representation? How do the playwrights challenge the monopoly on the construction of “Nativeness” that circulates through various medias and what is at stake in these attempts to halt their re-circulation?

2. Investigate the dramaturgical strategies used to represent the gender-based violence inherent in stereotypes, sexual violence, and colonization. In what ways do the playwrights push back against representational, physical, and colonial violence? If the function of violence is the destruction of the subjective self, then how do representations of violence act as a framework to resist the colonial push to fracture those identities?

3. Examine how Native women’s theatre engages in what Gerald Vizenor calls “survivance.” How does self-representation as a mechanism of resistance to culturally-created stereotypes, along with acts of storytelling and testimony, confront the legacy of colonization and push for decolonization?
At the centre of these three points of inquiry is a dialogical collision between past representations of Native womanhood and a resistance to those representations. By presenting both culturally-created and self-created identities in the theatre, there is a renegotiation of the stereotypical representations of Indigenous identities typically presented to Canadian theatre-going audiences.

When I speak about the representation of Native womanhood, I am speaking about three separate, but inevitably linked, aspects of Indigenous identity. First, how the Canadian government defines and represents Aboriginality in Canada; second, how the culture industry, specifically film and television, has typically defined and/or represented Aboriginality; and third, how Aboriginal women choose to self-identify. Because “race, gender, and class hierarchies structure (rather than simply complicate) each other” (Razack 15), it is important to consider these aspects of identity equally, and not necessarily as mutually exclusive factors of identity. It is not simply womanhood, but Native womanhood that is being investigated. As such, both racial and gendered identities are implicit in this investigation.

**Theoretical Framework**

This is a feminist research project, and it is also a cross-cultural project. In the chapters that follow, I employ a cross-cultural, postcolonial, feminist framework. Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak argues that cross-cultural research often requires “unlearning one’s privilege”; the cross-cultural researcher must be willing to do her homework towards “gaining some knowledge of the other” and “attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take us seriously [...] and be able to answer back” (1996, 5). Julia Emberley writes:

For a non-Aboriginal scholar such as myself, educated in the Western literary tradition, the ethico-epistemic challenge lies in the dual process of unlearning the institutional, epistemic, and representational violences of colonization and learning from Indigenous storytelling about the interwoven fabric of reciprocity, respect, balance, and responsibility that informs an Indigenous approach to reading stories. (2013, 148)

I state my positionality and clearly identify myself within my work because I subscribe to what Kim Anderson has called “an Aboriginal method of contextualizing knowledge” (2001, 21). Part of this is identifying not only my positionality as both a feminist and a university-educated scholar of theatre and drama, but also identifying myself as a cross-cultural researcher. I approach this project from a position that comes with certain privileges. My lived experiences set me apart from the lived experiences of the women playwrights and the characters they create. While I do not see this as inherently detrimental to my research, I do need to be aware of my position and account for it in my writing.

I also approach this project as a woman and a humanist who is concerned with the inequalities and violence experienced by Indigenous communities all over the world,
but especially those inequalities and instances of violence that happen in my own backyard, as it were. In her summary of arguments made by bell hooks, Constance Richards argues that “our ability to empathize with the circumstances of others gives us the vehicle to bridge whatever gaps exist between women of different nationalities, classes, and sexual identities, and also between different communities of women and men regardless of their location in the global economy” (24). Throughout the writing of this dissertation I felt immense guilt, but as many have pointed out, guilt is not a feeling, it is a mask for other feelings. I began to question what my guilt masked and quickly came to realize that it masked my anger. I was angry about the treatment of Aboriginal people in Canada (and around the world); I was angry with the prevalence of violence for all women, but especially Indigenous women; I was angry at the inaction of the Canadian government to help its citizens.

There is justifiable concerns that accompany the cross-cultural researcher. There have been researchers who have exploited their subjects for personal or professional benefit. Bell hooks labels this phenomenon “eating the other.” Since according to hooks “eating the other” is how “one asserts power and privilege” (1992, 36), dominant culture hopes that “the 'primitive' or fantasies about the Other can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo” (1992, 22; also see Anderson, 2001, 44). I do not wish to eat the other; I do not want my research to become another form of fetishizing Native culture and
appropriating Native voices. Instead, I wish to explore theatre of Native women as it exists for me as a non-Indigenous woman in Canada. Writing this thesis became a way to discharge my anger at the injustice in Canadian society that is reflected in Native Canadian women’s theatre. This study is about Native womanhood as it is presented in the theatre and the way Native women’s theatre attempts to reclaim a positive, decolonized notion of Native womanhood. Alan Filewod writes, “I can’t write about native theater; all I can write about is my response to it” (17). This thesis is my reading of how these performances work to challenge the social construction of Native womanhood as it is presented in North American culture. My primary intention is to write about these plays while embracing my position as an outsider to those experiences. I am a witness to these stories and, as such, engage not just in an act of witnessing, but also participate in my own decolonization. In this way, the process of decolonization extends not just to Aboriginal people, but also to non-Indigenous spectators who wish to decolonize their own misconceptions of Aboriginality as well.²

Feminism is different for every person, and to ascribe one reading of feminism to this study and the plays would do a disservice to the different political and historical

² Other scholars also share in this difficulty in writing about Native cultures and peoples. For Helen Hoy, it is a battle between being respectful and (self)aware while also not being bogged down by the need to “get it right.” She writes “In largely white feminist classrooms, too, I have seen the determination to ‘get it right’ as a form of personal enlightenment about racism, take precedence over the determination to take action against oppressive hierarchies and the unequal distribution of power” (Hoy 17).
agendas of the plays and their authors. Nevertheless, feminist and postcolonial discourse frames this project. While I recognize that both scholars and Native women are often divided on the use of western theoretical approaches to Aboriginal works, my approach to and reception of these plays is framed and informed by feminist theories of representation and performance. Feminism has been a point of contention for Aboriginal scholars, critics, artists, and activists because, as Salish/Métis author and activist Lee Maracle has concluded, since “racist ideology had defined womanhood for the Native woman as nonexistent, [...] neither the woman question nor the European rebel’s response held any meaning for” her (15). This resistance is described clearly by many scholars who have pointed out that “[w]hile mainstream feminists have been engaged in deconstructing images of femininity, black and lesbian women have continued to experience a crisis of self-definition due to white heterosexual women’s monopolization of this category” (Brewer 5). In the introduction to their *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, Shari M. Huhndorf and Cheryl Suzack see this resistance as detrimental because there is an “urgency of gender analysis specific to Indigenous communities” but “Indigenous women and feminist issues remain underexamined in contemporary feminist theory” (Suzack, Huhndorf, Perreault, & Barman 1). The authors identify the exclusion of Indigenous perspectives from current feminist research as the reason for insufficient feminist analysis; they argue that feminist research, “especially in academia, remains white-centred, despite the active involvement
of women of colour” (2), and this marginalizes the need to address the social, political, economic, and cultural issues facing Indigenous women. Central to my analysis is an engagement with Indigenous feminism, because it offers me the opportunity to seek out research by and for Indigenous people, offers Indigenous perspectives on feminist issues, and offers a way to counter-balance the difficulties found in feminist performance theory, for example. It offers a feminist lens to engage with the plays under discussion without diminishing Indigenous perspectives. Incorporating Indigenous feminists along side other feminist approaches creates a more inclusive theoretical frame to this project and my analysis of the plays.

Some argue that using feminism as an ideological platform from which to redress issues of class, gender, and race inequalities will inevitably exclude men from that discourse. Or that the feminist “struggle for gender equality” is erroneously viewed “as opposing traditional Indigenous practices and forms of social organization” and thus “undermines more pressing struggles for Indigenous autonomy” (Suzack, Huhndorf, Perreault, & Barman 2). Kim Anderson does not see feminist desires for the empowerment of women as opposing general desires for Indigenous autonomy, however, and offers suggestions on how to reconcile the two. She suggests that if Western feminism is unpalatable because it is about rights rather than

Suzack and Huhndorf also identify resistance from within Indigenous communities which I discuss briefly below.
responsibilities, then we should all take responsibility seriously and ask if we are being responsible to all members of our societies. If we are to reject equality in favour of difference, then we need to make sure those differences are embedded in systems that empower all members. If we see feminism as being too invested in Western liberalism and individual autonomy, then we need to ensure that our collectivist approaches serve everyone in the collective. And if we want to embrace essential elements of womanhood that have been problematic for Western feminists [...] then we have to ensure that these concepts don't get stuck in literal or patriarchal interpretations. (Anderson, 2010, 88)

I contend that while my project’s primary focus is on Indigenous women, its application can be applied to the decolonization of Indigenous men as well. Identifying the plays as feminist seeks to support mutual empowerment and collective benefit. Each play aims not just to decolonize and deconstruct images of Native womanhood, but to serve in community reconstruction of these identities. These plays are performed for, and in many cases by, communities of Aboriginal men and women as part of a tradition of healing through Aboriginal storytelling. Even despite the proto-feminist readings of pre-colonial Indigenous societies, many read an Aboriginal search for equality and feminism as incompatible. An Indigenous feminist approach, however, is “linked to a foundational principle in Indigenous societies – that is, the profound reverence for life” (Anderson, 2010, 81), while also creating “the kind of critical thinking that will allow us to stay true to our traditional reverence for life” (89). Anderson argues that “what we now call feminism – which the Merriam Webster’s online dictionary defines as ‘the theory of political, economic and social equality of the sexes’ – was simply a way of life to our
ancestors” (Anderson, 2010, 82). My use of feminist discourse is from a desire for social justice and equality; I could equally use the term humanist, but it fails to do justice to the incredible work by those who choose to label themselves feminist.

In addition, “although many native women do not call themselves feminist for many well-thought-out reasons […] it is important to note that many” do refer to themselves as feminist (A. Smith, 2005, 118). The problems arising from feminism are not always the theory, but the praxis that comes along with it. Whether they use the term feminist or not, most Native women appear to identify in some way or another with the tenets of feminism, especially when considering that “the unity of feminism lies in the commitment to end the oppression of women”; what is up for debate, however, is the “means of its elimination” (S. Phelan 139). For my own part, this project is about finding a balance between western theory and Indigenous theory, and a balance between writing about Indigenous women and writing for myself. Finally, I label my work as feminist because I see it as a tool not only to understand the colonial and social pressures faced by Indigenous women and men, but also as a tool that can help deconstruct the discursive power structures that define these pressures.

This work also exists within a postcolonial context. The postcolonial framework

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4 By this, I mean the philosophy that emphasizes the agency and equality of all human beings – which would also extend to (Native) men – while still focussing this project on the diverse ways Indigenous women seek to decolonize Indigenous identity.
used in this thesis comes to me from the previous work done in theatre studies by scholars like Joanne Tompkins or Marc Maufort. I must concede that postcolonial, as a term, is controversial within Native studies. Scholars are divided on the most appropriate terminology to use to describe the socio-political conditions experienced by Indigenous populations within a settler nation state, such as Canada. At the heart of all of the debates over terminology is “the centrality of colonialism as the theoretical apparatus for understanding the condition of Indigenous people” and the need for Native studies “to focus on decolonization” (Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 279).

While I may engage with postcolonial theatrical analysis, and certainly place the arguments of Acts of Resistance as part of a wider postcolonial reading of Native theatre, I appreciate that not everyone may agree that Native people in Canada are currently post-colonial. No term, whether it is postcolonial or settler colonialism is free of complications. Since its initial appearances in Native studies, settler colonialism’s definition has expanded to try and account for all the ways in which Indigenous lives were, and continue to be, affected by settler societies and the governments and laws they established. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja’s book Native Studies Keywords (2015) offers an informative and useful discussion on both

5 Of course what decolonization looks like and how it is accomplished is another debate within itself. Whether it is about “the overturning of the colonial structure” (Cavender Wilson and Yellow Bird 5) or geared towards shifting colonial mentality and colonized thoughts (Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 281), decolonization is ultimately about supporting Indigenous sovereignty and addressing the negative effects of colonization (past and present) for Indigenous people.
terms. The authors synthesize some of the most significant debates on terminology and reveal significant divisions among Indigenous scholars’ preferences in terminology. Walter L. Hixson argues that what distinguishes settler colonialism from colonialism “is that the settlers came not to exploit the indigenous population for economic gain, but rather to remove them from the colonial space” (4). According to Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism was motivated by “greed – specifically, greed for land” (Wolfe 27). Patrick Wolfe, Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini have endorsed the use of the term settler colonialism to describe a practice that is "premised on the elimination of native societies" and where “survival is a matter of not being assimilated” (Wolfe 2-3). It is the continued presence of the settler societies – the continued invasion of Indigenous lands and the processes of elimination – that upholds “Eurocentric notions of racial superiority, progress, and providential destiny” (Hixson 6). It is this continued invasion that leads some to argue that postcolonial is a term with limited value for Native studies (see Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 278). Other scholars have argued that it is not just the logic of elimination, but the innumerable “palpable” losses experienced by Indigenous societies after first contact, which include the “loss- of self-representation in all aspects of Native life” as well as the “land dispossession, language loss, and legal impositions on Native people” (Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 272), that limits terms like postcolonial.

However, settler colonialism has its fair share of criticism as well. Joanne Barker
(Delaware) has argued that etymologically, “settle” belongs to “reconcile” or “reconciliation” and so “it anticipates a reconciling of those histories within the current structure and social formation of the nation-state.” Barker suggests that the "nation-state is treated within 'settler colonialism' as having moved beyond its own tragically imperial and colonial history to be something else that is not quite entirely colonial because it has been 'reconciled' and 'made consistent' within/as the nation-state” (Barker). Thus, for Barker, who prefers the terms “colonialism” or “imperialism,” the use of "settler" in settler colonialism diminishes the past and current relationship between Indigenous communities and the settler governments. Macoun and Strakosch have argued that settler colonial theory “makes major contributions to current mainstream scholarship, but that its analytic and explanatory power also presents a range of political and ethical risks” (427). They argue that settler colonial theory can “result in a kind of colonial fatalism” in which it is possible to “portray settler colonialism as an inevitable structure likely to exist across time,” and can “excuse us from human political action in the present by presenting this action as futile or already determined” (435). Others have argued about the possibility of erasing Indigenous voices from settler colonial studies. In their article, “Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics

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6 Also see arguments by O’Brien and Den Ouden who argue against the “inexorable logic of elimination” put forward by Wolfe and draw attention to “the instabilities of settler colonialism and its claims of mastery over the lives, and fates, of Indigenous people, particularly in contemporary contexts” (8).
of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations,” Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel argue that “settler colonialism may not be the primary lens of living or theorizing [for Indigenous peoples], but it is also neither in the background or invisible” (10). Their criticism of settler colonial theory highlights a possibility of “re-empowering non-Indigenous academic voices while marginalizing Indigenous resistance” (8). The authors highlight arguments made by Leeuw, Greenwood, and Lindsay (2013) and Macoun and Strakosch (2013) to demonstrate that there is the potential for settler colonial theory to “displace, overshadow, or even mask over Indigenous studies” (9). Other scholars have altogether argued against colonialism as "the preferred analytic for understanding the status of Native peoples" because “not all Native peoples have been colonized” (Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 273), but they are nevertheless still subject to be occupied by foreign powers. For some, the term colonized (or behind it, colonization) also reinforces the concept of the vanquished, therefore, supporting a framework that maintains "Native peoples in the constant status of victims" (274).

As a term to understand and describe the status of Indigenous people, postcolonial is no less difficult. Some, myself included, argue that covert and overt acts of colonization, which are understood within the framework of settler colonialism, are less explicit within the framework of postcolonial theory. Since these acts of colonization continue and the process of decolonization continues, Canada cannot be understood as
existing in a post-colonial state. It should be mentioned that my choice to use the un-hyphenated ‘postcolonial’ is intentional and forms an important distinction from the hyphenated ‘post-colonial.’ Postcolonial “does not impart a temporal meaning in the way that the hyphenated ‘post-colonial’” does; postcolonial “relates to colonialism [...] in much more expansive ways than the hyphenated form” (Hixon 2). Some scholars, such as Robert Warrior, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig S. Womack, have expressed concern over the limits of postcolonial theory and its application to Indigenous studies. There is often a skepticism or distrust of Western theoretical paradigms which can silence or further marginalize Indigenous perspectives and which fail to focus on issues of Native sovereignty and decolonization. Some Indigenous scholars have demonstrated how postcolonial theory has largely ignored the histories of colonialism against Indigenous populations (Byrd xxxii). Along the same vein, there are debates about what actually constitutes post-colonial (Byrd xxxii). In the context of Canada, there are still active political and social policies of colonization affecting Aboriginal populations, and so to claim that Canada’s Indigenous population is post-colonial is to suggest (for some) that colonization is a part of the past and not a current policy or practice. I do not see postcolonial analysis and decolonization as mutually exclusive and this view is supported

And then there are some who choose to ignore Canada’s past. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who, during the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh, PA, USA, stated that Canada has no history of colonialism at all (Ljunggren).
by scholars like Emma LaRocque, who have argued that “postcolonial theory should not be understood as signifying the end of colonialism [...]

rather the post suggests the radical rupture in history created by the colonial movement” (summarized in Simpson and Smith 14). Jodi Byrd has argued for more engagement with postcolonial studies (or theory in general) “because postcolonial theory arose as a politicized intervention to colonialist knowledge production, it seems worth reconsidering some of its strategies for the continued development of indigenous critical theory” (Byrd xxx; also see Simpson and Smith 14-15).

The terminology one uses must be developed from Indigenous-centred framework in order to further support Indigenous rights and sovereignty; thus, for my own part, I am less concerned with the debate around terminology than with framing my research within the growing call for Canada to address its colonial past and present in order to support the urgent need for social justice for Indigenous people. The difficulties with postcolonial theory and terminology notwithstanding, I have borrowed from an array of scholarship that uses postcolonial as well as settler colonial analysis. Wherever possible, I use an interdisciplinary approach to feminist theory by including feminist performance theorists, feminist postcolonial theorists, and Indigenous feminist theorists, who may not be specifically related to performance, and who may not always share similar methodologies, but who nevertheless help to conjoin Native perspectives with feminist criticism in a context promoting resistance, positive self-representation,
and the continued decolonization of Native women’s identities.

In chapter one, I establish the political context in which the playwrights and their works exist, and highlight a history of legislation and policies that contribute to the negative representations of Aboriginal women. The plays of all Aboriginal playwrights exist within the historical contexts explored in this chapter, and by exploring the colonial history, the legislation, and policies that sanction the continued oppression of Aboriginal people in Canada, I signal exactly what the foundational playwrights explored in this work are pushing back against. Because each play examined in Acts of Resistance contains underpinnings of legislation, such as the Indian Act, or governmental policies, such as residential schools or the sixties scoops, it is important not only to detail these laws and policies, but also to highlight how they intersect with the plays discussed throughout this thesis. No play names the Indian Act directly, yet every play deals with its aftershocks. While they may not be the prominent feature, each play is besieged by these legal policies, which serve as the backdrop to the “conflict” in the plays; the laws and policies are signaled as the original injury to the characters’ understanding of both their Nativeness and their womanhood. While the content of this dissertation was difficult at times, writing chapter one was, in some ways, the hardest, as it forced me to confront the innumerable violations of basic human rights Canada has committed against its own citizens.

The ways in which legislation affects and creates identity, and the ways the laws
create, modify, regulate and surveil Native women’s identities will be a central focus of this chapter. It is well documented that many Aboriginal women have been significantly affected by the Indian Act’s gendered discrimination, and that during colonization the British Crown, and after that the Government of Canada, introduced Native communities to a new form of patriarchal lineage that heavily discriminated against women (see, for example, Anderson, 2000, 68, Lawrence 5, Mackey 51, Maracle 17, McGillivray and Comaskey 52, Rojas 35). I highlight some of the more salient moments to establish the socio-political framework in which the playwrights and their plays exist. The legal and social history of legislation in Canada established the major strategies of colonization. These are the themes the playwrights attempt to deconstruct and it is these themes that form the basis of the chapters that follow: identity formation, violence, homelessness, and strategies of decolonization.

Chapter two explores how Native women playwrights counter the re-circulation of negative representations of Native women across various medias and technologies of representation. Despite the momentous efforts to quell these negative constructions, stereotypes, and appropriations of Indigenous culture over the last few decades, film and television – and the culture industry as a whole – persist in using Indigenous culture for their own profit, regardless of the potential detrimental effects. These stereotypes are then picked up through other mediums of representation and used as cultural currency for commercial ends, which continues to reinforce the stereotypes and their circulation.
Chapter two’s focus is on how the playwrights use those stereotypes in subversive ways to disrupt the re-circulation of those stereotypes. The plays explored in chapter two demonstrate an interest in “countering the semiotic codes of cinema and television” by “dramatis[ing] characters/events that rework the stereotype of the Hollywood Indian” (Gilbert & Tompkins 209). The plays respond to the semiotic codes by denaturalizing them through parody and ridicule so that the audience’s search for an authentic Native womanhood is withheld. This chapter is particularly timely given the tide of resistance to the continued use of stereotypes and appropriation by the entertainment industry. From musicians wearing war bonnet headdress or buckskin clothing, to the mounting pressure on sport franchises to change their names (such as the National Football League’s Washington “Redskins”), there has been wave after wave of resistance to the frequent appropriation of Indigenous people’s images and culture.

The chapter begins with a close reading of a recent music video by pop band No Doubt and how this band’s video participated in a rejuvenation of stereotypes that have been, and continue to be, circulated by contemporary culture for profit. The chapter explores how the playwrights protest the recirculation of the Pocahontas stereotype, for example, by creating counter-narratives that challenge the authority and monopoly that the stereotypes have held in the creation of Native women’s identities. In order to disrupt the stereotype’s authoritative claims of representation, the playwrights often turn to humour and ridicule as tactics to undermine and resist the pull to stereotypes.
This humour turns the stereotype against itself towards its own destruction. The humour unsettles established ideas of Native womanhood and, as a result, engages in feminist culture jamming. The playwrights’ culture jamming supports not only the deconstruction of stereotypes, but also the halting of the re-circulation of those stereotypes altogether. Each play pushes back against claims of authenticity, but in doing so, rejects the insistence to offer an authentic representation in the hole left by the counter-narrative.

Chapter three transitions from the formation and subsequent culture jamming of stereotypes to one of the consequences of those stereotypes: physical and sexual violence in Kane, Cheechoo, Clements, and Nolan’s plays. I offer an investigation of the representation of violence, and analyze not just how the playwrights represent violence – the dramaturgical and theatrical strategies for representing violence – but also how representing violence on stage is an act of resistance to the prevalence of such violence. A central question in this chapter revolves around the ways in which each performance handles the representation of violence to highlight Native women’s subjectivity and reject a pull to revictimization. The answer to this question becomes the bulk of chapter three. I explore how each play offers a highly denaturalized representation of violence that subverts the traditional subject/object dichotomy to force the violence to be witnessed as an act of testimony and interpreted as an unnatural (and unethical) act. The playwrights all employ Brechtian styles of displacement in order to denaturalize violence against Native women and to support the subjectivity of the Native women characters
on stage. Such strategies of displacement include the use of silence, dis/placement, and
denaturalization in order to represent and disavow sexual violence against Aboriginal
women. I also seek to explore the limits of these dramaturgical strategies, especially as
the playwrights juggle multiple audience constituencies. I argue that each play allows for
multiple points of access by embedding in its dramaturgy spectators from dominant
culture and Indigenous cultures.

The positioning of Native women as the subjects of these plays, while
simultaneously rejecting revictimization, allows the plays to engage in acts of testimony.
Moments of violence in the plays stage a turning point between the pre- and post-
traumatic self, and although these turning points are marked by a moment of racialized
sexual violence, the trajectory of the plays actually points towards survival and resistance
of the subjective self in the face of such violence. This particular trajectory seems, on the
surface, to be deeply problematic; it appears to suggest that a tenured identity is
contingent upon a traumatic event. However, I suggest that the trajectory discussed in
this chapter is complex, and ultimately demonstrates that identity can be refigured in the
aftermath of a traumatic event. The plays, then, become trauma narratives that engage
in acts of testimony and compel the audience to bear witness to the colonial, patriarchal,
and physical traumas represented. Some of the most intriguing questions that propel this
chapter forward come from the choice to represent vertical violence (top-down) rather
than lateral, or horizontal, violence (internalized colonization). Since many postcolonial
theorists suggest that lateral violence is a direct result of oppression (Anderson, 2001, 97; Maracle 11; Native Women’s Association of Canada 1), Native women’s use of vertical violence warrants further investigation.

Helen Thundercloud suggests that, “‘We are a land-based people, and as colonized people we’ve had no home.’[…]. The dispossession of land and homeland factors heavily into identity problems of Native peoples, and the struggle towards a healthy sense of identity is linked to reclaiming that space” (qtd in Anderson, 2001, 181). Since displacement from homeland and community was a substantial step towards the colonization of Native people in Canada, reclaiming a sense of homeland has become an important step towards their decolonization. Chapter four’s concern is with the relationship between identity and community in Moonlodge, Path With No Moccasins, and The Unnatural and Accidental Women. It seeks to demonstrate how a return to “home” and community can help rebuild positive Indigenous identities and become the final act of resistance. Specifically, I am offering an Indigenous reframing of Una Chaudhuri’s notion of geopathology in which the geopathic crisis is not the problems of home (or being at home), but the problems of displacement from that home. Jill Carter (Anishinaabe-Ashkenazi) argues that the "identity that contemporary Native peoples seek to recuperate is an identity that traditionally has had to be located within the context of community [...] Hence, in the struggle to create and maintain a literature of survivance that properly locates and represents Native identity, the artist does not
undertake a solitary quest” (11). The purpose of Native theatre, then, is to recuperate Indigenous identity through storytelling and theatrical creation, but also to create a sense of community and unearth that identity within that community. I examine how the performances establish displacement from home and community as the source of their geopathic crisis. The plays stage a form of homelessness that directly impacts the formation and understanding of Native womanhood.

Each performance reveals a problematic relationship to location – a geopathic relationship – that is often connected to the fractured sense of identity for the women. Since “identity in the human brain is spatial, first and foremost” (Tompkins, 2006, 129), Indigenous people’s displacement or “unsettlement” from that space is an impediment to identity formation. Place is portrayed as violent, unstable, disjointed, or surreal in performance. Each play offers a different depiction of how place is problematic: it is presented as only a memory, or it is represented as abstracted, deconstructive, surrealist scenography. What all the performances highlight is the importance of a return to home or homeland. To stage a return to home, and with that a positive sense of identity, becomes an act of resistance and the final step in reclaiming Native women’s identities in the aftermath of stereotypes, violence, and colonization.

Staging history has been at the core of Canadian theatre since the 1960s and 1970s. Canadian theatre took it upon itself to help create a Canadian history narrative which tells our stories; however, Aboriginal playwrights have “rejected the non-
Indigenous monopoly on the production of historical texts” (McGrath and Stevenson 38), by presenting alternative, often revisionist approaches to historical events that have been left outside the ‘official’ Canadian history narrative. Chapter five examines the dramaturgical strategies used by the playwrights to complicate historical absences of Native women. In her essay "Trauma to Resilience: Notes on Decolonization," Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux writes: "For generations, First Nations women's voices were silenced in historical narratives that sidestepped their influence and power. Today, First Nations women are increasingly using those voices to reclaim lost stories and narratives" (20). The use of Indigenous theatrical storytelling, as a means to agitate the accepted historical narratives, offers Native women playwrights the opportunity to confront these absences. The playwrights do not simply offer alternatives to fill in historical gaps; they problematize the singular, westernized reading of history. As with the push-back against stereotypes, the playwrights and their plays reject the audience’s desire for an authenticity in their historical accounts. A central throughline of this chapter will be the playwrights’ version of historiography and the dramaturgical strategies they use to achieve this destabilization of historical records. The treatment of history has transitioned from filling in historical gaps as a way to redress cultural genocide, to creating wider gaps in the historical narrative. While the treatment of history in each play can be radically different, their ultimate goal is to challenge audiences to recognize the historical absences of Native women. I will trace that trajectory and highlight how these
playwrights have used storytelling to complicate and undermine the dominant history that they are pushing back against.

Memory has an important role in these performances, not only as a foundation for the action in the plays, but also as a method of decolonization. Each play draws on memory to find a sense of Native womanhood that is grounded in positive rather than negative connotations. Memory plays are powerful, as they not only entreat aspects of witnessing and testimony, but also function as an embodied memorial to the historically-based events they represent. Memory functions in a way that turns Cheechoo’s autobiography into a memorial of the trauma of residential schools, turns Kane’s nomadic character’s life into a memorial to the stolen generations of the scoops, or turns Clements’s revisionist history into a memorial to murdered and missing Aboriginal women.

A Brief History of Native Theatre in Canada, and selection of case studies.

For many Indigenous persons art is a form of resistance. It allows old wounds to be exposed, allows new generations to understand their past, and allows a wider audience – a settler audience – to see the stories that are very often left out of the national history. While anything called the “history” of Native theatre in Canada is problematic (at what point does that history start? What constitutes Native theatre? Does traditional
storytelling constitute a type of theatre?), I wish to explore the theatre that developed between 1980 and 2010. It is during this period that Native stories began to flourish in “mainstream” Canadian theatre.

It is fair to start this history in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1982, which marked the creation of Native Earth Performing Arts. Native Earth’s mandate was to perform Native theatre by Native artists. Until this point much of what could be considered Native theatre in Canada was created by non-Native playwrights. Native Earth ushered in a place and opportunity for Aboriginal artists to create theatre, and provided “a site for Native people who had been silenced by the weight of cultural censorship, racism, and the institutional oppression of residential schools to speak, and to be heard” (Charlebois and Nothof).

In 1984 Native Earth was joined by De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre (Debaj) located at the Wikwemikong Unceded Reserve, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Debaj was founded by Cree filmmaker, playwright, and artist Shirley Cheechoo, and it was the location for several significant performances and workshops, including Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters*, Cheechoo’s *Path With No Moccasins* and *Shadow People*, and Drew Hayden

While these moments in theatrical creation were, perhaps, significant in helping to pioneer a place for Native voices and (hi)stories, they are still created by non-Native playwrights. Such plays include *Walsh* by Sharon Pollock or *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* by George Ryga. Yvette Nolan, former artistic director of Native Earth has suggested, in fact, that with the performance of Ryga’s *Ecstasy*, there opened a place for Native theatre but that it would be almost 15 years before the first playwrights would appear on the Canadian stage (2008, 2).
Taylor’s *Someday*. By the late 1980s, Native theatre was gaining momentum in Canada “Native theatre artists first started creating” their own theatre with their own stories, which were “created largely to explain ‘us’ to ‘them’” (Mojica, 2008, 16).

Many mark the moment Native theatre entered into mainstream Canadian consciousness with the Native Earth performance of Highway’s *The Rez Sisters*. The performances were successful, and the original audiences were predominantly white.¹⁰

Ten years before the *Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples* was released these performances provided audiences the opportunity to hear the stories not being told elsewhere. This, as Yvette Nolan points out, was both blessing and curse, in that “while [*The Rez Sisters*] proved to the mainstream theatre community that Aboriginal artists could tell their own stories in their own way and captivate an audience, the play became the benchmark, and perhaps the only success story the mainstream deigned to acknowledge” (Nolan, 2008, 3).

As the various theatres around Canada started to produce more Native theatre, more Native playwrights emerged. What started as a handful of Aboriginal playwrights eventually grew and theatre companies developed to accommodate them and their

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¹⁰ Monique Mojica details her time on tour for Highway’s *Rez Sisters*, which had played predominantly to white audiences. Except in Winnipeg. One performance in Winnipeg had a largely Aboriginal audience, so when Mojica went out to deliver the opening monologue (which is mostly in Cree) she realized that for the first time in the production run, a majority of the audience understood what she was saying (Mojica, 2008, 16).
stories. Native Earth still produces several performances every year, and, in addition to their regular season, hosts Weesageechak Begins To Dance, a yearly festival dedicated to Native theatre and performance. Debaj theatre also continues to promote collaborative Aboriginal theatre, and “Anishnaabeg culture, language and heritage” (debaj).

Female Native playwrights have been successful in their theatrical endeavours; however, as Yvette Nolan points out, they are sometimes difficult to find (Nolan, 2008, 4). Native women playwrights were at the heart of Native theatre’s renaissance in the 1980s, yet they received very little critical attention. In a section on canonizing Native theatre, Henning Schäfer notes that “The vast majority of publications on Native theatre are focusing on Tomson Highway, with Drew Hayden Taylor, Daniel David Moses, Monique Mojica, and Marie Clements following in respectful distance” (34). Many female playwrights are no longer writing for the stage; they are shifting their focus to film, television, or other artistic avenues instead. Shirley Cheechoo and Margo Kane have both stepped away from writing for the stage; Cheechoo dedicates more time to film and directing, and Kane splits her time between acting and managing Full Circle Performance. Marie Clements, Monique Mojica, and Yvette Nolan (to name just a few) exist on the

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In this section very few Native women playwrights are mentioned/discussed in any great detail (the exception being Marie Clements). Of course this is not representative of the great work of many Native women playwrights, or the pockets of critical work published on Indigenous women’s theatre in recent years, but it does reveal the preferential focus towards Native male playwrights.
other spectrum and have enjoyed long and successful careers in theatre. What all these playwrights have enjoyed, however, is a place in the “canon” of Native theatre in Canada and they are a representative selection of Native women’s theatre in Canada during a specific historical moment that gave rise to the prominence of Native theatre in Canada.¹¹ They are representative of a specific point of resistance and pushback by Native artists and activists during a contained historical moment – specifically, the rise in popularity of Native women’s theatre in the Canadian mainstream that happened during the 1990s and early 2000s. These plays offer a historical intervention into the cultural work being done at the time of each play’s premier. The plays of Kane, Cheechoo, Mojica, Clements, and Nolan are at the front end of Native theatre’s attempts to politicize and publicize issues of representation, violence, Indigenous sovereignty, and self-determination that were facing Aboriginal women (and men) at the time of the plays’ creation/performances. The themes and issues presented in these plays are not out-dated, however, and are very much relevant to Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students.

¹¹ The issue of the theatrical canon and of Native theatre’s place in the canon is contentious. Gilbert and Tompkins argue that it is an always “unstable category and a contentious classification, generally referring to texts that are considered worthy of reading and studying, indeed the texts that ought to be read and studied, to the concomitant exclusion of other texts” (49). The formation of a literary (or in this instance a theatrical) canon has often been understood in terms of representation (or lack thereof) of specific cultural groups’ literary production and has been frequently criticized for creating a hierarchy of literature/theatre. Yet, the plays that form the foundational texts of this thesis are studied widely within all levels of post-secondary study in Canada, are included in several significant anthologies of Canadian and Indigenous theatre, and have been widely accepted as representative of Indigenous Canadian women’s theatre, and so their position within a theatrical canon is well founded.
Canadians in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Issues of representation, violence, and sovereignty are still at the forefront of political and cultural Indigenous activism. Thus, an exploration of this particular moment in Native women’s theatre in Canada offers me the ability to explore and trace the common themes at this important juncture—themes that are, perhaps, not being explored in the same way in twenty-first-century Native theatre. They represent a specific and significant historical moment that is worthy of further investigation to chronicle the resistance to the “single stories” of Indignity created in twentieth-century Canadian society.¹² There are certainly more recent works that could be explored,¹³ however, the plays under discussion offer me the opportunity to explore a specific point of historical intervention where Aboriginal artists were beginning to find their voices and style.

Marie Clements’s The Unnatural and Accidental Women, Margo Kane’s Moonlodge, Shirley Cheechoo’s Path With No Moccasins, Monique Mojica’s Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, and Yvette Nolan’s Annie Mae’s Movement are the case studies that form the cornerstone of my analysis. Several factors were considered when deciding on the case studies that would be part of this research project. Primarily, I

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¹² The notion of the single story is from Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2009 TED talk, of which I speak at greater length in chapter two.

sought to encompass several historical, cultural, and theatrical perspectives on the major themes of this dissertation. I chose to explore these particular playwrights because at the time of their premiere they engaged with some of the most pressing issues for contemporary Native communities. In many ways these issues remain contemporary several years after the plays’ premieres. Another determining factor was the availability of play texts in printed or published form. There are many Native women playwrights and plays produced in Canada, however, most are not available in any lasting way. Many performances remain undocumented or workshop performances with little or no archival material. Additionally, the chosen playwrights represent a broad spectrum from the Native community; they are from different geographical (west coast, prairie, and east coast) and cultural backgrounds (Métis and Aboriginal, reservation and urban); they are writing from and about different times of Canadian policy towards Native communities/women (urban, residential schools, Children’s Aid “Scoops” etc.); and they each present a very different view and representation of the complex issue of Native womanhood.

Margo Kane’s (Cree-Saulteaux) *Moonlodge* first premiered at the Women in View Festival in 1990. It has since traveled across Canada and the United States as well as Europe, Australia, and has been adapted for CBC radio. It is an episodic, solo-voice performance piece based on Native storytelling traditions. The play focuses on major life events for the main character, Agnes, who was removed from her home and family by
Child Welfare; however, at the heart of the play is an exploration of “the complex role of stereotype in the construction of a hybrid Native self” (Appleford, 2001, 236). The play compiles several Native women’s experiences into a one-woman show performed by Kane. It is with the sixties scoops as a backdrop and historical context that Moonlodge begins. The play follows Agnes as she navigates her way from foster home to hitchhiking to California, to her first powwow, and eventually to the moonlodge where her story returns full circle.

Monique Mojica (Kuna and Rappahannock) is a playwright and actor based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Mojica was co-founder of Turtle Gals Theatre Ensemble. From 1983 to 1986 Mojica was artistic director of Native Earth in Toronto. Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots premiered in 1990 and was produced by Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille both in Toronto, Ontario; it has been performed as recently as 2006 at Trent University. It remains Mojica’s most popular play to date. In 2012 Mojica wrote and performed in her play Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way which uses Indigenous storytelling traditions to layer stories of reclaiming identity and culture. She also appeared as Caesar in Death of a Chief, an Indigenous adaptation of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. Mojica co-edited Staging Coyote’s Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English vols. I & II with Ric Knowles. Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots is a two-woman play that deals with the over-simplified depictions of Indigenous women in the historical stories created by European explorers. The play, as with the other plays
discussed here, focuses on a recovery of identity and a rejection of the stereotypic
depictions of Indigenous women. It plays with the various historical manifestations of
Pocahontas and conflates all of them into one body in one performance in order to
fracture the veneer of authenticity contained in the stereotypes and histories of
Pocahontas.

Playwright, filmmaker, multi-media artist Shirley Cheechoo is a member of the
James Bay Cree nation and founder of the West Bay Children’s theatre, which would
later develop into De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig theatre group. She came to the attention of theatre
audiences with her solo-voice play *Path With No Moccasins* and her film *Bearwalker*.
Path With No Moccasins premiered at Lakeview Public School, West Bay First Nation,
Manitoulin Island in the fall of 1991. In 1991 it also premiered in Toronto, Ontario at
Native Earth Performing Arts (NEPA), and was performed in Canada and the United
States over 150 times between 1991 and 1995 (Chamberlain 1994). It is an
autobiographical performance piece that, like Kane’s play, follows Shirley from
childhood to adulthood through a very similar path to rediscovering her own Native
womanhood. The play is episodic and presents four key moments from her life:

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What was West Bay, on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario is now known as M’Chigeeng, Ontario.

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While it is clear that *Path With No Moccasins* is intended to be an autobiographical
performance, I will distinguish between the character and the playwright by using “Shirley” to
indicate the performance’s character and “Shirley Cheechoo” or just “Cheechoo” when referring
to the playwright.
residential school at age nine, lost and self-destructive at age twenty one, trying to reconcile the past hurt with hope for healing at age twenty eight, and self-discovery at Dreamer’s rock at thirty five.

*The Unnatural and Accidental Women,* by British Columbia-based Métis playwright Marie Clements, premiered at the Women in View Festival in 1997, but saw its primary theatrical run in the early 2000s at Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver, BC (November 2000) and Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto, Ontario (2004). It has been remounted across Canada and the United States, and adapted into a movie in 2006. It is a dramatic revisioning of a 30 year old murder case involving the murders of several Native women from Vancouver’s “skid row.” The play focuses on the lives and deaths of the women, and rather than revictimizing them, it offers a depiction of the women beyond coroner and police reports. The actual murders were committed by Gilbert Paul Jordan who used alcohol to incapacitate and rape his victims. Most of the women died as a result of alcohol poisoning. Most were also middle-aged Native women and their deaths were granted very little, if any, attention. In some instances Jordan reported their deaths to the police himself, but avoided any criminal charges. Both the means through which these women were murdered as well as the circumstances surrounding their murder (or at least the assumed circumstances) only furthered the culturally based stereotypes of Native women, especially those found in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). The coroner reports, which all suggested that the women
died of “unnatural and accidental” causes – even though many were found naked in hotel rooms, some with recent bruises and scarring, and all with a lethal blood alcohol levels – reveal the extreme racism that allowed Jordan to continue preying on Native women for years. The play rejects the focus on the murderer, and instead centres its drama on the lives of the murdered women. The Unnatural and Accidental Women is not just about the deaths of these women though; it is about their lives, their personalities, their families, and their desire for community.

Born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada, Yvette Nolan (Algonquin/Métis) is an accomplished playwright, director, actor, dramaturg, and scholar. She has been president of the Playwrights Guild of Canada, artistic director of Native Earth Performing Arts, and has directed the Native Earth performance of Clements’s The Unnatural and Accidental Women. Her play, Annie Mae’s Movement, was first presented as a staged reading at Native Earth’s Weesageechak Begins to Dance in 1998 and premiered at Hardly Art Theatre in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada later that year. The play had subsequent full-production runs in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Red Roots), Halifax, Nova Scotia (Eastern Front’s On the Waterfront), and Toronto, Ontario (Native Earth) in 2001. In 2006 Native Earth premiered the revised version of the play at Factory Theatre (Public Energy). The play also saw a short run again with Native Earth in 2008 with performances in Australia and New Zealand. In this play, Nolan takes on the role of historian and recounts the final year of Annie Mae Pictou Aquash (Mi’qmak), an Aboriginal activist
whose involvement in the American Indian Movement (AIM) led to her murder in 1975.

The play explores gender and race issues and the stakes of an Aboriginal woman involved in Aboriginal politics. Similar to Clements’s play, *Annie Mae’s Movement* is a revisionist historical drama that challenges historical narrative surrounding Aquash’s life and death.

In the introduction to her dissertation *Repairing the Web: Spiderwoman’s Children Staging the New Human Being*, Jill Carter writes:

> It follows, then, that if Story contains and communicates knowledge, and if the highest form of knowledge is “self-knowledge” and if Story is also a site of knowledge production, then it is *within* and *by means of* Story that identity may be re-constituted and/or refashioned: within Story, individuals, communities, and nations could conceivably imagine (or re-imagine) themselves into being. (2-3)

From this point of intervention, I hope that *Acts of Resistance* will build on the idea of storytelling, within Canadian theatre, as a mode of resistance, and of re-imagining Native women’s publically presented identities in the wake of colonization, legislation, and damaging profit-driven representations. The case studies all demonstrate how Native women’s theatrical storytelling pushes back against negative representations of Native womanhood and offers the possibilities to reimagine those identities. That many are historical or autobiographical helps avoid what Vizenor calls “simulation of survivance,” which “denotes the ‘literary’ reduction and erasure of living humans” (qtd in J. Carter 6). The liveness of theatre allows these stories to embody and reject a reduction (and a continued absence) of Aboriginal women. The stories presented in Native women’s
theatre help to communicate and reimagine new ways of understanding Native womanhood by publically rejecting and then exercising the stereotype – that is working out the stereotype through repeated applied efforts – from the repertoire. Acts of Resistance offers an analysis of the dramaturgical strategies used to actively disavow stereotypes, represent violence to re-evaluate identity post-trauma, create embodied memorials, call the audience to bear witness, and reclaim Native womanhood through storytelling and theatre.
Politics arises from law. To be without politics is to be lawless. To say our politics are in opposition to European politics would be correct. European law legalizes our oppression. Our law forbids it.

– Lee Maracle 39

Before I begin, I must know where I have been. It would be a disservice to ignore the history that exists for Native people in Canada since it is this history that directly influences the theatre created by Aboriginal women in Canada, and it is this history that cuts directly to the playwrights’s push-back against representational and physical violence portrayed in the plays. It is a history that often collides with, or contradicts, the history taught in Canadian schools, and I make a conscious effort to write with these moments of contradiction in mind. This history frames what I will write, how I will write it, and why it is important for me to write; this history will also frame how the reader responds and contributes to this discussion. It is important, therefore, that I set out with the appropriate information as well as an understanding of the prejudices that exist.

Devon Abbott Mihesuah has argued that it is important to “find ways to recognize stereotypes and bias in historical writings, including your own” (2005, 5); it is in reference to these historical writings that I will focus my attention on the negative constructions.
of Nativeness and the way these historical documents have informed cultural perception and negative stereotypes of Canada’s Aboriginal populations. The history of highly gendered colonial and assimilative practices in legislation, and the internalization of these policies to enforce this assimilation of Native peoples in Canada could fill their own book. It is not my intention to detail everything for the readers here. Rather, I wish to contribute to the continuing dialogue already established by scholars but frame it through a lens that creates the connections between the law and the assimilation of Native women and the Native women’s theatre explored in this thesis.

The Legislation of Identity

The legislation of identity is not an unusual experience; every citizen of Canada is identified as Canadian through legislation. National identity, as difficult to pin down as it may be, is legislated by the government and is contingent on geography, parentage, and residence. In short, a nation defines its citizens and its citizens define a nation. This relationship is not entirely true for Canada’s Indigenous populations. Unlike other nations who can regulate and legislate for their own people, First Nations in Canada are
dependent on the Government of Canada to create their legal identity.\textsuperscript{16} It is here, with legislation by the Government of Canada,\textsuperscript{17} that the state’s power “is felt strongly by citizens who are not only marginalized by intersecting and contrary regulations, but who are also marginalized by how their social identity is defined in their relationship with the state” (Fiske 248). Local bands and band councils have some authority on granting membership to their community, but the concept of “Indian Status” – essentially Indigenous citizenship in Canada – is regulated by the government and it is often a highly contentious legislation.

The legislation of Native identity became a strategic act of colonization; its original intentions were assimilation which “became the enduring justification for federal colonialism” of Canada’s First Nations (Milloy, 2008, 2). Early on settler governments began employing a “‘legal’ approach based on self-interest” to continue colonization

\textsuperscript{16} I want to distinguish between personal identity, cultural identity, and legal identity. While a person may identify as Canadian and the society around them may also identify them as Canadian, they can have a different legal identity in the eyes of the Government of Canada. For example, non-citizen residents who have lived and adopted a Canadian lifestyle, and who identify themselves as being “from Canada,” but who are not legally a Canadian because they are not a legal citizen. The same can be said for non-status Natives or Métis people who have either been denied citizenship to their culture(s) or who have not taken steps to apply for such things. One may identify as Cree, live within the culture, and in all ways be perceived as Cree, but if they are not granted “Indian Status” then in the eyes of the law they are a non-Status Indian and are denied the rights and obligations of such citizenship in the Cree nation.

\textsuperscript{17} I will use “Government of Canada” and just “government” interchangeably throughout this chapter regardless of which historical government is at the head of Canadian Parliament or which political party holds the majority of Parliamentary seats. Where it is necessary, I will distinguish between different time periods either by identifying the date or by indicating the Prime Minister at the time.
through legislation (Vowel, 2011). These practices did immeasurable damage to Indigenous identity and culture, and caused immense personal and collective trauma, the effects of which continue to resonate today. The evolution of the "relationship between non-Indian and Indian communities" was defined by three stages. The first established Aboriginal people as “separate” and therefore different. The second developed policy to define the relationship. The third involved "legislation to reflect both the social attitude towards Indians and the policy" developed to "define and conduct the relationship between the two" (Indian Acts Amendments 2). What this suggests is that legal language infiltrates consciousness, becomes ideology and, with time, can shape identity within both the law and society. The Indian Act, which is discussed in detail below, was not just “a set of policies to be repealed, or even [...] a genocidal scheme in which we can simply choose not to believe, [it] belies how a classificatory system produces ways of thinking – a grammar – that embeds itself in every attempt to change it” (Lawrence 4). It is this concept of grammar that I would like to explore in more detail.

According to Wittgenstein, essence is expressed through grammar. A formal approach believes that grammar stands independent of its uses in language and communication (see Braine 16. Also see Nicholas F. Gier’s Wittgenstein and Phenomenology (1981)). Grammar here is a mode of thinking, or perhaps more to point, it is a mode in which we are conditioned to think. Grammar is a structure inherent in both how something is and framing what something is. At the heart of all the laws that
regulate and control Native identity in Canada is a grammar that infiltrates to the very subconscious of how Aboriginal people are perceived. It is a self-sustaining system whereby the laws shaped (and shape) social attitudes towards Indigenous people and, in turn, the laws were shaped by those same attitudes it supports. The laws brought into question issues of authenticity – who is, and is not deemed “Indian.” The legislation of identity, through laws like the Indian Act, compelled a certain framework to understand Aboriginal identity; this was transferred to later acts of legislative colonization that aimed to erase that identity completely, specifically through the residential school system and the displacement of Aboriginal children from their homes and communities. The theatre, along with other artistic ventures, became a way for the playwrights to expose the struggle to reclaim positive definitions of self, which became a struggle to oppose the ideological pressures on Native womanhood that are inherent in the grammar of law.

The introduction of European political systems created a situation where “Native women on the whole experienced a tremendous loss” (Anderson, 2001, 68). This loss is attributed to the go-to Canadian law regarding the creation and maintenance of Aboriginal identity in Canada: the Indian Act. Other documents, such as the Gradual
Civilization Act 1857 in the Province of Canada and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869 have also affected how Aboriginal women were treated in Canada. However, none has been as lasting as the Indian Act. In the time between 1876 and 1951, a series of “regulations intended to impose patriarchy and coerce Aboriginal women to conform to the regiments and edicts demanded by local missionaries and Indian agents” were created by the Canadian government (McGrath and Stevenson 40). The targeting of Native women occurred as early as the first arrival of Europeans who were “shocked by the position of Aboriginal women in their respective societies [...] it was not long before they realized that, in order to dominate the land and the people that were occupying it, they needed to disempower the women” (Anderson, 2001, 58).

The laws of the provinces aside, the first Canadian law to impact Native women’s identities was The Constitution Act of 1867. The Constitution Act, in addition to creating the first incarnation of the country now known as Canada, also created “exclusive Legislative Authority of the Parliament of Canada [which] extends to all Matters coming within the Classes of Subjects” including “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians”

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18 Canadian Confederation did not occur until 1 July 1867 and involved the newly created provinces of Quebec and Ontario in addition to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Prior to Confederation, Quebec and Ontario were referred to as Lower and Upper Canada (respectively) and were joined together as the Province of Canada. The Gradual Civilization Act was specific to the Province of Canada; however, many of the articles contained therein were adopted in the Government of Canada’s Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869.

19 This connection between the colonization of the land and colonization of the people is briefly touched upon in chapter six, which looks at international Indigenous eco-theatre.
(91(24), emphasis added). In one statement the authority to self-identify and to self-govern were stripped away from the First Nations and given to the government that the Constitution Act created. This exclusive legislative authority would remain the case “until the issue was complicated in the late 1940s by Canadian citizenship legislation, Indian urbanization and amendments to the Indian Act in 1951” (Milloy, 2008, 4).

The Gradual Civilization Act was a law established to amend other laws regarding Aboriginal people in what is now known as the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Assented in June 1857, the act clearly states its intentions from the first sentence:

WHEREAS it is desirable to encourage the progress of Civilization among the Indian Tribes in this Province, and the gradual removal of all legal distinctions between them and Her Majesty’s other Canadian Subjects, and to facilitate the acquisition of property and of the rights accompanying it.

The language is direct. Assimilation of the Aboriginal population was the expectation and it was to be achieved through the removal of all “legal distinctions between them” and other “Canadian subjects.” This course of action failed at every attempt as Native communities in Canada rejected and resisted proposals – direct or indirect – for their assimilation, and wished to remain a distinct group within Canada. In addition to attempting assimilation of Canada’s Aboriginal people, The Gradual Enfranchisement Act

Other such attempts include the Enfranchisement Act and the 1969 White Paper. The latter was proposed by the Liberal government’s Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien and suggested the abolishment of the Indian Act and the assimilation of Native communities into Canadian society as ethnic minorities. All of these tactics were met with resistance and, in the case of the 1969 White Paper, the government was forced to back down.
of 1869 ensured that women were under the jurisdiction of their husbands and fathers more so than in the past. It substituted a matriarchal society with a patriarchal one and in doing so, devastated the social and legal rights of Aboriginal women.

The explicit language of assimilation present in the *Civilization Act* is absent from the Dominion of Canada’s *Enfranchisement Act*, but while the candid language disappeared, the force of the legislation did not. Enfranchisement was voluntary under the *Gradual Civilization Act 1857*; Native men could *choose* to become enfranchised, however, any wife or children of an enfranchised man were automatically also enfranchised and thus lost their Indian status (*Enfranchisement* 16; *Civilization* VII, VIII). Unlike the *Civilization Act*, however, the *Enfranchisement Act* aimed to take away Native rights and amendments were added to the new act that made enfranchisement more automatic and involuntary. One such emendation to the *Enfranchisement Act* was the stipulation that a Native woman marrying a non-Native man would encounter a non-voluntary enfranchisement and therefore she (and her children) “shall *cease to be an Indian* within the meaning of this Act” (*Enfranchisement* 6, emphasis added). Also included in that section was a provision that “any Indian woman marrying an Indian of any other tribe, band or body” would automatically lose the right to her identity and community and “become a member of the tribe, band or body of which her husband is a member” (6).

In one swoop this legislation stripped Indigenous women of their home
communities and their cultural identity (at least legally). It shattered Indigenous societal customs that respected gender equality, implemented a heavily patriarchal societal structure, and divested Native women of any agency or authority over self-defined identity. In fact, many of these acts “took away long-established rights for Native women and left them with fewer rights than Indian men” (Anderson, 2001, 68). The laws that created a system of oppression for Native men also created a system that would lead to the double oppression of Native women, in both Canadian society and in their own communities. Enfranchisement met strong resistance among Native communities. Those who did lose their status as a result of enfranchisement were primarily women and their children, as their enfranchisement was always already involuntary. The gendered discrimination of the early legislation is evident and has been discussed by many scholars. This involuntary enfranchisement is not directly addressed in the plays explored in this study, however, Marie Clements’s play certainly exists within the fabric of this legislation as Aunt Shadie and Rebecca would have been affected by Aunt Shadie’s marriage. It is revealed in the first few scenes that Aunt Shadie married a white logger, and this is a gesture towards not only the loss of legally-recognized cultural identity (since Aunt Shadie’s marriage means she and her children automatically forfeit their legal status), but also to Native women’s social and cultural displacement as a result of these legal policies (represented in the fallen trees). Significant here are the implications of involuntary enfranchisement when approaching the writings and artistic works of
Aboriginal women in the aftermath of these laws. It not only established the bias in the rhetoric of law, which not only reflected the social attitudes towards Aboriginal men and women, but also habituated the attitudes of the generations that would follow.

Perhaps the most problematic piece of legislation for Native people was the Indian Act. The first incarnation of the Indian Act was passed in 1876 and sought “to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians” (Indian Act 1876), but the underlying goal of the Indian Act remained the same. In 1914, Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, stated that:

the happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population, and this is the object of the policy of our government. The great forces of intermarriage and education will finally overcome the lingering traces of native custom and tradition. (Titley 34)

For the government and policy makers, Nativeness was something to be overcome and abstracted from society. In its original form as well as its revisions, the Indian Act stripped many men, women, and children of their cultural identity and enacted assimilation without forcing assimilation. Early Indian Act legislation created a definition of “Indian” which contained “almost no reference to Indian custom and experience or the ways in which First Nations people might want to arrange their relations with the ‘mixed-bloods’ and other ethnic peoples who would enter their lives, families and
communities” (Milloy, 1999, 9). Very few agreed to these practices, yet the act produced generations of displaced people who held cultural and personal rights to their communities, but no longer held any legal rights to those communities. The struggle to reclaim this space is a constant one; land claims, status claims, negotiations around who has status and who does not, and so many other difficulties result from early assimilationist legislation, much of which is still imbedded in the legal rhetoric and treatment of Native people in Canada today.

The Indian Act is heavily gendered and patriarchal. The 1876 version of the act makes it clear that an “Indian” is defined as “Any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band,” any child, and any woman “who is or was lawfully married to” a Native male (3, emphasis added). Here Native women’s identities are tied to their relationship with a Native male either by parental or marital ties. The Indian Act and its enforcer, Indian Affairs, defined who could and could not be defined as family. Path With No Moccasins directly confronts the different ideological approaches to kinship when Shirley is categorically denied the opportunity to attend her grandmother’s

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21 It was not until January 2013, after a fourteen year legal battle with the government, that Métis and non-status Indians were considered Indian with regards to the Constitution Act (CBC Jan 8, 2013). At the time of writing, it was the latest in a string of recent legislation that attempted to mend the damage caused by the Indian Act.

22 It is also worth noting that a subsequent amendment to the Indian Act in 1906 changed the definition of “person” to mean anyone other than an “Indian,” therefore denying personhood to all Aboriginal peoples in Canada.
funeral because she “wasn’t a close family” (Cheechoo 37). Not only is Shirley refused opportunity to speak her language and practice her culture, but she is also forced to accept Indian Affairs’s definition of family. Her grandmother was not considered close enough family for Shirley to attend the funeral, even despite Shirley’s own definition of family: “She was my, my grandma. She was the one I slept with, the one who gathered up the sticks. She made a feather blanket for me and showed me how to make bannock. How could they say she was not my kookum” (37). Kim Anderson argues that the “Indian Act not only dispossessed women of communities/communal authority, it very severely dismantled their authority within the family” (2001, 69. Also see Anderson, 2010, 83), since it destroyed a family-system that had been in place long before European settlers arrived. The destruction of the family unit, then, dismantled Aboriginal societies that were largely proto-feminist. It stripped away authority of the women and, in its place, introduced a colonial – that is, patriarchal – social, economic, and family model.

The Indian Act imposed itself on Native women’s sexuality. While it sustained the same general framework from 1880 until 1951, nearly annual revisions addressed "either new problems arising [...] or changing relationships between Indians and the majority society" (Indian Act Amendments 192). These new problems, or changing relationships, began to focus on Aboriginal woman’s sexuality, prostitution, and interracial relationships by monitoring these relationships. The Parliament of Canada began a “long series of attempts [...] to protect Indians from themselves as well as from unscrupulous
‘whites’” (*Indian Act Amendments* 82), but the laws were, as Yvonne Boyer writes, "aimed at eliminating interracial prostitution only" (78). It brought Native women’s sexuality under the directorship of Indian Agents and "attempted to confine Aboriginal women to reservations by regulating every aspect of social life" including Native women’s sexuality and bodies (Nelson 45). It indirectly equated Native women’s sexuality with prostitution and, in turn, began the circulation of the sexualized Native woman stereotype, which is re-circulated in the representation of Indigenous women in film, television, fashion, culture, and various other technologies of representation.

The *Indian Act* created a system that focussed on the few rights bestowed to Native men and pushed Native women towards a double bind: their identity was intrinsically linked both to legislation that ignored their traditions, and to their husband’s/father’s cultural identity. At no point was self-determined identity an option for Native women. Consequently, many women and their children were excluded from band membership and Indian status, and eventually forced to have a legal identity that conflicted with their self-identification. The focus on Native women is significant and intentional. By reducing the number of women who could confer Indian status to their children, the Government of Canada was reducing the number of legal “Indians” in Canada, assimilating Native populations into mainstream Canadian society, and restricting the rights to the land and resources therein.

Much of the original language from the *Indian Act* remains in place and is a painful
reminder of both what Indigenous women have lost and how easily identity can be legislated away. Many families “drifted in and out of Indian status over the generations until Bill C-31 amended the Indian Act in 1985, ostensibly, but not successfully, eliminating the inherent sexism it contained” (Episkenew 32). C-31 aimed to amend the gender discrimination in light of a successful appeal in 1981 to the United Nations Human Rights Committee by Sandra Lovelace in which the Indian Act was deemed to be discriminatory and a violation of the Canadian Bill of Rights. Bill C-31 may have “altered relationships to indigeneity, families, communities, and the Canadian government” but it failed to address the “connection between identity and belonging” (Srigley 242) and left Aboriginal communities to negotiate these new relationships. Despite the changes

Even now the Indian Act remains a highly contested, political hot-spot in Canada. Many Canadians see the act as a way to hinder the equality of Canada’s Aboriginal people, but also fail to realize that the lack of equality is ingrained in the Indian Act and the Indian Act’s rhetoric is ingrained in Canadian society. Aboriginal leaders are calling for the Indian Act to become a relic of the past and First Nations chiefs proclaim the act as something that “stands in the way of ... defining who we are as a people and who can belong to our nations”. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, on January 24, 2012, said that the act is “too entrenched to get rid of entirely” and that “after 136 years, that tree has deep roots. Blowing up the stump would just leave a big hole” (CBC News, January 24, 2012). It becomes, then, a double issue of both needing the Indian Act to prevent Aboriginal interests in treaty rights and self-government as well as maintaining distinct cultural status, while also needing to limit the Indian Act’s provisions that ensure Aboriginal people are held in inequality to the rest of Canada.

Current problems of the Indian Act as a result of C-31 include Aboriginal people being denied status due to “unknown or unstated paternity” which is not only a way to deny status to Aboriginal women and men, but often prioritizes the paternal lineage without considering the maternal side.

The Canadian Bill of Rights was adopted in 1960 and was the predecessor to the current Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms adopted in 1982. Both the Bill of Rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are used today; however, some, but not all, provisions of the Bill of Rights appear in the Charter.
resulting from Bill C-31, the federal government maintained a large monopoly on the definition of Aboriginality since it continued to propose government-defined “Indianness” by “establishing different classes of status” (Srigley 247). C-31 limited “full Indian status” only to the women who lost their status, and to their children, but not to their grandchildren. In addition, the authority to determine Band membership – thus community rights – was given to the Bands who could continue to exclude women (and men) from their membership. This resulted in many women regaining their status, but having no Band attachment, thus none of the advantages of membership (Harry 24). Later challenges of the Indian Act would see the different rules for women marrying non-status men/women and men marrying non-status women/men challenged as also discriminatory against women and would spark a further amendment in the later half of the 2000s.

It is in the context of this legislation of Native identity that the plays of Cheechoo, Kane, Mojica, Nolan, Clements, and others are created and performed. The representation of Native women in these plays, and their struggle for self-determined identity, confronts the prevalent stereotypes that are inherently tied to the rhetoric and violence of colonization contained within the legislation. In many Native women’s plays generally, and these plays specifically, the audience is presented with a strong female role in community decisions, such as Band elections or input on treaty negotiations.
lead who pushes back against the rampant stereotypes and misrepresentations of Native womanhood. Each play stages a desire to reclaim Native womanhood from the grips of colonial legislation and cultural representations. Native women’s theatre, then, indirectly deals with the consequences of the legislation of identity. Regarding history, however, Native women’s theatre addresses what Katrina Srigley calls “historiographical silences,” specifically as they relate to histories of oppression, colonization, and trauma.

The stolen generations: residential schools and “scoopings”

The term residential school can conjure painful memories for generations of Native people in Canada. While the various legislation mentioned above dictated and enforced policies of assimilation and colonization, the displacement of multiple generations of Aboriginal children into residential schools or into cross-cultural adoptions was instrumental in enacting these ideologies. Shandra Spears surmises that the removal of entire generations of Native children from our communities and families is a genocidal blow to our Nations, and we feel that violence in our bones. The myth of Native people as “conquered” implies that we were defeated in battle, but cultural warfare attacks the hearts and minds of vulnerable children. (Spears 81-82)

There is, perhaps, no theme more salient in Aboriginal theatre than the effects of
colonization, specifically at the hands of residential schools. Ojibwa playwright Drew Hayden Taylor notes that “the most pervasive feature of current Native writing in all genres in Canada seems to be the impact of ‘Residential schools – past, present, and future’ on Native children” (Knowles, 2011, 136).

The residential schools themselves were primarily created through the Indian Act of 1876; however, the roots of such schools go back further than Confederation. According to the Highlights from the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (HRCAP), in 1849, the first of what would become a network of residential schools for Aboriginal children was opened in Alderville, Ontario. Church and government leaders had come to the conclusion that the problem (as they saw it) of Aboriginal independence and 'savagery' could be solved by taking children from their families at an early age and instilling the ways of the dominant society during eight or nine years of residential schooling far from home.

Stemming from a belief that the best way to “civilize” Native people was through early education, the government established church-run, government-funded schools that were mandatory for all Aboriginal children and had a “three-part vision of education in the service of assimilation” (RCAP 1.2.10 1.1). This vision included, first, a justification for removing children from their communities and disrupting Aboriginal families; second, a precise pedagogy for re-socializing children in the schools; and third, schemes for integrating

27 I have chosen to use the author’s choice of spelling for Ojibwe; therefore, throughout this thesis it may also appear as Ojibwa, Ojibwe, or Ojibway.
Colonization and assimilation – a directed cultural genocide to deal with the “Indian problem” – were imbedded in the very vision of the schools.

Two plays explored in Acts of Resistance recount experiences with, or criticism toward the residential school system in Canada. Shirley Cheechoo’s play Path With No Moccasins makes frequent and explicit reference to the legacy of residential schools for Shirley. The solo performance, “performed by the playwright herself, [...] is one of the earliest and most powerful widely known dramatic exposes of the residential school system” (Knowles and Mojica 3). Path With No Moccasins begins with Shirley “locked in a room in the residential school” (Cheechoo 9), and what follows is Cheechoo’s account of her time at residential school and the consequences from those experiences, which include Shirley’s low self worth, her battles with alcoholism, and her loss of culture.

Unlike Cheechoo’s play, there are no explicit references to residential schools in Marie Clements’s The Unnatural and Accidental Women. Instead, Clements explores the generational consequences of residential schools. Rebecca is the “abandoned daughter” who “may have never attended residential schools or suffered relocation, but nonetheless exhibits the symptoms of generational trauma” (Johnson, 2010, 24). Rebecca is likely the daughter of a residential school survivor. Aunt Shadie’s age – 52 at the time of her murder in 1978 (Clements, 2005, 9) – would put her at the right age for a student/survivor of the residential school system. The play, then, offers insight into the
legacy and generational effects of residential schools. Johnson’s arguments about both Aunt Shadie’s likely experiences in residential school and Rebecca as a victim of generational trauma are merited, however I disagree with her reading of Aunt Shadie’s act of draping “an outfit from when she was a housewife” as indicative of her residential school training (Johnson, 2010, 32). In fact, this scene reads as a longing to return to her role as mother, which existed within that domestic setting. The play suggests that this act is associated with positive – or longing – memories; Aunt Shadie “smells the material and closes her eyes in memory. The clothes talk to her and she talks to them” (Clements, 2005, 18). Instead, I read this moment as a decisive act of resistance against the trauma that culminated in not being able to “soothe” her daughter because she was not there (Clements, 2005, 81). Aunt Shadie wishes to return to that role of mother to Rebecca, which is eventually achieved, if only momentarily, in the final scenes of the play.

The purpose of the residential schools was to systematically destroy Indigenous culture. The climate of the schools – that is ideological colonization and cultural genocide – saw generations of students who were “robbed of a political, historical, spiritual, linguistic and cultural base which could have given [them] a great sense of self-esteem and strength” (Spears 83). The schools did nothing to solve the so-called “Indian problem,” but they did create new problems, such as a disconnect from community and culture and a damaged cultural identity, as well as a legacy of violence and abuse. In
addition to traditional European education, these schools were “set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children” (TRC). By removing family-based education, the schools, and behind them, the government, hoped to distance Native youth from their culture and integrate them into Canadian society.

The story of the “woeful condition of the school system” that created “substandard care of the children,” “underfunding,” lack of “oversight” was not a result of “an aging nineteenth century structure falling into decay but of flaws, inherent in the creation and subsequent management of the system, that were never remedied” (RCAP 1.2.10 2.2). The schools were violent by their very nature; the language of the school’s mission was to “kill the Indian in the child” (RCAP 1.2.10 3, Milloy, 1999, 42). Unfortunately, the schools created a legacy of violence under the guise of “discipline and punishment in the service of cultural change formed the context of the children’s lives” (RCAP 1.2.10 3). Initially, punishment may have included depriving the children of food,

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While I use traditional European education here in order to distinguish between the residential schools and the education these children would have received in their home communities, I do not wish to suggest that these children received the same kind of education as other public school children. The schools were underfunded and the teachers taught highly gendered skill sets that were intended to continue the subjugation of Native peoples into servant roles. Girls learned domestic tasks such as “sewing, shirt making, knitting, cooking, laundry, dairying, ironing and general household duties,” while boys learned trades and crafts such as “agriculture, carpentry, shoemaking, blacksmithing, tinsmithing and printing.” Students were often part-time, involuntary, unpaid workers at the school. With limited class time, many students were well below their peers in terms of education when they aged out at 18. (Hanson, RCAP 1.2.10 1.1).
strapping, lecturing, or confining and isolating the students. Eventually, however, “deprivation verged on starvation, strapping became beating, and lecturing became the verbal abuse of ridicule and public indignity” (RCAP 1.2.10 3, also see: Milloy, 1999, 279-280). At the schools, students’ hair was cut, their clothes were taken away and replaced by uniforms, they were forbidden from speaking Indigenous languages, or practicing elements of their culture, and their studies would focus on discipline and order rather than the so-called unorganized world to which they were accustomed. *Path With No Moccasins* recounts several of these instances of abuse. Shirley’s hair is cut as a punishment (Cheechoo 15), her new clothes are taken away and she is given a “stupid tunic, again” (19), and she is punished for speaking Cree (11, 16). Each of these moments not only acts as testimony to the abuses of residential schools, but also emphasizes *Path With No Moccasins*’s act of testimony to that specific historical context.

The residential schools continuously taught their students to reject their traditions and to accept European world views and values, while simultaneously teaching the students that they do not fit into the European/settler world. Their cultural and

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The question of speaking Aboriginal languages in the classroom was raised in 2012 when a 12-year-old student in Wisconsin, U.S.A was caught by her teacher speaking in Menominee, the language of the Menominee tribe. The student was suspended for teaching another classmate the phrases “hello,” “I love you,” and “thank you” by the teacher who reportedly slammed her hands on the desk, chastised the student, and then asked her how it would feel if she (the teacher) spoke Polish so the student couldn’t understand (Black, D. Hibbard, L). The fact that this child was singled out and chastised for speaking her native language is significant and important in relation to settler and Indigenous relations in schools. What could have been a moment of education and bridging cultural gaps turned into a moment of punishment and compelled silence.
gendered identities were ridiculed. Female students were taught gender structures according to European – which is to say Christian and patriarchal – systems. Students were taught that their culture was morally corrupt; taught that they were “savages”; and taught to “reject their homes, their heritage and, by extension, themselves” (HRCAP). Any violations of the rules were often met with severe punishment. When we meet Shirley in *Path With No Moccasins*, she has been locked away in a room and deprived of meals for trying to run away/return to her home and family. Shirley addresses the audience, directly implicates us as witnesses and asks: “Anybody hungry? I am. I didn’t get any supper” (Cheechoo 12). We learn that this is a common punishment for infractions of the rules at Shirley’s school. Several children, both male and female, were also subjected to sexual abuse. Shirley narrates not only her own experience with a teacher who sexually abused her (Cheechoo 29), but also shares David’s experience with “Mrs. King [who] was forcing him to do things in bed with her” (28).

There was, of course, resistance throughout the residential school system’s history: language was one area that conjured moments of resistance among students. The punishment for speaking Aboriginal languages was severe, but many students held onto their language by speaking it in private or to themselves and keeping it as part of their “thinking vocabulary” (Haig-Brown 104). Shirley continues to speak Cree during the play; she replaces some words with Cree words, such as “kookum” (Cheechoo 10) or small phrases: “my mother told me if you make fun of someone, cheh kummit teck ta
goon. Oh, *I’m not supposed to speak Cree*” (17, emphasis added). These moments are moments of resistance in both their actions – of the past – and the storytelling/testimony – of the present – that Shirley uses to remain connected to her culture and language. Her use of language, we are told, does come at a risk of possible punishment, such as being hit with a yardstick (20).

The women of Clements’s play, specifically Aunt Shadie, occasionally speak in Indigenous language(s) as well. That Aunt Shadie holds on to her language is clearly an act of resistance to the push to halt that language’s use. These moments of language also appear most frequently as the violence against the women intensifies at the end of the first half suggesting that language can be a resistance to the violence (both physical and colonial). Aunt Shadie calls:

Do 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, (Clements, 2005, 58)

The other women repeat her call. This invocation of language signals a resistance to the colonial pressures to reject Indigenous languages in Canada and marks a call to community, as will be explored in chapter four.

In terms of Aboriginal culture, one of the most significant consequences of the residential schools was the return of generation after generation of Native children back to reserves with little or no connection to their language, culture, or community after
having spent several formidable years being taught that these cultures were shameful. While the third stage of the residential school’s vision was to integrate Aboriginal children with their Euro-Canadian counterparts, the inherent racism and lack of work opportunities forced many graduates of the residential schools to return to their home reservations. Even though various government reports suggested that these graduates could not return to their communities and “stand firm” in their education and refute their community’s way of life as was the goal of residential schooling (RCAP 1.2.10 1.1), the students were going back with a fractured sense of self that transferred to the next generations.

The entire residential system was designed not only to assimilate Native youth into mainstream culture, but also to humiliate, degrade, and destroy Native culture at its core. The schools achieved only partial success; while Native culture is still thriving,\(^3\) it has suffered serious setbacks which will take generations to restore. Although the last school closed in 1996, the residual effects of the residential schools are still felt in every Native community in Canada. The schools served as “vehicles of cultural genocide with concerted attempts to destroy language and stories” (McLeod 29). Resistance to the

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\(^3\) One of the clearest examples of how the healing has begun and Native culture is rebounding is to look at the 1996 and 2006 profiles on Aboriginal Women, which, among other things, explores the use of Indigenous languages for Aboriginal women. Comparing the use of language between the two censuses reveals a revival of language with increasing numbers of speakers across several language types; however, it is worth noting that only three or four of the many language types are on “solid ground,” and many languages are endangered or have been lost completely.
residential school was high, but even with this resistance, the residential schools led to fractured identities, dysphoria for generations, and a loss of culture that would prove increasingly difficult to regain. Shirley Cheechoo’s play, and to a lesser extent Marie Clements’s, enter into a dialogue with their audiences and this history of colonization. They become staged acts of storytelling that challenge both the ignored history of residential schools, as well as the generational trauma they caused.

While “scoopings” were not exclusively unique to Native communities (scooping policies also encouraged the removal of children from unwed mothers beginning in Canada after the Second World War), the “scoops” that I am looking at are part of a different systematic effort to subvert Indigenous culture and identity and assimilate Aboriginal children into mainstream Canadian society. The Scoops were a period from about 1961 to the early 1980s,\(^31\) which, incidentally, was about the same period of time that it took the government to phase out most of the residential schools. The scoops resulted in thousands of Native children’s removal from their homes and communities by Child Welfare agencies. While the scoops were not explicit government policy, they were another phase of colonization in practice. Shandra Spears writes that in “the context of

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\(^{31}\) This term was coined by Patrick Johnston in the 1983 report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* and is borrowed from one social worker who said “that it was common practice in B.C in the mid-sixties to ‘scoop’ from their mothers on reserves almost all newly born children” (Hanson).
colonization, the adoption of Native children by white families is an attempt to assimilate us into Canadian society” after which they “will presumably cease to be part of an ‘Indian problem.’” Meanwhile, their adoptive parents were “co-opted into this assimilation process by their urgent need to parent” (Spears 82). Unlike the residential schools, which hid Native children away until they graduated, the scoops called upon average citizens to actively, though likely unknowingly, partake in the process of assimilation and colonization.

By the time the scooping policies were implemented, the effects of residential schools were already apparent in Native communities; there was a generation of parents who had “been raised in institutions, without parents as models” (HRCAP). These agencies “had only one remedy for children thought to be in need of protection - removal from their families […] They made little or no attempt to place children at risk with members of their kin network or with other Aboriginal families who could help them hold on to their culture and identity” (HRCAP). Child Welfare agencies would enter into First Nation communities, often with very little education or knowledge of Aboriginal culture and would deem parents unfit to raise children (Hanson, HRCAP, Anderson 162, Faith 251). The children were removed without consent or warning and often placed in cross-cultural foster homes, sometimes quite far from their biological parents and community, with adoptive parents who were ill equipped to raise Native children and the problems of cultural and social identity that would follow. The children would be
“severed from their roots and grow up not knowing what it is to be Inuit, Métis or a First Nation member. Yet they are set apart from their new families and communities by visible difference and often made to feel ashamed of their origins” (HRCAP). Often Native children experienced a suppression of identity: families they were placed with would lie to them about their heritage and deny them access to their birth records. Their experiences of belonging to neither mainstream nor Aboriginal society created a difficulty in self-identification.

While the welfare of the children was deemed to be at the forefront of the scoops, this non-policy extended beyond that welfare and appeared as punishment for families of political dissidents, for example. Margo Kane’s monodrama Moonlodge gestures to these policies and the consequences on Agnes’s identity formation. Agnes’s father was vocal in his opposition to the oppression of Native communities as we learn from Agnes’s recount: “the voices [of the grownups] got louder and louder and my father’s was right along with them [...] [imitating] They been takin from us for a long time and now we’re takin their welfare cheques.” He proclaims to his children “they can take me but they’ll never take all of us” and then, in a moment of “realizing” Agnes tells the audience that her “father was taken away soon after by some men. And then the welfare came to take” her and her brothers and sisters away from their mother who ran “down the road after the car” (Kane 279). The connection between Agnes’s father’s political activism and her displacement is made explicit. The policy of removing children
was an attempt to break the spirits of those who would challenge the status quo.

The program that accompanied the Native Earth performance of Margo Kane’s *Moonlodge* spends a considerable amount of time detailing the history of the scoops and detailing the consequences of this non-policy:

In the mid-50s there was a systematic effort to deal with the ‘Indian problem.’ Metis and Indian communities of the prairies feared the ‘scoops’ [...] 
The systematic removal of children would often happen over the span of a year in a particular community until there were no children left. Many never saw their children until years later. Parents were devastated, [...] villages destroyed. People drifted into larger settlements or cities trying to cope with the loss. Many turned to alcohol. With a sense of powerlessness came hopelessness. (Native Earth Performing Arts, “File 8”)

It is clear that *Moonlodge* was created and performed as a critical response to a specific historical period of government-sanctioned policies and the systemic damage caused those policies. Kane, like many of the other playwrights, uses theatrical storytelling to condition the audience into witnessing the complex and traumatic history of scoops.

Yvette Nolan also addresses the issue of scooping Native activists and children. In her opening soliloquy, Anna begins talking about the “ways of getting rid of people”–of disappearing them. From the first words of the play there is an invocation of loss. She continues, “They disappear our kids, scoop ‘em up, adopt ‘em out, they never see their families again” because “It’s so easy to disappear people in this country, especially Indian people. Scoop ‘em up here, drop ‘em off there. Whoosh, gone. Then just deny everything” (Nolan, 2005, 3-4). It is no surprise that both *Annie Mae’s Movement* and
Moonlodge begin with references – either implicit or explicit – to the history of “disappearing” Aboriginal children. The plays stand in as testimonies to these violent and destructive histories. The playwrights’ role in documenting history and creating memorials to that history is discussed in chapter five, but the playwrights’ invocation of these past events reveals the importance of the larger issues of representation, violence, and identity at the heart of the plays.

The Unnatural and Accidental Women is a little more explicit in its referencing and criticism of the scoops; near the end of the first half a “fatherly male” voice over tells a story about

A deer who lost its mother, because someone shot its mother. Something like the story of Bambi, except that the little fawn was adopted by a white family that loved it, and then someone said that the fawn that grew to be an Indian girl should be with its own kind, so the father of the white family, who lived on the mainland, took a ferry and dropped the Indian girl on an island miles away, and hoped she would be happier. Well, the Indian girl wasn’t happy without the only family she had ever known, and she swam all the way back to her white family, and everything was going great...(Clements, 2005, 52)

The story resonates with the issues of Aboriginal children who were adopted by non-Native families and then, once they were old enough, sent off into the world lacking a connection to cultural identity. We are led to believe that “The Woman” – also known as Brenda – is the deer. Her character is described as “Native – looks and moves like a deer” (7). In this instance, the play is making a direct connection between the Woman and her displacement from family as a result of the scoops. In recounting her own
experiences as an adoptee, Shandra Spears recounts that her “friends from high school and university were graduating, marrying and moving on with their careers” while she “was synthesizing a whole new sense of identity at every level of [her] body, mind and spirit.” She was “biracial, fair-skinned, non-status, urban and culturally confused”; she “was angry about the loss of Native culture [she] had experienced as a child, and [she] was mourning the ‘white’ direction that [she] was rejecting as an adult” (Spears 88). It is for this reason that “the Woman” in The Unnatural and Accidental Women finishes the story: “Everything was going great, until she decided that she really didn’t belong anywhere. So she decided it would be better to surrender to the ocean” (Clements, 2005, 52). The woman’s interjection, like Spears’s account, emphasizes the extreme displacement felt by many Indigenous people. This story does not focus on issues of physical violence against the “deer,” but on the sense of isolation and homelessness the deer experiences as a result of its displacements. It reveals that the trauma of displacement occurs even when experiences were not grounded in abuse.

For more than a century women and their children were victims of legislative authorities removing their rights to community and homeland; legislation imposed a figurative (and often literal) homelessness where Native women were shut out of their communities, pushed away from resources, and denied access to their cultural heritage. The legislation that defined Native women became a significant development toward the internalization of racist and sexist stereotypes that circulate as representative of Native
womanhood. Aided by the active attempts at assimilation through the residential school system and the adoption of Native children to non-Native families, the legislation of identity created a rift in the cultural identity of those the legislation affected most. Generations of people suffer from trauma caused by the legislation that mandated residential schools, Child Welfare’s intervention, and other assimilation tactics attempted by the Canadian governments that were in charge at the time. The effects of the legislation on identity are far reaching, but perhaps one of the most destructive for Native women is the way in which the effects of the legislation created a rift between culturally-created identities and stereotype-based identities which have disastrous consequences for Native women in Canada.
CHAPTER TWO

Identity and the Media: the Deconstruction of a Stereotype

The “single story” creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make 'one story' become the only story.

– Chimamanda Adichie

No other ethnic group in the United States has endured greater and more varied distortions of its cultural identity than American Indians. Distorted images of Indian culture are found in every possible medium — from scholarly publications and textbooks, movies, TV shows, literature, cartoons, commercials, comic books, and fanciful paintings, to the gamut of commercial logos, insignia and imagery that pervade tourist locales throughout the Southwest and elsewhere.

– Devon A. Minesuah

In November 2012, the American rock band No Doubt released a music video for “Looking Hot,” the second single from their album *Push and Shove*. The video starts with a series of tipis somewhere in the American southwest. The shot transitions to lead singer Gwen Stefani staring off into the distance, wearing a red, white, and blue feathered headband and a glittery, American-Indian themed crop top trimmed with gold chains. In the next series of shots we see a white horse running through tall grass, and hear vultures screeching overhead before revealing our first glimpse of a southwestern town. A snare-drum roll and distorted guitar begin the song as we see Stefani being dragged through the streets and then tied to a wall by cowboy bandmates Adrian Young and Tom Dumont.
Stefani, featuring yet another overly sexualized costume change, now wears white, skin-tight buckskin pants; a white crop top covered by a white plains-Indian style breastplate; a white headband with white braids dangling and a white feather in the back; and white high-heel boots. Held at gunpoint by Young and Dumont, Stefani writhes against the wall of an Adobe building; she is twisting and thrusting her hips, dancing throughout her ‘confinement’ as she sings “go ahead and look at me, ‘cause that’s what I want. Take a good look won’t you please, ‘cause that’s what I want.” The video sparked anger over the stereotypes and overt sexualization of the ‘Native’ woman (portrayed by the non-Native Stefani). The band quickly pulled the video and offered an apology; however, this is just one moment when co-opting Native culture for entertainment (and financial) purposes results in dangerous stereotypes being re-circulated. This appropriation and over sexualization of the ‘Native’ female character demonstrates the crux of the problem when addressing depictions of Native women. Time after time, Aboriginal artists and

The video was actually released during Native American History Month (November), but after only one day it was pulled by the band and not their label. Nevertheless, the video is still circulating around the internet for viewing. Many articles reporting on the video pointed out that the continual usage of Aboriginal culture as public domain fostered racist and sexist stereotypes of Aboriginal people. Many commenters also came to the band’s defence. One commenter praised No Doubt for celebrating Native American culture and for Stefani for “looking hot” while doing it (Romano). Other commentators, like those featured on Pop Trigger, also came to Stefani’s defence by claiming that “native inspired fashion is in” and that for Stefani who is “really fashion forward, she’s just trying to have a magnification of this trend in her video.” (PopTrigger). Of course these arguments fail to acknowledge how the music video (or advertisement, fashion line, etc.) is still appropriating Indigenous culture, and re-circulating the stereotypes and beliefs that Indigenous culture is public domain and free for all the world to use for their own financial gains.
activists have unpacked and explored the dangers of stereotypes and cultural appropriation, yet the example above reveals that these stereotypes and appropriations remain a problem that has simply not gone away. Chapter one explored how laws and legislation in Canada are awash with “naturalized colonial stereotypes” that are “set into the discursive memory of a nation” (Moll 70). This chapter turns outward to explore how the foundational texts have pushed back against the circulation of these stereotypes and the depictions of Native women these stereotypes present.

Stereotypes circulate almost unconsciously in culture and society; they are found anywhere from fashion to print media, from Hollywood-studio system blockbuster films to advertisements for a wide range of products that often have nothing to do with Indigenous people. For the playwrights in this chapter, the depictions of Native women from the mid-twentieth century, especially those coming from film and television, continue to have traction because they are continuously renewed and recycled for modern audiences and consumers. Many of the most frequent stereotypes develop in and disperse from film and television are re-circulated through a myriad of other mediums. Margo Kane’s Moonlodge, Monique Mojica’s Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots and Marie Clements’s The Unnatural and Accidental Women pull from the repertoire of stereotypes (from print media, advertisements, art and photography, film and television, for example) in order to stage critical inquiries into the veneer of authority the stereotypes hold and to disrupt not just the logic of the stereotypes, but the ways in
which these images circulate around various mediums in order to normalize them for new generations to consume. According to Robert Appleford, Native theatre “seeks to denaturalise Native images on stage,” and “does not simply introduce ‘new and improved’ images and tropes for consumption” but “challenges non-Native audiences to understand how images of Natives circulate within cultural discourse” (2001, 234). While almost all plays by Native women have attempted to dismantle the negative stereotypes of Native women, I am interested in how the plays discussed here use common – and dangerous – stereotypes intermingled with satire as a way to “keep audiences [...] off balance” (233). I contend that to achieve this disruption of the stereotype’s authority, Margo Kane, Monique Mojica, and Marie Clements each engage in theatrical-based culture jamming in order to press audiences to acknowledge not just the stereotypes, but the circulation story itself.

Culture jamming is a political or social protest that attempts to disrupt the logic and unconscious acceptance of images or messages. It is a form of political action that use[s] a mixture of politics, art and humour to attempt to engage audiences emotionally, intellectually and politically in such a way that they rethink established ideas, and see them in a new and critical way. [...] The idea is to provoke critical reflection and re-evaluation of culturally hegemonic ideas by disrupting or ‘jamming’ the flow of dominant messages. (Fominaya 95)

Appropriated images of Indigenous people circulating around in dominant culture are often without the input or consent of Indigenous people. Culture jamming allows activists
to reject the passive “one-way information flow” by hacking into the culture industry’s “own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended” (Klein 281). Culture jamming, as I envision its role in Native women’s theatre, is not stand-alone parodies of stereotypes; it is a publically staged sabotage of the circulation of, and unconscious continuation of Indigenous stereotypes. What is at stake in the plays are not just the specific stereotypes of Native womanhood, but the ways in which these images are disseminated in culture for financial gain and cultural currency. Humour is a significant component of culture jamming; Mark Dery writes that “culture jammers are Groucho Marxists, ever mindful of the fun to be had in the joyful demolition of oppressive ideologies” (Dery). The playwrights’ culture jamming is a subversive, yet disarming, form of criticism that uses witty, often derisive reworkings of stereotypes to circumvent their authority, their cultural currency, and their continued circulation. By twisting the stereotypes into ridiculous parodies, the playwrights press audience members to view the stereotypes critically. It compels the audience to stop and think about the stereotype and its circulation within dominant culture and uses the performer and spectator’s co-subjectivity effectively to engage the audience in the destruction of the stereotype.

The ability to disseminate information is fundamental to resistance. Social activism in the theatre, by way of culture jamming, for example, allows Native women the space
to dispel the single story of Aboriginality so predominant in film and television. Theatre’s past popularity has certainly given way to film and television (and other contemporary media), and film and television’s ability to disseminate information is widely acknowledged. I cannot argue against filmed media’s greater ability to spread ideas and ideology, and some scholars have argued that theatre’s ability to disseminate is “more academic than popular” (Underiner 40); however, to discount theatre’s power to push back against stereotypes is a mistake.

When I speak about dissemination I do not mean just the ability to reach large audiences, but the ability to engage an audience. According to Max Herrmann, “theatre always produces a social community” (qtd in Fischer-Lichte 32). Central to this claim is that the distance between the spectator and the performer is reduced to the point where both become a part of what we now call performance. The subject/object “relationship in which spectators turn actors into objects of their observation” is rejected in favour of a relationship that creates “co-subjects” through their “co-presence” (Fischer-Lichte 32).

This is an important tactic to circumvent stereotypic representation and engage in one’s own decolonization. Any “resistance against different forms of power [is] a starting point” and can become a catalyst for how to deconstruct oppressive power relations through resistance (Foucault 780). In this instance, decolonization works to challenge the established power dynamics in a given society and calls us to be conscious of them, their effects, and the source of their authority in our society. The theatre, as part of popular culture and media, infiltrates the “institution” with counter-narratives that appropriate and then destabilize the codes of the simulation. The dramatists write with this resistance in mind and “the product of a writer’s pen both reflects reality and also attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 7). The very act of writing becomes an act of resistance that attempts to dismantle the simulations of Native women created in contemporary film and television.
This sentiment is echoed by Fernando Poytas who writes, “the intrusion-like participation of the theatre spectator [...] is more so in the perception of a play than of a film. The moviegoers know that, no matter the intimacy with which they perceive and feel the performance and their environment, they are physically totally detached from them, with no possible two-way interactions” (60).

The liveness – the immediacy – of the theatre lends itself to the dissemination of new ideas and information. It stands in direct contrast to the phenomenological absence of the cinematic. Live performance creates a tension between the performance and the audience. Unlike films which present a fourth wall vis à vis the screen, theatre’s fourth wall is more permeable, less tangible, and less immediate. The distinction I am making between the cinematic and the theatrical and the significance of liveness of the theatre is not to create a binary between the two, but to stress how the theatre, by way of its liveness, presses idea and reactions in a way that other, less immediate media cannot. It is the immediacy created by the liveness of theatre that is of importance here. We are face-to-face with a phenomenological body that stands in comparison to the stereotypes that she is (humourously) representing and jamming on stage. By positioning the

34 There are many notable examples where the fourth wall in film is broken, but it is a less-welcomed disruption of the viewing experience in film and still fails to emphasize the bodily co-presence of the actors/spectators. In theatre you are constantly negotiating the fourth wall; the actor’s footsteps, the set/scene changes, stage hands, actors turning to the audience, all disrupt the suspension of disbelief whereas film is perfected so that we are spectators looking in, but with our gaze rarely returned.
audience as part of the performance, the plays also pick up on the kinds of circulation that happens among theatre audience members and asks us to pause and contemplate that circulation story. In terms of the plays under discussion, it is both the humourous reworking of stereotypes by the actor and our laughter in response to those reworkings that sabotages the unconscious continuation of the stereotypes’ circulation story. We become co-subjects in the performance and participants in the deconstruction of the stereotypes. The intimacy of the performances is therefore part of the process of dissolving the authority of the stereotypes; this is a tactic not possible with film and television where the screen mediates the effective distance between the subject and the other (or the viewer and the stereotype) and positions our reactions not as part of the performance, but a distanced reaction to it.

The theatre allows information to circulate in different ways than film. Theatre can adapt to location and community and become acts of survivance. As Rauna Kuokkanen suggests, “The strength of survivance is that it is not merely a response or a reaction but rather a proactive stance [...] Survivance could be seen as a strategy that is constantly modified according to the needs and possibilities of both resistance and survival” (2003, 699). Such possibilities include tackling different themes or adapting different audience
constituencies that result from a change in geographical or cultural location. The plays discussed in this chapter have travelled beyond Canadian borders and have been performed in Europe, Oceania, and the United States. The location and staging of performance also affects and supports the interaction and intimacy between the performer and the spectator. Many of these performances were staged in theatres where the spectators surrounded the actors on multiple sides rejecting the gaze-directing frame of the traditional proscenium stage space. In many of the performances spectators would be looking not just at the actors, but at fellow spectators.

Yvette Nolan’s *Annie Mae’s Movement* was performed at the Native Canadian Centre (NCCT) in Toronto, Ontario and featured a stage space that was “divided into a kind of irregular cross with the audience sitting in four groups at each angle as if perched

35 This could include adaptations, like *Death of a Chief* directed by Yvette Nolan and Kennedy Cathy MacKinnon, which transforms Shakespeare for contemporary Indigenous audiences; or performances that change over time, such as Margo Kane’s *Moonlodge*, which has frequently adapted as times and themes change or audiences provide feedback. This could also include performances adapted into Native languages for the community they are presented in. Theatre is also remounted, often years after the performances’ original run, and with that remounting brings new interpretations as the times dictate. For more on how the plays address different audience consistencies, see chapter 3’s discussion of representing violence on stage.

36 *Moonlodge* travelled Canada extensively between 1990 and 1997, but it also travelled to the 1997 International Women Playwrights conference in Ireland; opened the American Indian Festival at Cleveland Public Theatre in 1998 (Evett); performed at Abron Arts Centre in New York in 1999 (Soloski); and was remounted in Australia during the lead-up to the Sidney Olympics in 2000. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* toured several Canadian dates, but has also been staged in various American states, including Kansas in 2005 (Blankenship) and Illinois in 2007 (Crossroads Theatre). *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* has also been staged throughout Canada and the U.S. as recently as 1998 (E. Charles).
on cliffs over a canyon” (Hoile). As a result, the audience sat facing each other and became a part of the performance for each other. In his 1981 article “Performance and Perception,” Frank Coppieters noted that when audience members become visible (and he identifies audiences in the round as his example), they feel themselves to be under “scrutiny as performers” themselves because there is “an interesting switch of attention from audience to performance and back” (42). Coppieters’s conclusions are echoed elsewhere. Don Taylor argues that live theatre involves the audience (or at least it creates a sense of involvement) that is missing from the “mechanical media of,” and I would argue the mode of watching, “film and television” (1996, 96; also see P. Phelan, 1993, 146). Many of the plays explored here position their audiences outside traditional stagings. Native Earth’s production of Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* was performed at Buddies in Bad Times (Toronto) and had the audience surround a thrust stage which produces a similar effect to that described above. Both Cheechoo and Kane’s plays were performed in Indigenous cultural/community sites (for example, West Bay public school and NCCT, respectively), and were also performed with similar audience
positionings. The audience in many of these plays is “facing its own opposite side, and the drama being acted in between, against a background of watching and listening faces” (D. Taylor, 1996, 96). This form of audience participation – whether acknowledged or not – also challenges the conventional power dynamics of proscenium stages. We become active participants – co-subjects – in the performance, and under these conditions audiences are denied “the position of distanced, uninvolved observers” (Fischer-Lichte 50). Our participation in the performance actively helps to reshape the specific claims about Native women and Native womanhood that circulate within dominant culture.

Specific examples relating to the plays are discussed below, but it is judicious to discuss the ways film and television have had an extraordinary effect on the circulation stories of many stereotypes. The present relevance of continued conversations on filmic treatments of Indigenous women is apparent from the very beginning of this chapter with the discussion of No Doubt’s music video. Depictions of Native women such as those found in No Doubt’s video are fraught with problems that include misrepresentations of colonial history; highly sexualized depiction of Native women; objectification of Native

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In her article “The Other History of Intercultural Performance” in Re:Direction : A Theoretical and Practice Guide, Coco Fusco recounts her performance of Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit... and recalls that the “tenor of reactions to seeing ‘undiscovered Amerindians’ in a cage changes from locale to locale” (276; also see Fischer-Lichte’s discussion of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco’s Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit... (44)). With regards to the performances discussed in this dissertation, location can (and does) have an effect not just on audience perspective of the performance, but also the kinds of audiences that will be present (which will also affect the possible reactions from any given audience).
women; conflating cultures and identities into fixed stereotypes; and appropriating Indigenous culture for financial and celebrity ends. These stereotypes can trace a clear lineage to the portrayal of Indigenous men and women in films from the mid-twentieth century, especially in the early western films, which presented an unchanging image of Native people. Ojibwe film critic Jesse Wente suggests that while “we don’t ride on horses or wear feathers [...] because of the movies, a lot of the world still thinks we do” (qtd in N. Diamond). Historically speaking, accurate representations of Native people have not been readily available for the general public. The film industry has often treated Indigenous culture as public domain from which stereotypical images or themes can be plucked out and slapped onto a performance or image of Native people. These representations were able “to distort the image of the Native American” in a way that previous attempts could not (Bataille and Silet xxiii). In fact, film media “did what thousands of years of social evolution could not do,” which is producing “the homogenized Native American, devoid of tribal characteristics or regional differences” (Bataille and Silet xxiii). This homogenized image of Native women and men became the archetype and the authoritative image for generations because film was able to reach those populations of settler society that did not, could not, or would not have access to “real” Native people. For many, film and television are ground-zero for the dissemination of harmful stereotypes of Indigenous women, and the ubiquitous nature of stereotypes demonstrates a circulation story in which the stereotype (from film or television, for
example) is incorporated into popular culture where it begins to circulate independent of its referent.\textsuperscript{38} It is valued for its appearance of authenticity and re-circulated as a free-for-all commodity that reinforces the myth of the vanishing Indian.\textsuperscript{39} While early depictions of Native people on film were positive at times, the 1930s saw a change in their representation that highlighted the violence of (mis)representation. During this time “the Indian is transformed into a brutal savage” for a country that “needs a new brand of hero” (qtd. N. Diamond). The “savage” is epitomized in the film \textit{Stagecoach} which, as Wente argues, “summed up and gave the opinion of Native people for decades to the populace in the US. That’s how they thought of us, and it’s because of John Ford that they thought of us like that. And that Native people may have even thought of themselves” like that (qtd. N. Diamond).

In his 2010 documentary, \textit{Reel Injun}, Cree director Neil Diamond explains that “Hollywood has made over four thousand films about Native people” which amounts to

\textsuperscript{38} Gerald Vizenor has written extensively on how stereotypes are devoid of a relationship to that which they are intended to depict, and how that fractured relationship has supported the belief that Indigenous cultures are invisible and vanishing. According to Vizenor, “photographic representations became the evidence of a vanishing race, the assurance of dominance and victimry” (2000, 15) and representations contained within these images are confirmations of master narratives of dominance, surveillance, and control. For Vizenor, “interimage simulations” erased Native presence to serve the manifest manners of the day. He calls these representations fugitive poses to describe the absent Native subject who is “posed in silence at the obscure borders of the camera” (Vizenor, 2000, 155).

\textsuperscript{39} The “vanishing Indian” stereotype is the myth that Native people have disappeared from the landscape because of an inability to adjust to “modern society” or from assimilation (from the years of cultural and physical genocide).
“one hundred years of movies defining how Indians are seen by the world” (N. Diamond). Michael Ray FitzGerald has noted that stereotypes of North America’s Indigenous populations are “durable” and “malleable” in order to accommodate “each era’s ideological necessities” usually supporting what FitzGerald calls the “endorsement of Euro-American domination” (2013, xii). It is essential to recognize that stereotypes do the most damage from the inside. They are effective in their influencing public and private identity formation. Neil Diamond tells us that while he and the other children in his Northern Cree community were “raised on cowboys and Indians” they often cheered for the cowboys, never identifying with the Indians [they] saw on screen” (N. Diamond). The Native people on screen were presented as “other,” as savage, as detrimental to progress, and these notions had the very real threat of being internalized by Native communities and beyond. While there is no “concrete relationship [that] exists between the Celluloid Maiden and actual Native American women” (Marubbio 5), film and television have support a belief that such a relationship exists. This is the essence of the circulation story: the simulations are counterfeit images devoid of a referent, but they are disseminated into the world where they gain traction and influence within dominant culture. The playwrights under discussion here, just like many other Aboriginal activists

All quotations pulled from Diamond’s documentary have been personally transcribed. I will identify the speaker of the quotation and then attribute Diamond as the source. Some quotations may appear colloquial; this is intentional, as I have attempted to keep the speaker’s voice and the flow of their commentary as close to the film as possible.
and artists, are challenging the circulation and unconscious internalization of these harmful representations.

Perhaps one of the biggest perpetrators of this circulation story is the fashion industry who claim to use Indigenous cultures as “inspiration,” but are frequently using Indigenous images and culture for financial gain while contributing to the re-circulation of stereotypes within popular culture. Just one week after No Doubt’s video was released and subsequently pulled, the Victoria’s Secret fashion show featured model Karlie Kloss wearing a leopard print bikini with turquoise jewellery and an extremely large feathered war bonnet. The outfit garnered an immediate reaction both in terms of appropriated images as well as the association of Indigenousness with hyper-sexualization. Victoria’s Secret excluded the outfit from the subsequent December 2012 broadcast of the event and released a statement apologizing for upsetting some “individuals.”

That these appropriations and stereotypes continue to have traction in fashion and in culture is a result of their commodification, which in turn fosters the profit-driven circulation of Indigenous stereotypes. The circulation of decontextualized headdresses in film and television (especially the westerns films that appeared in the second half of the twentieth

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41 It should be mentioned that this apology, posted on Victoria’s Secret’s facebook page (November 10, 2012) is not an apology for appropriating Indigenous culture, but rather an apology that the replica headdress offended some individuals. Non-apologies like this lack culpability and shift the blame for offence back on to the offended rather than taking responsibility for cultural insensitivity that resulted in offence in the first place.
century) is picked up by the fashion industry who use those images to “influence” their designs, which in turn creates fashion trends like the Hipster Headdress (as discussed by Adrienne Keene, (Native Appropriations, 3 Feb. 2010)). The appropriations in this event did not exist in a vacuum, however, and there were plenty of similar events which should have given warnings to the organizers about the potentially harmful consequences of proceeding with the outfit.42

In 2014 Ralph Lauren released the winter/holiday catalogue featuring “de-contextualized native men, without names, without tribes, without timeframes, to sell his clothes” (Keene, Indian County Today, Dec 2014). The catalogue contained sepia-toned images of old-west themed Indigenous people that Adrienne Keene has accurately read as having “a subtext [...] of ‘civilizing’ – even the wild Indians” through Lauren’s clothing, which is earmarked as a mark of progress (a catalogue of all new designs with old-fashioned flare). Many of the photographs used were taken by (or inspired by) Edward S. Curtis who sought to document the so-called vanishing Indian. The recycling of these images incites not just a re-circulation of the vanishing Indian stereotype that

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42 Besides the No Doubt video, earlier in autumn 2012 designer Paul Frank held a “neon-Native American powwow theme” with neon war paint, plastic tomahawks, and feathered head bands (Keene, Native Appropriations, Sept. 9, 2012). Many of the celebrities in attendance were younger Disney channel stars whose young fans will have seen these celebrities appropriating culture and sending the message out that such appropriations are acceptable and allowing the circulation story to continue. Paul Frank has since admitted their error, taken full responsibility for their appropriation and made significant strides towards collaboration with Indigenous designers and artists, and with proceeds directed to Native causes (Sauers, 20 June 2013).
fuelled Curtis’s project in the first place, but also a revival manifestation of the noble savage stereotype. It demonstrates how the circulation story is continually resuscitated to support narratives of dominance reinforced by commercial and celebrity ends. Ralph Lauren later pulled the catalogue and the company released a statement (not an apology). The blunders by Victoria’s Secret and Ralph Lauren (among many others) demonstrate the fashion industry’s adherence to the adage that it is easier to ask forgiveness than for permission. Of course the circulation story of stereotypes does not end with fashion or film and television. Devon Abbott Mihesuah tells us that misrepresentations of Indigenous culture “are found in every possible medium – from scholarly publications and textbooks, movies, TV shows, literature, cartoons, commercials, comic books, and fanciful paintings, to the gamut of commercial logos, insignia, and imagery that pervade tourist locales throughout the Southwest and elsewhere” (Mihesuah, 2009, 13). Both of these examples are part of an ever-growing list of designers, companies, filmmakers, and advertisers who exploit Native people and
The ubiquitous nature of stereotypes in contemporary culture means that creating such a list could become a book in and of itself. Naming just a few recent examples includes celebrities like Khloe Kardashian who dressed in Native American headdress to “play dress up” in 2010. It was sexualizing, trivializing, commodifying, and stereotyping Indigenous culture in one swoop. In 2011 she was professionally photographed wearing another, bigger, headdress. In 2012, actress Drew Barrymore also received backlash for posting a photo to her Facebook page in which the actress is wearing a colourful headdress and a Budweiser apron. Miss Universe Canada contestants in both 2008 and 2011 wore “national costumes” that appropriated Native culture. In 2008 it was a headdress with revealing buckskin, while in 2011 it was a dress and cocktail dress inspired by First Nations’ culture, without any consideration to the culture(s) she was appropriating.

The music world has also had its fair share of appropriations: In 2010 pop-star Ke$ha dressed in costume on American Idol singing about overly sexualized women. She also appeared in concert and music videos wearing warbonnets/headdresses, warpaint, and Native-inspired jewelry. Lana Del Rey’s 2012 video for her single “Ride” and Joan Franka’s performance on the 2012 Eurovision finale all received criticism for appropriation and/or sexualization of Native American culture. Juliette and the Licks (fronted by Juliette Lewis) and Bat for Lashes both frequently appropriate headdresses as fashion. In 2014 rapper Pharrell Williams apologised to First Nations after appearing in Elle UK magazine in a headdress.

Advertisers and sports teams often use Indigenous images and culture to market and sell their products. In 2014 Chris Wilson writing for Time Magazine revealed that there are at least 450 companies that still have Indigenous mascots or logos (C. Wilson). Companies such firearms company Savage Arms, Nokona baseball gloves, Big Chief Meat Snacks, and Indian Motorcycles are just a few of the many companies still using images of Indigenous people or culture for financial gain.

Older stereotypes are also being recycled anew in a 21st century digital age. The Mazola commercials of the 1970s (discussed below) are a significant source of inspiration for Mojica’s push-back against stereotypes, and they are readily available for modern audiences via online video streaming website YouTube. One such uploaded video from 1976 titled “Mazola Margarine. ‘We Call it Maize’ Commercial,” has over 30,000 views and features racist/sexist comments like: “what a hot Indian babe,” “You call it Squaw,” or “thumbs up if you wanted her to butter that corn and put it in her mouth.” These may be old commercials, but they are being reintroduced for modern audiences as a form of cultural currency that continues to objectify and sexualize Indigenous women and reinforce the old stereotypes of Indigenous people.
“Live from Tee Pee Town... it’s” — *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*: film history and Mojica’s reply.

For Native women in the media there are seemingly only two options for representation: the marginalized ‘squaw’ or the ‘submissive princess.’\(^{44}\) There is perhaps no stereotype that is as pervasive as Pocahontas, and if there is one character that encapsulates the portrayal of Native women in the media, it is Pocahontas.\(^{45}\) Seminole film historian Melinda Micco suggests that Native women “are pretty much absent from the Western [...] except, of course, for the Indian princess, epitomized by Pocahontas” (qtd. in N. Diamond). The historical figure of Pocahontas, like so many other Native women, has been given the ‘Hollywood treatment’ so that while “[i]t is possible to interpret characters like Pocahontas, Sacajewea and la Malinche as strong Indigenous leaders” film and television rarely portray this interpretation (Anderson, 2001, 101). Whether represented as the marginalized ‘squaw’ or the submissive princess, the consequences of these negative on-screen images have been heavy for Indigenous people. Micco deconstructs Disney’s representation of Pocahontas and asks:

\(^{44}\) Which are extensions of the male stereotypes of the “savage warrior” and the “noble savage.”

\(^{45}\) I choose to say character, as opposed to historical figure, since the representation of Pocahontas in much of the media has often been only loosely based on the historical figure and several, often dangerous, almost always sexist and racist liberties have been taken with her depictions.
Why is this woman, the Disney Pocahontas, such a profound image – a mythic image – for American people? What about children who know nothing of Native society? And they see this young woman who has this one-shoulder, skimpy dress that she’s wearing [...] the reality of Pocahontas is that at the time of contact with John Smith and this event she was about nine years old. So we imbue in her all the wrong notions of what we want to see in a mythical princess. She becomes an embodiment not of Native society, she becomes the embodiment of American society, [and] of American desire. (qtd in N. Diamond)

Micco’s concerns are well placed. The images presented by Disney, as well as the Hollywood western, are, for many around the world – especially those who have had little or no contact or experience with North American Indigenous culture – how they understand North American Aboriginal culture. The depictions of Aboriginal women are “frozen in time as far as film is concerned” (Bataille and Silet xxvii) and these images “created a gauge against which white femininity could be measured and defined” (Anderson, 2001, 104). The frozen images of Native women are delineated rather clearly in film and television. From Iris Lang’s performance of Princess Pocahontas in Walter Forde’s *Time Flies* (1944) to Q’orianka Kilcher’s performance in Terrence Malick’s *The New World* (2005), we see how very little has changed in how popular media has envisioned Pocahontas. Almost all representations of Pocahontas in the last six decades have been portrayed as a beautiful, young (but not too young) woman, scantily clad in buckskin, accessorized with headbands and feathers, submissive and sexualized for the white settlers to North America. These are the same tropes repeated time and again. There is very little, if anything at all, that is accurate about these representations, but
through repetition the copy became the simulation until the simulation became the “authority” on Native womanhood. Long after ‘traditional’ methods of colonization were abandoned, film and television, as part of a culture-creating and society-informing machine, continue to foster negative representation of Native identities. By rehearsing and repeating the stereotypes of Aboriginality and femininity and allowing those stereotypic presentations to represent all Native women, the film and television representations of Native women require (as well as participate) in the creation of a fixed understanding of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people. According to Bhabha, colonial discourse is dependent on the paradoxical concept of “fixity” to mark difference – “cultural/historical/racial difference” – in the other (Bhabha 94). He goes on to argue that the stereotype, which is a “discursive strategy” of colonial discourse, fluctuates between the “already known” and “that [which] must be anxiously repeated” (95). The need to repeat the stereotype ensures its place among “changing historical and discursive conjunctures,” yet, it is in that anxious repetition where the stereotype is revealed to be unstable as a mode of authentic representation (95). The challenge to the authority of

46 The use of the present tense is important. While the Hollywood film system has become better at incorporating more sensitive depictions of Aboriginal peoples and there have been more instances where Aboriginal voices are telling their own stories (Smoke Signals, Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, Lost Sparrow, Rhymes for Young Ghouls), it is certainly not without problems. Films as recent as 2013 when Disney and Jerry Bruckheimer teamed up for a remake of The Lone Ranger with Johnny Depp as Tonto, or the Twilight series, in which Native people are portrayed as wolves, are examples of how filmic representations of Indigenous people still have a long way to go before they move beyond the stereotype.
the stereotype needs to deconstruct the relationship between the stereotype and colonial power; the satirical repetition of such stereotypes offers one such avenue. Since, as Tamara Underiner notes, “drama became a way” for the new American nation “to work out its own identity in relation to both Europe and to native Americans, an identity which relied very strongly on a simultaneous identification with and disavowal of both” (Underiner 30), drama is an effective site to stage a resistance to such colonial processes of identification. The co-subjectivity and community created by theatre creates a space to challenge, not just the stereotype, but its circulation among audience members. The liveness of theatre, the proximity of the representation of stereotypes and the audience allows a site for debate so that the stereotype is not just re-circulated unconsciously. This form of resistance counters the semiotic codes established from the “Pocahontas Archive” (Underiner 29), which has been, and continues to be, represented in film and television.

Before I engage directly with Mojica’s play text, I would like to step back and examine Disney’s 1995 animated film Pocahontas to explore how the film not only engages in the Pocahontas archive, but also continues to re-circulate these misconceptions of Native womanhood for younger generations.\(^{47}\) While the film and the

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\(^{47}\) This is certainly not the only representation of Pocahontas I could use, and is not even the only cartoon depiction. Others include the 1994 Pocahontas (dir. Richard Rich), the 1997 Young Pocahontas (writers Merton and Schwartz).
play were created several years apart, I cannot help but read the play as a push-back against the stereotypes presented in the Disney film. It is worthwhile to explore the depiction of Pocahontas in the film since it is informed both by the zeitgeist of North American culture as well as the false claims to authenticity that Mojica is pushing back against. To reveal just how immersed the Pocahontas archive is in North American culture one need only look to the array of children’s Halloween costumes available in North America. One particularly offensive costume called “sassy squaw” was eventually pulled from stores, but other costumes such as “Indian Brave” and “Indian maiden” are still available and bear similarities to the offensive “sassy squaw.” The costume itself has a remarkable similarity to the outfit worn by Pocahontas in Disney’s animated film and is likely not a coincidence. Both are brown, animal-hide-like in appearance, with a fringe at the bottom of an alarmingly short skirt (especially for something marketed to children).

The name is also reprehensible and uses rhetoric that reinforces colonial linguistic

I must contextualize this statement and place myself within my research. I was young when Mojica’s play was first staged and was not introduced to the play (or theatre in general) until after the Disney film. It was only after I began my research did I realize the play pre-dates the film. This is due both to my age and to my non-linear introduction to the film and the play text. I read the play over ten years after its premiere (2003), but saw the film nearly ten years later (2012).

I contend that while the play pre-dates the film, the play was and still can be read as a push-back against all representations of Pocahontas that do injustice to Native womanhood since the Disney film is a part of the Pocahontas archive. The film’s depiction of Pocahontas (and Native culture and people in general) was not created in a void, and the representations contained within it are just one representation in a long line of representations stretching from colonial days up to the present, all of which have been propagating the same stereotypes. In contemporary Native theatre studies, the play would likely be read ahistorically against the film. This certainly speaks to Disney’s wide reach and to Mojica’s limited influence; however, I contend that Mojica’s primary objective was and is community healing.
constructions of Indigenous women. The company said it chose the name because it was catchy, but Aboriginal critics in Canada took offense not just to the naming of the costume but to the overly sexualized nature of the costume as well (CBC, October 27, 2012) and its continual propagation of the prevalent stereotypes of Native women. The Disney film, I argue, has had the staying power to organize many people’s understanding of Pocahontas, and behind her, Indigenous women as a whole.

Even after nearly ten years since its release, Pocahontas is a first glimpse at Native culture and Aboriginal women for many people around the world. Unfortunately, it is so fraught with problems of representation that the film is doomed from the first frame to propagate, rather than dispel, stereotypes. Our first view of Pocahontas looks more like a shampoo commercial than a young Powhatan girl. Her flowing hair remains perfectly in place while she stands barefoot high atop a mountain in a tantalizingly short, skin-tight buckskin dress. Aboriginal critics (such as Mihesuah, 2003, 60) have argued that this representation is just one of many that set up unrealistic standards of beauty for women and is a manifestation of common stereotypes of Native women and sexuality. Reviewers of the film pointed out that “Pocahontas is Ariel, Belle and Jasmine combined, a buffed-up babe squeezed into skintight buckskin” (Hicks). She is a “babe [...] with great

Another probable historical inaccuracy. Angela Ross summarizes D’Entremont’s criticism on Pocahontas’s hair which was “probably shaved, as this was the custom of Powhatan girls her age” (81), and Pocahontas’s “free-flowing historically inaccurate hair” sets up the impression of Pocahontas as “free spirit” that Disney desires to convey (83).
legs [...] She wears [a] form-fitting, off-the-shoulder buckskin that would be as much at home in Beverly Hills as in 17th-century Jamestown. She's got sloe eyes, a rosebud mouth, billowing black hair and terrific muscle tone. And she is the centerpiece of a film that's as great-looking as its heroine” (Maslin). In the scene where John Smith reaches land and the two nearly meet, we see Smith standing tall in his ship being rowed by sailors while Pocahontas slithers and crawls in the shadows on the ground being followed by woodland animals. From this juxtaposition comes a continuation of the submissive, sexualized, close-to-nature depictions of Aboriginal women. There is a through-line created with every depiction of the “Indian princess” that feeds the Pocahontas archive (the circulation story that exists for this particular stereotype), therefore, while they were created nearly twenty years apart, the stereotypes that inform Disney’s Pocahontas also inform Stefani’s dirty-pop “Indian princess.” Stefani’s character is the troublesome descendant of Pocahontas: she is not just the princess, she is a bad-girl “Indian princess” who encourages her audience to "go ahead and stare at [her] ragamuffin" (“Looking Hot”). While the term ragamuffin has typically been used to describe a “street urchin” or someone of shaggy appearance, it has also been used to describe a style of electronic reggae music. None of these definitions fit with No Doubt’s lyrics, however, and there is no doubt that Stefani is using “ragamuffin” in a sexual way, likely alluding to sexualize female body parts. This use of the word appears highly original to Stefani as no definitions available connect the term to female anatomy.
The Disney film’s character of Pocahontas was ostensibly animated to be a blend of ethnicities: “her convexly curved face was African, her dark slanted eyes Asian, and her body proportions Caucasian” (Aleiss 150). What is left out of this racial hybrid is the very thing Disney is proclaiming to have represented – a Native woman. The film’s co-director, Eric Goldberg, stated: “We’ve gone from being accused of racism in Aladdin to being accused of being too politically correct in Pocahontas. That’s progress to me” (New York Times, 11 June 1995). This portrayal is not “too politically correct,” nor does it signal any sort of “progress”; it accomplished very little except removing the Native from a story about Natives. Angela Ross argues Disney’s Pocahontas is a reflection of “mainstream American culture” more so than a reflection of Native culture (79). I do not think Ross goes far enough in this analysis though. It is not just a reflection of American culture, but a reflection of mainstream culture’s wistful hope for what Native culture is (or could be) – invisible. The film puts forth a representation of Native women that is, at the very least, physically assimilated into ‘American’ culture. Disney’s attempt to “accurately portray Native Americans” has resulted in the lead Native American being stripped of her Nativeness and turned her into a melting pot of contemporary American ethnic ‘others.’

It is the stereotype of the Indian princess (and her anthesis the ‘squaw’) which we see Monique Mojica predominantly pushing back against in her play. Mojica’s princess character, aptly named Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides, is a parody of all the stereotypes, from ‘princess’ to ‘squaw.’ It is this overt collision of the two stereotypes
that disrupts and destabilizes the logic that links the “Indian” princess to the dirty-pop singer decked-out in feathers and buckskin. Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides is the essence of theatrical culture jamming; she both borrows from and irreverently undermines the pre-existing circulated stereotypes. The static, unchanging caricature is balanced by Contemporary Woman #1 and #2. Comparing the characters gives the audience the opportunity to witness the absurdity of Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides’s misrepresentations of Native women. This Brechtian contrast supports the possibility to halt the circulation of stereotypes because it stages a dramaturgical disruption of the stereotype’s dissemination. Mojica is outspoken on the treatment and representation of Native identities in society and culture; she embodies the concept of a “woman word warrior” (Mojica 86), so it is significant that in performance Monique Mojica plays both Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides and Contemporary Woman #1. Her body informs both characters and we, in turn, witness how both characters can be internalized for many Native women – that they must play both themselves and the stereotype – until such time that the stereotypes can be pushed aside.

As Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins argue, both Mojica and Kane rewrite movie texts and “by refusing and refuting negative stereotypes [found in those films] Mojica and Kane’s plays create some space for contemporary native women to express their subjectivities” (49). They are not simply refusing and refuting the stereotype, although that is certainly a byproduct of the culture jamming that Mojica and others are engaged
in. They are undermining the very logic of these stereotypes through satire and ridicule. Their culture jamming is significant; Mojica draws on many cinematic stereotypes and then challenges the ‘fixity’ of these archetypes by presenting all the ways identity is anything but fixed. The play does not challenge every stereotype in every medium, but it does culture jam some significant stereotypes from film and television in order to subvert their circulation story. Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides is depicted as a princess, but also as uncivilized. She is an exaggeration of the many cultural stereotypes that circulated before, and continue to circulate after, the premiere of Mojica’s play. While it deals primarily with the Pocahontas archive, there are also clear signs of resistance to contemporary film and television representations of Indigenous women. These moments are invoked during Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides’s beauty contest entrance music, which is a “mixture of Hollywood ‘tom-toms’, the ‘Indian Love Call’, ‘The Good, The Bad and the Ugly’ and the ‘Mazola’ commercial” (Mojica 18). The Mazola commercial referenced here is an example of how Mojica pushes back against a specific set of stereotypes that were, at the time of writing/first performance, no longer being aired, but were still part of cultural memory and still informing and influencing settler society’s notions of Indigenous women. The commercial itself plays on stereotypes of Indigenous people and a connection to nature by continually referencing the natural “goodness” of corn and corn oil and by setting the commercial on a farm and corn field. Another Mazola commercial features Indigenous women grinding corn on the Metate stone wearing
traditional-looking dresses, braided hair, surrounded by traditional-looking pottery in a south-western-esque town. In this commercial the Indigenous woman speaks about traditional culture and way of life based on corn. Not only does the Mazola company use Indigenous people and culture to sell their corn-based products, but they stage those Indigenous people and cultures as archaic and static. The stereotypes that these commercials produce reinforce a singular version of Indigenous women (seemingly pre-occupied with corn) as well as the false impression that Indigenous people and culture are old and have not progressed with technology and modern society. They set up a binary between Indigenous people and contemporary culture to substantiate the belief in the disappearing (Indigenous) cultures. These images from the Mazola commercial are played out in Mojica’s Princess-Buttered-On-Both-Sides who uses the commercial’s stereotypes to sabotage their cultural currency and continued circulation.

Stuck in the talent portion of the beauty pageant, Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides first declares to the audience that “I shall dance for you, in savage splendour, the ‘Dance of the Sacrificial Corn Maiden’, and proceed to hurl myself over the precipice, all for the loss of my one true love, CAPTAIN JOHN WHITEMAN (swoons)” (Mojica 19). What happens in this moment is a “production number [...] from the movie ‘Rosemarie’ – corn celebration – played on pan pipes with vocalized cartoon sound effects” as the Princess “performs a Hollywood ‘Injun dance’” (19). The audience is at first presented with the possibility of an authentic event in the dance, but is then faced with the Hollywood
treatment of Nativeness. The scene elicits laughter from the exaggerated performance of Princess-Buttered-On-Both-Sides and the juxtaposition of expectation and reality – which is to say the expectation of reality and the reality of stereotypes – but at the same time unveils the inherent danger of such stereotypes.

In Transformation 10, Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides wins Miss Congeniality in the pageant. As Miss Congeniality she is agreeable to a wider (colonial) audience, but her performed version of Native womanhood is unsustainable. Until this scene, Mojica has been faithfully recreating these images in order to engage in theatrical culture jamming the Princess and Pocahontas stereotypes. She twisted these representations into humourous and distorted parodies of themselves to erode their mask of authenticity and halt their unconscious circulation; however, culture jamming is not enough and Mojica seeks to not just disrupt the transmission of these stereotypes, but to destroy them. It is at this point in the play that we witness her character’s death first as she dismisses the “Cigar Store Squaw” motif by setting aside the cigars and removing the “buckskin yoke in exasperation” (Mojica 49), and then as she “unplugs herself; corn lights out. Exits upstage left” (Mojica 52). As audience members, we become participants in the disruption of the circulation story and witnesses to the stereotype’s destruction.

*Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* deconstructs the stereotypes contained within historical accounts of Matoaka/Pocahontas/Lady Rebecca. Mojica’s performance across several characters establishes “the pervasiveness of commercialized stereotypes
of Native women and a need to create an identity that exists outside of a colonial context” (Walters 240). In juxtaposition to the over-the-top stereotypes presented by Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides are Contemporary Woman #1 and Contemporary Woman #2. Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides’s parody of the stereotypes as well as her position as a trickster figure (Shackleton 2001; Walters 2006) reduces the stereotypes – and the archetypes of Native women – to ridicule. The performance denies spectators a representation of authenticity. Neither Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides nor the Contemporary women allow themselves to be read as a representation of Native womanhood. The Contemporary Woman criticizes the search for authenticity: “I’d like you to take a good look – [turns all the way round] I don’t want to be mistaken for a crowd of Native women. I am one. And I do not represent all Native women” (Mojica 59). This warns audiences against a homogenizing gaze that can create new, but just as harmful stereotypes. The lack of distinct names for the contemporary women suggests these women are there to represent a type of everywoman of Native societies. Their numbers suggest that they are just two examples of a large number of “Contemporary women” within Native communities. That there are two characters to play an everywoman character – a typically singular role – is compelling. There is a demonstrated awareness that no two women can share the same experiences or perspectives. The dual role creates a space for a difference of geographic and cultural heritage of the characters, which allows for an additional, more global, perspective. The performance was also
constrained by only two actors to perform all the parts; however, because these two characters represent many women across many historical periods and geographic locations, the audience can overlook the potential for essentializing Native women’s experiences and opinions. The genre of the performance itself is helpful in this respect. With more character/views expressed – with a chorus of women acting as the ‘everywomen’ of the performance – we might be less forgiving of such problems and might become aware of perspectives that are absent from the performance. The play is careful to signal that it does not speak for all Native women/Native people, but that each individual is responsible for their own identity formation.

The need to interject a contemporary view balances the humour-as-criticism presented by characters like Buttered-On-Both-Sides. The contemporary women are on a path toward healing both themselves and their community. They are the ones who must “pick up their medicine in order for the people to continue” (Mojica 20), and in order to do that “must heal the women” (20). Ric Knowles argues that what is at issue for Mojica in these plays, among other things, is a contestation of ownership over the representation of Native women by those who have exploited those representations for political purposes ranging from the colonialist and the nationalist through to the feminist and the academic. (2001, 248)

Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots attempts to displace the depictions of Native women that create a heavily commercialized cultural construction of Native womanhood. Mojica, like many of her contemporaries, engages in a theatrically-based culture jamming
of the commercialized image of Native women in order to expose the ways in which Indigenous identity, as a commercial commodity for reproduction and consumption by a wider, largely non-Native population, is politically and personally dangerous for those populations it claims to represent. Wendy Walters writes that:

Where previously the identity of Native women has been co-opted through commercialization, assimilation, and religious conversion (so aptly demonstrated by Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides), healing means restoring the authority of Native women so that they might be able to define their identity, history, and participation in the future of Native survival. (240)

The play and subsequent performance is a counter-narrative that subverts the use of semiotic codes typically deployed to create the simulations. The rejection of the stereotype is achieved by demonstrating that these commercialized stereotypic depictions of Native women can no longer stand in place of real – and realistic – self-defined identities and cannot stand unquestioned in the history of Native women.

As the excess of stereotypes and negative constructions of Native womanhood are explored in Mojica’s performance, the audience and the performer witness how the stereotype “demonstrates their emptiness as representations” when brought into close proximity with a real live identity (Shackleton 259). The portrayal of the over-the-top stereotypic women becomes a counter-narrative that uses comedy to destabilize and “undermine the comfortable romanticism” of the stereotypes (Shackleton 261), which is a theme further explored in Margo Kane’s Moonlodge.
The “Hollywood version. Lots of leg” in *Moonlodge*

Unlike Mojica’s play, Margo Kane’s solo-voice performance, *Moonlodge*, uses a gentle, more subtle comedy to stage one woman’s push back against the internalization of the “Hollywood Indian,” the “media-generated illusions” (Appleford, 1999, 170), and other stereotypes frequently internalized by Native women. While the satire may be tamer in *Moonlodge*, the satire of stereotypes still undermines their cultural currency and circulation story. Kane, like Mojica, uses existing representations of Native people from popular media and contaminates their logic and circulation in critically-engaging ways. This critical engagement allows Kane to convert these images into meta-memes that punctuate the circulation story of the stereotypes as well as the inherent danger of the stereotypes for the people they claim to represent. Stereotypes do not just “draw strength from a shared cultural reservoir of thought-to-be-truths” (Denzin 132), they also earn their strength from their unconscious naturalization. The play demonstrates the ways cultural detachment and media-influenced identity formation create severe fragmentation of identity. Kane, as Agnes, transitions between various stereotypic identities, trying on and discarding each like an ill-fitting shirt, until Agnes reaches a turning point toward self-created identity that is not dependent on external definitions of Native womanhood.
Agnes’s alienation from her home and community translates into the impossibility of “simply adopt[ing] a ready-made authentic ethnicity,” and instead we witness Agnes “investigate and reject several different mainstream conceptions of ‘Indianness’ – conceptions that would be seen by the sympathetic spectator as patently ridiculous” (Appleford, 2001, 236). The “patently ridiculous” stereotypes used by Agnes during her search for a cultural identity are taken from stereotypes common to film, television, and popular music. The play demonstrates a desire to disrupt the semiotic codes that support the continuation of the Hollywood stereotypes of Native women, such as the ‘princess/squaw’ dichotomy often portrayed in film or the cartoon and wooden “Indian” found in popular music. Kane disrupts the logics of the stereotypes with humour and farce and continually plays the stereotype with a wink and nod toward the audience. When Agnes breaks from her story, or Kane breaks from character, we are reminded that what we are seeing is a performance emerging from stereotypes of Aboriginal women and not a ‘real’ identity for Agnes. These moments, as well as the humour they create, destabilize the stereotypes and challenge the source(s) of their creation by redirecting the “effectivity of clichés [...] toward their deconstruction” (Knopf 206). It is in the elicited laughter that these stereotypes lose their guise of authority. Our laughter becomes an act of participation in the destabilization of stereotypes; our laughter is the interruption that undermines the stereotype’s cultural currency. Laughter also implicates audience agreement with the performance’s attempts to deconstruct the stereotypes. *Moonlodge,*
like *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, challenges the historical claim of accuracy in the stereotypes;\(^\text{51}\) contests the efficacy of these representations and their repetition within Canadian culture; and confronts the “force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency” (Bhabha 95). Humour, then, becomes social criticism: behind the gentle comedy in *Moonlodge* there is a biting criticism toward that at which we laugh.

Renate Eigenbrod emphasises “a reading of *Moonlodge* in which a multiple self, whose shifting perspectives are expressed in the voices of different characters, is set up against a homogenized, ‘fixed’ idea of Nativeness” (185). Each of these multiple selves are stereotypes forced upon Agnes until she rejects them in favour of her own self-defined identity as a Native woman. The stereotypes in the first half of the play are rejected and replaced with an alternative identity based on experience rather than simulations from Hollywood. It is the juxtaposition of the stereotype with the alternatives created by Kane that refutes the singularity of media-created identity and as a result the play’s “dramatize the search for a usable Native identity” (Appleford, 1999, 81) for Agnes.

The fact that the performance stretches beyond Canadian borders positions Margo Kane as an ambassador for public political resistance against the stereotypes and misconceptions of Indigenous women. The development and performance history of this

\(^{51}\) The texts of *Moonlodge* put this play in a unique position with regards to the Disney film. While both Mojica and Kane’s plays continued to be performed well after the *Pocahontas*’s release in 1995, Kane’s text is the only one to be re-published in 2005. This subsequent edition has demonstrated some changes in how the play was performed and can be read as a possible response to the Disney film.
play, as is evident in the variations of the published copies of this text, show the ways in which Kane “respond[s] to her audience by revising her creative work” as well as “engag[ing] in a dialogue with the critical community writing about her work” (Couture 25). These revisions reveal the adaptability of Kane’s performance, and with that adaptability, a possibility to disseminate more sensitive depictions of Canada’s Aboriginal people. The play itself, as mentioned earlier, has been performed in Canada, the United States, Europe, and Australia. In each of these instances it has received moderate to considerable press. Perhaps most notably, it was performed in Australia in the lead-up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Australian press reviewed the play favourably and praised Kane for her ability to “get Australia talking” about Aboriginal rights (Plater). Kane’s appearances in Australia were timely, not just corresponding with the Olympics but also in the middle of “widespread debate following the findings of a government inquiry into the ‘stolen generations’” of Australia (Plater) thereby solidifying Kane’s position as an ambassador for political resistance.

Western audiences are conditioned to take Indigenous stories and representations as truthful and authentic, even when these representations and stories are not founded

As well as the performance archives available, including the stage manager’s prompt book from the Native Earth performance.
in fact. This conditioning runs the risk of what Andrea Smith summarizes as the real problem of the life story which is not “the genre itself but the fact that, particularly for Native peoples, these stories can only be read for their truth. Is this person’s depiction true? Are they authentic?” (2014, 210). It becomes the task of the playwrights and performers to pushback and subvert this desire for authenticity. Kane’s play destabilizes this desire for authenticity in order to “tell truths that are not contained in their bodies” (210). Kane, like Mojica, resists the pull to read her performance as authentic and the imposition of negative identity by redirecting the “effectivity of clichés […] toward their deconstruction” (Knopf 206). This redirection, which in turn leads to active displacement of stereotypes, appears most often through humour and ridicule of the stereotypes. It is in the comedic representation of these stereotypes that Kane (and the other playwrights) are able to subvert the circulation story that emerges when the insulated images of Indigeneity – the stereotypes – are pulled from twentieth-century Hollywood film and television are disseminated anew. Kane turns images of the “Indian princess” (for example) and the westernized reclaiming of “tribal heritages” into moments where we are encouraged to laugh at the absurdity of them. In turn, our laughter positions us

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53 This is a point to which I return in chapter five during my discussion of the representation of history and Indigenous storytelling. It is worth noting, however, that while plays may not be truthful or based on historical fact, that does not suggest there are no truths to be taken from these stories. Likewise, because a play is based on historical fact, does not mean that there are not problems with the truths they are telling.
as participatory in the push-back against the stereotype’s circulation story.

In one particularly poignant moment of culture jamming we see the synthesis of humour and stereotypes. Agnes approaches her foster-parent, Aunt Sophie, and asks to join Brownies with a friend. Agnes has to explain what Brownies are to Aunt Sophie and goes through a lengthy account in which she describes Brownies as:

elves and fairies and gnomes and pixies and sprites and imps and kelpies ... and they help people. And if you’re a Brownie you get badges for making your bed and cleaning your room ... And Brownies live in the woods so we get to go to camp and take nature walks and learn about trees and flowers and birds and ... and ... things and sing campfire songs. (Kane 281)

After hearing all of this, Aunt Sophie retorts that “it’s very important that you get in touch with your tribal heritage!” (281). Already the coming scene is set up in contrast to Agnes’s sense of self and the “tribal heritage” which she should identify with when she says to the audience that she “just want[ed] to go to Brownies” (281).

The Brownie camp scene becomes the mode through which Kane can introduce the stereotypes and subsequently twist them around in order to “challenge the uncritical acceptance of dominant ideas” of Native womanhood (Fominaya 95). At Brownie camp, in the following scene, the Hollywood/stereotypical “Indian” comes to the forefront of the performance. Kane continually plays these scenes tongue-in-cheek, sometimes glancing, smiling, or winking at the audience, and this allows her to break down the divide between the actor, the audience, and the stereotype further. During the scene Agnes wears a “headband and feather” and “sits [...] in cartoon Indian pose – arms and legs
crossed” (281). We see in Kane’s performance characterizations of Native people that are reminiscent of Saturday-morning cartoons and popular television of the 1960s. These stereotypes include cartoon Indians, such as those found in Disney’s animated *Peter Pan* or *Loony Tunes*’s Bugs Bunny (see “Horse Hare” (1960) or “A Feather in His Hare” (1948) for examples), or in television shows like the character Mingo in NBC’s *Daniel Boone*. While none of these examples is named explicitly, there is a clear derivation between the over-the-top performance of Indian-ness by Kane and the popular television/cartoons of the 1950s and 1960s. The single-feathered headband Kane wears links back to a long-standing tradition of television’s stereotypes of Native peoples and cultures, and its use is a prime example of how *Moonlodge* disrupts the ways in which stereotypes are circulated. Feathered headbands became a symbol of Indigenous North America specifically because they circulate as a byproduct of Hollywood filmic representations of Native people. These props are devoid of any material connection to Indigenous culture and are mass produced for profit and are found everywhere from toy stores and costume shops to souvenir gift shops in Canada. The inauthentic cartoony feathered headband that Kane uses as a stage prop during the Brownies scenes is a part of that circulation story and it is specifically signalled as a stage prop in *Moonlodge*. It is stored in (and removed from) Agnes’s suitcase where Kane (as the actor) produces the various costumes/props required for the performance. The headband radiates an air of theatricality that is continually reinforced, and that undermines its authenticity as a
symbol and as a result disrupts its re-circulation as a stereotype. Additionally, by placing the feather and headband in this scene that uses humour and ridicule to tear down the mis-representations of Native women, Kane offers a representation of the stereotype that counters the profit-driven circulation of stereotypes in media and culture. Kane not only uses the feather to deconstruct the stereotypic representation of Aboriginality (represented by the leather headband and feather), she also challenges the meaning attached to such objects which are frequently used for material benefit. By drawing on the mid-twentieth century cartoons and the feather, Kane is able to challenge not just the stereotypes, but the authority over representation that is frequently attached to these images.

It is at Brownie camp where Agnes thinks she learns her first Indian song: “It was at Brownies that I learned my first Indian song [Gets hanging drum]. And I got to lead the campfire songs because I had a very strong voice. [Earnestly drums in Hollywood tom-tom tradition]” (281). The song she ends up singing is “My Paddle”; this song is the 1918 “My Paddle Keen and Bright” written by Margaret Embers McGee. McGee’s song borrows heavily from a Hollywood-created “Native” musical design in its metre and singing style. What comes next, I argue, is a metatheatrical moment where Kane steps outside her theatrical role and directs the audience to spot the difference between the

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54 A monotonous rhythmic, Hollywood cartoon tom-tom style with an emphatic first note downbeat followed by three upbeats to precede the next (repeated) measure of music.
real and the unreal. This autonomous side-step away from character is significant; it allows Kane to, like a conductor, shape and direct our reception of stereotypes and our search for authenticity – both of which will eventually be denied. She “[Stands and grins at [the] audience],” and announces to the audience that “the next song I’m going to sing is Land of The Silver Birch” (281). This moment is not in all printed/recorded versions of this the play text; it was likely added after feedback from performances, but the inclusion of the ‘original’ to counter-balance the ‘copy’ is meaningful. It speaks to the ways that Native culture is appropriated, but also to the ways in which the ‘copy’ can be mistaken for the original or, at the very least, cause a moment of hesitation. While the two songs are slightly different in melody, their metering is similar and their key signatures are the same. The moment becomes a pointed example of the failure to distinguish between the authentic (performer) and the counterfeit (character), and the failure to distinguish between the “authentic” (woman) and the counterfeit (caricature) Native woman. As Kane sings “Land of the Silver Birch” by E. Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake, the spectator is reminded of the problematic nature of ‘authenticity’ and

A moment of hesitation did occur while preparing an article for publication (in which a portion of this section appears). My editor asked if I had confused the song with a similarly named poem by E. Pauline Johnson Takahionwake, “The Song My Paddle Sings.” My editor’s confusion and my moment of hesitation in wondering if I had gotten it wrong was wonderfully telling as it drew attention to questions of authenticity (my editor asking for the authentic) and the copy (that appeared in the performance).

C Major, although I am sure there are transpositions of these songs for different voicings and instrumentation.
identity politics. In the performance, audiences are purposely misled in order to highlight this problem with authenticity; common assumptions about Aboriginal culture are dismantled through humour and juxtaposition. As a result, the performance asks us not necessarily to seek out the “authentic,” but to seek out those moments we mistake for authentic and engage critically with why. Appleford is on point when he suggests that there is an attempt to decipher the real from the unreal (Appleford, 2001, 237), the authentic from the counterfeit, the simulacrum from the simulation. The performance sets these two positions in juxtaposition not just thematically, but also structurally through the position of the intermission. The play highlights the “ruptures and gaps” of representation and reveals how representation “fails to reproduce the real exactly” (P. Phelan 2). Agnes’s movement from emulation to self-created identity is divided through the insertion of the intermission.\(^{57}\)

After the metatheatrical shift in the Brownie camp scene, Kane resumes her role as Agnes and the scene introduces other songs supposedly associated with Native traditions and heritage; unfortunately for Agnes, they are western songs supposedly about Native people and include “Kawliga,” which she remembers as a popular song on the radio, and “Running Bear,” which “struck a chord in [her] red soul” (Kane 283). What

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\(^{57}\) While the intermission is not highlighted in either of the published texts of the play, the stage director’s prompt book makes a clear distinction as to where the intermission is placed. Additionally, the two filmed versions of this performance I have viewed (one a workshopped performance video, the other likely from the Aboriginal Achievement Awards) have placed the intermission at this point as well.
follows is an over-the-top dramatic singing of “Running Bear” with Agnes’s commentary interjected between the lines. I argue that these interjections are Kane’s attempt at disrupting the linguistic logic of the movie pitch that sells Indigenous stereotypes as profitable cultural currency. She does this by continually stepping out of her role as actor to signpost and disrupt not just the flow of the performance, but also the stereotypes contained therein.

On the banks of the river
stood running Bear, young Indian brave
on the other side of the river
stood his lovely Indian maid

[She poses on standing suitcase as Little White Dove.]

Little White Dove was her name
such a lovely sight to see

All the women were either subservient or sexy. I preferred sexy! [is dancing seductively flaunting and pouting.] And the women always followed their men ten paces behind.

But their tribes fought with each other
so their love could never be

Hollywood version. Lots of leg [Chorus line kicks]

Running Bear loved Little White Dove
with a love as big as the sky

Fringed mini-skirts. Lots of skin [More chorus line kicks.]

Running Bear loved Little White Dove
with a love that couldn’t die
Savage tragedy! [Melodramatic pose. Dives onto the floor and does frog stroke.]

He couldn’t swim the raging river
‘Cause the river was too wide

[Continues swimming various strokes] Because his name was Running Bear and not Swimming Bear!

He couldn’t reach Little White Dove
waiting on the other side

[She shades her eyes] And Indians always looked like this because if they looked like this [Covers them] they couldn’t see anything.

In the moonlight he could see her
blowing kisses across the waves
her heart was beating faster
waiting there for her brave

[Much shimmy with breasts and shoulders.] Primitive, primal, savage, supernatural love. (Kane 283)

Agnes’s (and arguably Kane’s) interjections read like a movie pitch with Agnes/Kane injecting commentary to ‘sell’ a story about Natives that pushes the humour into the realm of the ridiculous. She signposts the typical stereotypes for Aboriginal women – “subservient or sexy” – and then resists that stereotype with the camp performance of leg kicks and jokes. Since the circulation story of the stereotypes Kane is presenting continues because the stereotypes are constructed visually and linguistically as appealing, by twisting these representations to the absurd, Kane jams their circulation as cultural commodity. Kane gestures towards what many filmmakers have done to the Indigenous
woman: put her in mini-skirts with fringe and melodrama. As a result, this deflates the coy sexual dimensions in the song and the sexualization of Native women.

It is clear that Agnes’s attempts to “get in touch” with her heritage are grounded in culturally attractive but false notions of Nativeness constructed through a Westernized framework of “Hollywood tom-tom” drumming, “Princess Minni-Haha” and other “Walt Disney Injuns” (Kane 281-282), radio, movies, and what others consider to be her “tribal heritage.” Agnes’s Native identity is filtered primarily through western popular culture; Kane’s performance (both as Agnes and when she steps outside these roles) protests the stereotypes’ authority as identity markers of Aboriginality.

Even when Agnes chooses to redefine herself after leaving Aunt Sophie’s home, the influence of the media is still present and the audience sees how it affects Agnes’s sense of what constitutes “Native” and Native womanhood. When she meets Lance in Santa Fe, Agnes introduces herself as “Turtle Dove. Well, my real name is Agnes” (Kane 287). Her own choice to shift her identity and reclaim her Native culture is still founded on a Hollywood-esque concept of Indigenous identity. The name Turtle Dove holds remarkable similarity to that of “Little White Dove” from the song above and draws on film and television tropes of the connectedness of Native people – especially Native women – to nature. We again see how Agnes’s knowledge of Indigenous people and culture is based on what film and television have portrayed when Agnes proclaims “I’m from Canada [...] I know all about the Sioux. [from] Television” (287). It is not until Agnes
meets Millie that she gains any significant headway to her cultural heritage. Mill
proclaims that Agnes is “a good Cree name” (Kane, 1994, 101). Associating her name
with the Cree people connects Agnes with her heritage; it is a moment that
acknowledges that identity can exist outside the stereotypes, and reveals that her
“medicine will come from [her] own people” (Kane 291). This information about her
name is, in itself, not a significant revelation, but it is the realization that comes from this
information that is important for Agnes. She begins to associate herself not with a loose
concept of Indigeneity – as is the case with the homogenized Hollywood Indian – but to
a specific geography, group of people, and, perhaps most important, her family. It is once
Agnes finds a community of women who act as role models – in the moonlodge – that she
is able to find a connection to her roots, and become comfortable with her heritage and
identity as a Native woman. The play then ends with Millie welcoming Agnes to that circle
of women. As Selena Marie Couture argues, this “change brings focus on Agnes’
development of self as a part of a community of women and allows for a non-religious
reading of the circle” (23-24). The moonlodge becomes a site of “gender construction and
the sharing of gender-related knowledge” (Couture 24) that assists Agnes as well as the
audience in changing their understanding of Native womanhood.

This passage is in the 1994, Tony Hamill edition of the play, but is not featured in the 2005 edition. While I’ve consulted many editions of this play, the primary text I worked with and used is the Terry Goldie and Daniel David Moses 2005 edition of Moonlodge. I sign post any deviation from this text with the addition of a publishing year to signpost any citation not from the Goldie & Moses text.
“What does an Indian seem like”: The difficulty of authenticity in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

Marie Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* disrupts the linguistic construction of missing and murdered Indigenous women by culture jamming news reports and coroner reports that reinforce specific stereotypes relating to Native womanhood. Whereas Mojica and Kane twist and parody representations of Native women prevalent in popular film and television, Marie Clements creates social and political commentary on the kinds of stereotypes that circulate in news reports about murdered and missing Native women by juxtaposing these reports with representations of Native women on the stage. She uses the stereotypes of Aboriginal women that circulated during Gilbert Paul Jordan’s trial in 1988. Irene Richards, an “Indian family counsellor,” argued that “Indian people are treated second class” and cases involving “native women are taken very lightly” which is “The underlying reason” that Jordan was able to get away with murder as long as he did (“Race Bias”). A special report in *The Vancouver Sun* stated that “Jordan's choice of drinking companions - primarily middle-aged native Indian women alcoholics - helped him escape responsibility for more than two decades” (“Race Bias”). That the cases of the ten women were deemed accidental (even with blood alcohol significantly over the legal limit) reveals the level of racism that influenced the police and coroner’s reports. The victims were framed as women engaged in risky behaviour (prostitution, heavy drinking, drug or alcohol
dependency) and their deaths were therefore attributed to poor personal choices and criminal behaviour rather than racist and sexist violence. Even the recent RCMP report on murdered and missing Aboriginal women in Canada has failed to break free of the rhetoric of this circulation story of Native womanhood. Instead the report re-circulates the stereotype of the alcoholic, sexualized Native woman by stressing personal choice and risky behaviour as the causes for violence against Aboriginal women, and by stating that “vulnerability factors” such as use of intoxicants, involvement in the sex trade, and employment status all factor into the prevalence of violence against Aboriginal women. Positioning violence in correlation with such “vulnerability factors” transfers responsibility onto the victims and participates in a circulation story that propagates harmful stereotypes of Native women. While the report claims “Any discussion of victim characteristics is vulnerable to the accusation that blame is being assigned to the victim. There is no such intent here” (RCMP 17) one cannot help but recognize that the language here sustains racist stereotypes of Aboriginal people (drunk, prostitutes, lazy). These representational strategies used by the RCMP to account for the violence against Aboriginal women are then distributed to corporate media where they are re-circulated back to the Canadian mainstream public, thereby allowing these stereotypes to continue largely unchallenged.

In a performance that draws inspiration from a series of murders, Clements never allows these women to be invisible in performance, and that is what makes The
Unnatural and Accidental Women stand out. The women are always present on stage and this dramaturgical strategy invariably reminds the audience that these women were real women with real experiences that were largely ignored in the investigations into their deaths. The Unnatural and Accidental Women tackles the “vanishing” or invisible “Indian.” This stereotype is denounced through the very act of representing the murdered women on stage. The acts of survivance in the play offer opportunities for self-definition (survival of self) while creating a text that can become part of the continuation of Native stories (archive).59 This is especially poignant when the slides of the coroner reports are projected for the audience to see and stand in contrast to the women presented on stage. Instead of reducing the stereotype to an absurd stock character to be laughed at, Clements presents characters who are humorous without while also distancing the women from the stereotypes that circulate through the various media, police, and coroner reports. Humour is used in a slightly different way in Clements’s play than in the other plays explored in this chapter. The Unnatural and Accidental Women presents some of the most common (and damaging) stereotypes of Native women – the sexualized woman and the alcoholic woman – but disrupts their circulation story by undermining their authority over representation. The stereotypes are not where the play draws its humour; instead of using ridicule to destabilize the stereotypes as Mojica and

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59 I continue my discussion of survivance in chapter five and connect it to the performance of personal narratives.
Kane’s performances do, Clements uses humour to develop the characters’ personalities. The interruption of the stereotypes’ cultural power and momentum comes from its inability to hold its authority during the performance. It is in this juxtaposition between the characters and the coroner reports (slides) that Clements is able to jam the message that the murders were “unnatural and accidental.”

Those harmful stereotypes mentioned above make their appearance where the play is at its most discerning; Clements overlays themes of sexualized, gender-based violence, stereotypes, and identity in critically engaging ways. In the first half, we see Valerie sexually assaulted by the dresser, which is a personification of the murderer, Gilbert, and right after the murderer/dresser proclaims “you’re a regular Hollywood dairy cow [...] I said, you’re a real Pocahontas” (Clements, 2005, 31). The invocation of Pocahontas and Hollywood foregrounds the connection between stereotypes and violence. I discuss representations of violence in this scene and in The Unnatural and Accidental Women in greater detail in chapter three. For now, I wish only to demonstrate how stereotypes and violence go hand-in-hand in this play. The systemic violence against Aboriginal girls and women is a real outcome of the violence of stereotypes, and it is part of a damaging trajectory that starts with the internalization of stereotypes that can, and do, lead to various forms of physical and psychological trauma.

The juxtaposition, and blurring, of the historical and the fictional in The Unnatural and Accidental Women challenges any desire the spectator may have for historical and
subjective authenticity. Not only does Clements present a juxtaposition between the representation of historical figures of the murdered women (Valerie, Mavis, Aunt Shadie, Violet, Verna, Rose and the Barbershop Women) and the fictional protagonist Rebecca, but also between the culturally constructed identities (the stereotypes of self-destructive behaviour) and the “familial memories belonging to those who knew the women killed” (Maufort, 2008, 197). Stereotypes including lazy, drunk, or sexually available are all presented in the historical figures of the performance – the murdered women – because this is how the police or media characterized these women. The women are not single-sided characters, however, they are funny, personable, and relatable women who are more than the sum total of society’s misrepresentations of them. The ghosts in the performance destabilize the quest for authenticity; they are the historically-based characters, but their position in the play as both ghosts (always already dead) and as part of the imagistic and surrealist aspects of the performance means that their presence denies a reading of these women as ‘authentic.’ The performance diverges from the historical into the fictive in the character of Rebecca, and we are again faced with problems of authenticity. The character who appears to be the most historical – that is,

60 For more on the juxtaposition between the fictional and the historical see chapter five.

61 The most pervasive and destructive stereotypes are those that, as Miller points out, are often used across racial lines to depict all of English Canada’s ethnic others; these are, again, the drunk, lazy, violent, abusive, stupid, sullen, and/or self-abusive stereotypes.
not abstract, surreal, a ghost – is the character who is pure fiction. Rebecca provides an alternative to the misrepresentations that ‘ghost’ the ghosts of the murdered women, but her placement firmly in the fictional denies our desires to focus on her character as the authentic Native woman.

As I have discussed earlier, I chose to explore the pushback to representations of Native women from the perspective of theatre because I believe the theatre has an ability to transform opinions in a way that is often lost in film, and because these performances indirectly (if not directly) address the crux of the problems with misrepresentation and appropriation. Unlike the other plays discussed in this chapter, however, Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* has been adapted to film, giving me the opportunity to discuss the film and the play both in relation to each other as well as to the stereotype of the “vanishing Indian” I mentioned above.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed theater’s ability to disseminate positive representations of Native women because it is not subject to the same narrative pull that film-based media is. In an interview with the Queensland Courier Mail, Margo Kane stated that (theatre) directors she had worked with often could not see beyond their “Western ways of working, and didn’t understand that indigenous people needed to develop their own voice and tell their stories in their own way. In a sense, it was just another kind of exploitation, because the indigenous stories were expected to be presented in ways that Western people were used to” (Cotes, May 1999). While Kane is
speaking of the theatre specifically, this pull to tell stories from a traditional, western methodology and perspective is perhaps even more applicable in the development and production of film-based media. This is no clearer than in the film adaptation of Clements’s play, *Unnatural and Accidental*. The film adaptation is award-winning, yet it feels less honest than its theatrical counterpart. The film certainly achieved its goal of reaching audiences and drawing their attention to the missing and murdered Native women in Canada. It was featured at both the Toronto and the Vancouver International Film Festivals before being released to theatres and then to home DVD. Reviews even noticed the film’s potential to reach audiences and inform them of contemporary Aboriginal issues, but the film lost the potency of the theatrical performance in this regard. One reviewer suggests that the film “falls under the category of ‘important movie’” (Monk); however, the same reviewer also argued that “If this movie is about reclaiming dignity and overcoming violence, it would have been nice to see a suggestion

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62 My intentions with bringing the film into discussion here are to highlight a comparison between the performance and the filmic adaptation in terms of its narrative and the disservice it does to the subjects it claims to represent. For a more detailed comparison, Erin Wunker’s “The. Women. The Subject(s) of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women and Unnatural and Accidental*” provides an excellent discussion of the play and the film. She highlights the concerns I also had over the change in the film’s title from “The Unnatural and Accidental Women” to “Unnatural and Accidental” and argues that the removal of two words “The” and “Women” commits a disservice to the women of the play (and the women they represent) in a performance that has primarily been about re-establishing the subjectivity of the forgotten, missing, and murdered Native women of Vancouver’s DTES (and Canada in general) and subjects Clements’s performance to a more traditional (that is, patriarchal) system.

63 I would not, however, consider the film a financial success. Its total box-office earnings were just over five thousand dollars in a two-week theatre run (Box Office Mojo).
of that on screen instead of the emphasis on sexual violence” (Monk). While I agree that
the film is missing the reclaiming of dignity, I disagree with the reasons highlighted as the
problem. The emphasis on sexual violence is significant because there was no emphasis
placed on these very violent deaths. Monk’s claim that the film’s failing was that it
“inevitably place[s] us in the uncomfortable position of voyeur,” is the point of the film
and the play. The play compels us to bear witness and asks audiences to consider our
“response-ability”\textsuperscript{64} to the performances. Where the play succeeds and the film fails is
in the representation of this violence. The play places the women as central characters;
these women are important both to the development of the plot and the performance
of that plot. They are not just the victims of the barber. The women in the play are
individuals with active roles in both the first and second half of the play, and they are
instigators of both plot and comic relief; the film, however, shifts the focus back to the
murderer (in the film he is a mechanic named Norman) and the women are relegated to
the space of victims (again).\textsuperscript{65}

At first I failed to articulate why I disliked the film as much as I did. I wanted to

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\textsuperscript{64} I am drawing on Kimberly Blaeser’s (Ojibway) idea of reader’s responsibility to respond to the text as it
is discussed in Kim Anderson’s \textit{A Recognition of Being}. This speaks to “the reader’s responsibility to respond to the text”
and assumes that the listener, the audience, the witness “has as much a part in the creation of the story as the teller”
thus the audience “carries responsibility for the knowledge that is transmitted” (2001, 49).

\textsuperscript{65} A more detailed discussion on the representation and strategies of representing violence in \textit{The Unnatural and Accidental Women}
can be found in chapter three.
blame the directing or the cinematography, but in time I realized it was the story the film was trying to tell that bothered me most. The film was designed with the expectations of audiences raised on certain kinds of images of Nativeness and certain expectations of storytelling. These expectations cling to the circulation story of Native womanhood, and it re-circulates images of Native women as sexualized, alcoholic, pseudo-victims to anticipate those expectations. The play, however, unsettles this image by refusing this circulation story and giving the women a central role in performance. Clements does not completely reject the circulation story. In fact, she incorporates it through the use of the slide projections of the coroner reports. Clements jams the coroner reports’ intended messages by placing the murdered women front and centre in the performance. In the film, the murdered women became secondary characters to the revenge narrative presented in the play’s second half. The play does a much better job portraying the complex identities throughout the entire performance. They are, by all accounts, poor women who may also be alcoholics who live and work in Vancouver’s DTES; however, these are not the only traits that characterize these women. Aunt Shadie is a mother and “use to be a real good trapper” (Clements, 2005, 38); Mavis has a loneliness she tries to relieve by trying to make connection with people from her past; Valerie and Verna are mothers “searching to do the right thing” (6); Rose is a soft-hearted but thorny switchboard operator (5). We learn more about these women than just that they are lonely, poor, alcoholic women who were victims of a violent death – which is how the film
presents them. In fact, the credits only identify the women by colour of their outfit, suggesting that they need not be named – which is a meaningful element of the play. In the first half the dresser asks Valerie to pick a drawer and then reveals the voices of her sons Tommy and Evan. When the voices from the drawers stop replying Valerie “gets real close to the drawers” and she’s “listening” (Clements, 2005, 51). What follows next is the dresser attacking Valerie again, letting “her have it with all the drawers [...] It keeps punching her till she lays on the floor semi-conscious” then “fondl[es] her breasts” (51). This scene provides depth to her character: we learn about Valerie, her struggles as a mother and with drinking (Clements, 2005, 48), and, perhaps most significantly, something about her life and her desires. The film stages similar moments, but the focus is primarily on the murderer, Norman (played by Callum Keith Rennie). The play, in this way, is more engaging and effective at disrupting the circulation of stereotypes than the film adaptation.

The sense of community created by the women in the first half (which transitions into the second half) disappears almost completely in the film. My reading of the play had always been that these two worlds were on equal footing and that each served the

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In fact, without prior knowledge of the play prior to screening the film, I likely would not have seen even the faint glimpses of community that remained. I watched the film desperate to find traces of the play (especially the first half) to hold on to. Erin Wunker also has a discussion on the loss of community in the film in her article “The. Women. The Subject(s) of The Unnatural and Accidental Women and Unnatural and Accidental.”
other to push the story forward. The scenography of the performance highlights the women’s loneliness. Clements suggests that the first half, with the ghosts of the murdered women, “should have a black and white picture feel” and highlights the lack of community for the women in the first half. The scenes with the women happen episodically and appear separate from the others in the performance. They appear within the same space but never the same time and this creates a divide between the women and the potential for a community. It is Aunt Shadie who acts as a connecting force, and her role as a touchstone between the women is later represented by her living daughter, Rebecca. This failed to translate to film. In fact, the very nature of the camera’s lens seems to have served only to fragment the women from each other more. Erin Wunker observed that “the camera keeps the women separate, showing them in a dilapidated hotel, all looking out from their own solitary rooms” (Wunker 175). The reliance on narrative is, in many, but not all cases, film and television’s downside. The play, not experiencing the same demands of cinematic narrative, pushes identity, memory, and community to the forefront of the performance. That is to say, the story becomes secondary to the women themselves; the story works for the women, not the other way around. Non-linear memory becomes the driving force, and the dramaturgical style of the theatrical performance is strengthened by this. I contend it is because the film was (and is) reliant on narrative that it fails to achieve all the play does. While the film attempted to keep some of the surreal and imagistic attributes of the play (and its performances),
they failed to work in the same way as they did in the performance.

By the second half, the women have come together to form a community in support of Rebecca. It is “her search that literally sets the stage for the murdered women to tell their stories” (Wunker 166). The implication is that Native womanhood can be redefined through a community of women supporting each other and sharing their stories. Rebecca’s character serves as the catalyst for these stories to be told; this is something that is lost in the film adaptation. The creation of a community of Native women, who, by the end of the performance, sit down to a banquet together, is important. The humour the women create in the second half is also lost in the film version of the play. The women spend the majority of the second half rummaging through Rebecca’s apartment, wearing her underwear (Clements, 2005, 101), commenting on the nature of bathroom books and reading a book “one shit at a time” (70), pinching Ron’s bum while he sleeps (90), or fantasizing about “a Harlequin Romance set in Canada. The Mountie, the horse and the Indian maiden” (78). The humour is both sly and bawdy, and it not only gives depth to the women’s interests and desires, but it disrupts the sexual objectification of Native women. Here the women are active agents, they are subjects with desires, not objects to be desired. It presents a distinctly Indigenous humour that destabilizes the kind of thinking that creates the myth of the “Indian maiden.” All of these exchanges, however, are markedly absent from the film, which deflates any possibility of subjectivity for the women. As Rebecca reconnects with
her mother, and by extension, her Aboriginal roots, we are given an image of Native women who exist outside the misrepresentations of film and television. We see a community of women who do not, and cannot, fit into a singular view of Native womanhood.

Rebecca challenges Ron and Gilbert’s assumptions about Native women by figuratively attacking Ron’s political incorrectness and literally attacking Gilbert. After a morning of “true confession” and “pinched” asses, Rebecca scorns Ron’s attempts at political correctness as well as his palatially incorrect assumptions about “Ind...First Na...” (Clements, 2005, 96) – Aboriginal people, all before they “finished [their] first cup of coffee” (97). She derides his faltering, “And what? You were going to say Indians. Oh, don’t get all politically correct on me” (96), then asking, “You got a thing against Indians?” before informing him that she is “part Indian” (Clements, 2005, 96). Rebecca challenges Ron’s assumptions of what an “Indian” should look and behave like simply by remaining unidentifiable as “Indian” to Ron, who thought she was “Italian or something” (Clements, 2005, 97). While this could be read as Rebecca’s assimilation into dominant culture, I contend that Ron’s assumptions are the failure to reconcile his vision of Native identity.

Two of the only male characters in the play, and they are the representation of law enforcement and perpetrator(s) of violence against Native women, respectively. These characters represent the two causes of the silencing of the murdered/missing women in Canada. The perpetrators are those who physically silence Native women through acts of sexual and/or gender-based violence. While law enforcement agencies are those who silenced Native women by failing to fully investigate their murders/disappearances.
— based on misrepresentations and stereotypes — and the identity presented to him by Rebecca. That is to say, it is not Rebecca’s ability to “pass” as non-Native, but Ron’s inability to see Native women beyond existing stereotypes. By acknowledging these misconceptions, the play positions the representation of Native womanhood in direct opposition to the stereotypes so ingrained in Canadian society. In suggesting that the “good part” of her is “Indian,” Rebecca is also indirectly referencing her maternal bloodline as a positive side of her. It is the strong spirit of her mother, the connection back to her mother’s roots, that gives Rebecca strength. When Ron suggests that Rebecca does not “seem Indian,” Rebecca again challenges Ron’s expectations:

what does an Indian seem like? Let me guess – you probably think that, if an Indian goes to university or watches T.V., it makes them the same as every other Canadian. Only less. The big melting pot. The only problem is you can’t melt an Indian. You can’t kill a stone. You can grind it down to sand, but it’s still there sifting through everything forever. (Clements, 2005, 97)

Rebecca both dismisses the cliché images of Nativeness and rejects the assimilation practices of Canadian institutions that seek to homogenize and marginalize Native women.

This anti-assimilation theme reappears again when Rebecca decides to grow her hair back and “braid it like [she] used to” (Clements, 2005, 119). This appearance of, and the desire to wear, braided hair can be “considered performing part of Indigenous identity” (Fitzgerald, 2007, 177) inherited from memories of her mother. It is through the
discovery of her mother’s braided hair (which functions as a symbol of Native womanhood throughout the play), that Rebecca learns of the fate of her mother and the other women. From this discovery, Rebecca is able to re-connect with a positive sense of her own Native womanhood, which culminates with the revenge of her mother’s death and a return to a community of Native women. The braided hair is a clear image of Rebecca’s mother and by extension of her Aboriginal heritage. Deciding to grow her hair back, she goes against Gilbert’s livelihood as a barber, which evinces images of defying the patriarchal Gilbert who uses “every lie, every curve” to “kill” Native women (Clements, 2005,125). The discovery of the braids and the desire to reclaim a small part of her Aboriginal identity is the tipping point that allows Rebecca to become the trapper in the final scene with Gilbert. It is her reclaimed sense of positive Native womanhood and a promise to return to a sense of community that gives her the strength to survive the threats of violence from Gilbert in the final scene. The hair in the play becomes symbolic of Native womanhood in Canadian society and this scene harkens to the devastation of culture that Native women, and behind them Native communities, experienced as a result of colonial practices.

In 2013, contemporary Native artist Cannupa Hanska Luger (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara/Lakota) presented an exhibition at the Museum of
Contemporary Native Art titled “Stereotype: Misconceptions of the Native American.”

At the core of this exhibition (and accompanying performance art piece) was the need to acknowledge stereotypes, offer them up for discussion, and then dismantle or destroy them. “Stereotype” was a series of handmade ceramic boom-boxes and radios accessorized with common tropes or appropriated images from Native culture. Each stereo represented a stereotype that the artist had encountered within contemporary North American culture. At the end of the exhibition, Cannupa Hanska Luger “picked up each Stereotype, looked it over, held it to the audience as he explained its being and existence, [gave] a final call for words or thoughts – then he dropped each one, giving it to nature and the elements, mostly gravity. Each Stereotype shattered as it landed upon a [...] rock” (Jacobs). Once the stereotype was destroyed, the shattered pieces were returned to the podium where the stereotype once sat where it remained on display for the remainder of the exhibition. This act of culture jamming not only interrupts profit-driven consumption of Indigenous images, but the circulation of those very images. Patricia Hill Collins writes that “the journey toward self-definition offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined, controlling images [...] Replacing negative images with positive ones can be equally problematic if the function of stereotypes as controlling

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His name often appears as just Cannupa Hanska; he is listed in the works cited under Luger.

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The artist argued that selling the pieces would reinforce the stereotypes and allow them to continue to circulate.
images remains unrecognized” (Hill Collins 106). During the performance that accompanied the exhibition, Hanska Luger prosaically presents the stereotype to the audience, discusses its impact on identity formation and understanding of self, and then destroys it, not through violence, but by simply letting it go. It is not the subjective self, but the objectified, commercialized, racialized stereotypes that Hanska Luger destroys. It is not just the destruction of the stereotypes, but also a moving past these stereotypes. The exhibition engaged with the stereotypes in order to open a dialogue about the misconceptions and their causes, but also offered an opportunity to expose the “ironies and disparities” between the stereotype presented and the material realities for Indigenous people (Knopf 356). Luger tackles contemporary culture and representations of Aboriginality in film and television with his stereo “The Stefani,” which was created as a push-back against Native appropriation used in Stefani’s performance in the video discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

“The Stefani” stereo was an old-fashioned stereo which was painted completely white. It had a white braided strap around the front, some white fur over the stereo handle, and a white bird feather attached at the top and side. This stereo echoes Stefani’s all white outfit, with blonde-white braids, and white feather featured prominently throughout the “Looking Hot” video. The symbolic (and literal) act of Luger even created a stereotype based on his own identity, “The Luger,” which dispels many of the stereotypes he had internalized.
destroying the stereotypes portrayed by Stefani and others is powerful.\textsuperscript{71} Hanska Luger argues that the offense at the heart of the No Doubt video would be that of the over sexualization of women particularly toward the exotic other. The video continues the tradition of popular media treating Native culture as if it's part of the public domain, as if one can simply go into this reservoir of stereotypical images and draw from it without any kind of limitation or concern. It reflects our historical amnesia. (Luger)

By refusing to sell these stereotypes, and by refusing to allow ownership over Indigenous images, and by creating a site of critical engagement, Hanska Luger was able to halt the re-circulation of these images. Instead, Hanska Luger’s exhibition, much like the plays explored in this chapter, presents the stereotypes for recognition, and then ultimately deconstructs them (in the case of Hanska Luger’s exhibition and Mojica’s Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides, quite literally deconstruct the stereotypes). Bhabha argues that judging "the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its effectivity" (Bhabha 95).

Just as Cannupa Hanska Luger offers up each stereotype for discussion and ultimately its destruction, \textit{Moonlodge}, \textit{The Unnatural and Accidental Women}, and \textit{Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots} all push back against the stereotypes internalized

\footnote{\textit{Other stereos included “The Barrymore” (based on the image on Drew Barrymore’s Facebook page. Hanska argues that the objects that celebrities use, like Barrymore’s fake headdress, are themselves not just appropriating Indigenous culture, they are intended to be “thrown away. These products create a mentality of disrespect to the culture [...] They do not honor the aesthetic; they steal and consume an identity” (Hanska)), “the Curtis” (a reference to Edward Curtis) as well as the more generalized stereotypes of “The Indian Princess,” “the Plastic Shaman,” and “The Drunk.”}}
by the women in the plays and invite spectators not only to confront harmful stereotypes, but also, to borrow Robert Appleford’s phrasing, “invite the audience to participate in the exorcism of stereotype” (Appleford, 2001, 237). At the heart of each of the performances is a struggle for self-definition and a release from the misconceptions of Native women created by the representations in film and television. Each playwright interrupts the circulation story of those harmful (mis)representations of Native womanhood. Whether the performances attempt this in juxtaposition to comedic melodramatic appropriation of the simulative stereotypes or through outright rejection of the stereotypes, each performance points to the desire to be viewed, not as a fixed set of characteristics, but through self-definition. Each pushes back against the stereotypes and their unconscious circulation in dominant culture.
Throughout history women have absorbed the horror of wars, street violence, domestic brutality, and personal intimidation. Hence we ourselves have become a part of the violence and have been denied a constructive outlet for expressing our horror. We use stories to create drama which offers support for women in the struggle against violence.

– Spiderwoman flyer qtd in Canning 167

Violence against Aboriginal women in Canada is a serious problem that has prompted human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, to declare that the prevalence and severity of violence directed towards Aboriginal women constitutes a human rights crisis (“Violence” 2). In 2014 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) released their Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview. The report’s claim that between 1980 and 2012 there was a total of 1,181 reported cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women indicates that Aboriginal women are “over-represented among Canada’s murdered and missing women” (RCMP
3). Even reported cases of missing or murdered women were often treated with lackluster attitude; systemic racism and biases triggered investigators, coroners, politicians, and reporters to treat absences as unfortunate consequences of personal circumstance rather than acts of violence against Canadian citizens worthy of further investigation or intervention. The Highway of Tears is a stretch of Highway 16 running through northern British Columbia, Canada and is the site of multiple disappearances and murders of (mostly) Aboriginal women. The prominence of violence against these women is attributed to a deficiency in available infrastructure between communities in northern

There is a discrepancy in this number being reported to the Canadian public. The RCMP report states 1,181; however, CBC, APTN, The Toronto Sun, Huffington Post, the Quebec Native Women May 6th 2014 press release, and the information page for the Saskatchewan Craft Council (and the REDress Project) all state 1,186. Additionally, Tanya Tagaq’s performance at the Polaris Gala in 2014 featured 1,182 names. What the discrepancies suggest, and what the RCMP’s numbers reveal is that the number only accounts for those police cases that were made available to the RCMP and so it does not include cases that were reported, but never filed, or cases that were never reported (RCMP 8). The RCMP also acknowledges that differences in the total stated number are a result of “differences in scope, collection methodology, data mismatches, and/or purging of records from closed files” (RCMP 6). This number certainly does not take into account the numbers of Aboriginal women and children who experience violence that does not result in disappearance or death.
British Columbia and frequent hitchhiking as a result of these deficiencies. Despite these disappearances being an ongoing occurrence since the 1970s, no substantial police or political efforts to solve or prevent these disappearances have taken place. The same inaction is seen time and again in cases of serial murderers who target Aboriginal women. Both Robert Pickton and Gilbert Paul Jordan spent decades preying on Aboriginal women, many of whom came from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES), without much intervention by police – even after tips implicating Pickton, or catching Jordan in the act (more than once). The lack of action by police and politicians points to the diminished sense of value placed on the victims of these crimes. All of this links to an untoward tradition of cultural and historical ‘absences’ of Native women – both physical and representational absences. In light of the poor infrastructure and prevalence of violence against Native women, every year in Canada activists and Aboriginal community members call on the Canadian government for inquiries and action, and every year they

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A report complied by the Lheidli T’enneh First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Prince George Native Friendship Centre, and Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment & Training Association identifies that not only is the victim profile (the commonality of victims) a factor in the women taking chances by travelling/hitchhiking Highway 16, but poverty, lack of infrastructure, and isolation of communities with poor services, transportation, and other infrastructures are root causes of the frequency of Indigenous women travelling along the highway. The report acknowledges that “Many of the First Nation communities (Indian reserves) along Highway 16 are situated many miles from town and city centers. A majority of these First Nation communities do not have business, recreation, or other services that are available in the towns and cities. Poverty, coupled with the need to buy essential items such as food and clothing, requires travel from these communities to the nearest town or city” and that “youth have travelled, and will continue to travel by any” (17). Similar reports in newspapers, such as The Globe and Mail (Dhillon and Bailey, 30 May 2014), identify a correlation between the prevalence of violence and the lack of services and infrastructure.
are told by government officials that an inquiry “it isn’t really high on our radar” (Mansbridge).

Native playwrights have used the theatre as a way to draw attention to the ubiquity of the violence described above, and violence against Aboriginal women has played a significant role in Aboriginal theatre since its renaissance during the late 1980s in Canada. In fact, Drew Hayden Taylor once estimated that more than 75 percent of Aboriginal plays contained some form of rape in them (D.H. Taylor 67), and while that number is speculation, it certainly speaks to his perception of sexual violence’s prevalence in the theatre created by his contemporaries. Native women playwrights were at the heart of this renaissance and were creating theatre that demonstrated their own experiences. Playwrights like Marie Clements, Shirley Cheechoo, Margo Kane, Yvette Nolan, and Monique Mojica, and theatre groups like Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, Native Earth Performing Arts, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group, Red Roots Theatre, and Full Circle have showcased (and in many instances continue to showcase) performances and plays by Native women that highlight their experiences as Native women and serve as an important push towards decolonization and a push-back against the systemic violence described above.

This chapter is concerned with the representation of sexualized violence on stage in Moonlodge, Path With No Moccasins, Annie Mae’s Movement, and The Unnatural and Accidental Women. In discussing the representation of sexual violence in Highway’s Dry
Lips, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins argue that “Women’s bodies often function in post-colonial theatre as the spaces on and through which larger territorial or cultural battles are being fought” (214). If we apply this interpretation of post-colonial theatre to Native Canadian women’s theatre, then we must ask ourselves if the plays by Native women stage similar interventions on and through their bodies, and, if so, what is the larger battle being fought? How does it differ from the battle fought by male or non-Native playwrights? There is clearly a case for this kind of post-colonial intervention, however, its appearance is marked by a difference in dramaturgical strategies used to stage that intervention. Ric Knowles carries this argument further and suggests that the representation of rape of Indigenous women in Canadian theatre is emblematic of colonization of the land and its people, but this strategy may ultimately “risk dematerializing the experience of their female subjects by metaphorically representing the effects of Christianity and colonization on Native spirituality through rape” (Knowles 140). The playwrights under discussion here use different dramaturgical strategies to perform violence, but the playwrights offer strategies that stage an “active attempt to re-member: to reconstruct coherent psychological and social subjectivities” (Knowles 143). How do the plays of Marie Clements, Margo Kane, Shirley Cheechoo, and Yvette Nolan represent rape on stage, and how do those representations of violence account for spectators’ reception of violence? What are the consequences of re-enacting sexualized violence against Native women on stage? I am interested not just in why
violence is represented in these plays, but *how* violence is represented and the implications of such portrayals.

Charlotte Canning argues that to avoid the representation of rape becoming “pornographically erotic” some artists will deploy alternative strategies of representation “so that what is on stage are the ideas behind rape rather than the act itself” (Canning 170; also see D. Taylor, 1997, 4). To deflect the “usual traps of visibility: surveillance, fetishism, voyeurism, and sometimes, death” (P. Phelan 10-11), each playwright employs a Brechtian-style displacement as a critical strategy for representing rape on stage. This is accomplished through the *intentional displacement* of the male perpetrator of violence, and the *intentional placement* of the female characters as the central focus of the performance (which I will stylize as dis/placement). In this way, dis/placement echoes both the call for subjectivity by feminists and the concepts of displacement seen in Lacan. These displacements not only politicize violence against Native women, but they also offer a more sensitive approach to representing rape on stage and call on the audience to act as witnesses. In fact, these performances present violence in such a way that they circumvent the audience’s gaze and reject the objectification of Indigenous bodies on stage without sacrificing the importance of witnessing. This is a critically powerful strategy to counter dominant culture’s “percepticide” (D. Taylor, 1997, 259): the material and inherent danger in *not looking*.

At its core, dis/placement in performance rejects the silencing of sexual violence
by shifting spectatorial attention from the traditional subject (the attacker) to the traditional other (the women). The strategies that allow for this shift in spectatorial attention also create what Brecht has called the verfremdungseffekt (V-effekt), which encourages the spectator’s detachment from the performance while also denying the spectator’s ability to remain unseen. We are put into a dual role of both spectator and witnesses to Native women’s testimony of trauma, and we are encouraged to take on the responsibilities that witnesses (as holders of the story) have. Unlike traditional displacements from both physical location and historical spaces, Native women’s theatre’s use of dis/placement dislocates traditional perspectives (murderer, attacker, authoritative, institutional) and calls us out on dominant culture’s “percepticide.”

There are many ways that the plays discussed in this chapter engage us in the role of witnesses. As discussed in chapter two with regards to the liveness of theatre, the positioning of the audience can have the effect of audience members appearing to be a part of the performance. Of course audience responses are not uniform, and Brecht’s V-effekt’s attempt at distancing the audience from the characters on stage cannot be secured, and in some instances causes the opposite outcome. The performances under discussion here acknowledge this possibility and embed in their dramaturgy a way to address different audience constituencies that are witnessing the representation of rape on stage. By staging imagistic and highly stylized violence, the playwrights are able to shift our attention from the act of violence to the Native women on stage.
The pronoun “we” that I use to describe the audience is a fractured one. It is subject both to the diversity of audience members as well as the shifting signification of its use. I want to suggest that the term “audience” (or “we”) is used “as a model for intersubjective relations as opposed to a model for a unified community” (Rayner, 1993, 6). It is a way to imagine a community of witnesses who share a similar experience (the theatrical event) without erasing individual differences or undermining the possibilities of multiple interpretations of the same, shared event. In an editorial comment in *Theatre Journal*, Ric Knowles acknowledges that since the 1990s “scholars have tended to write less about audiences and more about spectators and spectatorship. Perhaps this is because ‘the audience’ refers to a collectivity, while ‘the spectator’ connotes something more atomized, indicative of a more fractured or pluralistic understanding of reception” (Knowles, 2014, xi). I, however, do not want to completely detach issues of spectatorship or audience from the sense of community that the theatrical event creates. Nor do I wish to erase the community that the plays under discussion here inevitably invoke through their audience configuration or dramaturgical strategies. While there is the possibility (or at least the hope) of a “we - the audience,” either through theatrical staging or from the theatre’s “sense of occasion” that forms a “temporal idea of group” (Rayner, 1993, 11), I must still account for the differences that exist in the interpretation of the plays under discussion here.

One such difference is that audience members may very well come from
Indigenous backgrounds, which will produce reactions, that for quite clear historical, cultural, and political reasons, will not necessarily align with spectators who come from dominant culture. Consequently, the Brechtian dis/placement in these performances may not function in the same way if, for example, those spectators are reflexively seeing their own experiences performed back to them on stage. I will concede that dis/placement in these plays is not seamless, however, it is an effective strategy for performing violence on stage. The dramaturgical strategies embedded in Kane, Cheechoo, Nolan, and Clements’s plays are pro-actively addressing some of the difficulties in performing violence in the theatre. We are denied access to those violent moments on stage except in the most abstract ways. In its place, we are offered only the reactions of the victims/survivors, the effects of which are significant. First, it problematizes our understanding of these moments through a denaturalization of violence. Second, it invites the audience to become witnesses to the trauma narratives and to disengage from dominant culture’s percepticide. Finally, the dramaturgical strategy of dis/placement helps to offset the dangers inherent in performing violence on stage. This means that the playwrights are able to speak to the audience members who are much more embedded in the experiences performed on stage. This is radically

We certainly cannot assume that the responses to these plays will be similar even within one ethnic or racial group. The perspectives of urban Indigenous peoples may well be different from reserve citizens, for example.
different in comparison to contemporary representations of rape, such as in Tomson Highway’s *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. In *Dry Lips*, Patsy Pegahmaghabow is raped with a crucifix by Dickie Bird (107) and the whole scene is performed on stage for audiences to witness. While the scene is intended to criticize the prevalence of violence against Aboriginal women, Highway received considerable criticism for his representation of violence and this scene in particular was chided for its misogyny and graphic depictions of sexualized violence that have resulted in audience members experiencing secondary trauma. Dis/placement, as a dramaturgical strategy in the plays under discussion here helps to stave off (or at least minimalize) the possibility of secondary trauma, and spurns the trope of the vanished victim/survivor, which would compound the already ubiquitous

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See Marian Botsford Fraser’s article “Contempt for Women Overshadows Powerful Play” in the April 17, 1991 edition of the *Globe and Mail* in which she claims *Dry Lips* is “a drama studded with misogyny” and “its structure, tone, language, and point of view” all demonstrate the play’s “contempt for women” so that it is “not a play about misogyny, but [...] a drama studded” with it. (Botsford Fraser). Also see both Jennifer Lee Covert’s *A Balancing Act: The Canonization of Tomson Highway* and Sarah MacKenzie’s *Representations of Rape and Gendered Violence in the Drama of Tomson Highway* for a more in-depth discussion of this play and its criticism.

Highway has argued that this scene is symbolic of the violence the church has done to Native communities (see Acoose 63; Shackleton, 2002, 42). In fact this scene is highly symbolic on many levels. On the one layer is the violence done by the church and colonization as represented by the crucifix. Yet another is in the violence against Patsy Pegahmaghabow who is associated with the trickster figure, and therefore representative of Aboriginal culture. Finally, it is the very literal representation of violence against women in Native communities.
vanishing Indian stereotype.\footnote{76}

Violence and turning points

As mentioned earlier, almost all of the foundational texts explored in this dissertation stage turning points; key moments in the performances where the playwrights are able to reframe and reclaim Indigenous womanhood. There are arguably several of these moments in each of the plays under discussion and each turning point is a moment where the spectator witnesses Native women pushing back against the aftermath of the settler colonial state. We see one example of such turning points in my discussion of the playwrights’ use of culture jamming to disrupt the re-circulation of harmful stereotypes in chapter two. Chapter four’s exploration of staging a return to home and/or community is a turning point towards reclaiming identity and rejecting the displacements caused by residential schools, 60s scoops, or other policies of displacement. Another such turning

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Such as the secondary trauma experienced by Marie Annharte Baker after watching the rape scene in Tomson Highway’s Dry Lips (see above).

Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of the male characters in these plays is beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation, however it is important to note that the playwrights do not paint all male characters with the same brush. There may be inclination to read the male characters, both the absent and the present ones, as damaging male stereotypes, but to do so would ignore all the moments where male characters function as positive, or at the very least neutral characters in the performances. Admittedly some of these characters are “name-dropped” and not represented directly, but the playwrights all signpost that not all men are perpetrators of violence or figures symbolic of dominant male culture.
point appears in *Moonlodge, Path With No Moccasins, The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, and to a different degree in *Annie Mae’s Movement* after staging sexualized violence based on a historical incident. In this chapter I am interested in the specific labour performed by the volta that appears around representations of sexualized violence: voltas that are accentuated by their placement before a structural break in the performance, such as the intermission or the performance’s conclusion. The turning points discussed in this chapter are a way for the playwrights to draw attention to the way acts of violence inform or affect the identity-formation process and a way to reassert subjectivity and reclaim Indigenous womanhood in the wake of such violence. The turning points explored in this chapter are not straightforward and have the potential to be read as if positive identity formation can result from the experience of violence, or that it is through experiences of violence that Indigenous women reclaim a positive sense of womanhood in these plays. However, such an interpretation of these moments underestimates their importance in drawing theatre audiences’ attention to historically-based violence against Indigenous women and the importance of what happens after

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Attributing the violence to a historical referent is easy for most of the foundational texts which draw on historical events (personal or otherwise). Margo Kane’s play, however, does not completely fit this historical designation. Kane has stated multiple times that the play is a work of fiction based on conversations with other Native women as well as drawn on her own life experiences. While there may be elements from real-life (that is lived) experiences of Kane or other Native women, there is no blueprint to be able to attribute aspects of the performance to the historical or the fictional. My use of historically-based violence in relation to *Moonlodge* is not based on the actuality of the violence Kane represents, but on the historical realities of sexualized violence for Indigenous women.
those moments of violence.

These plays all deal with aspects of history; they are memorials to the violence and the aftershocks of colonization (stereotypes and misrepresentations, displacement, violence, racism). They position the violence as a memory and part of the narrative flow of each play, but at their core is a theme of memorial and testimony. Audiences are positioned as witnesses to acts of testimony, the significance of which should not be underestimated. Trauma operates as a means through which subjectivity is erased. The traumatic experience is one “that attempt[s] to objectify the subject and mutilate or annihilate subjectivity” (Oliver, 2004, 193). The plays are more positive than some of the past theatrical representations of women who come to strength of character after moments of violence, since almost all of the plays under discussion here reject the traditional death-of-protagonist trope.78

Kelly Oliver argues that the act of witnessing one’s own or the ‘Other’s’ trauma “enables the subject to reconstitute the experience of objectification in ways that allow her to reinsert subjectivity into a situation designed to destroy it” (2004, 194). For Native women playwrights discussed in this chapter, the act of testimony is a call to audiences

While I do not wish to conflate 16th century drama with contemporary Native theatre, we can see this strength-of-character-after-trauma trope in The Duchess of Malfi (among many other plays) which stages a leading female character that is strong and resilient, yet dies after the moment she fully exerts that strength. In Duchess, for example, we see the Duchess at her strongest after psychological and physical violence when she proclaims “I am Duchess of Malfi still” – reaffirming her social standing, and her strength of character, but then she dies to fulfill the criteria for theatrical tragedy.
to bear witness to the playwrights’ acts of resistance to this attack on subjectivity. The trajectory is not suggesting that all women (and men) come to positive identity only after an experience of violence or trauma, but those that have experienced violence have an opportunity to reimagine their identity post-trauma. This is because acts of telling and retelling create empowerment over stories which can offer a “way to break out of the double bind of self-blame versus powerlessness [...] through empowerment – physical as well as political” (Brison 14). The “process of witnessing” (as it is created in these performances) is crucial not just for working through trauma, but for “personal and political transformation” (Oliver, 2001, 85). In this way, the plays are about the recovery from trauma; the voltas that are hinged around representations of violence become moments in which we witness Native women asserting a stronger, more forceful self that rejects the colonial push to shatter the subjective self.

To demonstrate both Vizenor’s concept of survivance and Brison’s concept of “mastering the trauma” (54), the plays not only need to deal with the issues of violence, but the juxtaposition of the pre- and post-traumatic self. They do not shy away from the difficult stories of struggle or the horrors of trauma because portraying “the horror, injustice, and multi-faceted aspects of Native peoples’ struggles while simultaneously highlighting their active engagement and resistance to such onslaughts is not to portray Native people as victims” (Atalay 610). Irrespective of the potential problems the turning points may create, they are ultimately not as important as the gesture the plays make
towards healing post-trauma. These are not just survivor narratives, but stories of sur
vivance. The oft-quoted epitaph from Tomson Highway’s *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* reads: “before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed.” These performances demonstrate that after the poison is exposed and the healing has taken place, it is possible to heal the scars of violence and become stronger individuals and communities.

I have excluded Monique Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* from this chapter’s discussion on the theatrical representation of sexualized violence. While *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* does incorporate some specific elements of sexualized violence (see Transformation 11 “Las Ratas” (Mojica 53), for example), it does not represent sexualized violence on stage and therefore does not offer opportunities to discuss the specific dramaturgical strategies used to perform violence. In these moments of violence, Mojica relies on storytelling of an other’s experience with violence, thereby displacing the moment of violence from representation on stage. Contemporary Woman #2 repeats the “testimonio of a 13 year old girl” who had been tortured by her interrogators by “inserting a live rat into her vagina. The tail of the rat was attached to a wire that was connected to the whole electrical system. With every question there would be an electric shock” (Mojica, 1991, 53-54). Contemporary Woman #1 relates memories of Anna Mae Aquash and re-tells some of the details surrounding her death. Both instances rely on acts of secondary-storytelling (telling another’s story of trauma),
and although they are certainly important moments of calling on the audience to become witnesses, they are ultimately set apart from this chapter’s interest in the representation of violence on stage.

Vertical vs. Lateral violence

According to the Native women’s association of Canada (NWAC), lateral violence is “a cycle of abuse and its roots lie in factors such as: colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma and the ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination” (NWAC 1). Lateral violence does not travel across boundaries. That is, it is experienced within communities and creates what Monica McWilliams calls “societies under stress” (112).\(^79\) Lateral violence is a direct result of colonialism and patriarchy. Lee Maracle writes that:

> these oppressions result from the accumulation of hurt sustained by our people over a long period of time. Our communities are reduced to a sub-standard definition of normal, which leads to a sensibility of defeat, which in turn calls the victim to the table of lateral violence and ultimately changes the beliefs and corrodes the system from within. (Maracle IX)

For the purposes of this chapter, the term describes violence enacted by an Aboriginal

\(^79\) McWilliams defines the term and includes societies dealing with the consequences of colonization (112).
person against another Aboriginal person. This type of violence is encountered in Tomson Highway’s *Dry Lips*, for example (see above). Clements, Kane, Cheechoo, and Nolan all reject the representation of internalized (community-based) violence. They instead present violence in a different way. To name this distinct treatment of violence, I have turned to studies on violence in the healthcare profession and borrowed the term vertical violence.

Vertical violence is defined as any act of violence that occurs between people of different social positions. It is a violence born of power imbalances that result from socially constructed positions of racialized others. In Clements, Kane, Cheechoo, and Nolan we may see communities in conflict, but that is not the focus of the representation.

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80 Again, *Annie Mae’s Movement* offers a critique on both vertical and horizontal violence because the identity of “The Man” in the final scene is obscured (and the fact that a single actor plays across all male roles also serves to obscure his position in the world of the play). The representational strategy is significant since it links community-based violence with colonial violence.

81 This term frequently appears in discussion of violence against nurses. There is considerable research on this topic in this area, but its use outside this field is limited. See, for example, Sandra P. Thomas’s “Examining Nurse-to-Nurse Horizontal Violence and Nurse-to-Student Vertical Violence through the lens of Phenomenology” found in *Re)Thinking Violence in Health Care Settings: A Critical Approach* Edited by Amélie Perron, Dave Holmes, and Trudy Rudge(2013).

82 While this term has been used to describe acts of violence that cross over hierarchal lines, I am not using this term to demonstrate a given-authority, but rather an assumed authority based on social and cultural biases. I am concerned here with cultural construction of that power (imbalance). That is to say, the vertical violence explored in these plays does not present a person who is more powerful because they were put in a position of power – like a teacher or police officer, though we do see those roles in Cheechoo’s performance – but because colonization, cultural stereotypes, and attitudes towards Native women have created an assumed position of power. It manifests itself as a sense of entitlement for those who choose to enact this outdated, misogynistic colonial attitude and exert that power over Native women.
of violence. Instead, the portrayal of violence here gestures back to colonial violence. In choosing to reject lateral violence (or connect it to colonial violence, as in Nolan’s play), the playwrights seek to disrupt the prevalence of violence at its source.

Solo Voice theatre and the performance of violence

The older solo voice plays of Margo Kane and Shirley Cheechoo held a different social and historical function with different immediate needs than the later plays by Nolan and Clements. At the time of their creation and subsequent initial performances, there was an urgent need for representations of Aboriginal women’s lived experiences. There was a need to tell better stories than those being told about Aboriginal women, but there were no long-standing traditions of these stories or representations in Canadian culture. In this way, the solo voice plays are signalling a start to this tradition, which continued as Native theatre (both its creation and popularity) grew in Canada. Both Kane’s *Moonlodge* and Cheechoo’s *Path With No Moccasins* pre-date the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s investigation into abuses in residential schools and foster homes; they were before the final residential school closed in 1996; before the Royal Commission on

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83 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was mandated in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2006) and began in June 2008 following the official apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and is scheduled to release its final report in summer 2015.
Aboriginal Peoples (established 1991, final report 1996); and they were before official apologies by the federal government (both the Statement of Reconciliation in 1998 and the official apology in 2008)\(^\text{84}\) for the crimes and injustices done at these state institutions. They also pre-date any tangible action being taken to solve the issues that the plays explore.\(^\text{85}\) The sense of urgency to tell these stories and the need to present positive depictions of Native women facilitated a genre in which the male characters – both good and bad – were relegated to the margins of performance as absent, but marked characters.\(^\text{86}\) There are traces of both positive and negative male figures in these plays that are absent from performance because the immediate need for these performances was to portray Native women’s experiences.

Solo-voice performance may be about “selfhood and individuality” (Preston 7), but

\(^{\text{84}}\) It is worth while to note that the 1998 Statement of Reconciliation by the Minister of Indian Affairs is not considered to be an official apology; however, it is a statement made on the record that acknowledges the Canadian Government’s role in the residential school system.

\(^{\text{85}}\) This is not to suggest that the other plays do not pre-date these events. In fact, all of the plays under discussion here were written prior to the apologies and the TRC. Yet, there is an important distinction to make between Kane and Cheechoo’s plays and Mojica, Nolan, and Clements’s plays. That distinction has to do with performance history. Kane and Cheechoo stopped performing their respective plays in Canada in the mid-1990s (although Kane’s play did have a run in Australia near the end of the decade, it did not receive any substantial publicity in Canada). The other plays, however, were still being performed well into the late 1990s and early 2000s. The solovoice plays were concerned with the treatment of Aboriginal people and of historical (as well as contemporary abuses) and they were contemporary with many of the events that have lead to the establishment of TRC.

\(^{\text{86}}\) These characters include Lance and Marvin in Moonlodge; Shirley’s father, her husband, and her young son in Path With No Moccasins; and Ron in The Unnatural and Accidental Women.
it also confronts issues of presence and absence in order to politicize the experiences of Indigenous women, specifically revolving around experiences of sexual violence. That each performance is vectored through one female actor is important; audiences become aware of the Native woman’s body and its subjectivity; we become aware of her body’s material presence while simultaneously forced to confront just how objectified her presence is. The dramatic form elicits our gaze so that we both corroborate the subjectivity of the performer and become witnesses to trauma. Solo performances literally stage the absent body, and “depending on how it is staged, absence can be extremely unsettling for the viewer” (Gilbert and Tompkins 230); however, unlike many of the plays that Gilbert and Tompkins discuss in relation to the postcolonial subject’s absent body, Kane and Cheechoo play against the absent body insofar as they reject their own absence – and the cultural and historical absences of Native women in Canada – and instead force their antagonists to be absent in performance. The use of dis/placement demonstrates how unsettling the absent body can be. It is the attacker, and not the victim, that is invisible. Susan Brison writes that typically “[w]e are not taught to empathize with victims” and that the focus of the audience’s attention is often on the “villain, or the one who solves” the crime (10). The focus on Native women’s visibility not only contradicts much of the rhetoric about sexual violence which tends to focus on the attacker and his defence, but it also reflects on just how invisible sexualized violence is in society.
Conceptual metonymy in Moonlodge

At no point would I argue that sexual violence is at the forefront of Margo Kane’s solo performance Moonlodge. The moment of sexualized violence is short and appears just before the intermission. Nevertheless, this moment is brief, but it is also salient. The performance and script underwent many revisions and drafts before, during, and after the workshopping stage, as is evident from both the revisions in the performance archive and the lack of a definitive (published) text that resulted in visible variations in the published texts. Margo Kane has suggested she wanted to keep the text as “fluid as possible” (Shantz 58) as a result of theatrical process required to create the performance text. Kane comments that:

In the written version that evolved for the Native Earth production of Moonlodge in November 1990 I was still struggling to articulate the story in a full way. Coupled with my inexperience in writing and a new director with a different vision, Floyd Favel, I was unable to feel fully satisfied from within the performance experience. I could feel as an actor that my own natural narrative line was being lost or replaced by a direction that I did not know and therefore trust. Also, being inside the piece, I could not see what the audience was seeing clearly enough and I wondered what story they were getting. Was it mine or was it the many directors and dramaturges who had influenced it? (Kane CTR 27).

Because of the state of flux in which the performance was produced – several different
directors, continual reinterpretation, and doubt – the published versions of the text also reveal the degree to which the performance was in flux. Of the published texts available, the scene with the most visible differences is the moment of sexual violence. The variations found in *Moonlodge* during this scene provide an interesting point of inquiry on the representation and performance of violence in the play.

During a scene titled “All the Way To Santa Fe” in the stage manager’s prompt book, the audience watches as Agnes leaves Aunt Sophie’s home, attempts to hitchhike to San Francisco, and then eventually meets a biker and ends up changing course towards Santa Fe. The Biker is known only as Marlon (because of his resemblance to Marlon Brando) or as “the Biker.” It is in this brief section of the play where Agnes is sexually assaulted. According to the Native Earth Performing Arts archives for *Moonlodge*, this scene took several months to develop. In fact, the original workshop production at Native Earth in early 1990 does not include this scene or any reference to Agnes’s rape.

The scene developed through workshopping at Native Earth, but did not include the actual rape until late in the autumn of 1991. In fact, performance footage of these

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A prompt book is a master copy of the script used by the stage manager during performance. This copy of the script will contain every detail necessary for a successful production including staging and blocking information, music and lighting cues, lists of stage properties, and other types of important notes. The prompt book, then, is a valuable source of information to piece together how a production might appear on stage to the spectators. The prompt book and the actor’s staging would have been closely matched; however, some variances may occur depending on the performance. In the production of *Moonlodge* I witnessed, this scene corresponds with the prompt book located at the University of Guelph theatre archives. The existence of variations of this scene, however, suggests that this scene has been performed in other ways as well and these choices also factor into my discussion at points.
workshops reveals that there is no indication of sexual violence for the character (then named Margo, later named) Agnes. It is not as a result of sexual violence that Agnes chooses to leave Marlon, but as a result of his infidelity:

I came out of the bathroom... I see Marlon, standing there, same picture, same story all the way there ... all the girls and women hanging around the rows of bikes... and Marlon Brando shifting ... from hip to hip, I’ve just about had it. I mean we come all the way to Sante Fe and he looks at himself in the mirror the entire way ... Excuse me ... pardon me ... do you mind ... and Marlon’s just standing in the middle ... I don’t know who you think you are, some kind of king of or something or other. Maybe I’m just some pretty Indian princess Pocahontas [sic] ... well, I can take care of myself, thank you very much. Si Ya Nara. (Native Earth Performance Files, “File 4,” 10-11)

The invocation of Pocahontas here is interesting. It insinuates that there was a conscious consideration of the Pocahontas/Indian princess stereotype, which is discussed in chapter two. The structure of this quote also suggests this was a perspective held by Marlon/The Biker and Margo’s (character) response of “Si Ya Nara” reveals a conscious rejection of that stereotype. In a later version, “All the way to Santa Fe” remains mostly the same; however, there is the inclusion of the song “On the Street Where You Live” and there is evidence that Agnes should be struggling with someone/something, but it is by no means explicit and Agnes/Margo’s decision to leave Marlon remains after the bathroom scene instead of after the moment of violence. The actual insertion of sexualized violence appears to be added around October 1991 – nearly a year after its premiere at the Women in View Festival in Vancouver, British Columbia – and it was at this time that the play was edited to have Agnes leave Marlon immediately after he raped her. What this
indicates is a difficulty with, and perhaps more significantly, a working through the problems of representing sexualized violence on stage as well as appropriate responses by Agnes after the fact. I argue that it also spotlights potential input from the theatre and Native communities from whom Kane drew inspiration.

Although there is no single authoritative published version of the play, all versions after October 1991 conclude “All The Way To Santa Fe” (and the end of the first half) when Marlon forcefully pulls Agnes aside (and away from the group they are with), and then violently rapes her. In the stage manager’s prompt book, the stage directions for the scene reveal that “(She rises, in love and moves toward him, singing On The Street Where You Live) and “Through [the] song they dance, she picks up blanket USL, he pulls her roughly, throws her to ground, and rapes her” (Native Earth Performance Files, “File 1,” original emphasis). In all renderings of this scene, the action on stage develops over the romantic-love song “On The Street Where You Live,” which appears in one of two forms, either a recorded version of the song or sung live by Kane herself. When Kane begins to sing the song she “extends her hand and he grabs her and drags her around the stage and pushes her onto the ground ...they struggle for the scarf pulling it back and forth” (Kane 286) and the following lyrics overlap:

    ohhhhh, the towering feeling

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I am consulting the performance archives, including video recordings of the performances. The scene has been performed both ways.
just to know somehow you are near
that overpowere/\{ing feeling
that any second you might suddenly appear. (Kane 286, emphasis added)

The song lyrics double as an expression of Agnes’s attack and as a result the intended
lyrical meanings are being subverted and twisted to signal a more equivocal
understanding of the violence on stage. What were intended to be romantic
“overpowering” feelings in the song are transformed into Agnes’s expression of violence
and fear. Robert Appleford writes that

Because of the manner in which the rape is staged (the absent rapist), and
the nature of the song’s text, the song can be seen to, if not facilitate, at least
abet the rape of Agnes. She is, most directly, raped by a man, but the cultural
texts that disguise the vulnerability of the female body also help to make her
an easy target. The extreme contrast of the song and the rape is at first
comic, but as the scene progresses, the horror of the act and its ironic
libretto indicate graphically the violence against the female body that
patriarchal texts enable. (1991, 170-171)

By contrasting the performance of sexual violence with a love song, the scene hastens a
jarring and unsettling tension. As the song continues: “People stop and stare/ They don’t
bother me,” the stage directions in the published text indicates that “in one strong
movement he pulls the scarf off and throws it away. In another he pushes her back on
the ground and abruptly separates her legs” (286). Even when sexual violence is seen,
it is not witnessed, therefore it is not acknowledged, challenged, or confronted. No one
in Agnes or Marlon’s group intervened in her assault: they may “stop and stare” but will
not assist. This speaks to a larger problem of historical absences of Aboriginal women and
their lived experiences in Canada. The violence Agnes experiences, and behind that, the violence many Aboriginal women experience, becomes part of a landscape of violence that is easier to ignore than to speak out against.

In his analysis of the scene “All the Way to Santa Fe,” Robert Appleford argues that the song’s placement in the performance can be read in a number of ways. In one sense, Agnes needs to separate herself from her violated body (her struggles to free herself prove unsuccessful), and the song with all its escapist sentimentality allows her to escape, if only temporarily, from her situation. In another sense, the song can be seen as part of a patriarchal system of gender signification, where romantic wish-fulfilment for women, the desire to be raised from rags to riches and to be worshipped in a non threatening manner, is promoted in order to mask the culturally and materially subaltern position of women. (1999, 170)

As I have argued elsewhere, this scene in Moonlodge is a breaking point where Agnes breaks from identity informed by outside influences. The scene becomes the divide between the pre- and the post-traumatic self. Prior to, and including this moment, Agnes defines herself through the songs and words of others. The song and concurrent rape become the final moment of objectifying and silencing Agnes. As a result, "On the Street Where You Live" and its placement in the performance becomes a final symbolic break from this other-influenced identity, and it comes at a moment where the consequences of representational violence are at their highest. Instead of reinforcing Agnes's voicelessness, however, Kane uses this song in potentially empowering ways. I would like to complicate Appleford's argument, then, and suggest that instead of using the song as
a moment of psychological escape, Kane uses this song in quite dramaturgically evocative ways that not only account for a diverse constituency of audience members, but politicizes Aboriginal women's voicelessness in Canada.

In the most common versions of “All The Way To Santa Fe,” there are moments of dialogue between the lines of the song.\(^9\) Just as Agnes/Kane disrupts “Running Bear” with commentary to disrupt the logic of the stereotypes the song puts forward, Agnes/Kane infuses “On the Street Where You Live” with commentary in order to disrupt its logic as a romantic love song. Unlike with earlier songs, Agnes does not have many moments of interjection; the only words uttered that belong to Agnes are words of protest: “wait a minute, you’re crushing me!” and “Noooooo!” (Kane 286-287), but these moments are clear moments of resistance and they disrupt the logic of the violence represented on stage. There is a contradiction between both the lyrics and melody of the song and the physical action on stage also points to a distinct act of resistance and undercuts any possible reading of the scene as romantic sentimentality. This punctuates Agnes’s push back to the moment of violence, and by repeatedly inserting her own voice into the scene, Agnes rejects the attempt to render her silent.

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\(^9\) The song is either played via recorded media or sung by Kane herself.
There is no explicit reference to rape, however, the stage directions/dialogue and the song lyrics/melody are in clear opposition with each other and create disruptive gaps in what is seen and what is heard in performance. As the song begins, we see Agnes dancing with Marlon/the shawl and the movement of the scene appears conspicuous. However, the transition from dancing to struggling with the shawl and Agnes’s few brief, but vehement interjections halt that expectation so that we are left with a break between expectation and experience. Stripped of the context of romance, the song becomes a terrifying display of fear and violence where “Overpowering feeling[s]” of love turn into overwhelming sense of fear (Kane 286). This stylization does not downplay the violence, however, rather, it heightens the audience’s awareness of it by drawing our focus to it as a moment of violence.

Finally, instead of using the song as a moment of escape, I argue that Kane, as Agnes, remains very much physically present in this scene. The simple act of remaining Agnes and not switching characters to Marlon, Kane is able to reject the focus on the attacker, and is able to push Agnes, as a Native woman, into the subject position. As a solo-performance, any ‘interactions’ on stage are always undercut by the fact that Kane (as the actor) is the only body on stage. These moments become interactions between

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The stage manager’s prompt book being the exception to this statement. The stage directions in the prompt book include a hand-written note on the margins of this scene (“he...rapes her”) and are not included in the typed script or the subsequent published editions.
presence and absence that allow Moonlodge’s audiences to focus on Agnes (and not her attacker) and support her position as a subjective agent.

_Moonlodge_, especially during “All the Way to Santa Fe,” creates its dramatic tension through Kane’s body and the various characters that her body incorporates. As a result, the “body takes on a much larger, more malleable form than normally conveyed by the flesh and blood dimensions of an actor confined to one naturalistic role” (Gilbert and Tompkins 235). In considering rape discourse – specifically the way in which legal and media institutions treat women’s rapes – it is not uncommon for the women to be ignored and for the focus to shift to the rapist. In _Moonlodge_, however, we are given no other option but to come face to face not only with Native women’s perspective, but with the embodied experience(s) of rape from the woman’s perspective. The struggle with the shawl, and not with another actor, certainly creates a sense of dramatic tension, but also significantly repositions spectatorial attention (and responses) to Agnes’s experiences. In performance Kane often switches between Agnes and the secondary characters to fill in moments of dialogue. We see this as she switches between Agnes and Aunt Sophie, her father, her mother, Millie, or even the Biker; however, during this scene Kane remains in character as Agnes and never switches to perform Marlon/The Biker. As a result of playing to an absent ‘other,’ Kane removes any physical agency that is typically

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91 This is evident in the way in which the burden of proof falls to the victims; the treatment of victims; the marginal numbers of assaults reported; the focus on the assailant to name just a few.
given to the antagonist/rapist.

To create a sense of presence in absence Kane uses stage properties to help transform and transition between characters. The way the actor interacts and manipulates the design helps to challenge the traditional subject/object dichotomy. Marlon/The Biker, an undeniable ‘presence’ on stage, is read through Kane’s interactions with ‘empty space’ and/or Kane’s manipulation of the red shawl. The empty space/absence of another’s body, the shawl, and the actor’s interaction with these two scenographic elements are what represent Agnes’s rape. This has led me now to reflect on Kane’s (and to an extent Clements’s) performative strategies to represent violence and her use of stage properties. There has been considerable scholarly attention on the significance of objects in the theatre and there have been many points of intervention that view the stage property in terms of semiotics, phenomenology, and scenography, for example. Here, I am concerned with where metonymy collides with ‘empty spaces’ that would otherwise (typically) be occupied by an actual body (subject). In my analysis and use of metonymy, however, I am suggesting a substitution of a corporeal subject with a
tangible object. For this, I would like to use the term conceptual metonymy.\(^\text{92}\) Deployed as a performance stratagem, conceptual metonymy is concerned with a physical object as a replacement for a physical being to compel an emotional response from the spectator. At the centre of my use of conceptual metonymy is both an emphasis on a physical thing replacing something else, and, by extension, emphasis on the intentionality of this replacement.\(^\text{93}\) It is not just for dramatic effect, it is a performance technique/strategy that has undercurrents of expressionism and surrealism as it attempts to emphasize – indeed assigns– subjectivity to the presently present body – in this case a Native woman. In Moonlodge conceptual metonymy is established vis à vis the red shawl and presents us not only a means by which we can witness Agnes’s lived and

\(^{92}\) I am using this term to describe a performance strategy, and I am borrowing this phrase from cognitive psychologists’ use of the “concept” – how we know, understand, and categorize knowledge — and elements of Lakoff and Burke’s definitions of metonymy. Metonymy typically assumes a connection between two objects. In my use of metonymy I do not assume this connection to be self-evident, but to be implied by the performance and, in the case of Moonlodge, Agnes’s interactions with the shawl. We do not associate Marlon/The Biker with the shawl, per se, especially since the shawl is used to represent other characters and actions as well, but because of Agnes’s interactions first with ‘The Biker’ (which is just Kane performing to 'empty space') and then with the shawl, the audiences creates the symbolic association between the shawl and the biker.

\(^{93}\) It is not only the reduction of a subject to an object that informs my choice of metonymy over metaphor here. Metonymy informs the image schemas created in Moonlodge’s representation of sexualized violence and it becomes a foundation for audiences’s perception and understanding of Agnes’s use of stage properties/objects in this scene. Teemu Paavolainen argues that “the very coherence of image schemas often arises by virtue of their PARTS being configured into experientially meaningful WHOLES. This involves a ‘metonymical’ correlation that often serves as the basis for metaphorical ones. Where the latter entail a unidirectional transfer of meaning across conceptual domains, metonymy can be defined as a reciprocal ‘stand-for’ relationship, involving ‘direct physical and causal associations’ within the given configuration” (8). The sparse stage design featured in Kane’s play (and arguably the other plays studied in this chapter as well) also creates heightened significance to the objects.
embodied experiences, but also a way to present Agnes’s rape without (re)objectifying her. Clements uses similar strategic devices in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* in which she compounds conceptual metonymy with the personification of objects, which will be discussed below.

**Sexual violence and the performative caesura in *Path With No Moccasins***

*Path With No Moccasins*, written by Shirley Cheechoo, is an autobiographical performance piece that, like Kane’s play, follows Shirley from childhood to adulthood through a similar trajectory to rediscovery of her own identity as both Native and a woman. While both plays share a similar trajectory and both share a similar performance style – Native feminist (semi-)autobiographical solo voice performance – their enactment of violence is considerably different. Although both plays involve physicality and verbal cues to represent violence, where Kane makes use of conceptual metonymy, Cheechoo employs deliberate silences to moderate moments of violence in the play.

Wittgenstein claimed that “whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent” (23). Since the violence experienced by Shirley existed outside language, it must be

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As a reminder: while it is clear *Path With No Moccasins* is intended to be an autobiographical performance, I am making a distinction between the character of Shirley and the playwright Shirley by using “Shirley” to indicate the character and either “Cheechoo” or her full name when referring to the playwright. Where it may be unclear, I will indicate in parenthesis either “character” or “playwright.”
represented outside language. Shirley is unable to speak of her trauma because trauma “is, to most people, inconceivable, it’s also unspeakable” (Brison 15). Laub suggests that "the speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to – and of listening to themselves. That while silence is defeat, it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage" (58). Yet, where Shirley remains silent, embodied performance takes the place of verbal storytelling, and she uses her body to re-enact the violence she experienced. Her body’s re-enactment is positioned as the testimony that cannot be expressed, and also highlights the significance of the physical – that is lived and embodied – experience of trauma and violence. These vocal absences highlight Shirley’s, and by extension, Cheechoo’s, presence on stage. We are denied a language base from which to understand Shirley’s rapes and, instead, are forced to recognize only the gestures and actions of a trauma survivor. In the context of theatre, which more often than not compels an audience to participate in silence, our participation in Path With No Moccasins’s silent moments, is as silent, but active witnesses to Shirley’s silence. We are forced to listen to the silence, to reflect on moments of silence, and consider the historical context and trauma of this represented silence. We are asked to account for those moments when Native women, like Shirley, experience a voicelessness regarding the abuses they experience, either because they are ineffable, such as in Shirley’s first rape at residential school, or denied the opportunity to articulate them, such as in Shirley’s second rape by police officers. At first, Shirley’s
experiences with sexual and gender-based violence fall between the lines and are encapsulated in ellipses (in print) and Cheechoo’s silence and physicality (in performance), which creates a narrative gap. Unlike Kane’s performance, which fills the gaps in the vocally unexpressible with a song, Cheechoo’s performance breaks from vocalized language completely and places the sexualized violence in the realm of a physical experience. Since emphasis in culture is placed on the vocalized experience (we tell stories, not embody stories95), the play invokes what Kim Solga calls the in/visible act, which calls on the audience/witness to not just “come to terms with what we’ve missed but also with how we’ve missed” what is “hidden in plain sight” (Solga, 2009, 17).

The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines ellipsis as an “omission from a sentence of a word or words that would be required for complete clarity but which can usually be understood from the context” (106). I would like to extend this definition beyond the textual to the performative and describe these non-vocal performative moments as ellipses: moments in which the verbal falters or falls away and we are left with gesture which can elucidate the context of the event. I would like to identify the accompanying performance of silence as a performative caesura. I am drawing on the musical definition of caesura to offer a term to describe a dramaturgical effect of

95 Although this is certainly challenged in many facets of performance theory and in Native storytelling.
sustained silence on stage, which is represented in the written text by the ellipses.96 A musical caesura is an *un-measured silent* pause and while typically brief in duration, the pause can be sustained to build tension, especially around a note requiring a resolution—a moment from dissonance to consonance. Unlike a musical *rest*, which is silent, but has a measured amount of time, or a *fermata*, which has a note attached to it (and is sustained briefly), the caesura has neither time nor note attached to it. It is an unmeasured *silence* that is left to the conductor/performer to decide its duration. In terms of my analysis, the textual ellipses become a performative caesura where Cheechoo, as performer, directs the duration of silence. It can be quick or drawn out until there is a tension in the audience waiting for, restlessly anticipating, the performance to go on.

In Cheechoo’s performance, as with the text, there are ellipses wherein the performance breaks off from language and trails off leaving the audience to fill in the blanks from the context. The context of these moments is clear in its trajectory as is the response; the audience is left not only to read between the lines, but to see what is absolutely left outside of language. Cheechoo’s use of the performative caesura in these moments not only disrupts the logic of violence by displacing it from spoken language, but also interrogates the (possibility) of understanding or knowing Shirley’s trauma. We are

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Or with stage directions, such as in *Waiting for Godot.*
invited to participate as witnesses (and are therefore forced to confront our complacency or participation in the silencing of violence against Aboriginal women) and denied the opportunity to fully know or understand this violence. After this point, Shirley moves from silence to naming the act, and then from silence to vocal opposition of violence against her and her community. The performance contains three incidents of sexualized violence which are either relived or remembered – an act of memory – or are directed “to us” – an act of telling – by Shirley. On stage these are removed from the ‘actual’ events because they are positioned as the past. Each instance involves men (usually who hold position of authority) that appear to feel entitlement to Shirley’s body. The audience’s first clue to fill in the gaps comes when Shirley, speaking “to us,” says the reason she did not believe David was that “if Mrs. King really made him do those things [in bed with her] he wouldn’t tell anyone. Because they always told you not to tell or they’ll do something to you. Even with a gun” (Cheechoo 28-29). We understand that Shirley is somehow ‘in-the-know’ about the codes of sexualized violence at her residential school. Shirley, in an act of testimony, remembers her time at school and the sexual violence she experienced there. Shirley *remembers* an encounter with an unnamed teacher at the school:

> Mr. . . . made me stay after class again, to wipe . . . to wipe the blackboards. It made my hands real dirty. So dirty I wanted to chop them off with a meat cutter because they were his hands now. He loved them. (Cheechoo 29, original ellipses)

The astute audience member reads between the lines, or in this case between the
ellipses (and in performance, the silence); there is something Shirley cannot talk about for the same reasons she cannot believe David. She then addresses the audience directly and confirms that there is something she will “never tell. Who’d believe [her]? Even the ones that you’re made to believe will protect you do the same damn thing” (Cheechoo 29).

Directly after this Shirley relives an encounter with the police:

Hey Claude! I saw the cops at your house. They were looking for you. They questioned me and searched me, and handcuffed me and then they . . . after they were finished they said ‘I’ve never had an Indian before.’ So Claude you better watch out eh! (Cheechoo 29, original ellipses)

The fact that she relives this account demonstrates an intensification of the frequency since reliving something not only implies experiencing something more than once, but also re-experiencing something. As with the previous example, ellipses here allow a pause to enact or relive what cannot be said. At first we are given a pause to consider what might have happened after Shirley is questioned, searched and handcuffed before she implicitly tells us; however, unlike the first instance of violence at the residential school, this is much more candid with the insertion of the phrase “never had an Indian before.”

The use of ellipses in both scenes demonstrates structural control in a moment when Shirley would have very little control. Shirley controls the silence and its duration. The violence of the scene is echoed in what Helen Hoy calls “the caesurae as a structural
violence” (Hoy 74). While I appreciate that Hoy is likely using the poetic term in her analysis, the concept of the caesura as a structural violence is still applicable and a compelling idea when transferred to both the musical and performative caesura. The (musical) caesura is a contradiction; it is a non-moment, an interruption of an event, but also an event in itself. The moment of caesura in a concerto is both presence and absence, and it often leaves its audience awaiting its resolution. This presence/absence paradox is echoed in the performative caesura by the empty physical and vocal spaces in which the attacker and the attack exist; both the attacker and the violence is and is not represented in the performance. Perhaps most importantly, the caesura in these moments of performance (and text) is silence. The gap in word, performance, and text is the “apogee of the caesura”; it is a silence that “is not, as in Heidegger, the ‘unsayable’ ground of poetic saying, but is the moment in which the subject [...] unravels, wherein ‘knowledge – after it has broken through its barriers [...] is spurred by itself to know more than it can bear or contain’” (Gosetti-Ferencei 196). Silences, pauses, or the Others’ words become a way to fill in the gaps of experiences that are unsayable and too difficult to express purely through language.

Silence in the theatre can be overwhelming; it is a powerful non-act. The potential for sustained silence (at the discretion of the director or actor(s)) causes a moment of structural violence to the performance (or the play text with the use of ellipses). The prolonged silence becomes an event the audience must endure through. A sustained
performative caesura can be unsettling. It disrupts the flow of the performance, makes us aware of our position as spectator, creates a sense of urgency, and becomes narratively (and structurally) disturbing. The performative caesura also leaves audiences looking for the resolution to the dissonant disruption; we are forced to acknowledge the performer and their presence in the moment of caesura as we rely on them to offer us the consonant resolution we seek. In terms of the performance of rape on stage and the use of performative caesura, the consonance offered is not the harmony after dissonance, but a simple movement away from the silent, violent act. It becomes our desire, mirrored in the character’s, to return to the comfort of the performer/audience dynamic that was present before the performative caesura. Like the traumatic event, the theatrical silence lingers. It changes the performer/audience relationship, even if just briefly. In bringing up silence, I wish to highlight how the textual ellipses can translate into a performative caesura which uses silence to draw attention to a point or theme. The performance enacts these moments of sexual violence as something that is not “marked, but [that] can only be recalled as that which occurred without appearing, thereby leaving a trace of absence, a re-(mark), which neither is nor is not” (Allen 152). In performance, then, the caesura is a “‘counterrhythmic rupture’” (qtd in Gosetti-Ferencei 195) not just where change is defined, but also where we are asked to bear witness to that moment of change. In the case of Path With No Moccasins, we are asked to bear witness to Shirley’s embodied testimony of trauma. Therefore, the
listener "must listen to and hear the silence [...] He or she must recognize, acknowledge and address that silence, even if this simply means respect – and knowing how to wait" (Laub 58).

Silences, pauses, and innuendo replace the performance of rape and leave the audience to draw their own conclusions. This is a strategic device that forces the audience to question other instances where silence must speak for violence against Native women. Silences become “more active than passive, especially on stage where a silent character still speaks the language of the body and of space” (Gilbert and Tompkins 190). For Cheechoo’s performance, silence becomes a disclosure of what would otherwise be ignored. Here silence is a commanding performative act; it unsettles audience expectations and commands audience attention. Cheechoo’s presence on stage confronts her invisibility during moments of violence. By rejecting a second body – a white male body – the play denies the attacker’s subjectivity. Self-representation becomes the only representation on stage and by focusing on the Native women we too are in a position to reject their historical and cultural absences.

The third and final occurrence of sexualized violence in the play is delivered as a direct address to the audience. It is not “relived” or “remembered” but relayed as an act of naming the event. In the final instance Shirley tells the audience:

I was twelve. There was a row of boys holding hands across the road stopping me. They pulled me off the bike, dragged me into the ditch. They took my clothes off. They didn’t rip at them. I didn’t fight back. I recognized
all their fuckin’ faces. (Cheechoo 30)

This short passage reads like a passage of careful, but assertive testimony; unlike the previous two incidents, there are no ellipses, no silences, thus no performative caesura. The development from hesitation and codified language to a brazen depiction of a sexual assault signals a desire to reject these silences.

The violence experienced by Shirley becomes linked to her identity as a Native woman and to her physical beauty and her Nativeness since “no matter how old [she] is, someone always wants to do this to [her]” (Cheechoo 30, emphasis added). It is her experiences with these violences that makes her realize she no longer wants “to be beautiful like Ann Margaret […] Boy, they want movie stars” (30). In other words, she no longer wants to subscribe to the stereotypes – especially those created in film and television – to help inform her identity. This moment signals a significant act of survivance. The physical violence Shirley experiences is compounded by, or perhaps promoted by, the representational violence discussed in chapter two. Like Agnes in Moonlodge, Shirley also experiences a fragmentation of identity as it becomes intertwined with all the things that she is not. Instead of a self-actualized identity, Shirley’s identity formation is initially informed by super models, movie stars, and her experiences at a residential school. In the first two parts of the play, Shirley’s identity is defined by stereotypes. Her Cree identity is stripped away from her by the teachers at the residential school and by the Indian agents who took her away from her home.
Instead, her identity is founded on what society believes a Native woman should be. Shirley participates in, and eventually wins, a beauty contest called the “Native Princess Pageant.” While the moment in the play itself is brief, it, like Mojica’s performance, plays up the idea of white ideals of beauty and talent, which include Shirley bleaching her skin to appear more white. Her womanhood is fractured through the sexual violence she experiences from teachers, police officers, and peers. During these sections of the play, which represent a time in her life when she was moving beyond these stereotypes, Shirley begins to carve out a positive identity as a Native woman that is more in-line with her own experiences; however, the play accentuates the struggle towards this self-actualization. She battles back and forth with the Water Spirits, in one moment surrendering herself to their wisdom and guidance and in another confronting them to damn them for taking away her father (who drowns crossing the ice). The struggle, for Shirley, is a “road [she’s] on [which] doesn’t seem to have no end” (39) except in her complete surrender as she walks into the water in an attempt to take her own life. This final moment of self-inflicted violence reveals the extent to which representational and physical violence have affected Shirley. From this moment, however, comes the strength of character to rediscover and reclaim a positive sense of identity.

Both *Path With No Moccasins* and *Moonlodge* use physicality mixed with either someone else’s words or no words at all, to reveal not only the silence surrounding sexual and gender-based violence, but also the difficulties of relating and naming these
experiences. While Moonlodge’s stage directions and stage manager’s prompt book reveal, to a degree, the level of physicality of the performer, Path With No Moccasins does not include such directions. Rejecting the attacker’s subjectivity means they resist their own re-victimization and position themselves as subjects. Moonlodge and Path With No Moccasins challenge the invisibility and objectification of Native women.

**Enacting violence with an ‘other’**

In performances with more than one actor, the representation of violence creates the potential for competition – between self and other, protagonist and antagonist, Native women and attacker – each vying for the spectator’s attention. The complexity of audience constituencies compounds these issues and presents potential problems for representing sexual violence. The representation of violence in solo-voice performances denied embodiment to the attacker and compelled the audience’s gaze through the woman’s perspective, thus allowing the circulation of only Indigenous women’s perspectives. Marie Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and Yvette Nolan’s *Annie Mae’s Movement* turn to a highly stylized, denaturalized performance style that helps side-step the potential pitfalls of enacting violence against Indigenous
women. The dis/placement used in these plays both “gestures [...] toward the missing in the historical record” (Solga, 2009, 18) and practices a more harm-reductive approach to theatre.

Subverting the subject/object dichotomy: Clements’s denaturalized violence

The use of historically-based coroner reports and the animation of inanimate objects in the performance are the most striking examples of how Clements politicizes violence against Native women. The slides/projections create a theatrical distance between what is seen in the projection and what is presented on stage, and simultaneously pulls the audience into a witness position. The projections are impersonal and detached from the lived experiences of the women they represent. Like the use of song in Moonlodge, the projections reveal the way that Native women are pushed to the periphery of culture and society. The use of another person’s words – the proclamation that the deaths were unnatural and accidental – also signposts the voicelessness that these murdered women experience. The performance, however, rejects this voicelessness as the murdered women are not given cue to exit at this moment and, in fact, they continue to be active, such as the potential for it becoming erotic or pornographic (see discussion on Canning above, for example).
participants in the story and on the stage.

Sarah MacKenzie argues that “[b]ecause the playwright does not stage the murders of the women, audience attention is drawn to the hours before they were killed. To this extent, the play focuses on the women’s lives, rather than their violent and untimely deaths” (MacKenzie). Although I agree with the crux of this statement – certainly that the play draws attention to the women’s lives – I disagree with the claim that the playwright does not stage the murders. It becomes very clear by both the action on stage and the projections that follow that the murders are, in fact, represented, albeit through highly stylized performance. The violence in the performance is apparent through the interactions between the women and the murderer vis-à-vis the dresser, chair, plane, or pillow and through the explicit dumb show-like “Barbershop Quartet” scenes. Actions on stage like covering a body; slumping down and not continuing to struggle against the murderer (or his metonymic substitutions); the stage directions of “lights out” or “lights fade” are all suggestive of a staged death. That all of these moments precede the projection of slides announcing a historical death solidifies this interpretation for audience members – certainly this audience member. There is no doubt that the play stages moments of violence, however, the strategies for performing these moments create surrealist depictions of violence that ultimately denaturalize violence. The use of objects makes the violence unnatural. We as audience members read this violence as unnatural and, in turn, consider how rape is unnatural. The play's
attempts to denaturalize violence are not transferred to the film adaptation *Unnatural and Accidental*. The film may cast a critical eye on acts of rape and violence, but ultimately, it fails in denaturalizing that violence. Without the jarring dichotomy of (animated) conceptual metonymy that is present in the play, the film’s depiction of violence positions it as normative in the same way television programs like *Law and Order* normalize violence, for example.

Unlike Kane’s use of song and Cheechoo’s use of silence, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* does not remove the women’s voices; even during moments of violence they are rejecting the attempt to silence them. Clements compels the audience to bear witness to the events and to the contexts in which the violence exists. This small, but significant difference highlights how Native women playwrights have moved beyond the silence – and behind that, how they have moved beyond the inability to express the trauma – since the premiere of *Moonlodge* and *Path With No Moccasins*. There are still vestiges of performance strategies used in the earlier play discussed here, however. Clements’s play removes a subject – in this instance the male attacker/murderer – and replaces him with objects,\textsuperscript{98} which, like *Moonlodge*, redirects the spectator’s gaze to the women. Similar to Cheechoo and Kane’s performances, the denaturalization of violence and the dis/placement of the subject/object dichotomy in *The Unnatural and Accidental*...

\textsuperscript{98} A member of the cast still plays these roles, but he is costumed as the objects and functions as a stage property until the stage property is animated.
Women allows Clements to deny the logic of violence and the supposed knowability of trauma. The spectator remains a witness to the traumatic experience without ever conflating witnessing with understanding. Dori Laub writes that a trauma narrative that is seen and heard “is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the 'knowing' of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge de novo. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (57). As witnesses, we are active and necessary participants to the testimony; acknowledging the victim/survivor’s position of priority in the performance ensures that our position as witness is not compromised by conflicting perspectives, such as that of the antagonist/murderer.

The objects used to stylize and denaturalize violence are animated – likely featuring an actor acting as puppeteer to the objects. Replacing the ‘Other’ with objects here puts pressure on issues of presence and absence and subjectivity for Native women. By slanting the subject/object dichotomy, The Unnatural and Accidental Women challenges assumptions made about subjectivity and its creation. This juxtaposition challenges us to recognize the subjugating positions into which Native women are often pressed. Dis/placement, then, becomes a cardinal strategy to represent violence on stage; it allows for multiple points of access by audience members by not only presenting violence in a way that challenges dominant culture’s percepticide, but also by
dramatizing violence in a way that acknowledges the possibility of audience members impacted by violence against Indigenous women. The play is intentionally reductive in the first half, but it is a transitional reduction that encourages (demands!) spectatorial attention to concentrate on the women. Starting with the continual presence of the murdered women and culminating in a rejection of Gilbert’s representation on stage (except through representational animated objects and in the “Barbershop Quartet” which I discuss below), everything in the first half is designed and staged to accomplish this reduction. This tactic of performance is just temporary, however. While the first half bears the bulk of the (historically-based) violence against the women and features the reduction of the murderer to object, the second half shifts to the fictionalized revenge narrative as it transitions from the conceptual metonymic to an embodiment of Gilbert.

Although the displacement of Gilbert/The Barber positions him as a secondary character, there remains a threatening nature to the objects as a result of their animation. Unlike Kane’s shawl which is manipulated by Kane, it is suggested in the play text that the dresser or the chair are manipulated by an unseen actor.99 The use of animated stage properties is just as threatening as an embodied murderer, but diminishes any position of authority that an embodied murderer may adopt. If we accept Sofer’s definition of stage property as an "inanimate object that is visibly manipulated

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And this is the case for at least some of the performances of the play (such as Native Earth’s production of the play).
by an actor" in performance and "perceived by a spectator as a prop" (31), then what happens to objects that are animated by an actor as in Clements's play? Since perception of a stage property is the condition on which a stage property attains status of prop, what happens when a stage property collapses into the role of performer? To an extent this happens for Agnes with the shawl, but as a spectator, we are less likely to associate the shawl with an animated person because its position as “character” is always reliant on Kane, as Agnes, to manipulate the scarf. The same is not true of Clements's play, in which the dresser, the chair, the pillow, all become embodied on their own. By removing them from their position as just stage properties, the objects unsettle the representation of rape in a way that the shawl in *Moonlodge* cannot.

The violence in the first half of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* is highly stylized; it represents a violence that completely rejects the subjectivity of the attacker. Valerie, who earlier in the play struggled with the dresser’s sexual advances – the unwelcomed squeezing of her breasts, or the verbal abuses such as calling her a whore (Clements, 2005, 29-31) – demonstrates the loneliness and isolation of all the women. In the scene “Room 23, when you’re 33 – Clifton Hotel,” the dresser manipulates Valerie’s emotional needs by presenting her sons, Tommy and Evan, to her – apparently from inside the dresser’s drawers. The dresser controls this scene, manipulates Valerie into moving closer before the dresser

*lets her have it with the drawers. One of the drawers slams her head, the*
other her stomach and legs – it buckles her. It keeps punching her till [sic]
she lays on the floor semi-conscious” and then “the top drawer slams her in
the head. She slumps down, her head on the TOMMY drawer. THE
DRESSER’s hand comes out of the top drawer and reaches down, across her
chest fondling her breasts. Lights out. (Clements, 2005, 51)

A similar incident involves Verna who desperately seeks to give her son the toy
plane she bought for his birthday only to be attacked by “The Pilot” of the plane. Verna
is led down the floors of the hotel by the fleeing plane while male voice-overs repeatedly
ask “can I get you a drink?” Eventually the plane and Verna descend into the murderer’s
room where the voice offering Verna a drink is “The Pilot.” The plane – and Verna – fall
to the ground both dead. The imagery is categorical in this scene. The plane is symbolic
of Verna’s past – and hope for a future – life with her son, but the plane is controlled by
its pilot – the murderer – who uses Verna’s desires and longings to be with her son as
fodder against her. Verna is “thirsty for ... for ... my kids, my man” (Clements, 2005, 92)
which creates the vulnerability and ‘weakness’ that The Pilot and the plane prey upon.
Later, the women indicate that they all “thought he was someone [they] knew. Someone
[they] needed” (Clements, 2005, 114).

The Barbershop Quartet scenes in the first half are not as subtle in their
representation of violence. They are dumb-show-esque performances that reenact the
ritualistic murders that the real-life – that is, historical – Gilbert Paul Jordan was
witnessed to have performed. An additional layer is added to this ritual where the Barber
braids his victim’s hair before violently cutting it from her head. These moments each
demonstrate one element of his ritual and are mostly pantomime with sparse interjections of dialogue. Marilyn is the first of the Quartet victims. She is seen in the barber’s chair as the Barber begins to “braid her hair in one long braid. He suddenly grabs her braid roughly and takes his scissors to cut it. She grabs it back in a tug of war” (Clements, 2005, 25). Patsy also struggles against the Barber who “dressed in whites follows after her with scissors” (Clements, 2005, 53). He then “grabs her braid. The red-and-white swirl of [the barbershop] light intensifies the struggle” (53). After the Barber recites, “down the hatch, baby./Twenty bucks if you drink it right down. / Down the hatch, baby./Right down. Finish it right down./Down the hatch, baby DRINK IT – DROWN” 100 (53), the Barber “emerges with Patsy’s braid” and the women’s “reflections in the mirror begin to multiply and become surreal” (53). The women’s hair is emblematic of their personhood and, by extension, their life. That each woman fought for her safety and her hair is of exceptional significance. First the barber cuts the women’s ties to their heritage by cutting their braids and then to their own identity

100 Gilbert Paul Jordan was allegedly overheard saying something similar to a woman as he poured alcohol down her throat just prior to police intervention. A detective who testified at Jordan’s trial recounted that he heard Jordan say “I’ll give you 10, 20, 50 dollars, whatever you want. Come on, I want to see you get it all down” (Rose, 8 Oct. 1988). Police intervened in at least four different incidents, and while none of those women died, their blood alcohol was well beyond legally impaired (0.08) (Rose, 5 Oct. 1988).
through their murders. He represents not only real-life murders but also acts of colonial and physical/sexual violence against Native women in Canada. While the play’s first half actively denies the murderer’s subjectivity, these dumb-shows stand as an exception to that. Their function in the performance is to both to contextualize and to stand in contrast to the stylized violence between the women and the objects of the surrounding scenes. We are intended to draw connections between the Quartet women and the other women in the first half. This is no more evident than in the play’s concluding scene when the braids of hair are symbolically returned to each woman – including the women who did not perform in the “Barbershop Quartet” scenes.

The first half’s reduction of the murderer to (mostly) inanimate objects demonstrates how the “killer is a manipulative embodiment” of the women’s “human need” (Clements, 2005, 7). It is not about the killer’s motivation, his personality, his story, but about the women’s human need for companionship and love. We see how the abusive dresser or the toy plane and its pilot are symbolic of the women’s need for their families, their children, their husbands; we see how the murderer eventually slides into that role to take advantage of this need. This is likewise observed with Mavis and her

I also cannot help but read this scene against the scene in Cheechoo’s play where Shirley’s hair is cut as punishment at the residential school. This type of punishment was intended (and usually succeeded) as a form of humiliation and a disavowal of Aboriginal culture (where the braided hair has become its own sort of stereotype. See Stefani’s performance in “Looking Hot”). The significance, then, could be read as a reminder of the colonial violence many of these women likely faced at residential school. Gilbert becomes a violent reminder of the assimilationist goals of the residential schools, 60s scoops, and legislation.
chair which “extend like real arms and curl around her. She hugs them and love-coos in comfort” (Clements, 2005, 36). These are moments of intimate violence but they are simultaneously both subtle and startling. The violence is subtle as a result of diffused expectations on the attacker and through the oddity of every-day objects engaging in dialogue or activity with the women. It is startling, however, in its very visceral enactment of violence, as well as through the projection of the slides which formally and clinically announce the women’s deaths. The performance itself is subversive in its representation of violence since it denies visibility to the expected subject, in this case the Barber/Gilbert; it denaturalizes violence against Native women; and it positions the women as “agents of resistance” (MacKenzie).

The first half of The Unnatural and Accidental Women expresses a fictionalized reality. It is highly stylized theatre, but contains the ‘real’ elements of the women’s murders. The play denies the marginalization and obscuring of the women’s murders; the audience is shocked by the deaths on stage, but faces the reality that these historical deaths are rampant occurrences that go unchallenged by systems of control and power in Canadian society. Mediated performance, the use of projections and sound effects, ironically presents the “real” elements of the story. We see the violence against Valerie, attacked by her dresser, or Mavis, attacked by her chair and the audience is engaged by imagistic performance, and focussed on the women’s death, but also on the cause of their attack. The chair or dresser have an active role in the on-stage murders. Even as
objects they cause the audience to give pause and question our understanding of the objectification of the women. Then we are faced with a slide – the mediated “real” of the performance – which informs us that “Valerie Nancy Holmes 33, died November 19, 1986 with a 0.04 blood alcohol level” (Clements, 2005, 51) or that “Mavis Gertrude Jones, 42, died November 30, 1980 with a 0.34 blood alcohol level” (57) and that both deaths were deemed “unnatural and accidental.” Then the reality of violence of the scenes crystallizes. It is in these moments that the play reinforces the reality of violence for these women. The women are established as subjects of the story rather than objects of the murders through their reappearance after their deaths are announced by projections. As a result, not only do Native women speak, but they outright refuse to be ignored and demand that they be remembered.

Even once Gilbert is embodied, he is denied anything beyond secondary positioning. It is Rebecca and the other women who are the central focus in act two. Gilbert is a secondary character whose main function is as a way for Rebecca to find “the end of [her mother’s] story” (Clements, 2005, 5) and rediscover her cultural identity. By denying Gilbert an active voice, or positioning him as secondary character, The Unnatural and Accidental Women presents violence in a “more humane” way where we can “investigate violence in non-realist forms” because “as a society, [we] are so used to seeing stories from the killer’s perspective that we have very little capability to understand anything other than the act itself […] the investigation into the victim’s
perspective is often incredibly complex and allows us in on the cost” (Campbell, personal correspondence with playwright). Clements’s strategies for performing violence, then, result in a shift in expectations and compel the audience to become witnesses to the traumatic event without expecting audiences to re-experience that violence in a realistic or injurious way.

The denaturalization and dis/placement of violence in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* offers a perspective that does not risk the dangers inherent in representing rape on stage. These dramaturgical strategies not only account for difficult topics in Canadian society, but for audience members who are embedded in similar experiences of violence. In *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, the lines between the stage rape and “real world” rapes are always already blurred since it draws on the “real world” rapes and murders of Native women as inspiration, but then presents them through a fictional filter. What is at stake in representing a fictionalized account of historical violence and what is our responsibility (response-ability) as spectators/witnesses to this violence? If “rape can only appear in social space as an aftershock,” (Solga, 2006, 57) then it is in this after shock where we can hold the proverbial mirror for audiences/witnesses to acknowledge the violence against Native women in Canadian society. The mirror that Clements holds up and reflects back to the audience is one that distorts the representation of violence – distances it from the real-world rapes just enough – without sacrificing the importance of witnessing or preserving
dominant culture’s percepticide further. It reflects the story that the film, television, newspapers, police, and even the government fail to evince, but Clements also accounts for diverse audiences, and understands the very real and very dangerous stakes of representing violence on stage.

“You cannot kill us all”: Annie Mae’s Movement

Like The Unnatural and Accidental Women, Yvette Nolan’s Annie Mae’s Movement stages the life and death of a historical figure, Anna Mae Pictou Aquash (Mi’kmaq), who was involved in the American Indian Movement (AIM) and subsequently murdered in 1975. Nolan’s performance creates a collage of life events in the last year of Aquash’s life and stages Aquash – through the character of Annie Mae – as a woman warrior who stands centre stage, rather than at the periphery. Unlike the other performances explored in this chapter, however, Nolan never stages a turning point in which Annie Mae transitions from stereotype to positive self-identification. Instead, Annie Mae fights the pervasive stereotypes from the beginning to the end of the play. This offers two possible interpretations of the turning point represented during the representation of violence. The first is a push-back against the larger colonial violence against Aboriginal people – a battle Annie Mae (and others in AIM) spend the duration of the play opposing. Read from this perspective, the turning point is both the historical moment of
push-back at Wounded Knee, and Nolan’s theatrical staging of this push-back.

The performance begins and ends with Anna Mae “curled in a foetal position CS. The red silk/red road flows downstage, the good red road” (Nolan, 2005, 3). The good red road is an Aboriginal concept of the proper path and its appearance in the performance as well as its suggestion that it leads out of Anna Mae’s body is not without significance. Its emergence from Annie Mae’s body intimates that she is someone who walked the red road and is a source of pride for Native women. The play presents a strong, independent female character who is connected to a positive sense of Native womanhood and who struggles against the internal and external sexism and racism that would deny her that identity. The play rejects the stereotypes of Aboriginal women outright and instead offers a character who maintains a steadfast sense of identity as a Native woman despite the obstacles in her way. Anna Mae already had the “tools to live in the white world” without losing her “Indian-ness” or her “sense of pride” in who she is (Nolan, 2005, 53). It is this sense of self and pride that can “help to rebuild an Indian Nation that was self-sufficient, autonomous, healthy and whole” (53). The play sets up this hope to maintain a sense of self from the first scene, and sets it in direct

102 Centre Stage.

103 Such as the patriarchal structure of AIM, the intrusion by the FBI/government, and the outside sources which are always already inferred.
opposition to those who would silence Native people.

The second potential turning point is in the final moments of the play. The audience is positioned as witnesses to the (historically unwitnessed) rape and murder of Annie Mae, and if we read moments of violence as a turning point, then the play stages that turning point at the moment the performance ends, the lights come up, and the audience leaves the theatrical event as witnesses to trauma. This second interpretation of violence-as-turning point is particularly interesting when read from the perspective of witnessing trauma and witnessing trauma testimony. In arguments put forward by Dori Laub, Kelly Oliver, Susan Brison, and others, the witness to testimony of trauma becomes co-owner of this trauma and as “enabler of the testimony” and “as guardian of its process and of its momentum” (Laub 58), the audience’s act of witnessing, and not the moment of violence itself, becomes the catalyst for change. It is the audience who are given the opportunity, whether they take it or not, to stage a turning point. That the play offers this opportunity of turning points by the audience rather than staging a turning point for the audience is pivotal. It signposts that work on changing perceptions of Aboriginal women, and work on ending violence against Aboriginal women continues. This is a point echoed in Annie Mae’s recital of contemporary Native women playwrights (see below). Through direct address, and “pairing this hopeful speech with the dramatic murdering” of Anna Mae “on stage, [Nolan] implicates the audience as witness to this murder” (La Flamme). We – the audience – become implicit
in the call for change; there is an invocation of community and hope that is left for the audience to carry forward.

In the first half, Annie Mae addresses the audience directly and says: “we have to fight, even if seems [sic] like we’re fighting ourselves. Or else we will disappear, just disappear” (Nolan, 2005, 4). This fight will appear in the performance not as a physical battle, but with a struggle against erasure and silence. We see Anna Mae’s struggle against the silence most clearly in the final scene. Anna Mae delivers a monologue and halfway through “The man” enters, watches and smells her (53), and eventually he “rapes her.” As this happens, Anna Mae says:

My name is Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Micmac Nation from Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. My 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. 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...104 You can kill me, but you cannot kill us all. You can kill me. (Nolan, 2005, 53)

By continuing to speak during her rape, Annie Mae rejects the attempts to silence her. While Clements’s women face the ‘Other’s’ impression of their lives and deaths (presented in the coroner slides) before they reject these by remaining a lively and

104 These are the names of contemporary Native women: Helen Thundercloud, Priscilla Lavasseur, Sylvia Maracle, Pelajia Highway, Agnes Grant, Monica Marx, Gloria Miguel, Lisa Mayo, Muriel Miguel, Monique Mojica, Joy Keeper, Tina Keeper, Margo Kane, Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, April Raintree, Colleen Cutschall.
significant presence on stage, Nolan’s Anna Mae relegates the ‘Other’ to a position of silence by continuing – by insisting on – speaking. Elaine Scarry has suggested that physical pain as a part of bodily experiences is difficult to write about and can reduce or devastate language ability (qtd. in E. Smith 224), and yet in this moment of sexualized violence Anna Mae regains her words. It is Anna Mae’s rejection of silence through the invocation of the audience, rather than the performative caesura (as we see in Cheechoo’s play) that unsettles the audience and denaturalizes violence against Native women. Refusing to be silenced during a moment traditionally bringing about women’s silence is a powerful act of resistance and a call for others to disavow the silence that surrounds violence against Native women.

_Annie Mae’s Movement_ engages in what Stanlake calls “blended time” where the theatrical present and the historical past are intermingled, resulting in the potential conflation of the two periods from the perspective of viewers, and invites “an active rather than passive mode of viewing” the performance (Stanlake 145). This fusion of blended time in the final scene pulls the historical into the present. On the surface we are presented with Anna Mae’s perspective, but beyond that “an extended perspective that links the issues of Anna Mae’s life to issues faced by contemporary Native American women” (Stanlake 145). In combination with Anna Mae’s direct address, the audience is simultaneously pulled into the performance as potential witnesses to the rape and murder of Anna and denying the history of percepticide by re-writing the historical
account from Anna Mae’s perspective. Unlike the other plays, which dis/place the perpetrator of violence, *Annie Mae’s Movement* does not dis/place the attacker. Yet, Nolan’s dramatization of Anna Mae’s rape and murder is still able to side-step some of the dangers of representing sexual violence on stage. Both the highly stylized performance and the intentional ambiguity in the male character in this final scene creates a sense of distance between the representation of violence and the spectator. The performance stages a dual intervention into the historically-based violence against Pictou-Aquash and the more contemporary murdered and missing Native women, and in doing so, the play criticizes the ways dominant culture looks away from these moments of violence. Nevertheless, it is the blurred lines between historical and contemporary violence against Indigenous women that helps the play create the distance to accommodate heterogenous audience constituencies.

Nolan’s use of blended time is a dramaturgical – and performative – strategy to resist Anna Mae’s silence outright. By reciting a list of “sisters” in the present while performing violence of the past, Anna Mae rejects the temporal logic of the rape – the sequence in which one moves from trauma to memory to reconfigured identity. She looks forward, away from trauma, and by speaking each name, Anna Mae rejects the silence of rape and refuses the fixity of her violation. It is a protest against being trapped

For more on history, blended time, and cultural memory, see chapter five.
in the time of trauma by staging a movement past trauma. What follows Anna Mae’s rape, however, is her murder, which necessitates the need to move past trauma during the actual moment of violence. Since her murder silences her protest, Anna Mae must stage the call to community and the call for further resistance during a moment typically used to silence women. In this way, *Annie Mae’s Movement* is unique among the plays I explore here; there is both a hope of community and a denial of the possibility for Anna Mae to see that moment come to fruition. What Nolan’s blended time accomplishes, then, is the audience’s call to build this community and continue to reject the silences of violence.

The ambiguity of the other character in the final scene reflects the real-life uncertainty of who was responsible for Anna Mae Pictou Aquash’s murder. The play describes him as “a man, with elements of LAWRENCE, DENNIS, FBI GUY, but he moves like an animal” (Nolan, 2005, 53). The ambiguity of the murderer here, or rather, the conflation of several different characters on both sides of the conflict, reveals the extent to which Anna Mae faced discrimination from outside as well as inside AIM. By leaving the responsible party ambiguous, Nolan highlights the systemic problems inherent in both the AIM (Native communities) and the FBI (dominant culture). It also allows Nolan to focus solely on Anna Mae’s experiences and perspectives. It puts her experiences at the forefront of the play and allows audiences to see Anna Mae’s acts of resistance.

There are only two actors for all seven characters in the performance: “the
woman plays Anna Mae, while the man is cast in six different roles which range from AIM leaders to government officials” (Stanlake 145). In conflating all six characters into one actor’s performance, and “by having one man portraying characters on both sides of the conflict, Nolan hints to the audience the similarities between both the FBI and the AIM. These similarities deal directly with the treatment of Anna Mae” (145). While the conflation of these characters into one character who, ultimately, rapes and murders Annie Mae can be read as a reverse stereotyping, I contend that it is, in fact, highlighting the ambiguity surrounding Anna Mae’s murder, and subsequently drawing attention to the experiences of both vertical and lateral violence. The conflation of the male character in the final scene has been read as an overall indictment of the marginalization of, and violence against, women from inside and outside of Native communities. As Doty argues, when Anna Mae is raped by the FBI Guy, “he embodies the sexist, misogynistic, accusatorial, and patriarchal influences that have negatively impacted Annie Mae during her involvement with the AIM” (57). Nolan’s play, like the others explored in this chapter, confronts vertical violence against Native women, but she gestures also to the problems of lateral violence in Aboriginal communities. That the FBI Guy is the actual source of violence is indicative of the first hurt – colonization, sexism, racism – and the repressive state apparatus, but also represents how “all men who devalue and disrespect the identities and individualities of Native women” are responsible for the violence and silences experienced by Native women (Doty 57).
It is after the presentation of the tongue-in-cheek stereotypes of Native women that audiences are confronted with one of the harmful consequences of the violence of representation for Native women. In the wake of the push-back against stereotypes and misrepresentations of Indigenous women, several of the plays under discussion stage a moment, or several moments, of physical – often sexual – violence against the Native women. The violence is salient and creates a direct connection to the previously culture jammed stereotypes, thereby highlighting the inherent danger of the stereotypes. The trajectory discussed at the beginning of this chapter may be problematic, but in structuring the performances in this way, the plays reject the pull to tragedy that suggests no possibility of healing after the traumatic experience. Each of these plays counters that pull to tragedy by demonstrating survival, resistance, and healing are possible post-trauma. It is not enough to simply stage resistance to the many forms of violence experienced by Indigenous women; the playwrights create dramas that help to stage that progression to healing and survivance. Emma LaRocque has observed that “‘we have developed what we might call an aesthetics of opposition. But now we need to develop an aesthetics of simply who we are’” (qtd in Anderson, 2001, 152). The plays explored here all move beyond these stereotypes and propose, as LaRocque suggests, an aesthetic of self-representation and identity; they all employ strategies of performing violence that promote resistance to that violence and appeal to audiences to be
witnesses to that trauma. They use strategies that allow for their participation in the aesthetics of opposition and identity formation. Whether it is Margo Kane and Marie Clements’s conceptual metonymy, Shirley Cheechoo’s performative caesura, or Yvette Nolan’s blended time, all of the performances denaturalize the moments of violence so that what is presented on stage is the thought rather than a re-presentation of rape on stage. By denying the normalization of violence, the plays create a framework, not through which to create subjectivity, but through which they can establish resistance to the colonial push to shatter the subjective self.

Heiner Müller argued, “there is no revolution without a memory” (153); as memory and memoir plays, *Path With No Moccasins*, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Annie Mae’s Movement*, and *Moonlodge* are important to a transformation of cultural representation of Native women. These plays end with a return, or promise to return, to home and community. In both plays stereotypes and violence are presented as past events; they represent what is being resisted in the performance. When the plays represent the present in time, they depict a positive portrayal of Native womanhood that resists these imposing definitions and understandings of Indigenous womanhood. The

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I use the word “end” here cautiously. While the plays have a theatrical end point, their thematic end is quite different. Typical of many Native Canadian plays is an ending which lacks a resolution found in traditional western performances. As a result, reviewers and spectators have been critical of the “endings” of the plays since there is no clear-cut “resolution,” but rather a hope for the future, and I argue, continued push-back.
present becomes the site of change and active resistance, whereas the past is figured as what needs to be resisted. The representation of violence on stage is positioned as memories to be worked through, but not to be focussed on; the significance is not on the traumatic event itself, but the ability to move beyond the moment of violence. This is truly inspiring and exceptional; the theatre is full of performances which end in tragedy after instances of violence against women. The pull to tragedy signals that the death/harm of a civilization’s women is the death/harm against the civilization itself. Violence against women is tragic, but plays which end in violence and tragedy suggest that nothing moves beyond that moment of violence. The Unnatural and Accidental Women, Moonlodge, Annie Mae’s Movement, and Path With No Moccasins as well as many other Native women’s performances propose something different – an optimism – that shows how life can, and does, endure after violence, and how chaos can return to order again. Exposing, naming, confronting, working through, and moving beyond violence lets the performances explore identity beyond the stereotypes and violence, present life after violence, and signal a strength in Aboriginal communities. These plays demonstrate how Aboriginal communities are unwilling to continue weathering the oppressive effects of colonization; instead, we see plays, and the communities behind those plays, opposing that colonial violence. While this is about Native Canadian culture, it can be pushed further towards a transnational reclaiming of Native culture, and behind that, a reclaiming of positive Native womanhood because “Native women are actively
shaping a better world for the future generations” (Anderson and Lawrence 11).
CHAPTER FOUR

The Long Road to Healing: Coming Home Through The Theatre

What is home? The place I was born? Where I grew up? Where my parents live? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community, my people? Who are "my people"? Is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional, sensory space? What interests me is the meaning of home for immigrants and migrants. I am convinced that this question—how one understands and defines home—is a profoundly political one.

– Chandra Talpade Mohanty 126

No map, no trail, no footprint, no way home only darkness, a cold wind whistling in my ears. The only light comes from the stars. No where to set my feet. No place to stand. (rising) No map, no trail, no footprint, no way home.

– Mojica 19

In her chapter “‘I am a proud Anishinaabekwe’: Issues of Identity and Status in Northern Ontario after Bill C-31,” Katrina Srigley writes about Alice Desjarlais’s experiences with home, culture, and identity. In it she writes:

As a young woman in the 1960s, Desjarlais wanted to leave the North behind, to escape her family and everything associated with it [...] Despite these efforts, at sixteen Desjarlais was sent to North Bay to attend high school. This did not last long; as soon as she had a chance, she quit and fled to Toronto. ‘I hated my own culture. I wanted to hide that part of me ... I wanted to be a white person,’ [...] For Desjarlais this self-hatred initiated a twenty-year cycle of addiction and abuse that only ended when she decided to come home to northern Ontario. (241)
This sense of homecoming, the return to culture, and, beyond that, a return to positive identity represents a desire to reject the cultural pressure to assimilate which makes up the focus of this chapter. It is the return to home – or the prospect of returning to a community – that the plays propose as a final step towards healing. It is part of Anderson’s construct stage to reclaim Native womanhood. Home, especially as the plays represent it, is as much a political concept as it is a geographical concept. Government policies of colonization and displacement created increasing numbers of [Native women] who, on a daily basis, live with no community or no land base — and in that sense [...] have no home. Some of us were taken away by the ‘sixties scoop’ and not repatriated, while others cannot regain our Indian status or never had it. In some cases, entire communities have been dispersed, have lost their land base or are denied recognition as Native communities by the federal government, so that it is no longer possible, either economically or practically, for people to live at home. (Lawrence & Anderson 12)

For the purposes of this chapter, home is the space where Aboriginal people not only reclaim a positive Aboriginal identity but also begin to live this identity. Notions of home are “fluid”; it “needs to be constantly ‘negotiated’” because it is “variously but not exclusively, a homeland - indigenous or adopted - a sexuality, a body prescribed by moral or ableist codes, cyberspace, a community, or a place where caring occurs, sometimes at substantial cost to the caregiver” (Schissel 1). Place, and behind that, home, “are regularly characterized by ambiguity, contingency, and unsettlement” (Tompkins, 2012, 1). While the representation of home in the theatre is always tenuous, representations
of home in Indigenous theatre often highlight the instability of the concept from a (post)colonial perspective; it takes into account “the killing, ‘taming’, or ignoring of indigenous peoples and the redistribution of their lands among European settlers” in what Joanne Tompkins calls “‘unsettlement’” (Tompkins, 2006, 6). Tompkins’s “unsettlement” can be extended to the various forms of displacement forced upon Aboriginal people in Canada because it “recognizes that the history of settlement” for Indigenous people around the world “is both profoundly unstable and the cause of cultural anxiety” (6). Indigenous theatre’s focus on home offers a counter discourse to the colonial framework of home. That colonial framework continuously seeks to destabilize, deconstruct, or destroy Aboriginal land base, familial and community ties, and identity. An Indigenous concept of home situates it “at the centre of our lives. It is about people, land, culture, and what we dream” (Maracle and Laronde iii). To that end, the concept of home that I am employing here does not need to be homeland or reservation; rather, it is a signified space where one feels at home with themselves and their cultural identity. It is a location for reclaiming culture, tradition, and identity, but it is not necessarily connected to a specific geographical location. Consequently, Aboriginal concepts of home speak to concepts of community, belonging, and healing for Aboriginal people. The plays under discussion attempt to destabilize the privileged space of the home while also trying to establish concepts of home that fit both an Indigenous paradigm of home (and community) and a framework of decolonization. Although not
always staged, home is a prominent figure in all of these performances. It holds promises of understanding their identity as Native women, of understanding the power that comes from this position in society, and of educating Native communities about the significance and importance of women both historically and contemporarily. Each play may offer a different interpretation of that return, but they all signal that initial loss of home as the first hurt, and the return to home as the final hurdle in reclaiming Native womanhood. The return to home or community is one of the final stages of healing and the final act of resistance to the colonization of Native women’s identities.

As revealed in chapter one, laws of displacement heavily affected Native women’s identity formation (among other things). The laws influenced not just how Native communities and their members would be legally identified, but also influenced concepts of belonging and home as a result of these displacements. Helen Thundercloud acknowledges the importance of home and community as a source of healing, and “addresses it in her healing work by taking people back ‘to their first hurt’: homelessness” because “many Aboriginal people feel deprived of a home” and beyond that, a tenable identity rooted in that home (Anderson, 2001, 180-181). The laws prodigiously affected Aboriginal women and children; they witnessed notions of Nativeness, as a legal identity, sometimes stripped away and saw their cultural identity challenged by residential schools and scoops which displaced children and denied them the opportunity to understand their own culture. The loss of home became a central
focus in the push-back against colonization, and to reclaiming Native identity. Since the loss of home, community, and culture was a significant step towards the colonization of Native people, reclaiming home, community, and culture is a step towards decolonization. Politics of dislocation inform the dramas explored in Acts of Resistance and highlight how identity is "a negotiation with—and on occasion heroic overcoming of—the power of place" (Chaudhuri 56). According to the Native plays I explore in this chapter, that problematic place is not home, but a location of displacement, be it figurative or literal, and it is through resisting that displacement and pushing back against the forces that compel that displacement that Native women etch out not only a home, but a community in which they can begin healing. During its original run in Ontario, Canada, Path With No Moccasins often featured a talk-back session where “people were invited to gather and talk about their residential school experiences. For many, Path With No Moccasins affirmed the idea that artists can heal themselves and others by relating their stories [...] The circles of discussion became part of another kind of healing" (Sleeping Children Awake). Both the performance and its subsequent talk-backs became a publicly-staged act of resistance and healing. They created small, albeit temporary, communities to come together and help heal. Staging a return home meant that others could also come home through the theatre.
The problems with home in Native women’s theatre

Previous chapters have gestured to how Native women’s plays turn a corner from stereotypes and violence and stage a return to home, homeland, or community as a final step towards reclaiming identity. I argue that the transition from a longing for home to the staging of a (hopeful) return to home is a defining characteristic of Native women’s theatre in Canada. It creates the opportunity to reject Native women’s displacement – Tompkins’s concept of unsettlement – and is the final act of resistance to the colonial push to destroy Native women’s subjective selves. Each play may not resolve with a return to home, but they each end with the hope that this return can, and will, happen. Inherent in staging a return home is to point out the problems of displacement. The plays problematize issues of home from the first scenes; whether it is a removal from a home, a displacement from community, or a revelation about the problems within community, the concept of “home” is uncertain and recondite, and acutely connected to a sense of identity. As Una Chaudhuri writes, “Who one is and who one can be are [...] a function of where one is and how one experiences that place” (XII). Displacement from home and homeland becomes an impediment to identity formation, as discussed in chapters one and two, and the “dispossession of land and homeland factors heavily into identity problems for Native peoples, and the struggle towards a healthy sense of identity is linked to reclaiming that space” (Anderson, 2001, 181). Dispossession of land and
homeland are featured in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Moonlodge*, *Path With No Moccasins*, and, in more subtle forms, in *Annie Mae’s Movement* and *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*. In each of these plays, notions of home are problematized and represented through a tremendous sense of loss; home is both present and markedly absent in the plays. The problem of place has been described by Chaudhuri as “geopathology,” which she defines as “problem of place— and place as problem”; it appears in theatre “as a series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location, from the micro- to the macrospatial, from home to nature, with intermediary space concepts such as neighborhood, hometown, community, and country ranged in between” (Chaudhuri 55).

Since identity is connected to place, displacement can, and often does, reveal itself through a fragmentation of identity; in Indigenous women’s theatre, that fragmentation appears as geopathic ruptures. These geopathic ruptures are represented not only in how the plays deal with the *theme* of home, but also how they deal with the *representation* of home. Geopathology is an interesting frame from which to explore the representation of home in Native women’s theatre; however, it needs to be reframed through an Indigenous, anti-colonial lens in order to look not at the problems of home — as Chaudhuri does — but at the problems of displacement from home, and the promises of (some sort of) homecoming. Issues of colonization, among other things, are not considered in Chaudhuri’s *Staging Place*, and therefore her concept of geopathology fails
to address the complex and difficult notions of “home” and “homeland” for those affected by colonization. It fails to weigh the divergent relationship with place that many Indigenous people – as just one example – face. This is, in part, because Chaudhuri’s focus is primarily naturalist modern dramas and so a post-colonial reading is outside her frame of study. I wish to take the arguments put forth in Staging Place and use them as a starting point for my own consideration of how place presents a different set of complications in Indigenous women’s theatre. This chapter explores a contained historical moment during the last decade of the twentieth century in order to explore the playwrights’ engagement with the geopathic crisis of displacement and the eventual return to community. Some modern drama articulates the

    dramatic discourse of home [...] through two main principles, which structure the plot as well as the play’s accounts of subjectivity and identity: a victimage of location and a heroism of departure. The former principle defines place as the protagonist’s fundamental problem, leading her or him to a recognition of the need for (if not an actual enactment of) the latter. (Chaudhuri xii)

However, the works of Native women playwrights under discussion here subvert this discourse of home. Instead the victimage of location is connected, not to home, but to their displacement from home. The heroism of departure is the moment of resistance which witnesses them returning to home. While “the act of returning home is an archetypally regressive act” and may be used “not to recuperate identity but rather to stage the difficulties, even impossibility, of such recuperation” (Chaudhuri 92), we cannot
explore or understand the plays in terms of simple progression and regression without considering the unique relationship with place and displacement that exists for Indigenous populations. I would be amiss to argue that the plays of Native women suggest that returning home can return to you an *a priori* identity; since their displacement was the initial impetus to identity formation – the initial hurt – it is their return home that offers the opportunity to recuperate *some* of their cultural, and arguably political identity.

To stage home becomes a moment of return, even within the theatrical, to the importance of homeland, and beyond that, community, culture, and cultural memory. It is an act of resistance that challenges the original displacements and the trauma that has resulted from these displacements. The performances display a desire to return to home and community, which is evident through their search for community, a reclaiming of culture, and a recovery of positive self-identification as Native women. Staging resistance to imposed homelessness – and beyond that the loss of cultural identity – is to suggest a sense of self-worth and a sense of value for what has been lost; resistance cannot exist without a sense of offence. Opposing offences against identity is inherently connected to a return to positive self-construction of identity. To return home, to return to culture, is to reclaim a right to this homeland and culture. If writing about the return to home is a form of protest, and to return home “through stories is to anchor ourselves in the world” (McLeod 33), then performing a return home through stories becomes an
anchor of resistance. Through the theatre, these anchors of resistance become physical, visible, acts of resistance.

From confined spaces to wide open places: reclaiming home in *Path With No Moccasins*

For Shirley Cheechoo, residential school was like "being put in a box and you can't move" (*Sleeping Children Awake*), and the staging of *Path With No Moccasins* reflects this analogy. *Path With No Moccasins* begins in a small, enclosed room of Shirley’s residential school. By the second half, Shirley, who is “twenty one,” is “under an empty house, a crawlspace that she can’t quite stand up in” (Cheechoo 22).\(^{107}\) The physical space of the performance, especially the first two acts, is claustrophobic; the scenography of the performance in the first two acts literally closes in on Shirley so that she cannot take a stand or move easily. The scenography highlights Shirley’s “unsettlement” – the geopathic crisis – inherent in her displacement from the family home. She is forced to crawl along the floor, keep her head low and slouch, and this disquietude with moving

\(^{107}\) The November 1991 performance of *Path With No Moccasins* at The Theatre Centre in Toronto, Ontario had a set that contained a “pale blue oval background for the sky, and an ingenious folding wooden structure, which represents, in turn, the inside of her school, a railway trestle and a small tent” (Lacy, 25 Nov 1991).
highlights both her difficulty with place and her debased sense of self. The stage design reveals the detachment from a stable sense of place by revealing the "rupture between human beings and their natural environment" that makes the setting "one that intrudes [...] so comically" to make "nature a mere setting – 'scenery'" (Chaudhuri 55). In *Path With No Moccasins*, the dimensions of the residential school room are disproportionate; it is stretched and skewed in incongruous ways that force a perspective of isolation and loneliness. The stage space is small to heighten the sense of enclosure, but as the play progresses, the dissonant stage design gives way to a simple black box style of performance. Its lack of (visible) limits forges the impression of not just space, but possibilities. Light and sound design continue to establish place, but also create a sense of harmony between the performance and the performer, between Shirley and her location. The sounds that fill the third and fourth acts are based on natural sounds of waves and wind, and they suggest less dissonance of place as the play comes to its conclusion. This harmony is evident in the sense of space created in the empty performance area. No longer does the design intrude on Shirley's personal space; instead, it appears limitless and unrestricted. This limitless sense of space in *Path With No Moccasins* is problematic in other performances, such as *Moonlodge*, in which a sense of vast space becomes representative of Agnes's loss of connection to family and location. Her nomadic life style is her geopathic crisis (see below). For Shirley, whose geopathic crisis is her confinement and the repression of identity formation that
accompanies it, this limitless space represents the freedom needed to begin reconstructing and reclaiming a sense of Native womanhood. Shirley begins to explore a wider theatrical and thematic space only after she resists the moments of trauma and begins to reimagine herself in the aftermath of that trauma. It is once Shirley has reached that turning point and begins to engage in acts of resistance – rejecting the stereotypes and westernized concepts of beauty, denouncing and testifying about moments of violence – that she stages a return home at “Dreamers [sic] rock on Manitoulin Island.” The return home is mirrored by her actions on stage in which she “lays out her star blanket, moccasins, sage and a feather wing and clay bowl” (Cheechoo 41), and it is here that we see both a reclamation of identity and home.

Memories of home, family, and community become the mainstay of her resistance in the first part of the play. The play begins with a memory “to us” about Shirley’s removal from her home: “That train. Always taking me away making me let go of my father’s hand” (Cheechoo 9). But in her moments of reliving memories, Shirley goes back to memories of her community to create personal strength at the residential school. She thinks of “[s]moked fish all hanging in rows, the water singing as it hits the shore. The loon’s calls out in the middle of the lake. The shadows of my parents paddling, checking the nets, floating in the water as the sun tries to come through the mist. I walk along the shore. I gather flat stones and try to skip them on the water” (10). Eventually memory begins to betray Shirley, and her memories become something she attempts
to erase. She turns to alcohol in the second part of the play to combat the trauma of the abuse experienced at the residential school. After reliving the moments of sexual violence, Shirley speaks to the bottle of Canadian Club whiskey and states, “I drink you to forget but you won’t let me. You keep punching me with memories, so I drink more and more until I don’t remember anything at all. She drinks” (Cheechoo 31). Memories originally provide her with strength to endure, but eventually they hold her down. In this way, the play highlights how returning home will not solve all the problems of identity and culture, but it is the place to start rebuilding. The play is filled with memory of family and home, but it is in the third and fourth parts of the play that Shirley returns home to start repairing her fractured understanding of self.

What follows the first two parts of the play are the stress fractures along Shirley’s identity as a result of her time at residential school and removal from her family and homeland. In part three Shirley discloses “to us” just how deep those fractures run. On Dreamer’s rock she tells us, “I really am going crazy. Indian children are never alone I was told. They have grandparents and uncles, all kinds of relatives to hold them. Where are mine? Am I just to [sic] old? Am I alone on this rock? I think I’ve lost me” (Cheechoo 36). Part two ends with a desire to return to home and community to begin healing. Shirley "sings along" to Nazareth’s “Whisky Drinking Woman,” but inserts her own lyrics:

No one with a sense of humor
No one's a happy too
Just a crying with the tunes
No one knows how to get home too  
I find myself a walking  
It's way past morning time  
Just some down lonely dirt road  
Far away from my hometown. (32)

The act ends with Shirley repeating the lines "No one knows how to get home," cementing her desire to go home, but also her lack of the tools to get there.

It is once she is at home, with a family, that she starts to come full circle, “to let go of [her] old self” (Cheechoo 41) and reclaim a positive sense of Native womanhood. Of course this return to home and positive identity is a common trope in a sizeable cross section of Aboriginal theatre in Canada. The return to a sense of home allows Native women to begin reclaiming identity in the aftermath of their unsettlement. Since Shirley was denied a tenable home, the end of Shirley’s geopathic crisis is signalled not by a departure from home, but rather a departure from what is inextricably not home. Part of this return includes a return to the language of home: “Every morning I splash my face, to wipe away my sorrow [...] I gargle my mouth to wash away all the dirty language I use to beat myself” (39). But it is not until she solicits a sense of community that she really begins to feel at home. The use of Indigenous language becomes one method Shirley can use to wash away the “dirty language,” and not only resist the pull to destroy her culture (and language), but also to find her way home. She begins to drum and chant a song in Cree:

        kei pei tah tin a tah po shen numshoom
Shirley seeks the strength of her family, her grandfather and grandmother to help her as she grieves the loss of her father and attempts to find her way back to family and community. This return to Cree, which has not been seen since the first part of the play, signals a desire to recover her Cree roots and a longing not to “forget about trapping and hunting” (34) and family. More than that, however, the return to Cree signals an act of survivance, signalling both a resistance to the attempt to stop Shirley from speaking her native language and the survival of the language in spite of these efforts.

The healing starts when she returns to community and begins speaking to the water spirits instead of the bottle of Canadian Club whiskey. To combat her loneliness she “used to talk to the moon [...] used to talk to the bottle [...] used to talk to the water spirits at the Black Rocks [...] The loneliness that shoots up and down my spine, and me searching out there for someone to answer me” (Cheechoo 43), but by the end she is looking to make connections. She says to the audience, “Today’s supposed to be a

Translated as: “I hear you calling me grandfather/I hear you calling me grandmother/come and help me/ come and help me. /My father left me, grandfather / my father left me, grandmother / come and help me/ come and help me” (36)
powerful day for making connections,” calling on us to be a part of that connecting process. Shirley begins to “connect” rather than “remember” by the end of the play; she connects during moments that identify her as part of a community. She associates herself with “those sleeping children taking a path with no moccasins awake” by claiming she is “one of them” (46), and, beyond that, she connects herself to a community of displaced Aboriginal people who are returning to home, homeland, and community to begin healing the damages of that displacement. She will become a part of a community that seeks to heal the generational scars of displacement and colonization. She states: “What I put out will come back to teach me” (46). Shirley begins to understand that her body is her own and “no one is allowed to touch it” unless she allows it (46). And in the final moments of the play, Shirley becomes connected to a sense of community.

I have seven friends, seven women sitting in a circle. All different in color. The beauties of the sister moon. My sisters from a different time protecting me so I can walk into the light and tell my story with no fear, with no sadness, no judgement, leaving behind my old self, self-betrayer that has trapped me in silence, in a box of cockroaches crawling all over me sexually abusing me against my will telling me they loved me. I felt the fear making my crotch ache. I could not say No! No! No! I want to talk to me now. Down to where my gut is aching, aching to answer me. I must take my position in the sisterhood because I am a woman. One sister must not let down another. (45)

In a final gesture towards community, Shirley speaks “to us” again. Shirley, who is clearly becoming more confident in her identity as a Native woman, says:

You know what I think. I think we should all make the biggest star blanket. Me, you, no matter what color you are. We’ll put our marks on it. A star
blanket full of healing colors made by us with no judgement of the past. And we’ll cover our world with it, with us underneath to be healed as one. [...] I have seen the seven sister moons. They were all lined up in different sizes across the sky. I only met the biggest one. I’ll take you to meet the others when I know how to see them again. Let’s say it’s a date. Even if you’re in Japan or anywhere in the world you can say “I have a date in Canada with one of my sisters to see the seven moons. But the date isn’t set yet. I just know it’s coming.” You can say, “I shall wait. For my sister spent a long time waiting, so she can love herself so she can be free [...] So she could become whole, instead of torn apart by those who want her power.” (Cheechoo 47-48)

This moment of speaking to the audience calls us to become the “you” in her address. She calls us to be a part of that community that will “be healed as one.” Of course Cheechoo did invite the theatre community to come together, share stories, and help heal each other through the talk-backs that became a part of her performances. This invocation of the audience is a common trope in many Native women’s plays, such as Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, which calls on “friends, sisters, guerrilleras – the women – ‘Word Warriors’ to help” form a community of women who are a source of strength and empowerment (Mojica 59).

A strong sense of identity is connected to community and vice versa. Each play discussed in this thesis stages an invocation to a community of women to help shape and

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109 It is important to signal that the focus of this chapter is primarily on Native women’s return to community and concepts of at-home-ness as a method of decolonizing Native womanhood. However, I recognize that Native men also share in this return to community (and can help in building that community). The talk-backs, for example, were for all members to engage in sharing stores, and this included both male and female participants.
better both individuals and the community. Like many of the plays explored here, Shirley’s connection with a community of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women suggests a new-found level of comfort with her identity both as a Native and a woman. It demonstrates the self-respect achieved by Shirley, and creates an invitation for others to join in and begin their process of healing. Shirley/Cheechoo implicates the audience in this moment. She calls on us to join the circle, to form a community of people who will respect her – and behind her the other “sisters” – who seek self-actualization and self-respect. This moment also highlights a comfort with not only herself (self love and respect) but also a renewed connection to her Aboriginal heritage. She returns to speaking to the moon, to finding solace in its glow; the star blanket, as a symbol of healing and community, stages a return for Shirley not only to heal herself but others in her community as well.

Displacement and nomadism in Moonlodge

Margo Kane’s Moonlodge also examines the problems of home and community for Native people who have been displaced. For Agnes, who was part of a generation of children who were “scooped” from their families, problems with concepts of home are evident from the first scenes of the play. The program for the play read:

To this day Native people continue to find their way home. Many were
adopted or fostered out-of-province, some to the United States, some even to Europe. Many come home with tragic stories of abuse and memories too painful to push aside. They and their families have begun the slow process of healing, rebuilding themselves and their communities. Native organizations now exist to assist in the re-uniting of Native families.

It is hoped that MOONLODGE will be a part of the healing of our people. We have survived tremendous losses with a sense of humour, dignity and honour. We are capable of determining our own future and that of our children. (Native Earth Performing Arts, “File 8”)

While the play revolves around finding and reclaiming a sense of identity, the push-back to Native women’s displacement from homeland (and thus a push-back to the practice of colonization in Canada) is a significant step towards decolonization. Staging a return to home means artists like Kane can help in the healing of Native people who have experienced the dysphoria of displacement.

As mentioned earlier, Moonlodge’s representation of stage space functions in an opposite way to Cheechoo’s play. Agnes’s displacement materializes in her nomadic life style, and that geopathic crisis is represented through the instability of location within the drama and the stage space. Even objects, such as the suitcase or the drum, hold transient significations as the play transitions from one place to another. It is her movement around the stage, rather than the restrictions seen in the other plays, that highlights Agnes’s problematic relationship with home, which in turn signals her geopathic crisis. In every signalled geographical change – the foster home, hitchhiking across the country, Santa Fe – Agnes searches for, but cannot find a community, and,
beyond that, a place to be and feel at home. Problems of home are evident in *Moonlodge* immediately. Not only is Agnes removed from her home by Child Welfare, but after she leaves her foster parent’s home she embarks on a period of nomadism that heightens our perception of her displacement. The problems with place for Agnes are first created by force. She “remember[s] moving and moving” between foster homes where she “had to share beds with all kinds of children. And dinner tables filled with strangers” (Kane 280). Then, through self-imposed nomadism. Agnes recounts: “Somehow I managed to graduate from high school and everyone was talking about California and San Francisco and Haight-Ashbury and love-ins. It sounded so . . . Groovy! And they were all taking their backpacks and hitchhiking . . . all over. There was a bigger world outside of my Aunt Sophie’s” (Kane 284). Geography and place are continually signalled after Agnes leaves Aunt Sophie’s. She names where she is for the audience, and arguably for herself, to know where she is in the world at any given time. It is only once she creates a community of women for herself that Agnes is able to relieve her geopathic symptoms.

The geopathic crisis for Agnes, and *Moonlodge*’s problems with concepts of home in general, is established through Agnes’s nomadism; Agnes is a “character without a history, uprooted, piecing herself together” (Eigenbrod 182). “Agnes’s nomadism” strips Agnes from a genealogy and memory until the return home is staged. She wanders around from place to place until Millie contextualizes what it is Agnes should be doing.
Millie is making bread at the camp and the smell triggers in Agnes a memory of “home” and family. As Eigenbrod points out, this is Agnes’s “first intimation of a memory of ‘home’” (182). Much like Cheechoo’s play, memories cued by sensory observations are what lead Agnes back to a sense of home. The smell and sight of Millie’s frybread reminds Agnes of home: “It used to be my job to make frybread for the big dinners. I had a stool in front of the stove at — home. . . . [Retreating] I’ve gotta go. Excuse me [...] [As memory floods in]” (Kane 289). It is the memory of home that is both the cause of pain, as a result of what was lost through her displacement, and the catalyst for change and a return to home.

It is at the powwow that Agnes first finds a sense of community and belonging. While she is “watching those around her” to know how to dance at first, as she continues dancing the movements come easier for her (Kane 288). Though she first dances “as the little boys and then the little girls” (288), Agnes eventually transitions to just “dances.” It is through the dance that Agnes finds her place. Agnes’s return to dance is symbolic not just of a return to tradition and community, but also a rejection of the violence she experienced earlier. The previous instance of dance in the play (during “All The Way to Santa Fe”) led to a moment of intense violence and violation of identity. That Agnes returns to dance to redefine her relationship not just with dance, but also her body, reveals an act of survivance and a desire to reclaim her subjective self post-trauma. Agnes starts dancing at the powwow with trepidation, but then moves to a
more comfortable relationship with the dance – so that she “could have danced all night” (Kane 289) – revealing the way that dance became a means to connect to the community around her and to heal the rupture between Agnes and her body, surroundings, and culture. This brief moment of not just community but also of culture helps Agnes to reconnect to a feeling of home and links her to a heritage that she had been denied through her nomadism. Like Shirley with her star blanket, the return to a sense of culture through dance is one of the first medicines that Agnes is able to employ to find her way back to community, and eventually, to home.\(^\text{110}\)

Agnes begins searching for her own medicine to help heal the scars of displacement, but it is through Millie that she ends up finding a community in which she can begin to heal.

Millie: Hmmm? Medicine. There’s all kinds of medicine for all kinds of people...You look confused. Your medicine will come from your own people

Agnes: My own people? [under her breath] But I don’t remember who they are.

MILLIE: Where are you headed next? Do you know where you’re going? I don’t think so. What are you looking for?

AGNES: I didn’t know I was looking for anything.

MILLIE: Have you ever looked for your family? Maybe that’s what you should

\(^{110}\) It is not my intention to discuss the important function of dance in Indigenous culture; the variety, various significance/uses of dance between different Indigenous cultural groups would make this an impossible task for this thesis. However, the return to dance in Moonlodge is significant as it highlights not just a return to culture, but a repudiation of the many attempts to destroy that culture. Several Aboriginal nations in Canada were banned from certain dances, or events and gatherings in which dance was a significant component. The fact that dance becomes a way to start connecting to culture is a doubled act of resistance both to the laws that were once established to stop dance and to the return to home and tradition.
be looking for... Well, you know where to find me. When you’re in my neck of the woods just ask around. I’m the only Millie there. Come and stay awhile. I’ll be expecting you. (290-291)

What is happening here is an invitation to be a part of Millie’s community, but also Agnes’s awareness that it is her family, her home that she seeks. It is not just looking for her own family, but finding a place, a home, where she can learn and grow. Millie points Agnes in the right direction and it leads her to the moonlodge with Millie and a circle of women. No only does Agnes find a community to align with, but she finds and becomes a part of a community of women who support each other (by listening to each other’s stories of trauma and healing), and that can offer foundations on which to begin rebuilding an empowered Native womanhood. While the play does not stage Agnes’s reconnection with her family, the play does stage the final act of resistance to displacement by seeking out and reconnecting with the severed ties of family, culture, and community. It is by Agnes’s very act of placing herself within a Native community, reconnecting with cultural traditions, and coming to terms with her trauma that she resists her continual displacement.

A concept of theatrical community is invoked in Moonlodge from the very first scene. Moonlodge begins with the “sound of women’s voices in Cree and English around a fire” (Kane 278). The sounds of a woman’s community, and the invocation of the theatrical space as that community, resonate as audiences enter the theatrical space. The play suggests that Agnes not only enters and begins her story in a community of
women in the moonlodge (which suggests that she has found a community to be a part of), but, much like Cheechoo’s talk-backs at the end of her performances, the audience is also an active participant in that community by the very act of listening to her story.

Displacement and isolation: The Unnatural and Accidental Women

Marie Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* also presents a scenography that problematizes concepts of home and place. Whereas space for Cheechoo is confined and claustrophobic, and for Kane it is immense and roaming, the representation of space for Marie Clements is isolated and violent. The play highlights the various ways Native women have been unsettled or displaced through its staging at various hotels in Vancouver’s DTES. The hotel rooms, of course, signal displacement from home; by its very nature, a hotel is temporary. That these women are not allowed to leave their hotel stage space until the second half reveals not only their displacement from home, but also their isolation and lack of community. The play expresses the isolation of the women not only by giving them separate stage spaces representative of their hotel rooms, but also
through surrealist aspects of lighting, projections, and sound effects.\textsuperscript{111} The first half of \textit{The Unnatural and Accidental Women} considers the fragmentation and objectification of Native women. There is a direct correlation between the colonization of land and the colonization of people in this imagery. The play begins with a "collage of trees whispering in the wind" and then "the sound of a tree opening up to a split. A loud crack-- a haunting gasp for air that is suspended. The sustained sound of suspension as the tree teeters" as the logger yells "TIM-BER" (Clements, 2005, 9). This sequence of sound effects and the sound of the tree cracking before showing the staged death of Aunt Shadie reveals a deep rift between the women and their landscape. As if watching a tree fall in reverse, she “bolts upright, unfallen” (9), just before a slide projection announces her death.

Like the trees that loggers fell, the Native women are displaced from their homes

\textsuperscript{111} As discussed in Sarah Banting’s article “Being There: Stage Presence and \textit{The Unnatural and Accidental Women},” during the November 2000 Firehall Arts Centre run of the play much of the first half (specifically moments of isolation and violence) was performed “behind transparent scrims segregating them [the women] from the audience and suggesting the isolation of their lives and deaths” and it was after their stage deaths that “they emerged from behind the scrims to join each other in what audience members report was an especially ‘focused and visceral’ scene, where they stepped fully into ‘the three-dimensionality of the theatre.’” (Thomas) As they danced and sang in a ‘powerful chanting circle’ (Birnie) they ushered in the play’s second half: a funny and gutsy vision of these otherwise isolated women as a sisterhood capable-even after death-of helping their survivors finally defeat the barber” (Banting 81). The transparent scrims help to add a fuzzy or distorted appearance to the first half’s violence that highlights not only their isolation, but also encourages the audience to acknowledge their own “blind spots” (83) and become carriers of the story rather than making “a familiar and hence ignorable story merely visible, allowing it to be consumed with detachment” (85). Instead we are encouraged to view these women as individual subjects with stories and lived experiences that the audience can learn from, bear witness to, and eventually engage in the reciprocal elements of Indigenous (theatrical) storytelling.
and communities. Native women are equated with the land; the whole first half reveals a destruction of, and detachment from, nature and it signals Native women’s various forms of detachment. That this scene's sound effects are contained within the scene "FALLING BACK - Beacon Hotel" suggests an even wider rupture between the natural space and the hotel space. Sounds of the natural world are set up in juxtaposition to sounds of the destruction of that natural world, such as a “long saw sawing.” Traditionally, western views of Aboriginal women have often “mirror[ed] western attitudes towards the earth” (Anderson, 2001, 100), and so these industrial sounds of destruction are gesturing to the attitudes toward Native women. The connection between the women, place, and nature is made even more explicit when Rebecca states, "Everything here has been falling - a hundred years of trees have fallen from the sky's grace. They laid on their backs trying to catch their breath as the loggers connected them to anything that could move, and moved them" (Clements, 2005, 10). The images of cutting and displacement appear again in the play when the barber cuts the women’s hair and alludes to the women’s murders and their ultimate displacement from both geography and subjectivity.

The concept of home in Clements’s play is always undercut by a longing and a loneliness the women experience. Valerie’s children, Tommy and Evan, continually ask: “When are you coming home? It’s been a long time now” (Clements, 2005, 49), but Valerie replies: “It’s hard to come right now. But soon. I’m gonna get the job and
soon...” (50). The play highlights isolation by staging the women “in their own spaces and places,” except for Aunt Shadie and Rose who act as the connecting force between the women. Rebecca’s apartment in act two is also designed to “reflect the symptoms of urban isolation even without being on Hastings Street” (7). Beginning with the murder of Aunt Shadie in the first scene of the play, there is a progression towards the formation of a Native woman’s community and a reclaiming of Native womanhood as a result.

When Shirley, in *Path With No Moccasins*, uses Cree at residential school, and then later when she reconnects with her community, we recognize that the use of Indigenous language is a strategy to resist her unsettlement and to reclaim (or maintain) Native culture/identity. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* uses language not just as a form of resistance to Native women’s unsettlement, but also as a means to reform a Native women’s community. In terms of scenography and stage space, we see the underpinnings of a community developing as the physical space of the theatre is united both between the women, and by the women in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. The women also begin to create a community with each other through Indigenous language. That connection through language begins with the Cree/English song at the end of act one that is “interspersed with episodes [of] about six of the women’s deaths,” and during the performance “dance and singing were used to make a ritual of welcoming each woman into death” (Harrison 266). The song calls to the other women and intimates a connection and a community: “Do I hear you sister like yesterday today [...]
Hear your words right next to mine” (Clements, 2005, 60) and “See you as if you were sitting right here next to me” (63). Marie Clements stated in an interview with Klisala Harrison that the use of the Cree language was a way to go back to “authentic selves” and was intended both to “call to each other” and honour each other, as well as begin forming a community of women (qtd in Harrison 273). The song does not get the opportunity to end – it does not resolve – because the “journey that [the women] go through isn’t completed until Gilbert” dies and the women reform a community (Columpa Bobb qtd in Harrison 274). The language the women use refer to their community space as a home; Aunt Shadie tells Mavis and Verna to “get [their] asses home” because “Rose is making tea for everyone” (Clements, 2005, 85). Even when separated from place of origin or family of origin, Native women can find a sense of home and family still. The women are not home yet though; they are separated by geographical stage space between the switchboard and Rebecca’s apartment. It is in the conclusion of the women’s stories and the return to womanhood in the final scene that brings all the women together to form a community. As the women begin to interact with each in the second half, we begin to see the shape of a community. No longer are the women isolated on the stage. Mavis, Valerie, and Verna are together in Rebecca’s

\footnote{To clarify, I do not believe that Clements is suggesting that the play offers an authentic depiction of Native women, but rather, that the return to language offers a connection to something more authentic than the stereotypes and misrepresentations offered by the coroner reports or media, for example.}
apartment; Aunt Shadie, Rose, and Violet are together at the switchboard, and these multiple worlds begin to close in on themselves, drawing the women into a community together, as the play draws to its final scene.

Of course there is a community of Native women at the end of the play. The whole play enacts the process of these women finding home and community with each other, which is eventually achieved by the end of the second half. Neither Rebecca nor the women need to return to a homeland to find home and community. It is in returning to a state of community, however, that *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* faces the problems of identity formation and presents the return to community as a method of reclaiming a positive identity.

*THE TRAPPERS follow through, as REBECCA and her mother stare at each other. THE TRAPPERS take the razor, wash it and replace it. REBECCA hands each woman their braids. THE WOMEN leave in a line. Her mother remains standing. REBECCA reaches in her pocket and hands her mother her braid of hair. AUNT SHADIE: Re-becca. AUNT SHADIE raises her hand and touches her face. REBECCA: Meegweetch and thank you. AUNT SHADIE hugs her and falls behind the line of WOMEN/TRAPPERS, as the lights fade on the landscape and THE WOMEN tracking their way back.*

*Slide: The First Supper — Not To Be Confused With The Last Supper*  
*REBECCA watches the long line of women as they take their heavy trapping clothes off, their long, long hair spilling everywhere. They begin to sit down to a beautiful banquet à la the Last Supper. Lights fade on them, and the sound of their voices becomes the sound of trees.* (126-127).

The creation of a community is evident in the final tableau with the women sitting to eat with each other. They create a circle of women who are accepting of each other and who
can begin to heal the wounds of representational, sexual, and colonial violence. That they return to their trapper – and beyond that, their traditional – roles suggests a return to a strong, empowered sense of Native womanhood that respects and values the roles of women within a community. In that final interaction (and arguably the first interaction) between mother and daughter, there is also the suggestion that this created community can help heal generational trauma experienced by Rebecca. She is able to let go of her past anger and forgive her mother.

If the play sets up the sound of trees falling as a point of disunity, a displacement from nature, and an unnatural state of being in nature, then what do the final two sound effects (both trees falling to the ground) suggest? Of course, the sound of a tree falling is equated with death and in this moment the death being signified is Gilbert’s at the hands of Rebecca and the trappers. Nevertheless, that Rebecca walks away “in the wind and trees” suggests that she is not the last tree falling, but is able to re-establish a connection with nature and reject her geopathic crisis. Rebecca regains her connection to nature in this moment, and, as Kim Anderson writes, the “relationship with the land is critical to Native female strength and resistance” (Anderson, 2001, 127). I would suggest, like a judge’s gavel, the sound of the tree falling is the sound of closure. After the last “loud thud,” Rebecca walks away. It is a resolution that signals, perhaps, an end to her own disconnect from nature because the balance has, in a way, been restored. Of course this balance is not perfect, but it is a way to begin healing. This final moment
is not just the last tree falling; it is Rebecca’s search finally coming to an end. While community for the murdered women is staged, Rebecca is left to continue on and keep searching for that community, which is hinted at by the end of the play in both her desire to grow her hair long and her connection with her mother.

What separates Clements’s play from *Moonlodge* or *Path With No Moccasins* is a return to positive Native womanhood without a need to return to the reservation or to ancestral homeland. Rebecca is an urban Native woman and represents generations of Aboriginal men and women who enter cities but still wish to maintain a sense of Aboriginal Identity. While other performances explored here have staged or foreshadowed a return to a geographical and/or actual community, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* stages a return to community without leaving the city, which suggests that the two are not mutually exclusive. The isolation of the first half is neutralized by the formation of a community of women who support each other, laugh with each other, joke and tease each other, and share their stories and experiences.

The plays are geopathic dramas that highlight the problems of home as it exists for Native women; it is a problem with the consequences of colonial policies that drove Native women’s displacement from home and community. However, unlike the modern dramas of Chaudhuri’s book *Staging Place*, the plays explored here do not problematize homecoming, but rather signal homecoming as the final act of resistance and means to
help understand and create identity. Homecoming does not always entail a return to original home, but a return to a feeling of being at home. Bonita Lawrence and Kim Anderson argue that “coming home means reconnecting physically and psychically to their communities of origin, or building alternative communities in the cities where they feel at home” (12). In all of the plays, however, home is always at a distance; place is unsettled or displaced. Home is a location of healing, but home (and community) is an untenable reality for the women at the start of each play. It is only through their various forms of resistance and an engagement in their own decolonization that they can finally begin to reclaim a sense of identity and place. As demonstrated in Mohanty’s questioning of home at the start of this chapter, the journey home is shaped by a difficulty in defining what home is within these plays, and in a broader context. Home, in the context I am using it, speaks to not just a place of origin, but to a community, a geography, a landscape, a mentality, where one feels at home, and where identity can and, as I argue, does become a source of strength rather than confusion. Home for Native women playwrights is about finding a community of women who support each other, who draw strength from each other, and who can engage in a process of decolonization together. This process of coming home can be achieved through Indigenous storytelling, which, as this dissertation argues, is a significant part of the decolonization process.
CHAPTER FIVE

Memory and History – Storytelling as Memorial

At its origins, storytelling was a way of relating the history of the community. It was a way of explaining human nature. A single story could have metaphorical, philosophical, psychological implications
– Drew Hayden Taylor 61

Every time a story is told, every time one word of an Indigenous language is spoken, we are resisting the destruction of our collective memory.
– Neal McLeod 31

In each chapter thus far, I have explored a trajectory within the plays to reclaim Native womanhood, and in doing so, have outlined the ways Native women playwrights are staging acts of resistance to the stereotypes and misrepresentations, violence, and historical absences. Each chapter has outlined how Native women playwrights are pushing back to resist “negative definitions of being,” reclaiming Native women’s identities, and acting “on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of [Native] communities” (Anderson, 2001, 15). Indigenous storytelling is a specific mode of resistance that makes it possible to reclaim identities that have been fractured by cultural and political policies aimed at colonization and/or assimilation. As Jill Carter notes, "Native Performance Culture (NPC) constitutes an artistic inheritance built upon the persistence of memory" (240). NPC has begun to "weave [...] classic comedy
routines, hit-television iconography, popular music, and survivors' testimony" in order to "locate and isolate the source of the dis-ease which continues to profoundly impact the lives of contemporary Aboriginal people" (J. Carter 241-242). As I have explored in earlier chapters, Indigenous storytelling in the plays of Clements, Nolan, Mojica, Cheechoo, and Kane has used popular culture and personal experiences in an attempt to deconstruct and dispel the culture industry’s near-monopoly on the production of identity and representation of Native womanhood. If the push-back against stereotypes, sexual violence, historical absences, and political policy is the what, then storytelling in the theatre is the how. While the first part of Acts of Resistance is concerned with what specifically is being resisted in Native women’s theatre, this chapter is interested with how those things are being resisted in Native women’s theatre.

The theatre explored in Acts of Resistance attempts to decolonize Native womanhood by challenging the historical narratives that form the basis of their plays. Whether it is cultural genocide of the residential schools and scoops, as seen in Margo Kane and Shirley Cheechoo; the representational violence of Native women, as seen in Monique Mojica; or violence against women, as seen in Marie Clements and Yvette Nolan, each play is both inspired by and critical of a historical narrative that has been twisted to ignore or de-emphasize Indigenous women’s roles and experiences. The ordering of the plays is not necessarily temporal, although they do fall into three periods that more or less correspond to each other. Rather, the groupings are around the
dramaturgical strategies and themes addressed in the plays. Although each play tackles the failures of historical records to account for Indigenous perspectives and experiences, the plays not only address different historical moments, but also use substantively different methods to address these failures. I argue differences are a result of the primary needs of the historical context and geographic locations in which these plays were created rather than the time period in which they were written/premiered. As a result the groupings are not (and do not need to be) linear. The personal narratives of Kane and Cheechoo create a point of intervention with historical accounts to offer a fuller version of that history. In their plays, however, they make a claim at history that can be both interpreted as "truth" because of the play's position as testimony, and as part of a wider array of experiences beyond the individual. The plays’ position as personal history makes a claim that the individual story is important to the understanding of history; however, they also run the risk of being interpreted as representative of multiple experiences, even if the intention of this is to undermine that possible reading of history and testimony. Monique Mojica's play acts as a bridge between the dramaturgical strategies used to challenge the historical narratives. She connects the solo-voice plays of Cheechoo and Kane to the later plays of Clements and Nolan. Mojica picks up where the solo voice performances leave off and challenges history's ability to undermine collective experiences. It questions historical accounts, but refuses to offer an alternative version of those accounts. Instead, Mojica holds up
multiple historical narratives to create a comparative frame that enables a critical engagement with how each of these narratives work to undermine Indigenous women’s role in history. By the later half of the 1990s, the modes of historical representation begin to change. Playwrights like Yvette Nolan and Marie Clements begin to confront the holes in the historical narrative; however, they reject the call to fill in those gaps. Instead, they use fantastical or surreal representations of violence and history to reveal a widening chasm between what is historically “known” and what is left out of the dominant historical narratives. They search for a way to balance the disparities in dominant historical narratives. The plays make a break from concepts of stable history presented in the earlier works (claims to the historically significant "I" narrative, or storytelling as a form of historical narrative) and instead present something that not only destabilizes the concept of singular versions of history, but also destabilizes any attempt to try and complete that history. If the solo voice plays are filling in historical gaps, and Mojica is signalling those gaps, without necessarily filling them in, then Clements and Nolan are widening those historical gaps. They take moments of historical significance (specifically around violence) and rip them open to explore the instances when we choose to look sideways to avoid the difficult moments of history. It is not that they seek to fill in the "great hole[s] of history," but to destabilize the ground around the holes, inevitably making it bigger before the holes collapse in on themselves. By making the holes bigger, they are making those holes visible, and like a pothole that turns into a
sinkhole, the playwrights create chasms so large that we cannot ignore them any longer. Regardless of whether the playwrights are filling in gaps or making them bigger, each play uses storytelling within a theatrical context to achieve that destabilization of accepted historical records, and to signal moments of cultural genocide.

By drawing on historical events, the plays create a space where personal histories can become a part of the historical record – or at least be incorporated into cultural memory of historical events. Furthermore, by using an Indigenous mode of teaching, the plays are able to create a documentation of experience without subjecting survivors (or potential witnesses/spectators) to a system that could “turn cruelty and violence, especially towards children, into a discourse to be easily re-consumed and re-fetishized within, for example, the pornographic language of subjugation” (Emberley, 2013, 146). Rather, the Indigenous storytelling that each of these plays invokes "allow[s] for the intervention of different frameworks of knowing that can undermine” that pull to re-victimization (146). Storytelling places emphasis on the individual's experiences, as part of a collective whole, which not only objects to traditional historical archives, but also stakes a claim to its place within that archive. Finally, framing the testimony within Indigenous storytelling invokes two intertwined concepts: the Aboriginal concept of witness and Aboriginal acts of resistance.

Storytelling’s place in Aboriginal culture is well documented; it forms the basis of oral traditions that focus on "the sacred, the historical, those dealing with cultural
traditions, and life experience and testimonials" (Emberley, 2013, 152). Storytelling can be different things to different people and cultures, and while the intent of my research here is not to explore ‘traditional’ Indigenous narratives – those are outside my scope, my experience, and my agency – I do need to offer a definition of storytelling as it relates to, and intersects with traditional (that is conventional western) theatrical genre. At its core, Indigenous storytelling makes interventions into dominant historical and cultural narratives by “rewriting history/ies from the perspective of previously marginalized constituencies” which is “a staple characteristic of postmodern and postcolonial literature” (Maufort, 2013, 159); in turn, this storytelling alleviates what Joy Hooten calls the “cult of forgetfulness” (qtd in MacKenzie). Each playwright explored in Acts of Resistance has demonstrated a desire to push back against dominant representations of Aboriginal women, and in doing so, they attempt to reclaim ownership over their representation and histories. By offering the silenced subjects an avenue to speak and be heard, Indigenous theatrical storytelling engages in both feminist and postcolonial modes of narrative. Native storytelling as a theatrical genre is subversive, political, didactic, and is always responding to a broader public discourse. It is characterized by counter-narratives that include: an opposition to representational violence in culture and history; a use of parody, paradox, and trickery to catch the audience off guard and challenge their assumptions about the stories it tells; a call to the audience to act as witness; a desire to stake a claim on the production of identity; and a desire to create
counter-narratives that challenge historical absences of Native people.

Survivance, with its “active sense of presence over historical absence, the dominance of cultural simulations, and manifest manners” (Vizenor, 2009, 1), is another characteristic of Indigenous storytelling. For Vizenor, Native stories “seldom wait alone for meaning at the margins of perception or translation. Native stories and literature are eternal traces of survivance” (Vizenor, 2011, 11). In Fugitive Poses, Vizenor argues that Indigenous stories can “create a sense of presence, a tease of memories, and a resistance to pictures of victimry” (2000, 154). Indigenous theatrical storytelling not only creates a moment of resistance, but also creates a sense of Indigenous presence that helps to dispel the myths of the “vanishing Indian.” Native women’s storytelling examined in this chapter, with its focus on historical events, enacts moments of survivance by rejecting the historical texts that have traditionally “imprison[ed] Indigenous women in stereotypes which obscure and distort their very real and lived experiences” (Acoose 52). Steven Hoelscher proposes that stories of survivance are a type of counter-narrative that “undermines the master narratives that sustain imperial rule [...] and offers new opportunities for self-determination and cultural sovereignty” (Hoelscher 14). Indigenous storytelling, especially in a public venue like the theatre, is both an act of resistance and an act of survival because it allows Indigenous people to take ownership over their lives and stories and create a better narrative than what is being told about them. Indigenous storytelling also "demands a high level of interactive
exchange between storyteller and listener" (Emberley, 2013, 148) so that witnesses are not passive spectators, but creators and holders of that knowledge. There is a high level of participation required on the part of the audience members that subsequently supports the co-subjectivity created through the live theatrical event which I discussed in chapter two. Testimony and memory provide something that documentary knowledge cannot; they become less about the empirical reconstruction of history and more to do with the experiences and effects of the events being conveyed. In the plays of Mojica, Clements, Cheechoo, Kane, and Nolan, storytelling, and its more personalized relative, testimony, become counter-narratives that “attempt to understand experience and its aftermath” and that may include the fallibility of memory with “its lapses, in coming to terms with – or denying and repressing – the past” (LaCapra 87).

Storytelling in Native women’s theatre is not just an Indigenous strategy for counter-narratives, however; it is also a feminist strategy. An “Indigenous feminist ethos of responsibility compels women to share their stories and personal pain with one another to promote healing for everyone” (Archuleta 98), and whether or not the playwrights choose to identify themselves or their works as feminist, there are clear traces of (Indigenous) feminist storytelling aesthetics. Specifically they engage in subversive storytelling which addresses the historical absences and silencing of Aboriginal women. Not all Native women may be in a position to challenge cultural stereotypes and take on their own self-representation. Yet, through the act of telling
“experiences with racism, sexism, colonization, loss of language and culture, Native women are able to fuel the healing process on both a personal and a national level” (Anderson, 2001, 141). The ethos of Indigenous feminism means the playwrights are able to address multiple audience constituencies by challenging dominant culture’s percepticide and promoting healing among those who may be more embedded in the histories being told.

The use of Indigenous storytelling in the theatre develops an "intertwining of Western and Indigenous storytelling traditions in such a way that the elements of Western literary traditions become embedded in Native storytelling traditions and elements of the oral traditions become embedded in the Western literary traditions" (Emberley, 2013, 151). It is inaccurate to say that these plays defy conventional theatrical genres; they exist in and are part of that tradition, and the playwrights use elements from those conventions, like the chorus in The Unnatural and Accidental Women, to tell their stories. These plays do, however, push the boundaries of audience expectations of theatrical genre and storytelling; the pushing of these boundaries is what led some reviewers to be critical of Indigenous storytelling’s place in Native theatre in Canada. Ray Conlogue with The Globe and Mail proclaimed that Moonlodge “turns out to lack drama”

113 For example, observable tragedy or comedy with the theatrical conventions expectant of both, such as plot or catharsis.
because “telling a story is not a play.” What this reviewer fails to (or chooses not to) recognize is the place of storytelling in both Aboriginal culture and traditional (western) theatre. It is a way to present a story to an audience and, as a result, call upon storytelling to facilitate healing, witnessing, and resistance.

Metatheatrical shifts allow the playwrights to position the spectator/audience as witnesses to the theatrical event. Indigenous theatrical storytelling in the plays under discussion here uses these metatheatrical shifts to disrupt the narrative logic of the performance by overlapping the theatrical past with the theatrical present in order to draw attention to that performance. Conventional understandings of history displace the story from the teller; Aboriginal storytelling places that knowledge firmly in the “I” or the “we.” By creating a dramaturgical strategy that appeals for the audiences’ acknowledgement of both the storyteller and the frame in which the story is told, the plays can confront our expectations of historical narratives and destabilize the history being represented. Staging these historical moments as part of embodied storytelling can certainly press their urgency, but by invoking the present – and its audiences – they

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114 This reviewer also failed to distinguish between “sex” and “rape” during “All The Way to Santa Fe” when he described Agnes’s journey as taking “off for every teen-ager’s mecca [sic], California, on the back of a Harley-Davidson with whose driver she has her introduction to sex and drugs. But she doesn’t get farther than New Mexico, where she stumbles with astonishment over a lively native culture.” While most reviews omitted mentioning the moments of sexual violence, those who did write about it reported it as sexual violence, which suggests that there is no possibility of doubt that the scene represented sexual violence. This glaring mis-reading of Moonlodge is highly suspect.
call on the audience to act as witnesses to these alternative histories. There exist several moments in the plays of Clements, Cheechoo, Kane, Mojica, and Nolan where characters make off-handed remarks through asides, or direct address by facing the addressing the audience. Direct address can be considered if not a prerequisite, then certainly a common characteristic of Indigenous storytelling. Its purpose is to invoke the Aboriginal concept of witnessing while also destabilizing concepts of an authentic, linear, history.

The use of memory to relate stories often pushed to the very margins of history and culture is another significant part of Indigenous theatrical storytelling. The plays are founded on memories; Shirley’s memories of residential school, Agnes and Rebecca’s memories of their mothers, memories of historical figures corrupted by or left out of the archive. Relying on memory is relying on the intangible; memory is always contingent on the perception of the viewer, and the more viewers there are the more variations there can be. It is for this reason that the writing and study of history has attempted to distance itself from the subjective. However, traditional historical narratives do not fit an Indigenous approach to history and knowledge sharing. Storytelling is history-telling. The personal is historical. The performances are both a memorial to lived experiences and counter-narratives that ask us to reconsider both our relationship to and understanding of “the settler’s authorized collective myth” (Episkenew 70). The playwrights reveal the gaps in historical narratives and ask audience members to think critically about the significance of those gaps. What is achieved by pushing Indigenous
women’s perspectives to the margins of history and what effect is achieved by exposing those moments theatrically? Native women’s theatre allows the women’s stories at the margins to invade the written space of history so they are no longer side notes, but rather full chapters in cultural memory/history. By presenting alternative moments from Canadian cultural memory, “Indigenous people [...] make public the alternative collective myth that comprises our truths” and are “heal[ing] the wounds that colonialism has inflicted on the Indigenous population” (Episkenew 73). The plays explored in this chapter use memory as the groundwork for storytelling that creates counter-narratives that address the absence of Native women in Canadian history and de-privilege exclusionary forms of knowledge.

**Personal memory as collective history**

The use of historical documents or events to form the basis of a theatrical event is not uncommon, and their uses are often to create counter-narratives that challenge the accepted account of a historical event. The use of personal narrative, memory and testimony, offers a different kind of counter-narrative – one that challenges historical

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I use cultural memory and history interchangeably. While they represent different things (unrecorded events and documented events, respectively), they both belong to a dominant historio-cultural narrative that informs a wider Canadian public and both vie for a place in the collective consciousness, often pushing alternative memories or histories to the margins.
absences. There is a difference between a focus on historical documents and personal narratives to relate history/memory. These differences appear to separate themselves by the immediate needs of the time the playwrights were writing. At the beginning of the Native theatre renaissance, around the last two decades of the twentieth century, the stories being told were largely about getting positive representations of Aboriginal people to a wider Canadian public and filling in gaps of representation. In the case of Margo Kane and Shirley Cheechoo, their plays explore the negative effects of their removal from their family home and community. Kane, as Agnes, performs – relives – both the traumas of being pulled from the family home by Children’s Aid and her rape. Cheechoo relives and recounts her experiences of abuse and isolation in a residential school. They do not rely on historical documentation of these events; instead they focus on storytelling and propose that memory – and in some instances testimony – is a viable source of documentary evidence. Both Moonlodge and Path With No Moccasins are now part of a canon of Native theatre, and they stand as a memorial to the immediate needs of their time – visibility and storytelling as history – and to the progress made since their original theatrical run in the early 1990s.

For Indigenous storytelling, the personal is invaluable as it shapes and forms perspectives around experience. Recounting memories of traumatic events such as the residential schools creates humanized accounts of historical events, and “creates a text that not only contains information about the vulnerability of children but underscores
the problem of recognizing how violence is constituted within a given institutional context" (Emberley, 2013, 146). When concerned with memory and history, we experience both the present and the past at the same time and “one is able to distinguish between (not dichotomize) the two” (LaCapra 90). Indigenous theatrical storytelling in the solo-voice plays privileges the personal as part of the historical. Marc Maufort suggests that *Path With No Moccasins* “conflates the historical with the personal” (Maufort, 2013, 162); however, I would argue that it is not a conflation of historical and personal, but actually a claim that the personal *is* (or at least can be) historical. It is through Indigenous storytelling that the plays challenge our ways of thinking about the place of the personal in the historical since the storyteller often holds a place of privilege and that privilege is echoed in the women’s placement within the theatrical space.

The solo-voice performances of Margo Kane and Shirley Cheechoo are at least partially autobiographical,116 and claim a space for personal memory in the discourse of national and collective history. At their core, then, the monodramas exemplify Indigenous storytelling: they synthesize the personal and the political, and they push

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116 The program bill for Margo Kane’s performance suggests that the play is an amalgamation of multiple stories from women all over Canada and Kane has suggested that this is not an autobiographical play; however, the use of the playwright’s first name, Margo, in early drafts of the script/performance archive, suggests that there are, at some level, aspects of the personal and the autobiographical in the play.
back against dominant histories and the absences inherent in them. In relating stories
about experiences in a residential school or being “scooped” from their family, these
plays epitomize concepts of survivance by signalling not just their survival from moments
of trauma – the scoops, residential school, sexual violence – but also their resistance to
these moments. The testimony becomes preserved in the performance and creates a
memorial to the history they elucidate. Memorials function as a way to reinforce
collective memories (Carrier 173). Unlike the invisibility of physical (architectural)
monuments (Carrier 15), the theatre creates, compels, a sense of visibility as they
construct performances that make visible collective experiences and memories.
Positioning these performances as memorials raises the question who and/or what is
being remembered/memorialized? Memorials, both temporary and permanent, focus
on “issues of memory and history and an urgent, excessive desire to express, or claim,
those issues in visibly public contexts” and are “typified by adamant assertions of citizen
rights and persistent demands for representation and respect” (Doss 2). Native women’s
theatre’s focus on these pressing issues not only positions their plays as memorials, but
also asserts their visibility within a public sphere. They offer us issues that affect

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The invisibility of memorials results from their familiarity to us. As Sue Malvern argues, monuments “are
founded as much on acts of amnesia as on remembrance. What monuments embody is the impossibility
of ever making the past present to the present” (253). The ephemeral nature of theatre places theatre
in an interesting position of being both present and absent. Theatrical memorials are an interesting
cross between temporary memorials (see Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero’s discussion
on “grassroots memorials”) and more permanent ones. While the performance itself may be short-
lived, it offers tactile traces to stand in as a memorial.
Aboriginal women, but which have not infiltrated Canadian consciousness. As previously mentioned, both *Moonlodge* and *Path With No Moccasins* theatrical runs pre-date much of the Government of Canada’s attempts at apology or reconciliation. They circulated as performances before significant public attention was focussed on the residential school system, the 60s scoops, or before the final report of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996). These performances existed in a time when little, if any, attention was granted to the history these plays attempt to expose. The plays offer their stories – their memorials to residential schools or scoops – as a way to engage the Canadian public with these histories. It marks the dark violence of these government-sanctioned policies for the Canadian public and asks us to bear witness to them.

Instead of pulling from an archive of history as with the other plays explored later in this chapter, Cheechoo and Kane develop their performances out of embodied memory and experiences. The play and the performer’s body function as a memorial to the trauma – and survival of – colonial violence, especially of the residential school and displacement of Native children from their families. Of course, writing “autobiography is often a double-edged sword for Indigenous writers […] On the one hand, autobiography claims the authority of eyewitness to the events narrated. On the other hand, that same authority can be challenged when reader’s memories and interpretations of events differ from those of the author” (Episkenew 110). First person narratives make a claim to authoritative history, but are not without possible skepticism,
especially in moments when the plays diverge into comedy. Yet, what are the ethics of that skepticism? If the plays and the performance of these plays function as a memorial to certain aspects of history and lived experiences, then what is at stake in moments when the plays/actors introduce alternative, counter-narrative, versions of a known history, or when they introduce a narrative that is not part of the collective memory? Can we, as both audience members and as potential witnesses, dispute the narrative offered? We are conditioned to take Indigenous first-hand accounts as if coming from an authority on a given situation, but what happens when that first-hand account is presented as a piece of entertainment that has also attempted to destabilize claims for authenticity? Both Moonlodge and Path With No Moccasins call on audiences to be skeptical of this sort of claim for authenticity and truth; yet, storytelling and personal narrative in these plays seem to make those very claims. The plays then both problematize and valorize acts of testimony and memory. They draw our attention to the problems inherent therein, but still make a claim that these lived experiences have a value to cultural history. The plays make an intervention into the history of residential schools and 60s scoops to offer an account that relies on lived, embodied experiences. That intervention into history may offer fuller, perhaps more just, but by no means official or complete accounts of that history. Since the tangibility of national history—the artifacts and archival material available—is what makes history appear so objective, the performance of memory in plays that deal with history destabilizes this tangibility. The
plays, then, offer alternative sources, a “repertoire,” that “holds the tales of the survivors, their gestures, their traumatic flashbacks [...] in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral and invalid forms of knowledge and evidence” (D. Taylor, 2003, 193). *Moonlodge* and *Path With No Moccasins* “create a counter-discourse that contests not only the content of conventional histories, but the so-called objective basis of their methodology” and “Aboriginal women’s voices challenge the official erasure of members of their race and sex” from Canadian history (Thomson 29).

**Remembering the 60s scoops in *Moonlodge***

The personal narrative in *Moonlodge* not only examines a life, but also draws on the history of the stolen generations and the placement of Native children with white families. The play explores how the personal becomes a matter of historical importance. The play explores Agnes’s fractured identity and journey toward healing, and in doing so casts a critical eye toward the policies that witnessed the removal of countless Aboriginal children from their families and communities and denied access to their cultural heritage. *Moonlodge* (and its subsequent performance) becomes a memorial; it offers a counter-narrative to the history of the scoops and reveals some of the heavy consequences that resulted from the scoops, including: loss of culture and cultural identity, loss of homeland, and a forgotten history that are only now starting to be fully
disclosed by the government and through inquiries. It is not a counter-narrative in the same way that Nolan, Clements, or Mojica’s plays are counter-narratives. *Moonlodge* offers audiences moments of testimony that fill in the gaps between historical accounts. The personal narrative performances do not offer an alternative history, but rather offer personal experiences that are absent from already documented histories. This is different from the works of Clements, for example, who stages a performance that offers an alternative to the missing pieces of a pre-existing, albeit biased, documented story. At the time of Kane’s performance there was no large-scale public push to address the history of government-sanctioned scoops. Kane challenges the historical absence by staging an intervention into that history.

*Moonlodge* is framed around storytelling. It begins in the present with Agnes entering the moonlodge and engaging directly with the audience, but quickly transitions to Agnes telling us a memory at which point the theatricality and embodied memory takes over. As she recalls a memory of her mother, we see Agnes “struggling with a sudden memory” of the day she was removed from her home when “two cars [pulled] up. The priest – and some white people” (Kane 278-279). We see Agnes, imitating her father’s resistance, proclaim “they can take me but they’ll never take all of us.” Following this, in a moment of “realizing,” Agnes tells the audience that her “father was taken away soon after by some men. And then the welfare came to take” her and her brothers and sisters away (Kane 279). The use of the past tense indicates Agnes’s movement away
from a performer’s role and she speaks to us as if giving testimony. That is to say, Agnes moves from performing the past to testifying in the present. Throughout the play Agnes uses the present tense to narrate the events in the theatrical past, but uses the past tense when the play shifts to storytelling in the moonlodge (and arguably shifting outside the realm of performance and addressing the audience as an audience). This switch to the past tense, and thus to an act of testimony, reappears moments later when she “steels herself against the pain of abandonment” and declares to the audience

they moved us from foster home to foster home. They took brothers from sisters and sisters from sisters, until I sat all alone in the car just looking out the window. I remember moving and moving until I didn’t know where I was or where I was going or where I came from. (Kane 279)

Like the moment that precedes it, this moment exists in an instance of self-reflexive metatheatricality where the theatrical cracks and spills into the present. While there is no indication of a direct address, unlike Cheechoo’s text (discussed below), the use of the past tense suggests that Agnes transitions between the embodied action of the past (indicated by present tense) and the present in the moonlodge. Agnes’s experiences are one person’s story in a long line of stories that create a more full – but by no means complete – account of the history and legacy of the scoops. The testimony Kane, as Agnes, offers in Moonlodge reveals how the personal becomes a matter of historical importance. It reveals the gaps in the historical record of the Child Welfare scoops by offering us one example of the human cost of such government-sanctioned policies. As
these moments in Moonlodge are functioning as both Aboriginal theatrical storytelling and moments of testimony, Agnes’s experiences become a part of a historical record. It is through these moments of aside and direct address, characteristic of Indigenous storytelling, that the storytellers are able to write themselves onto the historical record, if only in the cultural memory the play elicits. This is perhaps most true in Moonlodge and Path With No Moccasins as they draw their performance from memory and ask that the personal become a part of the historical. Our placement as audience members within the moonlodge, thus within a female space, conditions – maybe even compels – us to experience a historical account from an Aboriginal woman’s perspective.

The play is critical not only of the absences in the historical record, but also of the damage caused by the government policies that sanctioned the scoops in the first place. Moonlodge is able to accomplish what many other memorials cannot; it creates a humanized element that we are asked to remember along side the history. Agnes becomes a displaced child with no connection to her family roots other than the stereotypes presented to her by the media and her foster parent. In one pointed moment, we see the extent of Agnes’s disconnect from her culture. Again using the past tense, Agnes states

I was one of the few brown faces in school and then Indians were bussed in. Real Indians! Marvin was tall and handsome. His hair was long and wild. All us girls would hang near him waiting to catch his eye. Then he’d turn and flash his famous smile and we’d all melt. I had a crush on him. ... But I never talked to him. He scared me. I knew he could see the Indian in me. He
looked right in and touched it with his eyes. He knew me but I didn’t know him. He came from a remote reserve that I knew nothing about. I didn’t belong to his world. (Kane 284)

By switching from the present tense to the past tense, therefore pulling us from the past back into the present in the moonlodge, Kane marks this memory as a moment of testimony. The testimony reveals the ways in which Agnes is unable to reconcile her cultural identity with her life experiences. It is not that Agnes “didn’t know him” but that she could not see the “Indian” in herself. It is not just that Agnes cannot speak to her crush, but that she cannot understand her cultural heritage. She was unwillingly detached from that aspect of her identity and we are instilled with a sense of loss that comes with this detachment.

Memory and testimony in *Moonlodge* allow Agnes (and Kane) to recall her path toward community and self-definition and offer them as part of the healing process for other Aboriginal women who have endured similar circumstances. *Moonlodge*’s place as a memorial to the legacy of the scoops, and use of Indigenous theatrical storytelling exemplifies concepts of survivance as it signals the ways in which individuals (like those represented by Agnes) have resisted and survived their own cultural erasure. By offering a live, repeated, embodied memorial, *Moonlodge* resists the historical and cultural absences of Aboriginal stories. Agnes’s journey becomes inscribed in the cultural memory of the audience and, as with Clements, Mojica, and Nolan’s performances, allows the audience to adapt their cultural memory to include the personal and the
The painful memories of residential schools in *Path With No Moccasins*

First-person memory is the catalyst to theatrical storytelling in Shirley Cheechoo’s play *Path With No Moccasins*. The play uses Indigenous storytelling not only to stake an individual claim on a shared history and fill in the blanks of that history with first-hand accounts, but also to share in storytelling’s role as both a healing process and a witness-creating event. It is a memorial to the legacy of the residential school system, but it is also a memorial to acts of survivance in the face of that legacy. Whereas in *Moonlodge* Kane plays across several characters as they interact with Agnes, Cheechoo’s *Path With No Moccasins* resoundingly falls within the autobiographical “I.” Cheechoo’s performance “emphasizes the healing of a broken self, but a self grounded in cultural memory,” while "Kane problematizes the very notion of a unified identity through the shifting positions of a character" (Eigenbrod 177-178). However, both performances engage in Indigenous storytelling to place an emphasis on an individual’s (hi)story, and both act as a memorial to the events they portray.

Cheechoo’s role as storyteller helps her to contextualize the hurt sustained by the residential school system, and its presence on a the stage offers a publically staged resistance. Both the performance and its subsequent talk-backs push this publically
staged act of resistance to become moments of community healing. The performance, and the story contained within it, are a part of a collective history achieved through personal testimony, the purpose of which is twofold: to fill in the gaps of a historical record, and to help push the “journey toward self-discovery” forward (Maufort, 2013, 163). The first part of the play is rife with examples of the kinds of abuse many experienced as a result of their placement in residential schools. She describes some of the abuses faced at the school such as grabbing students by the hair and dragging them in front of the class (Cheechoo 11), beating children with “their best tennis racket” (13), a leather strap (16), or yardsticks (20), cutting students’ hair for violation of school rules (15), and, as discussed in chapter three, the sexual violence (29). When we meet Shirley, she has been locked away in a room and deprived of meals for trying to run away/return home. Shirley addresses the audience directly: “Anybody hungry? I am. I didn’t get any supper” (12). Many of these moments are direct address, as indicated in the play text by the dramaturgical cue “to us,” and are meant to implicate the audience as witness. Unlike Moonlodge, which uses the past tense to signal a direct address of memory (from Agnes’s position as storyteller in the moonlodge), Shirley speaks directly “to us” and recounts moments of violence and abuse. Some of these moments are “relived” or “remembered,” especially the moments of sexual violence that Shirley is forced to re-experience through memory, but even in those moments after she relives a rape, she returns to directly addressing us, implicating audience members in the act of testimony
after the fact, and bringing the context of the theatrical into the present.

What follows the first part of the play are the stress fractures along Shirley’s identity as a result of her time at residential school and removal from her family and homeland. Her loss of identity in the performance comes as a direct result of her placement in a residential school. In part three Shirley discloses “to us” just how deep those fractures run. She recounts a dream to us:

I was having an operation, and I wasn’t quite asleep. I was trying to tell the doctors but they can’t seem to hear me. The doctor said ‘first the clitoris’. He pulled it and stretched it to the ceiling and hooked it on a hook. I screamed from the pain, but they can’t seem to hear me. Then ‘the tubes’ he said. He grabbed one and stretched it and hooked it on the ceiling then the other. I was in so much pain, I thought my head was gonna burst. (Cheechoo 37)

It is her sense of womanhood that is under attack. Shirley uses this grotesque and violent dream to reveal the deep, embodied fractures that run along her sense of identity as a woman. On Dreamer’s rock she again speaks directly to the audience: “I really am going crazy. Indian children are never alone I was told. They have grandparents and uncles, all kinds of relatives to hold them. Where are mine? Am I just to [sic] old? Am I alone on this rock? I think I’ve lost me” (Cheechoo 36). After this point she speaks directly “to us” and begins to drum while singing a song in Cree. This song calls out to her family and her ancestry and creates a link to heritage, family, and the past (see chapter four). This return to Cree, which has not been seen since the first part of the play, signals a desire to return to her Cree roots and a longing to not “forget about trapping and hunting” (34)
and family. More than that, however, the return to Cree signals an act of survivance, signalling both a resistance to the attempt to stop Shirley from speaking her native language and the survival of the language in spite of these efforts. While the play text offers a translation of these moments of Cree, the performance does not. By leaving (some) audience members on the outside of understanding, Shirley disrupts the illusions of theatre and the audience, in their moment of confusion, becomes aware of their position as audience. That Shirley addresses this moment to us rather than to “the water spirits” or “to the voices” signals a deliberate choice to call on the audience in this moment of resistance. We become the witnesses to this resistance.

In the first part, while locked in a room at residential school, Shirley remembers and draws inspiration from her mother and her grandmother who are described as strong women. She draws on memories and remembers her past with her family or community to hold onto her cultural identity even while the residential school attempts to strip it away. However, by the fourth part she is no longer “remembering” but “connecting,” “reliving,” and speaking in direct address in present time. Whereas before Shirley relied on memories of strong women of her past to help hold onto a positive sense of Native womanhood, by the end of the play Shirley invites the audience to participate in that community with her (as discussed in chapter four) to “make the biggest star blanket. Me, you, no matter what color you are. We’ll put our marks on it” (Cheechoo 47). Through direct address the audience is invited to create a community
and to become witnesses to the testimony of trauma and the movement towards healing.

It is through revisiting memories and putting them into a pool of collective testimonials/history that *Path With No Moccasins* demonstrates how the personal narrative can speak for the collective history. Cheechoo employs storytelling to not only add to a collective memory of the residential school legacy, but to call upon the audience to be witnesses to her testimony. Like Agnes in *Moonlodge*, Shirley’s direct addresses develop into moments of testimony that become part of a reinvigorated historical archive that includes embodied knowledge and memory. Since Aboriginal storytelling requires the listener to be an active participant and the "repertoire requires presence: people particpat[ing] in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there'" (D. Taylor, 2003, 20), Cheechoo and Kane’s embodied storytelling of memory becomes a significant intercession with the archival history and cultural memory of residential schools and 60’s scoops.

“A conjurer’s trick”: Performing History, Memory, and the problems of evidence.

In rewriting history to redress historical absences of Native women or Native women’s perspectives, playwrights like Mojica, Nolan, and Clements create counter-narratives that compel audiences to face these historical absences. Unlike their predecessors,
Clements, Mojica, and Nolan refuse to fill in those historical gaps. Instead, they either signpost them as gaps (as is the case with Mojica) or make those gaps bigger (as with Clements and Nolan). In doing so, they draw our attention to the role these historical absences have had in the continued cultural genocide of Native communities. They achieve this through a destablization of the historical narratives that serve as the basis for their plays. Roger Brechtel argues that “the representation of history as history is always a conjurer’s trick, [...] a prompt for an imaginative apprehension of something incommensurable with any attempt to represent it directly – the theatrical imagination used to excite the historical imagination” (Brechtel 20). While Native women’s theatre may excite historical imagination and encourage further exploration into these histories, the plays that appear in the last few years of the twentieth century outright reject any attempt to represent historical records directly; the playwrights reveal little – if any – faith in dominant modes of history telling and, instead of presenting a historical narrative to be read in conjunction with the accepted history, they destabilize and even unravel their claims to authenticity and veracity.

While all of the plays stress the importance of the personal and the individual, there is a greater focus on drawing from the historical archive to form the basis of dramatic plot. Historical documents are used to stake a historical claim in the plays, thus placing them within the realm of historical storytelling. Yet, the plays use this basis in the historical to deconstruct the authority of that presupposed historical claim. Historical
documentation (coroner’s reports, available historical biography, colonial writings) makes a direct claim to its authority as history. As counter-narratives to the dominant history, however, the plays destabilize the stories by inserting other stories – alternative stories, fantastic, unbelievable stories – between the documentary evidence to subvert our previous assumptions about Native women and our previous reception of historical documentary evidence as authentic or equitable. These moments of incorporated historicity blur and collapse the divide between the historical and the fictional, thereby drawing into question the accuracy of both.

Yvette Nolan, Monique Mojica, and Marie Clements include the historically-based life-events of Native women that have been distorted or left out of the dominant historical record as a way “to redress the omission in the telling of history,” hoping for “more inclusive accounts of particular historical periods” (Bennet 46). Their plays revise historical narratives to examine the unexamined; they explore how Native women have shaped historical events, but have not been granted that privileged space in the accounts of those events. Despite the exploration of the alternative history, the plays reject this theatrical (hi)story as a viable option to fill in the holes in the historical account. The dramaturgical style of the performances, their eccentric, sometimes outlandish or improbable presentation, denies recourse to read these plays as historical. One way these playwrights achieve this is through conflating the real with the fictional. This blending of the real and not-real becomes a way to “unsettle the artistic domination of
Western dramatic realism” (Maufort “Journey” 3).

The woman who “carries her history of resistance” in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*

Mojica’s strategies for challenging dominant historical narratives differ from Kane and Cheechoo, but are also not quite as destabilizing as Nolan and Clements. In this way, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* functions as a bridge between the fill-in-the-gaps style of the earlier plays and the widen-the-gaps of the later plays. Whereas Nolan and Clements offer counter-narratives to push up against and destabilize the dominant historical record, Mojica offers a comparative frame by presenting several historically-inspired narratives at one time, but performing them with one actor, who then holds these representations up for the audience’s critical examination. Jill Carter suggests that Mojica's body becomes the 'book' in which we 'read' the literal artifact belonging to those who once 'read,' named and 'mapped' the Aboriginal peoples they encountered. In her body, two texts are juxtaposed—that belonging to the authentic descendant informed by the 'persistence of memory' and the pervasive (and erstwhile persuasive) fraudulent cartoon. Through her body, we are invited to read this intertextual facing for ourselves, to assess two profoundly oppositional narratives ... and to decide for ourselves which

While the play is written for two actors to play multiple roles, I am speaking specifically about the roles Mojica herself played.
story will govern our own attitudes towards ourselves and/or towards Others. (260)

I would argue, however, that Mojica offers more than just two texts side-by-side, as mentioned above. Mojica draws on several historical narratives that are often wildly different from each other. Pocahontas is drastically different from Lady Rebecca and both are oppositional to the cartoon Pocahontas stereotype that is being challenged in the play. I argue that the juxtaposition of multiple historically-based narratives of Pocahontas allows Mojica to challenge not just historical – that is European – narratives of Pocahontas, but any possibilities of an “authentic” historical identity for Pocahontas. Mojica’s performance is a counter-narrative because she offers alternative perspectives on Native womanhood without completely re-writing history. In fact, Mojica’s play is a counter-narrative because it repeats all the different historical accounts available to us; she shows how the history is contradictory and confusing by offering several versions of that history. Mojica’s storytelling, then, is about confusion through the fusion of multiple stories. She offers numerous versions that conflict not only with the dominant historical record, but also with each other. Mojica finds the weak spots of historical inclusion and puts pressure on them – pushes back against them – to erode the authority they hold.

Storytelling in the play also draws on memory as a source of historical knowledge. In this way, it is connected to the earlier theatre seen in Cheechoo and Kane. Few stories are as complicated and contradictory as that of Pocahontas, who Mojica takes as a
central point of contention in her play. Much of Pocahontas/Lady Rebecca/Matoaka’s story is staged through first person narrative. These memories serve as counter-narratives that put pressure on cultural memory and (dominant) historical accounts of Pocahontas. Historical figures are pulled from history and cultural memory into the present of the play and are given a voice to stake their claim to their own identity. As part of Mojica’s push-back against the dominant history, she offers us the Contemporary women. Contemporary Woman #1’s “journey towards her own healing” is framed through, and aided by the “journey to recover the history of her grandmothers” (Mojica 14). The shift between colonial and contemporary times is part of Mojica’s metatheatrical shift. The play transitions between past and present where historical figures have risen to challenge their representations in history as well as popular culture. The fusion of multiple interpretations of Pocahontas/Lady Rebecca/Matoaka is represented in performance by one actor and her “physical being as the vessel” through which Native women of the past “might express themselves” and call “into account the manufactured stories of Pocahontas (Powhatan), Malinche (Nahautl), the Quechua Women of the Puna and the mothers of the Métis Nation” (J. Carter 259).

Mojica not only presents counter-narratives for the audience; she implicates the audience in that construction of history. The Troubadour, joined by Storybook Pocahontas, sings “And so here ends the legend/ of the Princess Pocahontas- fa la la la lay, fal la la la LELF-/if you want any more, make it up yourself” (Mojica 31). This brief
moment catches the audience in two very subversive ways. First, it plays to pop culture’s infatuation with the Pocahontas archive in order to catch us in the search for an authentic (hi)story about Pocahontas. Mojica’s storytelling both challenges an “authentic” Native identity (as discussed in chapter two), and interrogates claims of an authentic history. Second, it reveals how arbitrarily many of the stories belonging to the Pocahontas archive are created. Many of the first archival histories of Pocahontas have been "designed to titillate European audiences or to attract continued financial support of European explorers, entrepreneurs, pirates, and military personnel" (J. Carter 259). Since she captured Hollywood and popular culture’s interest, the desire for more stories about this historical figure has assisted in the creation of stories with no basis in history or fact, but which nevertheless become part of the Pocahontas archive and are, in turn, interpreted as having basis in fact.

Mojica’s performance is a challenge to Native women’s exclusion from and/or their misrepresentation in the historical record. This misrepresentation is highlighted in one actor’s portrayal of Lady Rebecca/Storybook Pocahontas/Pocahontas/Matoaka. Mojica’s rewriting of history becomes more like an editor flagging an inconsistency rather than suggesting a revision. She offers us the inconsistencies for our critique, but fails to fill in the holes of history. Instead Mojica starts ridiculing the inconsistent representations of Indigenous women in history and then she pushes back against the historical records that helped to cultivate the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal women.
As a result, Mojica simultaneously represents and deconstructs the “continuing stereotypes of a constructed female ‘Indianness’” (Beck 178), but refuses to be the source of the stereotype’s replacement.

The play is non-linear and jumps between the contemporary and the historical, and between dialogue and direct address. The fusion of time functions in the *Princess Pocahontas* in a way similar to *Annie Mae’s Movement* and *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* in that it calls on the audience to be witnesses, and to take culpability for their role in creation and repetition of history. It features contemporary women commenting on history while historical women comment on the contemporary. Contemporary woman #1 talks about “Pocahontas [and] the women who birthed the Métis nation” (Mojica 22) and questions the history around them – “Waiting by the water for a white man to save[...] are you a real Indian Princess” (21). Contemporary Woman #1 also remembers Anna Mae Pictou Aquash; She states “I never really knew Annie Mae. Though we’d been in the same place at the same time [...] We looked at each other and smiled, acknowledging ... [t]he weight of our history on our backs, the tiredness of the struggle we shared” (Mojica 53). By including these temporal shifts in her performance, Mojica, like Clements and Nolan, highlights that these issues of representation, historical absences, and equitable histories have been, still are, and will continue to be problematic. This shared history, both of the past and of the present, pulls historical struggles of representation, violence, and racism into the present. The
Contemporary Women’s role as a bridge between the historical and the theatrical, the past and the present, invites the audience to act as witness to these historical struggles.

“sow[ing] the seeds of doubt” in *Annie Mae’s Movement*

Yvette Nolan’s *Annie Mae’s Movement* disrupts linear narrative by placing Anna in both the past and the present, and in doing so, agitates the play’s position as a historical narrative. Nolan pokes holes in the historical narrative, not just where Anna Mae’s absence is concerned, but with the circumstances around her life and death. It pokes holes at our understanding of the circumstances surrounding Anna’s death by highlighting the internalized sexism of the reserve (Nolan, 2005, 3), and the poor living conditions and diets (27) that Anna signals as damaging to the community. Denaturalizing the performance of history through a conflation of time enables Nolan to destabilize the space around the historical gaps to draw those moments into question as well, which in turn, allows her to oppose the accepted history’s credibility as history. By representing time in the performance as mutable and in flux, Nolan underscores the times when we choose to look sideways to avoid difficult moments in history.

Anna Mae is the storyteller of her own experiences; as the storyteller, she transitions from representations of the past to direct address in the present. This shift in the temporality of the performance pulls the audience into a dual witness role. We are
both witnesses to (theatrical) storytelling and witnesses to historical (and contemporary) violence against Aboriginal women. Stanlake argues that the play has three distinctive times. The past, which is the bulk of the performance and is where the two actors interact with each other; the present, which is invoked through direct address and Anna Mae’s position as storyteller; and blended time, which is where, according to Stanlake, the past and present converge and Anna Mae directs her dialogue to the audience while the action is still firmly past/performance (144). In essence, this blending of time forces the past and the present, history and theatre, to merge with each other. It collapses the distinction between the two temporalities and highlights how the problems of the past are still invading the present. The audience, then, becomes theatrical time travellers, shifting our perspective between present and past, and contemplating our relationship between the two. Audiences are called to act as witnesses to alternative histories that challenge recorded historical events and the absences of certain – that is Native women’s – histories.\footnote{While Anna Mae Pictou Aquash is a known historical figure, she is by no means a household name and is often overshadowed by her male counterparts in the AIM movement. Her story exists almost exclusively in cultural memory (such as performances or songs).}

While I wrote about the use of blended time in relation to Anna Mae’s rape and murder in chapter three, I am turning to the treatment of the historical record and the counter-narrative Nolan presents. Since the “past events occur within the present mode of time” (Stanlake 143), the historical perspective shifts and Anna’s stage death then
“suggest[s] that the intergenerational effects of this woman warrior/martyr will inspire other Aboriginal women” (La Flamme). Through the use of blended time, Anna Mae’s monologue in this scene becomes an act of testimony and pushes back against not just her rape and murder, but also historical accounts of her life that have been pushed to the margins of cultural memory and history. By positioning the monologue in the present as direct address while the violence is enacted in the ‘past’ time of the performance, Anna Mae continues her role as storyteller and the audience, in turn, becomes witnesses to this testimony. We are not just witnesses to this historical violence. Instead, by pulling the audience into a part of the performance, we are asked to recognize how *not* bearing witness to the violence of history has destructive consequences – in this context, a murder case that has considerable doubt around the culprit, as evinced in the merger of all male characters into the FBI guy at the end of the play.

Time is most clearly merged in the final scene of the play when Anna Mae directly addresses the audience, makes reference to contemporary playwrights, but is experiencing her rape and murder in the past. The scene begins with Anna, who discloses that her motivation to create the survival schools was to “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 […] to rebuild an Indian Nation that was self-sufficient, autonomous, healthy and whole” (Nolan, 2005, 53). The creation of the survival schools is an act of resistance from the past, but this act of resistance is
overshadowed by “the man” who enters the scene and “rapes her” (53). Because the Anna Mae of the historical past cannot resist the pull to history – and her rape and murder – the performance shifts to blended time and the character Anna Mae, while being violated in the performative past, resists her violation by directly addressing the audience.

My name is Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Micmac Nation from Schubenacadie, Nova Scotia. My 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. 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. (Nolan, 2005, 53)

Anna Mae directly addresses the audience; in that direct address we see Anna’s act of resistance. She recites facts of her life, states her bloodline and provides herself a history that was marginalized. She rejects her own historical disappearance that was anticipated in the first scene when Anna, after talking about disappearing people, says “Anna Mae? Anna Mae Who? Never heard of her” (4). By drawing on contemporary playwrights, and naming them as her sisters, Anna Mae calls on the audience to recognize the historical as well as the contemporary significance of the violence she is simultaneously experiencing. Anna’s voice may be silenced, but all of the playwrights continue to resist the many ways in which Native women are silenced or “disappeared.” By naming these playwrights, Yvette Nolan suggests that Anna Mae’s resistance is being taken up by these...
playwrights. The repetition of “you cannot kill us all” confronts not only the FBI’s attempts to silence AIM, but also attempts to shatter Native womanhood. Anna Mae calls for resistance and community by listing off strong women who are equally resistant to their own silencing within Indigenous communities. Anna Mae’s personal storytelling becomes the act of resistance; it becomes the hope for continued resistance so long as the playwrights continue to challenge moments of unjust historical representation.

Stanlake argues that our heightened awareness of the performance as a play "prepare[s] the audience ... to accept their own roles, during blended time scenes, as present witnesses of the past" (145). Positioning Anna as storyteller, especially in those blended moments, pulls the audience into a position of witness to a history that has been marginalized. Of course drawing the audience’s attention to their position as audience and the story’s position as theatre problematizes any attempt by the audience to read this (hi)story as authentic. Nolan’s use of blended time in her storytelling rejects the urge to read the play as either authentic or historical. It is Anna Mae’s role as storyteller, and her desire to tell her story, that puts pressure on the dominant historical narrative.

Storytelling figures prominently from the onset of the performance; framing the play from this position of Aboriginal, female storyteller inherently creates a counter-narrative to the history being revisioned in the play. The play begins with Anna Mae revealing through direct address the resistance she met while she attempted to be a role
model for the community and take on a leadership role within the American Indian Movement. She is was told that training to fight was for “the men, the warriors, the dog soldiers. Not you, girl” (Nolan, 2005, 3). Despite the implication that only men may be the warriors of the community, Anna explains that she got her strength from her mother who “use to fight with the Indian Agent” because “‘you gotta stand up ... you gotta fight for what’s important, no matter who wants to shut you up’” (3-4). This opening address calls on audiences to hear Anna Mae’s testimony and to recognize the historical context in which Anna Mae as well as the play exist. She implicates a history of sexism, racism, and colonization as both the targets of her resistance and the origin of the violence against her. She speaks to the audience and asks us to “fight, even if [it] seems like we’re fighting ourselves. Or else we will disappear, just disappear” (Nolan, 2005, 4). The use of direct address, as part of Indigenous theatrical storytelling, calls audiences to action. Here Nolan is calling on us to not only remember the history of disappearing people or of moments of sexism, but to resist them and fight back. She calls on us, as she has called on the women of her community, to make the changes that the women on the reserve were “so unwilling to make” (Nolan, 2005, 27). Anna Mae is unique among the characters studied thus far; she is not seeking to (just) strengthen her own identity as a Native woman, but to strengthen her community and their understanding of Native womanhood. Anna Mae’s storytelling becomes an act of resistance to the challenges present in Native communities and acts as a call for change. She uses these moments of
direct address to acknowledge problems in the historical community of the play, but by pulling the storytelling into the present and addressing the audience, Nolan also highlights their significance within a contemporary context.

Like *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Annie Mae's Movement* problematizes the creation of history through revisionist rewriting of historical records that “suggest that ‘disappeared’ women warriors will not be left on the margins of history” (LaFlamme). If the breakdown between the real and fictional becomes a dicey proposition because it requires the audience to be able to distinguish between real and imagined, what happens, then, in a performance that is continually self-referential? The play highlights its theatricality not just through direct address, but by projected scene titles (much like in Clements’s play), or characters acknowledging the audience through direct address or interaction. Rugaru acknowledges the theatricality of the play by scanning or smelling the audience (Nolan, 2005, 5). Doug also acknowledges the audience when he reveals he was the one “to infiltrate AIM.” He directly implicates us as witnesses to his confession: “There are those of you who are sitting there shaking your heads, going tsk-tsk-tsk, thinking why does the FBI need to undertake covert operations on citizens of the United States” (Nolan, 2005, 35). By the end of the speech, Doug again points to the audience and addresses us directly, as if listening to a press conference: “I'll take a couple of questions now. Uh, *(pointing)* you!” (36). By conditioning the audience to be aware of the performance’s theatricality, Nolan also
conditions audiences to consider the history that is presented skeptically. In doing so Nolan challenges the authority of documented history, but declines to offer a replacement for that history. We see similar tactics in the historiographic theatre of Marie Clements, whose continual reminders of the theatricality of the performance frames the real and the fictional to trick our expectations of authoritative history. While Doug is speaking about his infiltration of AIM, he highlights the tactics of the historical revisionist plays of Nolan and other Aboriginal playwrights: “Our counterintelligence program is basically very simple: infiltrate, disrupt, sow the seeds of doubt in a few people’s minds, they do the rest for you” (Nolan, 2005, 36). By performing histories that “sow the seeds of doubt” in the minds of the audience, the plays can challenge colonial histories about Native women. Authenticity is not the goal for these playwrights; their goals are to disrupt the historical narrative without necessarily replacing it. They seek to highlight other versions of a story that always already push back against dominant history and always already problematize an authentic reading of history. The performance of history from an Aboriginal woman’s perspective is an act of resistance.

“Being in a memory, but present in time”: The Unnatural and Accidental Women and storytelling.

Marie Clements draws on Aboriginal storytelling traditions in several of her plays that
frequently use obscured historical narratives as a starting point for her counter-historical dramas. In her reexamination of historical events, Clements manipulates cultural history – the reportage of the deaths – through blended time and a merging of the historical and the fictional. The results of these revisions are not just counter-narratives to the history she presents, but a subversion of the historical record. Clements’s storytelling hyperbolizes the fictional and the theatrical to heighten spectatorial recognition of the women’s marginalization – indeed their absences – from the collective cultural history. In drawing from a historical record, Clements’s performance “makes some claim to represent ‘real’ figures and events from the past” (Brechtel 15). Since part of the “theatrical bargain” is that “some degree of fictionalization, or, at the very least, aestheticization, is necessary to dramatize or perform history” (Brechtel 15), we accept that there will be a melding of the historical and the fictional; however, Clements takes this “bargain” to the extreme. The conflation of these two worlds challenges audiences’ very understanding of historical events, and even destabilizes the pre-existing history. Our desire for historical ‘truth’ is always left unfulfilled. The paradox – the trickery – involved in Clements’s fusion of historical and fictional catches audiences in their desire for authenticity of both history and representation, while also never fully offering a

While my focus is on The Unnatural and Accidental Women, other plays by Clements are also heavily centred around storytelling and the historical, ie: Copper Thunderbird, Burning Vision, Age of Iron and Tombs of the Vanishing Indian.
The Unnatural and Accidental Women reflects a “typically post-colonial rewriting of neglected facts [from] the official historical record” (Maufort “Journey” 14). It not only directs audiences to consider how the historical record is rife with holes, but rips those holes open wider to compel audiences to acknowledge their existence and challenge their continuation. Clements’s use of surrealism and denaturalized violence is what enables the play to begin pulling at historical absences of Native women. This is no clearer in the performance than the conflation of the real and the fictional. The most prominent melding of historical and fictional appears most visibly through Clements’s use of mediated slide projections of the coroner reports that represent the ‘facts’ from the historical record. As the first half progresses, and the violence against the women intensifies, the slides become more frequent to not only highlight this intensifying violence, but also continually foreground the material reality of the staged violence. These serve as a constant and intrusive reminder of the historical violence committed against the women represented in the play. The juxtaposition of the coroner slides with the performance of the rapes and murders always undercuts the slides’ authority, and

There are ten coroner slides in the play text, but the coroner reports are not the only slides projected in the play. Some slides are used to indicate a geographical location such as “the switchboard – reception” (16) or “Glenaird Hotel” (21) and function as a transition between one scene and the next; however, any discussion of slides in this chapter will refer directly to the coroner reports unless otherwise stated.
it is a deliberate manoeuvre intended to circumvent the coroner’s reports directly. By juxtaposing the slides’ statement of an “unnatural and accidental” death with the staged murders, which are excruciatingly unnatural, but far from accidental, Clements reveals the emptiness of the slides and their historical referent. Clements’s refusal to offer an authentic representation of historical events undermines the slides’ claim to historical authenticity, and beyond that, the legitimacy of the historical reports. The coroner reports may offer us a glimpse at the historical ‘real,’ but the friction between the coroner reports and the highly stylized violence they claim to represent undercuts claims of authentic, truthful history.

While the violence on stage is denaturalized through a peculiar subject/object dichotomy (as discussed in chapter three), the dis/placement of the attacker/object makes a purely historical, that is to say, authentic, reading of the play deeply problematic. The juxtaposition of the slides with the violence requires audiences to put aside our urge to dismiss these representations as pure theatricality. It calls on audiences to see the historical real while also pointing to how that historical real is laughable. We witness The Woman (who we are led to believe is Brenda A. Moore) “lying flat on her bed. A pillow lies on top of her” until that pillow turns into a man dressed as a pillow, which then “grinds into her, adding a violence to the swimming sex rhythm” (Clements, 2005, 52). Moments later we are faced with a slide projection that reads: “Brenda A. Moore, 27. Died September 11, 1981 with a 0.43 blood-alcohol reading. Coroner’s report
concluded her death was ‘unnatural and accidental’” (Clements, 2005, 61). The juxtaposition of these two moments, like many of the other similar moments in the play, asks audiences to see the historical amid the fictional, and to try to distinguish between the real and the utterly absurd in the coroner reports. By making the violence so stylized, Clements highlights how these moments of historically-based violence are unnatural – or at least that violence against women should be unnatural – but rejects that these moments are accidental. When the dresser attacks Valerie we are again confronted with a friction between what the ‘historical real’ of the coroner reports state and what the ‘theatrical fiction’ portrays. Audiences see exactly how the deaths are unnatural, but fail to see how they are accidental.

The use of this dis/placement is Marie Clements’s dramaturgical stratagem to pit the fictional and the real against each other in order to push back against dominant culture’s authorized history. Clements also makes use of personal storytelling in the play. The effects of these moments of storytelling call on the audience to pay attention and to bear witness to not only the story, or the ways in which that story fails to match up with official accounts, but also how this inconsistency destabilizes the (w)hole of the historical account. While each murdered woman is given opportunity to engage in storytelling to contextualize both her life and her murder, the act of storytelling is most evident (and poignant) in a scene near the end of the first half titled “Violet - Niagara hotel.” Violet sits on the floor with the "shadow of a man cast[ing] itself long on the
walls. Her face reaches him mid-groin.” He is only present through shadow. While the
dis/placement of the man works in the same way as in other scenes with the pillow or
the dresser, this scene contains no other objects to represent violence. Instead of staging
an attack by other objects, Violet is allowed to narrate her own death for us:

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 a-round for a while,
waiting for the next set of lips but not cleaned 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 Violet’s head falls down. (Clements, 2005, 59-60)

Why in a play which stages many other instances of violence that rely on unnatural
violence at the hand of objects like the dresser, does this scene reject this
denaturalization of violence and offer Violet the role of storyteller to recount her own
death? Where all the other moments challenge our assumptions about violence against
women by staging unnatural acts of violence and the absurdity of the historical record,
this scene relies only on Violet’s narration and the slide projection. As soon as Violet’s
head slumps, the slide projection announces her death and in this moment the audience
realizes that the slide itself highlights its own absurdity. Violet’s blood alcohol reading
was 0.91, which is not only the highest reading of all the women in the play, but is
outrageously high for anyone (Clements, 2005, 60). After a 0.50 blood alcohol level a
person will likely have severe impairment of motor skills and breathing, and will likely be
unconscious if not already dead of alcohol poisoning, yet Violet’s death warranted no coroner’s report to be issued (60). In both the denaturalized and dis/placed violence, and Violet’s testimony, Clements’s storytelling blends the fictional with the historical to create an alternative history that problematizes and rejects the ‘official’ historical record. Instead, the Indigenous storytelling in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* challenges the exclusion – the absences – of Aboriginal women in historical records. The series of events surrounding the factual murders committed in Vancouver may reside in “an institutional record,” but the alternative Clements offers is not to fix the historical record or to offer a more realistic account. Instead, Clements, destabilizes that history and “amends the dominant culture’s faulty memory” by bringing “personhood to women dismissed in the official collective memory as losers, prostitutes, anonymous victims” (Maufort, 2008, 197).

The historical elements of the murders are presented in the first half in a magic-realist, non-linear, imagistic style. They appear dream-like and resoundingly unrealistic. The fantastical dramaturgical and scenographic elements destabilize any straightforward reading of historiography in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. The play presents itself to audiences as a dramatization of a historical event, but what is offered becomes so surreal that it denies us the opportunity to receive it as historical. Because her play is surreal and unbelievable, Clements confronts the audience’s expectations of a historical text and denies us the opportunity to receive the historical with any
confidence in the ‘historical’ account it is offering. The first half stages inanimate objects attacking (historically-) based women, and becomes “a growing up through memory” that is both “in a memory, but present in time” (Clements, 2005, 7). The play is non-linear and surreal; it jumps between past and present to disturb narrative flow. It offers us historical facts (coroner’s reports) and positions them as just as unrealistic as a dresser attacking a woman. The coroner slides, which also reveal a date of death, reveal to the audience that in one instance we are seeing Rose’s death in 1965 (Clements, 2005, 18), then jumping to Valerie’s murder in 1986 (51) then back to 1980 to witness Mavis’s murder (57). The play denies any opportunity to put logic to the violence by denying a linear logic to the play. Meanwhile the second half presents the fictional elements of the performance in a more linear, albeit still surreal, style. The fictionalized revenge narrative of the second half is chorological, which gives it a logic that is denied in the first half. The second half also witnesses a complete merger between the “real” and the “non-real” elements with the murdered women and Rebecca interacting and affecting each other’s plot lines. By structuring her play in this way, Clements toys with our expectations of history and fact. Because it is the abstract and imagistic that has one foot planted in the historical, our expectations are always undermined, and our ability to judge and verify the verity of history and cultural memory is called into question. In destabilizing our expectation of a ‘true story,’ Clements destabilizes the authority of the documentary evidence that forms the official story.
The first half places Rebecca as a Greek chorus commenting on the ‘real’ events and historical murders while the second half places the Native women as the chorus of Rebecca’s search for her mother, and a rediscovery of her own sense of Native womanhood. Unlike traditional Greek choruses, however, the Native women take on an active role in the second half, going as far as interacting with and influencing the performance; history literally comes alive in performance. The women are "in different areas of the apartment touching and using Rebecca's things" (100). Aunt Shadie phones Rebecca from the switchboard, waking Rebecca up, but is “not able to answer” Rebecca’s “Hello?” When Rebecca disconnects the phone call from Aunt Shadie at the switchboard, she also disconnects Gilbert on the other end of that call. Perhaps the clearest example of how the women of historical past affect Rebecca’s fictional present is in the final moments of the first half where the women become Rebecca’s chorus. The women set in motion events that provide the momentum of the second half. First, Mavis “bumps Ron and he stumbles into Rebecca” (Clements, 2005, 64) which sets up Rebecca not only romantically, but also allows them to “pinch” him, ogle him, and appease their own sexual desires later on. It is later implied that Rebecca and Ron will continue their relationship when Ron phones to make plans for dinner (105). Secondly, Verna steals Rebecca’s wallet and leaves it on the table for the Barber to pick up (65); this interaction between the real and the fictional establishes the revenge narrative that will drive the second half of the play. Without Rebecca’s wallet, the Barber cannot contact her,
Rebecca will not discover what happened to her mother and the other murdered women, and there would be no return to community and womanhood at the end of the play. The most poignant moment in the play is also the moment that unites the present and the past and strengthens the union between the real and the fictional. In this moment of the play, Aunt Shadie "emerges from the landscape as a trapper. She stands behind REBECCA. She puts her hand over REBECCA’s and draws the knife closer to the BARBER’s neck [...] they slit his throat" (Clements, 2005, 125). This merger between the real and the fictional reminds us that the past is always affecting the actions of the present. The play takes that theme to extremes by positioning the Native women as active agents that push the trajectory of the second half to its historically inaccurate conclusion. Fusing time in the play raises a critical eye to history, and cripples our attempts at reading Clements’s counter-narrative as an authentic history.

Muriel Miguel, who played Aunt Shadie in the Native Earth performance at Buddies in Bad Times, acknowledged that the play is “a tribute to these women’s lives” (Walker). The play tells the story from the victims’ perspective, giving agency to the lives and identities that were overshadowed by media attention on Jordan. In its function as part of Indigenous theatrical storytelling, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* not only confronts the marginalization of so many women whose disappearances go unmarked, but actively creates a space for their memory. The women, Valerie, Mavis, Aunt Shadie, Violet, Verna, and Rose, are repeatedly referred to by name; this continual invocation
of names becomes a spoken memorial.\textsuperscript{122} The \textit{Unnatural and Accidental Women} situates Native women in the subject position of the performance; even after their theatrical deaths they are central to the plot, to the humour, to life of the performance, and to how we interpret the revenge narrative taken on by Rebecca.\textsuperscript{123} Its place within the public sphere creates a memorial to missing and murdered Native women in Canada. As a memorial, the play compels audiences into recognition of historical events. It demands that we, the audience, bear witness. Clements’s play specifically, and Native women’s theatre generally, may not rectify the failures of the institutions, such as the police, depicted by the sometimes politically correct, sometimes racist character Ron, but they can honour the lives of women affected by them, and can raise awareness of these injustices. By questioning the modes of representation – the violence of representation – Clements creates a shift in the spectator’s gaze; the women on stage perform “the unseen and unheard story” of the Native women, while also manifesting “the power of the spectator as witness” (Solga, 2009, 7).

The layering of time in all three plays problematizes history and historical

\textsuperscript{122} Like those for the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, or the Vietnam War, which frequently read the names of the victims aloud as an act of remembrance and memory.

\textsuperscript{123} The fact that the women remain in the performance situates them, like Angela in Yvette Nolan’s \textit{Blade}, as an “after-image ... Like when you turn off the TV, and you can still see the picture there for a split second” (qtd in Shantz). Yet, unlike \textit{Blade} where the image of Angela changes as the play progresses into what the media has depicted her as, the women in Clements’s play move media-generated stereotypes to women with histories and identities that reject the stereotypes from earlier.
reception so that audiences not only begin to think critically about the historical accounts and how they are received, but also consider how these past abuses of Native women continue in the present. What all three performances accomplish in their conflation of historical and present time in their performances is a call for community; specifically, a community of women that offer the hope for a change in representation through a positive construction of Native women’s identities. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women, Annie Mae’s Movement, and Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* take on popular history that affects, but often excludes, Native women and the roles they have played in those histories. At the heart of their historiographic inquiry is a desire to destabilize traditional historiography and challenge the common, often misinformed, understanding of Native womanhood.

As the history play demonstrates, our relationship with history is always in a state of flux. These performances ask us to consider our relationship with history vis à vis the performance and cultural memory. The performance of history – and certainly the creation of it – is always a political one. The political potential of these performances is at the heart of *Acts of Resistance*; it is a shifting view of Indigenous women in society as a result of the presentation of self-created identities in lieu of other-created media representations and stereotypes. Revisioning history allows the playwrights to push back against other-created histories that foster harmful representations, or, in many
instances, no representation at all. Native women’s theatre is “about historical events
... where the victimized survivor is given the position of the witness. The witness is able
to tell the spectator something about the experiences previously hidden behind the
‘veils’ of his or her past and now, through performance, reveal to the spectators” (Rokem
205).

In 1996 the *Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples* stated that “If Indian
people generally can be said to have been disadvantaged by the unfair and
discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act, Indian women have been doubly
disadvantaged” (RCAP 1.2.913). As Sophie McCall argues, however, RCAP missed an
opportunity when it translated testimony (storytelling) into a report for the government.
Whereas RCAP presented facts about Aboriginal people, with a special section on
Aboriginal women, the playwrights explored in this chapter adopt a tradition of
storytelling and testimony (and, to use McCall’s term “told-to stories”) to employ a
method of healing more in line with Aboriginal traditions. Aboriginal women playwrights
reframe the themes of the report to humanize, personalize them, and in turn, audiences
are offered a visceral connection to the consequences of colonization. History plays that
draw on both personal memory and historical records are a way to rewrite historical
accounts to include the marginalized and forgotten persons/topics of history. Writing
personal or revisionist versions of history also helps to create identities that are formed
from within the community and not reliant on other-defined identities.
CHAPTER SIX

Looking Forward: The Transnational and the Theatrical – Indigenous people home and abroad

Perhaps part of the desire to attend theatre and performance is to reach for something better, for new ideas about how to be and how to be with each other
– Jill Dolan, 2001, 455

And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed
– John Steinbeck 249

Like the legend of the Phoenix, all ends with beginnings.
– Daft Punk

During the writing of this dissertation there emerged a new movement in Canada that surrounded the Conservative Government’s Omnibus bill C-45.\textsuperscript{124} This movement, called Idle No More (INM), follows the same grassroots framework as the “Occupy” movements that had taken place only a few years earlier. Beginning in the autumn of 2012, INM was a way for four women from the Canadian prairies, Sheelah McLean, Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon, to draw attention to Aboriginal issues, the

\textsuperscript{124}Later renamed the Jobs and Growth Act. Contained within this massive bill were proposed changes to the Fisheries Act, the Navigable Waters Protection Act, Environmental Assessment Act, and the Indian Act, which critics suggested would diminish environmental protection and Native reserve lands.
Omnibus bill, treaty rights, and environmental protection. Idle No More grew from these four women’s desires to push back against the proposed changes to legislation in the Canadian government. According to the founders, those changes demonstrate a continuation of Canada’s colonization of Aboriginal rights since the changes were proposed without consultation with Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal communities would be affected by the potential ecological damage inherent in those changes. Idle No More became an example of Indigenous (anticolonial) ecofeminism in praxis. It recognizes that not only do “Native people suffer the brunt of environmental destruction,” but also that “what befalls Native people will eventually affect everyone” (A. Smith, 1997, 24). In a very visible way, Idle No More started connecting the dots between the colonization of Aboriginal people and the present ecological crisis for a wider Canadian public.

Idle No More’s beginnings were given even more attention by the timing of political activism by Attawapiskat First Nation’s chief Theresa Spence who staged a hunger strike in December 2012 in the hope of drawing attention to the state of emergency that her community was facing. Many other Aboriginal chiefs used the movement and the attention to raise awareness and concerns about treaty rights as
well. After a month of campaigning and social media exposure, Idle No More turned into something that resonated with a wider international Indigenous community. From this grassroots Canadian movement grew a larger, international call for Indigenous sovereignty and protection of the environment. There were solidarity rallies and flash mobs in the United States, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Egypt. The movement has not lead to an Indigenous revolution that radicalized the way Canada and the world treat their Indigenous populations, but it does raise global awareness of Indigenous rights in Canada (and beyond). Indigenous and settler populations around the world were standing together to call for awareness and respect of Indigenous rights, environmental protection, and beyond that, the decolonization of Indigenous peoples. Idle No More, as with Indigenous eco-drama (discussed below), recognizes that Indigenous sovereignty and protection of the environment go hand-in-hand.

As with most protest movements, Idle No More was not without its criticism. Some of it was a fair assessment of grassroots movements which often have difficulties

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125 Chief Spence’s hunger strike, as with the other protests, was not directly connected with Idle No More, but it was in solidarity with it. The protests, especially by Chief Spence, helped garner media attention on issues of Aboriginal sovereignty. The hunger strike lasted six weeks and drew a lot of national and international attention to Canada and the treatment of its Aboriginal people.

126 Nor did it stop Bill C-45 from being passed through Parliament and the Senate to become law.
pinning down its objectives, while some of it was based on 150 years of racist stereotypes and representations of Aboriginal people (especially women). Much of the backlash to INM came in the form of citizens criticizing Aboriginal people for being the same stereotypes that have been recycled time and again, and which Aboriginal people are continually pushing back against. Charlie Angus, a Member of Parliament for Timmins-James Bay, Ontario, wrote that “the purveyors of these false stereotypes – the ‘lazy’ Indian, the ‘corrupt’ Chief, the ‘ripped off’ taxpayer’ – seems [sic] to be hijacking the public conversation away from issues like chronic infrastructure underfunding, third class education and the inability to share in economic development” and “if you read through the comments it is impossible not to recognize a relentless pattern of malevolent attacks that would be considered inexcusable if they were used against other social, ethnic or religious minorities” (Angus). He continued to explain that the racism in the comments about INM and the Attawapiskat residents were read by many Aboriginal people across Canada, and described the negative effects those comments had on the communities (especially children):

whenever I hear about the wonderful efforts being taken to protect young people online I think of the trauma experienced by children in Attawapiskat by online attacks. When the media began reporting on their struggle to have a school built in the community, the online haters overwhelmed the comments pages. A teacher in Attawapiskat told me the children were very

Or, perhaps more to the point, those objectives change as people join and the movement either evolves or is expropriated by others with a different agenda.
shaken up when they read the long string of abusive comments that demeaned them as "lazy Indians," "losers," "gasoline sniffers," etc. (Angus)

The medium may be different, but the message is the same. Where once the stereotypes were recycled in Canadian media,\textsuperscript{128} the stereotypes are now recycled and revived as they proliferate in the comment sections of online newspapers and online forums. These stereotypes frequently appear more ubiquitous because they materialize one comment after another – and are often met with resounding support from other readers.\textsuperscript{129}

Aboriginal communities reading the comments sections read these racist, sexist, hate-filled stereotypes that have very little connection to their own understanding of self and community, but have the same potential to be internalized as the stereotypes that circulate in popular culture. This is the malevolent nature of racism and stereotypes.

It is this polarization at the heart of Idle No More that caught my attention: the international Indigenous push to have their voices and perspectives heard on one side, and the negative reaction by some of the general public who wish to continue their participation in the silencing of Indigenous voices on the other. While I have written about how the plays of Shirley Cheechoo, Margo Kane, Yvette Nolan, Monique Mojica, \textsuperscript{128}

See Sorouja Moll’s 2013 dissertation ‘Zones of Intelligibility:’ The Trial of Louis Riel and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Media for an in-depth exploration of how print media has historically functioned to propagate stereotypes of Indigenous people.\textsuperscript{129}

Not to mention that the comments do not appear to be screened or removed by moderators whose job it is to screen comments that are deemed to be “hate speech” “personal attacks” or “defamatory statements.”
and Marie Clements have engaged in a decolonization of Indigenous identity through theatrical performance, I am aware that the theatre is not a fix-all solution, but it is a start. I would venture to say that the majority of those commenting online have never seen *Moonlodge* or *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*; yet these plays still offer hope for change. For every Native woman playwright getting up and telling a story, actively trying to reclaim her identity from colonial interference, there will be others. The more that Native women and men challenge their invisibility, attempt to halt the circulation of stereotypes, and proffer Aboriginal perspectives to wider audiences, the more opportunities will be created to effect change, and with that, the opportunity for the continued decolonization of the misrepresentation of Aboriginal identity.

In writing *Acts of Resistance*, I hope to highlight the ways Native Canadian theatre becomes a system that supports the decolonization of Aboriginal women. By examining some of the dramaturgical strategies employed during this historically significant moment in Native women’s theatre, I highlighted the ways the theatre encourages acts of resistance that engage in a reclamation of Aboriginal identity. Each play explores significant forces of oppression that affect Native women in Canada (and beyond): the proliferation of negative images of Indigenous womanhood, (sexual) violence, and the pitfalls of dislocation and displacement. I tease out the connections between theatrical performance and the decolonization of Native women’s (mis)representations by demonstrating how self-representation, coupled with strategic theatrically staged
presence and absence can promote decolonization. Each chapter analyzes some of the
dramaturgical strategies the plays coming out of this contained historical moment have
used to address the oppression created through stereotypes, sexual violence, and
displacement. In doing so, I linked self-representation to acts of resistance, which in turn
create narratives of survivance. The plays of Kane, Cheechoo, Clements, Nolan, and
Mojica, like so many of their contemporaries, all demonstrate a desire to challenge the
oppressive and malevolent circulation story of stereotypes. The use of humour,
heightened theatrical presence and self-representation, and Aboriginal concepts of
testimony and witnessing all heighten spectatorial recognition of Indigenous women’s
self-created identities, which in turn denaturalizes, destabilizes, and ultimately
deconstructs the stereotypes. Ridicule and humour, as biproducts of the playwrights’
culture jamming, undermine the logic and unconscious acceptance of the
misrepresentation of Indignity that the stereotypes offer. They denaturalize the semiotic
codes and common tropes of Native womanhood that form the basis of the stereotypes.
The plays resist the pull to recreate stereotypes by offering counter-narratives that
dismiss claims of authenticity while also rejecting the pull to create a replacement for
that stereotype.

In my discussion of the representation of physical and sexual violence, I explored
not just the dramaturgical strategies to represent violence on stage, but also focussed
on issues of presence and absence that run through each of these plays (and arguably
every play produced by Indigenous playwrights). I questioned in what ways does the representation of violence in Native women’s theatre help the process of decolonization? What I discovered was that a Brechtian subversion of the traditional subject/object dichotomy is a common trope throughout the case studies, and these dis/placements were a way to address heterogeneous audiences without pushing issues of violence against Indigenous women to the margins of visibility. I offered two useful terms to describe some of the strategies for performing violence: conceptual metonymy and performative caesura. Both of these performative strategies support the subversion of the subject/object dichotomy while also highlighting Aboriginal women’s presence within the theatrical – and the cultural – realm. This subversion leads not only to the denaturalization of the violence, but a disavowal of the continued invisibility – the “vanishing” – of Indigenous people. The very act of performing Indigenous stories in the public sphere is an act of resistance and the representation of violence with the Native women in the subject position creates a counter narrative that pushes back against the stereotypes and the prevalence of the violence against Indigenous women. The function of violence is not (re)victimization, but healing through storytelling, which evokes elements of testimony and witnessing, and engages in acts of survivance. By highlighting the many ways that these moments of violence are pushed to the margins of visibility, the plays reject the invisibility of these moments of violence, and call on audiences to engage in Aboriginal concepts of witnessing. As part of a trauma narrative, these plays
highlight Indigenous presence in order to reject the destruction of the subjective self, but they also call on us to become witnesses to the traumatic event and historical (and cultural) absences of Native women and Native perspectives. Indigenous storytelling traditions ask us not just to engage in Aboriginal concepts of witnessing, but also ask us to acknowledge the presence of Native women in Canada. Indigenous storytelling asks us, then, to participate not just in solidarity with Indigenous people, but to be responsive to Indigenous experiences and voices in order to help facilitate decolonization. This is achieved through the interplay between the actual and the theatrical, which is another significant characteristic of Indigenous storytelling. The plays, by their very nature, are public and demand a sense of visibility, but they are also vessels through which the story can carry on. This may be by word-of-mouth, theatre reviews, or even in the classrooms of university drama classes.

“This is not a conclusion”

In 1997 Margo Kane was invited to participate in Australia’s lead up to the 2000 summer Olympics in Sydney. The organizers wanted to use the increasing international attention on Australia to draw attention to issues affecting Australia’s Aborigines. Rhonda Roberts, artistic director of the Festival of Dreaming, justified her invitation of Canadian artists “because of the strong connections and similarities in their work and its relevance to
James Waites, a theatre critic in Sydney, Australia, suggested that it is evident “the cruelties suffered by Australian Aborigines were not a unique aberration born of a misguided local bureaucracy”; rather, they were “passed down to forelock-tugging administrators in Australia, Canada - and, I wonder, anywhere else?” (qtd in Plater). Even after nearly ten years since its original performance, the artistic director recognized the significance of Kane’s play for Australian Aborigines and their push for decolonization. The stories and the dramaturgical strategies presented in the play could draw attention to, and potentially inspire, a new generation of Australian audiences to reconfigure their understanding of Indigenous people. What both Waites and Roberts gesture to is the transnational appeal of Native theatre's attempts at decolonizing identity.

I realized that for all the years I have been working on this project, I have yet to figure out what definitive conclusions I can draw from this project, except for an ongoing necessity for the push-back against misrepresentations, violence, and displacement to continue. There are many questions that remain from (or have been created by) this project, but the biggest one for me is where can this research lead? I have spent a considerable amount of time working on theatre that is, in some instances, nearly as old as I am, but now I wonder about the implications of this research inside and beyond Canada’s Aboriginal theatre. How does it apply to more recent performances? This is not only because there is a continuing need to engage in acts of resistance, but also because
of a need to continue the decolonization of Indigenous peoples globally. Perhaps there is no definite conclusion because the issues addressed in the historical scope of this thesis persist to this day. Thus, playwrights and theatre practioners continue to engage in instances of Indigenous theatrical storytelling in order to promote the continuation of Indigenous people’s decolonization. The inability to come to any solid conclusions is a result of Indigenous playwrights who continue to press the boundaries of representation and the theatrical genre, and who continually engage in acts of resistance that reshape our understanding of Indigenous peoples in a 21st century context. Jill Carter ended her 2010 thesis *Repairing the Web* with these words: “This is not a conclusion. Nor ought we try to write one. We stand ready to be transformed at the dawning of a new creation” (287). I take inspiration from these words. It is not a conclusion that is the aim of this project, it is a hope for future research and a hope for continued push back by Indigenous and settler artists, activists and academics. Perhaps the best way for me to conclude is to open more doors, ask more questions, and look to the transnational application of some of the strategies that this work has explored.

It is with a focus on the transnational in mind that I suggest not a conclusion, but a preface – a look forwards rather than backwards – to the potential for exploring and promoting Indigenous perspectives globally. Future projects could use the investigation of Native theatre in Canada found in this thesis as a springboard to explore the dramaturgical strategies of representation, violence, and displacement on an
international level. How do Indigenous playwrights (both male and female) around the world choose to address (or not address) stereotypes in their work? How do they represent Indigenous perspectives? How do they redress issues of colonial and physical violence against Indigenous communities? How do they respond to the continual push toward displacement of Indigenous populations? The logical extension of this thesis is to seek ways to apply the decolonization readings from Native Canadian women playwrights to a broader spectrum of Indigenous theatre, and explore the ways that international Indigenous theatre is engaged in advancing the decolonization of Indigenous populations through, for example, Indigenous storytelling.

I would like to now turn briefly to one potential frame from which to explore this shift from local to international: Indigenous eco-theatre. My discussion of Idle No More at the beginning of this chapter affixed the oppression of Indigenous people to the oppression (and destruction) of the environment (among other things), so that resistance to one becomes resistance to the other. Along a similar vein, Indigenous eco-theatre connects issues of identity, community, displacement, and Indigenous storytelling techniques with the need to redress one of the most pressing contemporary concerns for Indigenous men and women globally: the ecological crisis.

Indigenous eco-theatre synthesizes contemporary Indigenous concerns for

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A translated and English version of this chapter appears in the Norwegian arts and politics journal *Seismopolite* (8) Dec. 2014.
climate change (which is already dramatically affecting Indigenous economies, lifestyles, and self-governance) with feminist concerns for the emancipation of Indigenous peoples in order to overcome the “dual oppression of women and nature” (Vakoch, 2012, 3). This is a simplistic view of eco-theatre and ecofeminism, since it does not appear to take into account other forms of oppression at play; however, it is my argument that both eco-theatre and ecofeminism recognize the significance of colonization (for example) in that “dual oppression” — or at least they should.131 Andrea Smith writes in her article “Ecofeminism through an Anticolonial Framework” that “it is essential that ecofeminist theory more seriously grapple with the issues of colonization, particularly the colonization of Native lands, in its analysis of oppression” (1997, 22). Indigenous eco-

My use of both terms does recognize this. Anticolonial discourses, among many others, underpin my use of the terms eco-theatre and ecofeminism. While there is no single definition of ecofeminism, I am using the term to highlight a criticism that explores the intersection of feminist concerns (such as colonization, sexism, racism, gender (in)equality) with ecological concerns. It attempts to understand how feminist concerns can be mirrored and addressed in ecological concerns. While some, such as Chris Cuomo, argue that eco-feminism should “share, at least, intentions that are explicitly both feminist and environmentalist” (qtd in Vakoch, 2011, ix); I, like Vakoch, argue that those explicit connections are necessary because ecological and feminist concerns are not mutually exclusive. There are tensions between ecofeminism and Indigenous scholarship; however, my use of ecofeminism is not just concerned with oppression of women and environment. It is concerned with the forces of oppression that help support the continued oppression of all people, sexualities, classes, races, and so forth, and with an understanding that “all oppressions are related and reinforce each other” (A. Smith, 1997, 21). Therefore, my use of ecofeminism does not exist in a vacuum; at the heart of my use of ecofeminism, then, is an understanding that issues of Indigenous agency, environmental concerns, and gender are a critical point of intersection, and a valuable lens to consider the continued mis-treatment of Indigenous people and the land, which, as Andrea Smith points out, often go hand-in-hand (1997).

The article appears under the name Andy Smith.
drama does not seek to redress environmental concerns without also gesturing to the other forms of oppression that are connected to, or help support the oppression of Indigenous women (and men) and the environment. Indigenous eco-drama becomes another act of resistance, and offers hope for a continued decolonization of Indigenous people and the land. It is a theatrical representation of the desire for physical and spiritual survival of Indigenous peoples globally. Both Idle No More and Indigenous eco-drama seek to honour Indigenous sovereignty and the environment, and respond to issues of colonial violence and oppression.

Eco-theatre and ecocriticism is an especially interesting avenue to explore the transnational possibilities of Acts of Resistance since many of the dramaturgical strategies explored in earlier chapters can offer a way to contemplate Indigenous perspectives on (and potential solutions to) the current eco-crisis. Eco-theatre achieves this through aspects of Indigenous storytelling explored in earlier chapters, and offers us an opportunity to reconfigure the ways we understand Indigenous people, the environment, and the connections between the two. What follows now is a very cursory look at three Indigenous eco-dramas, Marie Clements’s Burning Vision, Allison Warden’s Calling All Polar Bears, and Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter’s Min Duoddarat III, which
highlight these very connections. Nature acts in a significant role in the plays in order to reveal not just humans in conflict within their environment, but humans in conflict with their environment. Indigenous eco-dramas reveal the ways that environmental conflicts are human conflicts; the representation of nature disrupts, if only momentarily, the binary between the human world and the natural world, and in doing so, suggest the importance of theatrical (and critical) investigations of the natural world. For example, Marie Clements’s *Burning Vision* has a character called “the Little Boy” (named after one of the atomic bombs created with the help of uranium mined in northern Canada). He is a “beautiful Native boy” and also the “personification of the darkest uranium found at the centre of the earth” (Clements, 2003, 15). He is undoubtedly a representation of the

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I do not wish to locate these plays (or other Indigenous plays that have a focus on the environment) as just eco-theatre. These plays are certainly more complicated than a single eco-drama/eco-feminist label. I recognize that these plays also address issues of colonization, violence, Indigenous identity and self-representation, and sovereignty. That being said, we cannot ignore that protection of the environment (and thus protection of Indigenous people who live in that environment) is a significant theme in these performances. As such, these plays are eco-dramas, and they can (and should) be explored from this perspective.

By making this point of intervention and gesturing to possible future projects, I wish to reveal the implications and benefits of my research to theatre created and performed inside and outside of Canada. I also wish to highlight how Indigenous playwrights, as with the founders and supporters of Idle No More, are at the forefront of public calls for environmental change. In conjunction with this call for change is a call for the end of other forms of oppression, or as many (eco)feminists argue, the opposition to any “isms” that support the continuation of the “logic of domination” (qtd in A. Smith, 1997, 21).

Finally, in gesturing towards Indigenous eco-theatre (as just one potential avenue of research), I wish to foreground the potential international application of my thesis’ core arguments. I do this in the hope of fostering and supporting continued research and in the hope of rejecting the logic of domination.
uranium that was mined in Canada as well as representative of the Aboriginal populations who lived (and/or who were displaced from) around the mines. The Little Boy not only disrupts the dichotomy between human and nature, but also inextricably links the colonization of the landscape (uranium mining) and the colonization of Aboriginal people. The destabilization of that binary allows Indigenous eco-theatre to confront the colonial, heteromasculine, capitalist, patriarchal ideologies that sustain the continued colonization of the natural environment and the colonization of the Indigenous people who live on it.\textsuperscript{134}

Eco-theatre/ecocriticism is a bourgeoning field in theatre studies, and recent titles propose ways theatre is “Representing and thematizing the more-than-human world in performance” (Arons and May 1).\textsuperscript{135} In recent years, Indigenous playwrights have begun to create eco-dramas where the theatrical, the natural, and the political begin to intersect in the hope of “shaping and transforming human attitudes” towards the environment and an acceptance “of our enmeshment in the larger ecological

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community" (Arons and May 1). Theresa J. May coined the term "ecodramaturgy" to describe a theatre and performance "that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the centre of its theatrical and thematic intent" (Arons and May 4). Indigenous theatre quite frequently foregrounds the environmental/natural world as a significant element – sometimes even a character – in performance, which in turn offers a way to address issues of ecological violence and the consequences of that ecological violence for Indigenous people. Therefore, Indigenous eco-theatre is Indigenous ecofeminist theatre, and it offers significant potential for the continued decolonization of Indigenous women and men.

Marie Clements’s *Burning Vision* is a historically-inspired eco-drama that draws attention to the uranium mining that happened in Canada’s northern territories, and the role it played in the creation and subsequent use of the atomic bombs during the Second World War. Beyond this historical narrative, it is a play that highlights the interconnectedness between human/human and human/environment. Clements heightens spectatorial awareness of this interconnectedness of humans and their environments through a synthesis of the historical and the theatrical in *Burning Vision*.

This investigation of eco-theatre and Indigenous playwrights here does not wish to perpetrate the myth of the “Ecological Indian,” which suggests a harmony between Indigenous populations and the environment/land (see Greg Gerrard’s *Ecocriticism*). Instead, I wish to reveal the ways in which Indigenous playwrights are at the vanguard of acknowledging their role in the protection of the environment and engaging in (theatrical) activism to help reshape both their relationship and our relationship with the eco-crisis.
Clements not only interweaves fact and fiction in order to leave our desire for an authentic history unfulfilled, but also highlights how those holes in history have a global reach. As a result, Clements “manages to connect issues of place-identity and environmental justice with transnational and cross-cultural concerns” (Gray 29). Its focus on the damaged, contaminated, and dangerous environment also highlights the consequences of environmental destruction for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

Clements uses several characteristics of Indigenous theatrical storytelling to destabilize the binaries between humans and their environment. In *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, objects become characters to denaturalize violence against Aboriginal women, in *Burning Vision*, the landscape – that is the natural world – becomes a character to denaturalize the violence against the environment (and the violence enacted on the people who inhabit that environment). The soundscape is ever-present, always re-inserting itself into the human spaces of the play. In doing so, it pulls the audience’s attention to the ecological impact of the mining. The sounds of caribou hooves between the movements serves as a reminder of the natural world’s place in a performance about environmental crisis. The caribou migrate and eat from a polluted landscape and that has an effect not just on the environment, but also humanity as well,
since the Dene traditionally followed the migration of caribou. The jarring nature of
the soundscape creates the impression of an environment in crisis. Throughout the play
the sound effects remind audiences of the natural world and include “The sound of a
fishing line whizzing through space” (26), water splashing (88), “caribou hooves
stamped[ing] across the surface of the earth” (42), and a continuous sound of “hearts
beating” throughout the play. However, the representation of the natural world is
engaged in an auditory battle for attention; it is a battle against an industrial soundscape
of feedback, clicks, ticks, and static that invade the natural soundscape in the
performance and denaturalize that environment. Each of these moments invites
audiences to recognize the connections between the natural world and eco-crisis
created by radium mining.

On the other end of the spectrum is Rose, a Métis woman living and working near
Port Radium, who experiences a geopathic crisis as a result of the landscape which has
become toxic for all living things near the radium mines. She is a fictional character, but
is representative of a neglected historical reality; she becomes one of the characters
Clements uses to conflate fact and fiction. By addressing issues of environmental justice,
however, Clements engages in elements of not just ecocriticism, but also ecofeminism,

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137 The ecological effects of mining on migratory animals is also explored in Allison Warden’s Calling all
Polar Bears and Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter’s Min Duoddarat III/ and Stáinnak, which are discussed
briefly below.
which recognizes that "the liberation of women [...] cannot be fully effected without the liberation of nature, and conversely, the liberation of nature so ardently desired by environmentalists will not be fully effected without the liberation of women" (Gaard 21-22). This is, in part, because environmental changes reveal the fragile connection between Indigenous women and the environment; they are more likely to have their homes, families, and work affected by the eco-crisis. Rose contextualizes this connection between environmental justice and social justice by exposing the impact of environmental destruction on both: “The kids are playin’ in sandboxes of it, the caribou are eating it off the plants, and we’re drinkin’ the water where they bury it. [...] everybody’s wearin’ it these days, so I guess there’s no harm if a bit gets in my dough” (Clements, 2003, 103). Not only does this scene highlight how environmental pollution from the mining infiltrates the whole ecosystem – landscape, plants, animals, people – but it also gestures towards issues of gender and women’s labour within traditional and capitalist frameworks. Both Rose’s work space and its by-product (the bread) are polluted. The pollution of the landscape also contaminates Rose’s opportunities for financial independence, interrupts her livelihood, and highlights the vulnerability of women within an ecological and economic context. This is, of course, not limited to women’s work. In fact, Indigenous communities in general are greatly affected by the destruction of the natural environment. Environmental crises can (and do) lead to an economic crisis, which in turn tends to disrupt Indigenous traditional economies, often
before the capitalist economies are affected. In a discussion of Sami traditional economies, Rauna Kuokkanen argues that “to present a more accurate picture of the state of indigenous economies, one has to consider competing land and resource uses, colonial state regulations and environmental destruction, the diminished or lack of access to traditional territories and resources due to expropriation of land or intrusion of outsiders” (Kuokkanen, 2011, 216). While all Indigenous people will be affected by economic/ecological crises, Indigenous women are more likely to be driven to migration, exploitation, and poverty. The contamination of Rose’s bread reveals how these environmental crises pass through other economic and social sectors (from food to bodies) and affect multiple generations (Rose’s baby). This brief moment reveals the interconnectedness of ecological destruction not just between natural environments, but also between humanity’s physical, geographical, and economic environments.

Similar dramaturgical strategies and themes used in Clements’s plays are also echoed internationally as well. Allison Warden (who also goes by the stage name Aku-Matu) “is an Iñupiaq Eskimo Inter-Disciplinary Artist” (Warden) based out of Anchorage, Alaska. Her 2011 solo-voice performance, Calling All Polar Bears, highlights concerns of the Indigenous populations of Alaska. Warden uses Indigenous theatrical storytelling to present a performance that creates transnational links between climate change, the current eco-crisis, and Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) people globally. As with other Indigenous eco-dramas, nature is not just represented in the performance (although it
is represented through photographs projected onto a screen); it is an active agent in the performance. Just as in *Burning Vision*, the natural world has an active voice in *Calling All Polar Bears*. Warden uses animals and humans to engage in theatrical Indigenous storytelling as a way to highlight Indigenous (and environmental) concerns.

Aana Nora, an elder woman, is the main guide through the story. She offers us a glimpse at Indigenous people’s perspectives, and the significance of the story being told.

You know Indigenous people, like me, we're so cool, first of all. And then second of all, we have had a connection to the land for thousands of years. If we had two more hours, I could tell you the lineage of my people. We know; we remember. And we remember our stories about the land, and you know that's kinda cool. It's kinda important. And the people, we take care of the animals of the land you know, it's like they're entrusted to us [...] and we take good care of them because they take good care of us. We don't have tofu [...] Oh, anyway, so you know these Indigenous peoples, these perspectives they are really important, okay, so just remember us. (Warden)\(^{138}\)

In this opening monologue, Aana Nora not only asserts the importance of Indigenous perspectives, but also rejects the pull to the “vanishing Indian” stereotype by calling on the audience to “remember us.” She defends not just an Indigenous voice, but the necessity of the visibility of Indigenous people. In doing so, however, she also begins to create a throughline between Indigenous feminist concerns and ecological concern, thereby revealing that the two are thoroughly linked. The Brechtian style of direct

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\(^{138}\) I transcribed all of the quotations from Warden's performance from video. I aimed to keep the language as close to the playwright/performers as I could.
address here, similar to what we see in Nolan, Mojica, Kane, and Cheechoo’s plays, is one of the characteristics that define Indigenous theatrical storytelling that seeks to break the illusion of the unseen spectator. In Calling All Polar Bears direct address entreats a sense of responsibility for the story we witness; at the heart of that story is a call for environmental change. The story is positioned in the first person (in this instance Aana Nora) and it implicates the audience in the story, draws on the Aboriginal concept of witnessing discussed in chapter five, and creates a moment where the character (and the performer who is behind that character) asks the audience to pay attention to the importance of the stories being told.

The use of Indigenous theatrical storytelling conveys the importance of Indigenous perspectives as they relate to both decolonization of Indigenous women (and men) and decolonization of the environment. Through its frequent direct address of the audience, Calling All Polar Bears implicates the audiences in a call for change. Aana Nora’s opening speech features a moment where she speaks to an audience member directly, compliments him/her, and then likens that person to a beautiful polar bear. She goes on to survey the room and then suggests that the whole audience may be polar bears that have gathered to witness the story; that small moment of interaction and humour (as the performance videos demonstrate, the audience laughed throughout this scene), Warden suggests that we the audience are just as affected by climate change as the polar bears we are likened to are. Later Warden appears as the polar bear
storyteller; this performance, like in *Burning Vision*, destabilizes the human/environment binary. When Warden appears as the polar bear storyteller, and we watch the polar bear struggle to reach land, we are reminded that we are the “land-loving polar bears” Aana Nora mentioned earlier. The polar bear’s struggle becomes our struggle as well; we are part of this story of eco-crisis. The play is a call to adjust our thinking and pay attention to the perspectives of Indigenous communities who are already feeling the consequences of the ecological crisis. It asks us to reconsider our place within the ecosystem in order to foster a decolonization of both Indigenous people and the environment through our act of witnessing and our responsibility as witnesses.

Beyond North American borders, there are theatres and playwrights that seek to continue the decolonization of Indigenous people and raise awareness of Indigenous perspectives. Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter (BST) – the national Sami theatre in Norway – was founded in 1981, and primarily uses the Sami language as its performing language. It uses the theatre (as a “new element of Sami culture”) in conjunction with “age old – and still continued – tradition of music and story-telling” to promote Sami culture, perspectives, and create bridges between cultures (Beaivváš ). BST frequently uses theatre to stage a counter-discourse to the ecological and economic crisis affecting

Warden also uses stage properties as stand-ins for other characters. For example, she uses white, furry mittens to represent polar bear cubs in a similar way to Kane’s use of the scarf to represent Aunt Sophie or her interactions with Marlon.
Sami populations in Norway. Their performance, *Min Duoddarat*, tackles issues of encroaching industry and environmental devastation. The 1981 performance drew inspiration from the Alta controversy, which used the theatre to connect Sami perspectives and environmental concerns for Norwegian audiences. In the 2011 remount of the play, titled *Min Duoddarat III*, the conflict is around the economic, cultural, and environmental impact of increased commercial mining in Finnmark, the Northern-most region of Norway.

The play centres on issues of identity, displacement from the land, and the consequences for the Sami community and its traditional economy (such as those seen in chapter four). For Indigenous people around the world, "The significance of traditional economies in indigenous communities goes beyond the economic realm— they are more than just livelihoods providing subsistence and sustenance to individuals or

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140 This is just one example of Beaivváš’s eco-theatre. Another performance from 2012, *Stáinnak*, is concerned with the “moderne miljøfarling industriteknologi”/ “environmental hazards of modern industrial technology” (Teaternett), and like *Calling All Polar Bears*, it uses allegorical animal/fairies to frame *Stáinnak*’s storytelling which highlights the interconnectedness of humans and their environment.

141 The Alta controversy centred around the construction of a hydroelectric power plant along the Alta river in Finnmark, Norway. Original plans for the dam would displace a village of Sami people and cause a disruption for reindeer migration and salmon fishing.

142 This play is not published. I would like to thank Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter for kindly allowing me access to a Norwegian/Sami copy of this play. It originally premiered in 1981 but has since been remounted and/or revised at least three times. The Norwegian/Sami texts do not have English translations available. Where a text appears originally in Norwegian, I offer the original text with my personal translations in a footnote.
communities”; they are central to Indigenous identity and culture (Kuokkanen, 2011, 215). For Piera, a former reindeer herder, identity is directly connected to his relationship with the land. Selling his herd (and therefore his rights to the land) brought him “shame” because he "mistet [hans] selvrespekten”; han “hadde ingen tilhørighet lenger" (Min Duoddarat III, scene 5). The loss of affiliation, and identity, is connected to the damaged environment:

Sårene ble igjen
i naturen og
dypt i min sjel
Jeg visste ikke lenger
hvor jeg hørte til. (Min Duoddarat III)\(^{144}\)

Piera offers insight into the consequences of selling his herd to Ásllat, a reindeer herder at a crossroad between selling or keeping his herd. He recounts that displacement is followed by destruction not just of identity, but also the environment, and beyond that, the economy: “Gruva er oppe på fjellet der de har funnet malm og gull. Bekkene fører giften med seg ned i dalen. Her finns ikke lenger fisk, myrene er svarte, og ikke et

\(^{143}\) “lost [his] self-respect”; he “had no affiliation anymore.”

\(^{144}\) “The wounds were left / in nature and / deep in my soul / I no longer knew / where I belonged.”
multebær å se” (scene 5). Piera’s warnings to Ásllat of the consequences of displacement/dispossession of the land contextualize the connections between human/human and human/nature: “Men sårene og giftstoffene fra gruva er ikke borte. Vi lider på grunn av det ennå idag. Er dette min arv til mine etterkommere?” (Scene 5). Piera realizes that his failure to protect the land from commercial mining will not only result in an ecological crisis, but economic and identity crises as well.

While Min Duoddarat is not written by women, nor is it specifically about Sami women, it nevertheless engages in the same (eco)feminist concerns for the decolonization of both Indigenous people and the environment seen in Clements or Warden, for example. Min Duoddarat III “recognize[s] the value of actions and characteristics typically devalued by dominant (patriarchal) culture,” thereby gesturing

145

“The mine is up on the mountain where they found ore and gold. The streams bring poison with them down into the valley. There are no fish here anymore, the marshes are black, and there’s not a cloudberry to be seen.”

Both fish and cloudberrys are part of a traditional Sami diet. While neither salmon nor cloudberrys are not substantial components of the Sami economy in northern Norway, Finland, and Sweden, selling surplus cloudberrys within their communities or to Norwegian grocery stores can be a boost to that economy (see Garl-Gøran Larsson 2013; Jan Idar Solbakken and Stine Rybråten 2010). Cloudberrys are not commercially grown and that is indicated in their retail price (often around 150,-350,-NOK/kg (CDN $26.00 - $60.00/kg)). The disappearance of cloudberrys from the ecosystem not only affects a traditional Sami diet and the potential for supplemented income, but it also affects a wider Norwegian population who place a high value on the berry’s connection to a Norwegian national identity (they are often called “Norwegian gold”).

146

“But the wounds and toxins from the mine are not gone. We still suffer because of it today. Is this my legacy to my descendants?”
towards an Indigenous eco-theatre/eco-critical framework. (Vakoch, 2012, 4). The push to colonize Indigenous landscapes is often connected to a push to assimilate Indigenous people by forcing the communities to embrace capitalist economic ventures “such as logging, mining, hydro, and oil and gas development,” which, as Rauna Kuokkanen points out, often “leaves indigenous women particularly vulnerable, as they are often compelled to migrate to urban centres” and “often face increasing incidents of violence and sexual abuse” once there (Kuokkanen, 2011, 217).\textsuperscript{147} If the fallout from a loss of traditional economies is the continued subjugation (and colonization) of Indigenous women, then the fight to protect and preserve Sami traditional economies (as presented in \textit{Min Duoddarat III}, for example) is a feminist (and Indigenous) concern; it encumbrances issues of Indigenous decolonization, ecocriticism, gendered discrimination, and violence against women. It seeks to decolonize Sami people by challenging the patriarchal, heteronormative assumptions about land(scape) and environment.

These plays are just three examples of a wide range of international Indigenous theatre that offers an Indigenous, ecofeminist frame to explore contemporary issues of environment and Indigenous identity. Through representation of ecological criticism, 

\textsuperscript{147} Also see Rauna Kuokkanen's 2008 article, “Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence” in the \textit{International Feminist Journal of Politics}.
each play engages in active decolonization of Indigenous identities, and a dissemination
of Indigenous perspectives on the current environmental crisis. They become acts of
resistance to the continued pull to colonize, assimilate, or otherwise oppress Indigenous
communities. The environmental theatre of Indigenous artists asks us to consider our
place of privilege in the natural world and challenge the rationalizing of dominance over
the land. Acknowledging that the roots of environmental domination are the same
fundamental roots of racial, sexual, and gendered dominance means that we can apply
an (Indigenous) eco-feminist reading to Indigenous eco-theatre. Greta Gaard argues that
“At the root of ecofeminism is the understanding that many systems of oppression are
mutually reinforcing. Building on the socialist feminist insight that racism, classism, and
sexism are interconnected [and which are all encompassed in colonialism], ecofeminists
recognize additional similarities between those forms of human oppression and the
oppressive structures of speciesism and naturism” (Gaard 21). If the systems of
oppression that seek to dominate, control, and profit from the environment are the
same systems that dominate, control, and profit from Indigenous peoples, then
challenging those systems of dominance is an act of both feminist and Indigenous
(theatrical) activism. The recognition of common sources of oppression allows us to stage
an intervention into, and decolonization of, environmental and social justice
concurrently.

I offer this brief investigation of Indigenous eco-theatre as an example of the
transnational application of *Acts of Resistance*. There are many other avenues from which to investigate transnational Indigenous theatre to highlight the ways Indigenous playwrights across the globe are engaged in theatrical acts of resistance. These moments of resistance not only contribute to a restructuring of audiences’ understanding of Indigenous peoples by revealing the many forms of colonial oppression, they also stage public acts of resistance to support a continuation of Indigenous peoples’ decolonization.
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