

INDIGENOUS
WOMEN'S THEATRE
IN CANADA

A Mechanism of Decolonization

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	viii
1 Violence against Indigenous Women and Dramatic Subversion.....	1
Decolonization through Dramatic Resistance: Framing the Discussion.....	1
The “Discovery” Myth: Colonial Misrepresentations and Violence against Indigenous Women.....	5
Post-Colonial Drama: Misrepresentations of Indigenous Women.....	11
Interpellation, Stereotyping and the Perpetuation of Gendered Violence.....	16
Reverse Interpellation, the “Decolonial Imaginary” and Resistance	20
Identity Politics and “Intercultural” Commensurability: The Ethics of Criticism.....	23
Indigenous Women’s Drama: Decolonization and Recovery.....	27
Notes	29
2 Reclaiming Our Grandmothers in Monique Mojica’s <i>Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots</i> and <i>Birdwoman and the Suffragettes: A Story of Sacajawea</i>	30
Monique Mojica’s “Transformational Dramaturgy”	30
Reimagining “Indian Princesses” in <i>Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots</i>	31
<i>La Malinche, Malinalli Malintzin</i> or <i>Dona Marina</i>	34
Deity, Woman of the Puna and Virgin of Colonial Peru	39
Marie, Margaret and Madeline: The Mothers of the Métis Nation	43
Princess Pocahontas	49
Reimagining Sacajawea in <i>Birdwoman and the Suffragettes</i>	55
Reviving Sacajawea: Transforming History.....	59
Recuperating Our Grandmothers and Reconfiguring Sexual Violence: “ <i>Una Nacion</i> ”	64
Notes	66

3	Community and Resistance in Marie Clements' <i>The Unnatural and Accidental Women</i> and <i>Now Look What You Made Me Do</i>	70
	Marie Clements: Performing Interconnected Subjectivities	70
	Revisiting and Revising Violence in <i>The Unnatural and Accidental Women</i>	73
	Community, Witnessing and Empowerment	76
	Revenge, Reclamation and Remembrance: The End of the Story	82
	Representing Victimhood in <i>Now Look What You Made Me Do</i>	85
	Sisterhood, Sex Work and Self-Representation: The Women's Group	87
	Cultural Impunity and the "Abused Abuser": Narrating Resistance	93
	Breaking "Cycles of Violence": The End of Madonna's Story	99
	Notes	102
4	Media, Gendered Violence and Dramatic Resistance in Yvette Nolan's <i>Annie Mae's Movement</i> and <i>Blade</i>	106
	Yvette Nolan: Re-educating Canada.....	106
	Anna Mae Pictou Aquash: "Warrior" and Activist.....	111
	Remembering Anna Mae in <i>Annie Mae's Movement</i>	116
	Masculinism, Maternalism and Feminine Resistance	120
	Heroism vs. Martyrism: The Rape and Murder of Anna.....	123
	<i>Blade</i> : Identity Politics and Reception	126
	Race, Representation and Coalition Across Difference.....	128
	Stereotyping, Sexualization and Communal Resistance	133
	Notes	138
5	Indigenous Women's Theatre: A Transnational Mechanism of Decolonization	141
	Collective Creation and Dramatic Subversion	141
	The Transnationalization of Indigenous Feminisms	145
	Spiderwoman Theater: Enacting Intercultural Resistance.....	148
	Notes.....	151
	References	153
	Index.....	172

For my Mum

EXCERPT

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VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND DRAMATIC SUBVERSION

The truest poetic function of the theatre — to invent metaphors which poignantly suggest a nation's nightmares and afflictions.
— Robert Brustein

—*Harbin et al. (2005: 359)*

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

— *Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles (2009a: 6)*

Decolonization through Dramatic Resistance: Framing the Discussion

On June 3, 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) released its final report (<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>) concerning the pervasive and politically neglected issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The federally funded report suggests that systemic racism is among the main causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls and recognizes that the government itself has enabled — and continues to enable — this violence. The report has 231 recommendations and calls to action that have, to date, not been enacted. The federal government promised to release its Action Plan in a timely manner but has used the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shutdown as a rationalization to further delay the process. In the meantime, the pandemic-related closures and restrictions have only exacerbated social isolation and violence

against women and girls across North America. Given Canada's history of colonialist violence against Indigenous Peoples, and the long history of ignoring and denying this violence, taking action to address this legacy must take precedence.

Of course, violence against Indigenous Peoples is not unique to Canada. The violent conquest that facilitated the settlement of white settler societies has been well documented not only in the North and South American contexts, but also in Australia and New Zealand. Regional variances in Indigenous Peoples' ways of life and experiences of colonialism renders a singular analysis impossible, demanding specificity in any analysis of Indigenous Peoples' experiences. Warning against the post-colonial homogenization of international Indigenous experiences of colonization, Gary Boire argued that "the superficial crime of superimposition may have been the same in all colonies, but given the specificities of history, ethnicity, gender, culture and geography, there are significant and subtle variations between each repetition and amongst the multiple reactions to it" (1990: 306). It is true that experiences of colonization and displacement were significantly different in each colony, yet, with respect to certain historical events, as well as to the production and reception of Indigenous theatre, other nations and regions offer useful contrasts and juxtapositions to the Canadian situation. Although the Canadian experience of displacement may have close parallels with the U.S. experience because of the politically constructed border that cuts through and separates traditional Indigenous cultures and territories, Australia and New Zealand may actually offer closer comparisons when the post-colonial crisis of nationhood is considered in terms of Indigenous resistance and artistic production. The affinities of British imperial rule have resulted in structural similarities in the cultures of these countries. Alan Filewod has noted that in Canada and Australia the emergence of Indigenous literature and theatre has followed a remarkably similar path, "marked by issues of cultural nationalism and decolonization"; due to shared historical patterns, notwithstanding their complex differences, Indigenous writing for the stage and otherwise has encountered similar problems of production and reception (1994: 364).

It is widely recognized that Indigenous women living in these societies are overrepresented as victims of gendered violence, in both intracultural and intercultural contexts. Contemporary research indicates that the historical trauma caused by colonization resulted in a gendered systemic and structural discrimination that continues to place Indigenous women at

greater risk for sexual abuse and violence (See Elias et al. 2012: 1561). It is unsurprising that in Canada violence against Indigenous women remains “a major public health concern” (Dauod et al. 2013: 278) as national studies suggest that Indigenous women are subject to gendered violence at a rate three to four times higher than women in the general population (Brownridge 2008: 355; Brownridge 2009: 99–100). For Indigenous women in white settler societies, violence, especially sexual violence, is a fundamental mechanism of the colonial project. When deployed in tandem with myths of racial and cultural authenticity and the coercive erasure of cultural memory through the residential school systems and the child welfare systems, sexual violence works directly as a tool of genocide. While gendered violence is most obviously used in settler and invader contexts to uphold racialized and gendered hierarchies, less obvious, although equally integral to white settler colonialism, is the propagation of various notions of racial and sexual purity, which function to efface Indigenous cultures entirely and which construct métissage as debased. Characterized by abuse, neglect and the ceaseless undermining of pre-contact ways of life, the residential school system was designed to destroy Indigenous and Métis cultures through the forced assimilation of children, and in the 1960s the child welfare systems in Canada functioned as an extension of these destructive institutions. Acknowledging this history is essential to creating a new, decolonial future. We must understand the violence inherent to white settler colonization in multiple contexts and in Canada’s particular colonial trajectory if we are to tackle the complex set of historical and socio-economic factors that perpetuate both historic and contemporary violence against Indigenous women. Ultimately, my aim is to reveal the complexity of the linkage between colonization, violence against Indigenous women and contemporary Indigenous women’s literary and dramatic production.

In particular, I examine representations of gendered violence in Indigenous women’s drama in the Canadian context as they have been used for decolonizing purposes. The term decolonization hinges upon not only disciplinary standards, but also individual motivation; it is the outmoding and dismantling of colonial hierarchies, the rebalancing of unequal power relations between Indigenous Peoples and white settlers and the eventual forging of alternative modes of relations. These new relations must be based upon the acknowledgement of the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to land and resources. They must be founded upon

mutual recognition and the shared desire for the formation of a diverse and interconnected society built upon the principle of human equality. Such a dynamic social transformation would inevitably lead to the reshaping of relations between white men and Indigenous women, as well as between Indigenous men and Indigenous women, diminishing incidences of gendered violence against Indigenous women, but also, by extension, changing relations between men and women generally, diminishing all women's experience of violence.

Informed by Indigenous and feminist poststructuralist and post-colonial theoretical perspectives that address the production and dissemination of racialized regimes of representation, I assess the extent to which colonialist misrepresentations of Indigenous women, such as "Indian Princess" or "easy squaw," have served to perpetuate stereotypes, further justifying the devaluation of and violence, especially sexual violence, against Indigenous women (Acoose 1992: 65). Most significantly, I consider how and to what degree resistant representations in Indigenous women's dramatic productions work against such representational and manifest violence. I do so while acknowledging that patriarchal colonial power structures are a result of "the corrosion of Indigenous Women's power in governance and the colonial imposition of heteropatriarchy" (McKegney 2013: 7) and are deeply embedded in the social fabric of many Indigenous communities (for more, see the works of Sioui and Highway). I investigate the manner in which Indigenous women's plays might operate as tools of cultural renewal and intergenerational recovery. My methodology is grounded in a historical, sociocultural consideration of Indigenous women's theatrical productions. Such a method asks not only how a dramatic text might deploy a decolonizing aesthetic, but also how it might redefine dramatic, literary and sociocultural space for decolonial ends. Attentive to the great variance of subjective positions occupied by these Indigenous women writers, this text examines the historical context of theatrical reception, asking how the critic's and spectator's engagement with and dissemination of knowledge concerning Indigenous theatre might enhance or impede this redefinition.

Despite a recent increase in productivity among Indigenous playwrights, most critical and academic attention, at least in North America, has been devoted to the work of male dramatists. This is seemingly due to the expediency with which male dramatists, such as the renowned Cree author and playwright Tomson Highway or the Ojibway writer Drew

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

The "Discovery" Myth: Colonial Misrepresentations and Violence against Indigenous Women

Despite the specificities of regional variations, colonial regimes share a common process of domination of Indigenous groups through marginalization, segregation and eventual reintegration as subordinate subjects with women dependent on the rule of men. Imperial travel narratives clearly demonstrate a discourse of anti-conquest propagated by the European male elite hoping to appear innocent while simultaneously forcing their

European rule on conquered states. The disturbing denial of genocide in the North American context is present in other genocidal projects, particularly the Nazi Holocaust, suggesting that there exists a genocide typology characterized by deliberate cultural destruction, persistent denial of historical fact and the imposition of raced and gendered patriarchal hierarchy. The ethnocentrism at the heart of the white settler genocides was certainly innate to the ideological framework of European colonialism which demanded the subjugation of women, especially Indigenous women, and consequently was inherent in imperial perceptions and portrayals of all Indigenous populations (see McClintock 1995: 25–30; Churchill 1997: 85). This consistent relationship between genocide and the settler-colonial tendency has been aptly termed by Patrick Wolfe as “the logic of elimination” (2006: 387).

In Canada, European conquest and colonization are often denied, largely through the propagandized myth that the country was peacefully founded and not violently colonized (Razack 2002: 2; Freeman 2012: 444). In order to distinguish Canada from the United States (Mackey 1999: 37) and to maintain a sense of national innocence (Razack 2002: 2), records of the acquisition of Canadian territory revealing the brutal destruction of Indigenous societies were buried and disregarded by Canada's government and religious institutions (Lawrence 2002: 22–23; Alfred 2009: 181). Such erasure facilitates national denial of historical truths, the understanding of which is fundamental to successful decolonization. Dickason argues that hegemonic historical accounts of Indigenous cultures regularly obscure what actually took place during the colonization of North America (Adams 1995: 28; Dickason 1996: 12; Sioui 1992: xx; Trigger 1985: 28), disregarding histories of upheaval and displacement in favour of mythical portrayals of colonization as the just and timely introduction of European culture (Dickason 1996: 12–13; Thorton 2001: 13).

While it is understood today that the unhealthy interactions with European colonists drastically diminished the flourishing Indigenous populations of North America (Dickason 2001: 370; Sioui 1992: 3; Trigger 1985: 7), until the second half of the twentieth century it was widely believed that Indigenous populations were savage, outdated relics of times past (Sioui 1992: ixx) and that the Indigenous impact upon the environment was so inconsequential that North America remained a virgin land at the time of European contact (Dickason 2001: 27), leaving initial discovery to the colonizers (B. Lawrence 2002: 37). In his book,

Fear and Temptation, Terry Goldie (1989) draws upon Dennis Lee's *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (1977: 19) to argue that literary representations of Indigenous closeness to nature are regularly used to "justify an emphasis on the Indigenous person as land." As with colonized land, Indigenous women were viewed by early colonizers as objects of conquest, passive and open to exploitation. It is therefore unsurprising that, in the earliest narratives of colonization, the land is gendered female; the virginal quality of the land designates an empty void, attributing initial discovery to the colonizer and thereby justifying masculinist conquest and barbarity (McClintock 1995: 26–30). As Goldie notes, in colonial literature, "the image of the female as receiver of the male power provides an explicit opportunity for the white patriarchy to enter the land" and in these early portrayals "the normative sexual relationship of the white male with the indigene female is rape, violent penetration of the indigenous" (1989: 65–66).

Many early accounts of northern Indigenous cultures were written by French Jesuits, the first missionaries to Christianize the Indigenous populations of Eastern Canada. Their depictions were skewed by the religious beliefs of the Order, and they were bent upon the conversion and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. It is these texts that provided the basic elements for Canada's first historians whose research, in turn, set the tone for a European narrative. As these are the earliest and most complete interpretations of Indigenous culture, all subsequent examinations of this early historic period have thus been influenced by these Jesuit relations, which portray Indigenous women as corruptors of men, impediments to Christian progress and, most disturbingly, as allies to Satan (Anderson 1991: 56). Concerned particularly with practices relating to marriage and divorce, Jesuit missionaries expressed disgust with the problem of female sexual freedom, dismayed by the "libertinage to which the girls and women here abandon themselves" (Thwaites 1904–1906: 15: 107; 38: 253).

It is true that Indigenous women played a notable role in the resource extractive economy of the early colonies, especially in Western Canada, where women were regularly wed to European men and thus were treated with some measure of respect (Van Kirk 1996: 8–30; Stevenson 1999: 53–54; S. Carter 1999: 130; Carter and McCormack 2011: 9; Ray 1998: xxii). These Indigenous brides, however, were displaced with the arrival of white women (Van Kirk 2002: 1). As the relentless proselytizing of missionaries exacerbated the growing tension between European trappers and

Aboriginal women, Christian notions of female purity framed Indigenous women as impure and uncivilized, in contrast to white women, who were viewed as pinnacles of virtue and agents of civilization (Brown 1980: xv). In Western Canada, the missionaries, particularly the Anglicans, brought by the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1820s, firmly denounced interracial marriage between white men and Indigenous women as immoral and debased (Van Kirk 1984: 10). By the early twentieth century, misperceptions of Indigenous women were rampant throughout North America because they were held up to a patriarchal Christian societal model. Often Indigenous Peoples have been "described and dissected by white explorers, traders, missionaries and scholars whose observations sometimes revealed more about their own cultural biases than they did about Indigenous ways of life" (Barman 1997–1998: 237–38). Diamond Jenness, for example, frequently quotes the Jesuits and early explorers in his 1932 book *Indians of Canada*, which has regularly been presented as the most comprehensive work pertaining to early Indigenous-settler relations, indicating the lack of satisfactory material available concerning Indigenous women in colonial North America.

When the improved amenities of flourishing settlement brought an increased number of white women into the North American colonies, the idea of Indigenous women as passively violable, which had previously enabled early colonists to engage in interracial sexual liaisons without moralizing reprimand, vanished, being replaced by the notion that these women were aggressively sexual and immoral; thus they were a danger to the very health and success of the young nation (Kim Anderson 2000: 86; Barman 1997–1998: 247–49; S. Carter 2008: 153; Roome 2005: 49; Stoler 1992: 148–49). The arrival of white women in colonial settings generally coincides with some recently enacted or strategized stabilization of colonial domination (Stoler 1992: 148). Depictions of the vulnerable white woman in need of protection were contemporary with portrayals of Indigenous degenerate wantonness during periods of threat to imperial rule, whether real or imagined, so as to legitimize the coercive measures needed for control. This is not to say that white women were themselves responsible for racial segregation or for the highly racialized polarization of women into the docile and harmful. In imperial, colonial and national propaganda, white women may have been represented as "freedom and liberty" (Pickles and Rutherford 2005: 9), but colonial discourse has always implied that women do not share the same liberty as men. When

considering the position of white settler women, it is important to keep in mind that hierarchical colonial regimes were structured in terms of race and gender by elevating white European men into a position of superiority through the obscure inferior ranking of Indigenous Peoples and women (Stoler 1997: 366; McClintock 1995: 25).

Because white women were symbolically aligned with the social and moral purity of imperial rule in the British colonies, images of the ravaged white female body became a signifier of colonial upset, suggesting that “the stereotype of the dark rapist” aligns directly with the pending failure of the civilizing mission (Sharpe 1993: 68). This is why stories of rape emerge during periods of political instability, providing a justification for the oppression of Indigenous men and women, who were represented as potential rapists and unchaste squaws, respectively. The theme emerges in the recent histories of European women and colonialism in that — depending on historical context and location — protecting the honour and virtue of white women became a pretext for controlling and suppressing the Indigenous populations.

By the late colonial period, Christian notions of purity resulted in a great deal of concern on the part of Europeans over the unions of white men and Indigenous women, primarily because such marriages signified what was perceived to be an attempt to meld two irreconcilable differences, civilized versus savage and Christian versus heathen. Settlers were fearful of the threat posed by intermarriage toward white bloodlines (Hodes 1999). According to Victoria Freeman, nineteenth-century Canadian discourses concerning human difference did not exist in isolation but were part of a “pan-European debate ... that was intimately connected to the global spread of empire” (Freeman 2012: 197). As Freeman argues:

most Europeans — and most people of British ancestry, whether in the United States, British colonies, or Britain itself — shared a sense of racial superiority over non-white colonized peoples, taking for granted that there was a fundamental difference between those of European (and especially Anglo-Saxon) descent and the rest of the world’s peoples. (Freeman 2012: 197)

Denigration of *métissage* thus became integral to the maintenance of white settler rule. In many colonial settings, including Canada (Stevenson 1999: 51; Van Kirk 2002: 5), there was an early phase of intermarriage that produced *Métis* offspring, yet in colonized regions as diverse as Mexico,

Cuba, India, Indochina and South America, prohibitions against intermarriage, whether state-sanctioned and officiated or informal and customary, eventually became a component of colonial culture (S. Carter 1997: 15; Stoler 1992: 515). Regulatory practices, whether formal or informal, that ensured the social control of Indigenous family life in Canada were clearly influenced by these colonial discourses of racial and social purity that raised alarms concerning the pollution of the imperial race (Barman 1997–1998: 241). These prohibitions inevitably resulted in perceptions of the Métis as a dangerous source of subversion, a threat to white prestige and to the European community at large (Stoler 1992: 515).

Aside from Christian anxiety over miscegenation, mid- and late-nineteenth-century representations of Indigenous women as inherently corrupt were influenced by rigidly moralizing Victorian discourses concerning sexuality, particularly British fervour surrounding the regulation of prostitution. Conversations on prostitution depicted Indigenous women as sexually aggressive harlots whose immorality posed an imminent threat to the rapidly expanding Euro-Canadian settlements. These narratives were particularly useful in creating divides between white and Indigenous femininity on the grounds of wit, respectability and unrespectability (see, for example, Barman 1997). In *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality*, Gail Hawkes traces the nineteenth-century imperial obsession with prostitution back to Christianity, which gave it prominence and held out a promise for “the redemption of the prostitute, the personification of polluting and uncontrolled women’s sexuality” (1996: 14–15). Colonial rhetoric concerning Indigenous social behaviours served to justify the connection between Indigenous women and prostitution by equating migration, gift-giving ceremonies and egalitarian gender norms with the sex trade (Perry 2001: 54). In early Canada, Indigenous women came to be wholly sexualized and were rarely allowed any other form of identity. Indeed, not only in North America but globally, Indigenous women presented a dilemma to colonizers, at the heart of which lay their sexuality. It is certainly true that sexualized misrepresentations of these women are common to colonial conversations of the Americas (Allen 1992: 2–3), Australia (Kociumbas 2004: 83) and New Zealand (Denoon et al. 2000: 171–73). Despite coinciding depictions of sexual aggressivity, the connection between Indigenous women and colonial land remained a crucial component of colonial discussion, signifying what European settlers deemed the feral aspects of Indigenous women’s behaviour, a

linkage that eventually resulted in a relationship of conquest, possession and exploitation. In particular, “the project of colonial sexual violence established the ideology¹ that Native bodies are inherently violable and by extension, that Native lands are also violable” (Smith 2005: 12).

Post-Colonial Drama: Misrepresentations of Indigenous Women

Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009: 147–48) aptly notes that theatre is a “particularly attractive genre for Indigenous people looking for a creative outlet for their stories” because, in part, theatrical productions are not the creation of solitary individuals and a common value among the many Indigenous cultures is the value of community. Some Indigenous writers take this argument even further, suggesting that contemporary Indigenous theatre is not an adaption of the Western theatre tradition, but is based upon traditional Indigenous performance culture. Cree dramatist Floyd Favel Starr claims that the concept of “Native Performance Culture” could be described as developing practices of our ancestors, which came about as an intuition born out of personal, cultural and universal need (Starr 1997: 83). Native Performance Culture is instrumentally designed to interrupt the colonial fragmenting processes. Unlike Western performance, contemporary Indigenous theatre can be traced to the history and terrain of this country. Like Episkenew, Drew Hayden Taylor (1997: 140) acknowledges theatre as the “predominant expressive vehicle for Canada’s Native people,” arguing, in a similar vein to Starr and Manossa, that “theatre is just a logical extension of storytelling.”

Performance was certainly a part of Indigenous cultural interchange long before European contact, yet, so far as critical reception is concerned, Indigenous theatre did not enter the North American mainstream until the late 1980s (Knowles 2009a: v). Before European colonization, North American Indigenous Peoples partook in elaborate performances — often religious in nature — incorporating props, masks and smoke effects. In Canada, many of these traditional performances were illegal under the federal Indian Act of the late nineteenth century. It was not until 1951 that the Act was revised to allow these ceremonial dramas to recommence (see Spradley 1972). However, critical discussion of performance across cultures has been relatively late coming to Canada. This is largely due to the fact that the official policy of multiculturalism, adopted in 1971 and entrenched in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in

1982, relegated art produced outside of the majority French and English cultures to non-professional status (see Gomez 1994: 31–33; Knowles and Mundel 2011: i–viii; Off 2011: 8–14). Minoritized productions were funded through the Multiculturalism Directorate until as late as 1991, when the arts councils officially recognized minority non-Western or Indigenous cultural production as professional, fundable art rather than merely “ethnic” folklore, to be preserved in the terms of Bill C-93, the *1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act* for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada, rather than publicized, critiqued and nurtured into evolution (Off 2011: 8–14; Yhap 2011: 19). With limited access to public support, Indigenous theatre and performance began — in the final decades of the twentieth century — to emerge from the fringe ghettos of official multiculturalism making its presence felt in the professional theatres from which it had been absent in the post-1967 nationalist phase. Finally, Indigenous work could attract a larger amount of critical and scholarly attention (Knowles and Mundel 2011: vii–viii). Consequently, the 1980s witnessed an astounding increase in production by minoritized writers and particularly dramatists. Beginning with Tomson Highway’s and Drew Hayden Taylor’s rise to prominence, Canada became the location of substantial Indigenous dramatic work including contributions by Daniel David Moses, Monique Mojica, Yvette Nolan, Marie Clements and Margot Kane, among others.

As a response to slanderous colonialist portrayals, mid-twentieth-century North American cultural production came to represent Indigenous women sympathetically with many post-colonial works (particularly pieces by male authors) returning to the symbol of the virgin land so deeply embedded in colonialist discourse. These post-colonial works are implicitly subversive, yet often the female body is reappropriated to be metaphorically violated once again with rape — specifically interracial rape — in a symbolic act of colonial violation of the land. This is especially true of plays produced in areas of the world where the territory was considered to be empty and open to colonial discovery. Images of rape are used in post-colonial pieces to demonstrate the violence involved in the process of colonization and presented in a manner intended to portray the problematic mentality which accompanies the act of sexual and colonial violation. This technique can serve, in some instances, to mitigate the voyeuristic aspect of white consumption and encourage the recognition of complicity in the implementation of the colonial order.

The most famous Canadian example is Ukrainian-Canadian playwright George Ryga's 1967 play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, which represents the struggle of a young Indigenous woman in the city. The protagonist, Rita Joe, becomes an emblem signifying both the destruction involved in the process of colonization and the contemporary violence to which Indigenous women are subjected. Her body ultimately becomes a tool of the plot where the disciplinary measures of imperial patriarchy are played out through her rape and murder, suggesting the triumph of the imperial project. As well intended as Ryga was, the play has been critiqued for staging a one-dimensional stereotypical representation of Indigenous Peoples (Grant 1995: 106), especially of Indigenous women (Knowles 2003: 246). Highway also employs rape emblematically in his plays *The Rez Sisters* in 1986, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* in 1989 and *Rose* in 1999, as well as his nationally best-selling novel, *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* in 2000 through his gratuitous depictions of sexist violence (see Baker 1991; Botsford Fraser 1991; and Tuharsky 1991). In her text, *Backlash*, feminist theorist Susan Faludi fervently contests sympathetic depictions of sexualized victimhood in asking whether audiences really need to be taught that "rape victims deserve sympathy" (1991: 151). In their influential 1976 study, "Living With Television: The Violence Profile," George Gerbner and Larry Gross make a convincing argument that rather than encouraging social change, enacted depictions of victimhood work to dramatize preferred social relations with the "portrayal of certain groups as victims" providing "a symbolic expression of those victim types' social impotence" (Gerbner and Gross 1976: 182). Alan Filewod suggests that Highway's depictions of Indigenous womanhood were particularly unsettling, given that his plays were, at the time, largely accepted as "unmediated testaments of authenticity" (Filewod 1994: 367). As I have argued, even if such emblematic representations, whether staged or literary, do reflect the negative outcomes of the violent colonial implementation of heteropatriarchy, they might also reify racially charged stereotypes concerning Indigenous women, particularly when performed for or consumed by a mixed-race audience as spectacle (MacKenzie 2010: 45). Although rape has indeed been overused as a metaphor, it is important to keep in mind that not all plays by Indigenous men portray women violently or emblematically. Highway's works are a particular example, but writers such as Drew Hayden Taylor and Daniel David Moses have had no criticism levied against them for misrepresenting Indigenous women. Taylor, having

expressly denounced the overuse of emblematic gendered violence, refuses to include portrayals of rape in his work. These representations, which depict Indigenous women as easy victims, have been used extensively to represent colonial destruction of Indigenous societies and, as Taylor disconcertedly notes, while rape may provide the perfect metaphor for what happened to Indigenous culture, it is necessary to be wary of “becoming fixated on dysfunction” (Drew Taylor 1996: 34).

However, such images are sensationalist to the public and, for this reason, despite the tremendous increase in Indigenous dramatic production in recent years, the “best known” scene from Aboriginal theatre in Canada is a brutal rape scene in Highway’s *Dry Lips* (Knowles 2003: 248). Nolan (2008a: 3) notes that Highway’s plays are controversial for Indigenous theatre, as practitioners continue to sit on committees with non-Indigenous colleagues whose entire “experience of Aboriginal theatre in Canada is *The Rez Sisters*.” Such post-colonial works as those by Ryga or Highway are problematic because their emblematic depictions of violability are reminiscent of colonialist representations, which renders resistant presentations in Indigenous women’s plays all the more important to successful decolonization. Although all literary and dramatic expression is aesthetic and representational by nature, the works explored in this text portray Indigenous women not as emblems signifying colonial destruction, but rather as indomitable, empowered leaders.

To examine works by Indigenous women is certainly to turn to a broader range of depictions of colonial and sexual violence, quite often the dramatic pieces by these women draw from lived authorial experiences or the life experiences of other real women, while also making explicit the connection between personal experiences of violence and broad-based complex or material colonial violence. Several studies demonstrate the capacity of theatre to function as a socially transformative tool of self-representation in women’s social movements (Driskill 2008: 155; O’Neil 1982: 494; Sethna and Hewitt 2009: 471). Moreover, in both activist and literary sites, the telling and enactment of personal narratives is understood to be a “means for women to employ their own autobiographical accounts as sources of knowledge” (L. Anderson 2000: 34), particularly to the extent that these accounts constitute various sites of what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson refer to as “coming to voice of previously silenced subjects” (1998: 27). Australian performance theorist Joy Hooton insists that “no document has a greater chance of challenging

the cult of forgetfulness than an Indigenous Woman's autobiography" (Hooton 1990: 313). The narrativization of traumatic memory in text and the transfer of script to stage serves as a means of turning the colonial gaze back upon itself. Literary critic Daniel Heath Justice argues that Indigenous narratives are not only "expressions of intellectual agency as well as aesthetic accomplishments," but these representations assist "in the struggle for sovereignty, decolonization and ... the healing of this wounded world" (Justice 2011: 336). "In a post-colonial situation," as Neal McLeod writes, "in the subversion of stories by the colonizer, one is able to reassert one's narratives" (McLeod 2001: 17), responding to the "settlers' authorized collective myth and drawing attention to the sickness inherent in colonialism" (Episkenew 2009: 70).

In order to mount dramatic resistances to hidden violent misrepresentations of Indigeneity, clear manifestations of deeply entrenched colonialist misbeliefs, Indigenous women playwrights regularly employ surrealistic modes of representation. These depictions allow for the revisioning of dominant historical narratives, thereby enabling representational re-empowerment of those Indigenous female leaders — mothers, Grandmothers and sisters — who have been deprived of space in masculinist histories. Surrealism also assists with the recognition of intergenerational connectedness between Indigenous women cultural activists. The surrealistic component of Indigenous women's drama is grounded in Indigenous cultural roots (Maufort n.d.: 1), whereby the role of maintaining ancestral ties is recognized as an important component of successful decolonization. The infusion of magical elements into these texts justifies those depictions that speak to the relevance of otherwise unacknowledged inter-worldly bonds for Indigenous women. It is also through surrealism that Indigenous women writers are able to revisit traumatically violent events without staging gratuitous portrayals, which might undermine the subversion of colonialist discursive violence by engaging a similar method of representation.

Theatre expert Mimi Gisolfi D'Aponte contends that Indigenous women's dramatic writing manages to "transcend cultural boundaries, while simultaneously transmitting the essence of female victimization and survival of that victimization," with the final product, the show, allowing for the "purging of pity and fear through witnessing tragedy in the theater," rendering Indigenous women playwrights not only "transmitters" and "healers," but also "transformers" (D'Aponte 1999: 101–103). Canadian

Indigenous theatre critic Michelle La Flamme, for example, has described plays by Indigenous women as “Medicine ... that ultimately heals” (La Flamme 2010: 116). Mojica postulates that dramatic representations can be “used to bridge the rupture and impact on audiences, body to body, so that the transformation reverberates” and “changes us” (Mojica and Knowles 2009a: 5). For Mojica, Indigenous women playwrights not only address colonial trauma, but envision new ways of “performing possible worlds into being” (Mojica and Knowles 2009a: 2). When we make a decision to create from a base of ancestral knowledge,” she writes, “we confront the rupture, the original wound” (Mojica and Knowles 2009a: 3). While plays by Indigenous men are by no means less relevant to decolonial movements, Indigenous women’s works confront the gendered nature of colonial violence more directly.

Interpellation, Stereotyping and the Perpetuation of Gendered Violence

In his seminal essay, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus,” political philosopher Louis Althusser argues that ideology functions in such a way as to secure the reproduction of existing social relations and power dynamics through a process of “interpellation” (Althusser 1971: 180). It “can be imagined,” writes Althusser, “along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there’ ... The hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, she becomes a subject”; the subject then transforms to become a particular social entity because she is recognized as such (Althusser 1971: 174). Ideology — perpetuated indirectly by institutional mechanisms — is responsible for the construction and maintenance of present hierarchies, effectively ensuring that existing social orders are sustained. While Althusser has been critiqued by feminist theorists on the grounds that his understanding of the role of ideology in the social construction of subjectivity and his notion of interpellation provide little space for theorizing subversive agency (Hennessy 1993: 21), his work has also been acknowledged as extremely influential for Marxist, materialist, structuralist and linguistic feminists (Assiter 1990: vii–ix). Without the ability to prefigure resistance through the theorization of subversive agency — imagined rebellion against tyranny — social change is impeded. Criticism of Althusser is thus due. Yet, it is also evident that Althusser’s

theory of dominative interpellation directly influenced second-wave feminist thinkers, including film theorist Laura Mulvey. In her now famous 1975 article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey makes the argument that the cinematic objectification of women for the “male gaze” or the “to-be-looked-at-ness” instills within both male and female viewers sexist notions concerning gender and sexuality (1992: 27). This suggestion is in keeping with the Althusserian concept of interpellation as a force seemingly invulnerable to conscious resistance. However, several feminist scholars have used Althusser’s theory as the basis to make a case for the existence of subversive consciousness and “reverse interpellation” (Butler 1997: 163; Rowe 2005: 16). My adaptation of interpellation theory is employed for the purpose of theorizing subversive agency realized through the theatre. While it may be true, as Althusser contends, that the subject responds to “hailing” (1971: 174), inasmuch as she will understand that she is being addressed, such reception does not eliminate the possibility of subversive reaction. We, as individuals, can resist social construction. The validity of interpellative potential and the existence of resistant agency are by no means contradictory. This important point will be further expanded upon in the following section.

In her essay “The Politics of Representation,” literary theorist Barbara Godard, while acknowledging that representations evoke a range of reader or viewer responses, interprets Althusser’s theory of interpellation to argue that literary and dramatic representations present subject positions that readers and spectators are invited to occupy (1990: 186). Godard’s contention demands that the realm of artistic production be considered a social institution that is responsible for the construction of ideology by shaping the society in which it is created and which it in turn creates. Acoose draws upon the influential work of Kenyan anti-colonial scholar Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o to make the argument that in the Canadian context — as in other white settler societies — literature “functions as ideology” (Acoose 1995: 32; Wa Thiong’o 1997). Likewise, performance theorists have long argued that it is critical to take into consideration the potential interpellative impact of dramatic representations and, in particular, the potential perpetuation of “negative stereotypes” (Bennett et al. 1993: 10). Ideology and discourse inevitably bear upon one another because shifting ideological mechanisms shape complex representations and structures to inform ideology; they operate in tandem, contributing to the construction of social order and influencing subject development. Historically,

Indigenous women have been represented as either promiscuous and morally corrupt, or as hapless, violated victims in post-colonial art. When considered in terms of the production of subjectivities, the interpellative potential is extremely powerful because, as Althusser writes and as evidenced throughout history, ideology surely “acts” as a “little theoretical theatre,” in a world populated by “actors” (Althusser 1971: 174, 177).

Addressing the construction of identity, Edward Said, in his now canonical study *Orientalism*, demonstrates the way in which ideologically driven cryptic representations are developed and deployed as commanding tools of sociocultural segregation and domination. Analyzing a series of examples from varying media, Said reveals the insidious process by which the West managed to directly construct an image of the Near East and Orient in direct contrast to how it defines itself. Orientalism did not actually reflect what the countries of the Near East were or what they are. Instead, Orientalism was the discourse “by which European culture was able to produce and importantly manage the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively” (Said 2006: 3). Within the context of Western domination over the Orient, there emerged a new “complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and historical theses about mankind and the universe.” (Said 2006: 7). In creating an image of Oriental anachronous exoticism, the West ensured a relationship of power and control between the West and the East, using representations of “otherness” to harden the distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority (Said 2006: 21). Although he failed to include a gendered analysis in *Orientalism*, the absence of attention to the specific positions of women in the original text was acknowledged by Said in his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*, which has been astutely corrected by a number of feminist literary scholars.

Extending Said's argument beyond the West and Orient division, cultural theorist Stuart Hall contends that images function regularly in the service of upholding elitist status quos. Upon the evaluation of a series of photos depicting racially diverse athletes, he found that the cultural authority uses binary portrayals to establish a dichotomy of us versus them between Black and white, civilized and primitive, powerful and powerless to effectually maintain a social divide — “fixing difference” — in which one group is dominant over another (Hall 1997: 248). Hall refers to this

process as “stereotyping” (Hall 1997: 230). As he suggests, these dominant complex representations (stereotypes) are undermining constructions that do not reflect the true subject position of those minoritized. Clearly receptive to feminism’s commitment to social transformation, Hall was extremely critical of what he perceived to be a failure on the part of cultural studies programs to embrace feminist thought in the 1970s; contemporary feminist theorists continue to employ his work to explain societal power dynamics.

Oppositional stereotypes of Indigenous and white women were used in colonial settings to marginalize and oppress Indigenous populations. Sadly, such employment of stereotypes in the colonies made it possible for those who held power to condemn Indigenous sexuality while simultaneously exploiting the very women they had turned into sexual objects for their own gratification. Drawing from their research on colonial Asia, Stoler and Cooper observe that while “elites were intent to mark the boundaries of a colonizing population, to prevent these men from ‘going native’ and to curb a proliferating mixed-race population that compromised their claims to superiority and thus the legitimacy of white rule,” these same elites marketed the colonies as “domains where colonizing men could indulge their sexual fantasies” (1997: 5). In the colonies, hierarchical dynamics of gender power and race converged in a manner that inevitably resulted in acts of gendered and often sexualized violence against Indigenous women. I argue that colonial discourses of racial and sexual purity, having portrayed Indigenous women as promiscuous and immoral serve to perpetuate a stereotype of uncontrollable licentiousness that causes these women to be viewed as being there for the sexual taking. Emphasizing the potentially tragic effects of racial stereotyping and acknowledging the capacity of literature and art to propagate such stereotypes, Acoose argues that “it is gross and deadly violations like Helen Betty Osborne’s that make the issue of Indigenous women being misrepresented ... of such vital importance” (Acoose 1992: 70).²

Representations of immoral licentiousness and passive violability contribute to stereotypes that naturalize and “fix” identities socially (Hall 1997: 258), perpetuating a dangerous cycle of stereotyping, misogyny and violence by encouraging racist notions of sexual availability concerning Indigenous women. Just as colonial representations of these women as sexually aggressive corruptors have resulted in dehumanization and violence, so too does the contemporary overuse of rape in metonymic

alignment with the colonial project risk replacing and effacing both the lived material reality for women who are victims of gendered violence and the actuality of its gendered and raced practice. If, as Jacques Lacan (1977: 104) argues, “the symbol ... is the death of the thing” or as in poststructuralist and semiotic theory, the sign indicates the absence of the referent, it would suggest that even those metaphoric depictions designed to evoke empathy for Indigenous women more likely serve to undermine their plight by complicating reality. The fact that we Indigenous women have been raped seems to make the broader public think that we are violable. This allows the rapist to be vindicated and the issue of colonialist racism ignored. Regardless of authorial intentions, colonial and post-colonial misrepresentations of these women facilitate the maintenance of masculinist hierarchical power relations that hinge upon the oppression of Indigenous women. The interpellative impact of these dramatic and literary misrepresentations contributes to racialized violence against Indigenous women, yet, as my argument suggests, women today are reimagining and subverting such harmful portrayals and setting in motion a decolonizing process of “reverse interpellation” (Rowe 2005: 16).

Reverse Interpellation, the “Decolonial Imaginary” and Resistance

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, feminist cultural theorist Chela Sandoval reinterprets some of Western philosophy's most prominent thinkers and makes an argument for resistance from below. Using U.S. Third-World feminist critiques as a mode of analysis, Sandoval resituates the varied canonized writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, Donna Haraway and Michel Foucault to reveal how such theorists have unwittingly contributed to an ongoing philosophical and literary decolonial process (2000: 3–4). While focusing on the particular position of American women from the third world, Sandoval identifies the existence of a “differential” consciousness, which, enabled by an innate “form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence,” allows for movement between ideological positionings (2000: 58). It is precisely because marginalized groups are removed from the comfort of the dominant ideology, and thereby society, that resistance is made possible. It is thus the process of power itself that repositions constituencies and provokes subversion. Significantly, the subversive or

“differential” consciousness is most readily engaged “under conditions of colonialization, poverty, racism, gender or sexual subordination” (Sandoval 2000: 104) and often works together with a radical “coalition consciousness” or resistant group mentality (Sandoval 2000: 78). As she writes,

The skills dominated groups might develop, if they survive, have included the ability to self-consciously navigate modes of dominant consciousness, learning to interrupt the turnstile that alternately reveals history, as against the dominant forms of masquerade that history can take, focusing on each separately, applying a formal method of reading, cynically but also uncynically and not only with the hope of surviving, but with a desire to create a better world. (2000: 104)

These skills, Sandoval argues, are the Methodology of the Oppressed that were developed and employed by American women of colour and that are the praxis of U.S. Third-World feminism (2000: 2–4).

Feminist rhetorician Aimee Carillo Rowe interprets Sandoval’s methodology as a theoretical mechanism of “reverse interpellation,” whereby the influenced subject remains capable in the face of coercive interpellation and can strive for “resistive hailing” (2005: 16). In imagining, or perhaps reimagining location, the marginalized individual can subvert ideological domination. As I have argued, hailing can serve to maintain social hierarchies and further oppress minoritized social groups. Notwithstanding the potentially negative impact of dominative interpellation, there remains the possibility of subversive reaction. Like Sandoval, Rowe argues that differential consciousness can “shift the terms of interpellation” particularly in the context of coalition or community belonging where the subject is able to engage in a resistant consciousness (2005: 16–18). Judith Butler makes a similar argument in *Excitable Speech*, suggesting that, although constituted by coercive interpellation and subjection, the individual can appropriate the assignment of injurious names — such as queer — as positive affirmations. (1997: 163). Butler argues that this appropriation initiates a process of reverse interpellation, which leads to the development of militant resistance rather than conformism or domination (1997: 163). While Butler focuses on the resistant performance of identity — a process that is intrinsically imaginative — for Sandoval and Rowe, reverse interpellation leads to the cultivation of the decolonial imaginary, the

imagining of agency for those placed on the margins by colonialism (Rowe 2005: 16; Sandoval 2000: 52–53, 188).

Introduced by Chicana scholar and activist Emma Perez in her poignant text *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, the decolonial imaginary provides a visionary “alternative to what was written in history” (1999: 5). In white settler societies, historical accounts as well as artistic productions are largely governed by the colonial imaginary, which works in opposition to the decolonial imaginary, implicitly rewriting normative social dynamics of culture, race, age, class and gender. The decolonial imaginary, however, is a rupturing space or an “interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” through the invocation of resistant imagination (Perez 1999: 5–6). It is therefore the decolonial imaginary that enables Indigenous Mestiza artists, historians, writers and dramatists to operate outside the circumscribed imaginative borders of colonialism by initiating a process of decolonization through resistant reverse interpellation.

Applying Perez’s argument to Indigenous theatre, Cherokee scholar, activist, writer and director Qwo-Li Driskill suggests that, while not post-colonial, Indigenous Nations are engaged in numerous decolonial movements and that the development of Indigenous theatre definitely “takes place in the ‘decolonial imaginary’” (2008: 155). Indigenous writers and performers are thus able to envision decolonial ways of being and thereby develop new stories that aid in resistance and decolonization. These visionary pieces have the potential to educate readers and spectators concerning colonial histories of violence, as well as futuristic concepts that may lead to relearning and healing. Theatre, according to Driskill, assists Indigenous Peoples “to engage in the delicate work of suturing the wounds of history” (Driskill 2008: 155). I argue that Indigenous cultural production, when used as a socio-pedagogical tool, has the potential to alter the course of events. This implies that Indigenous writing does not simply offer a window into the lives of Indigenous Peoples, by which settler audiences can vicariously experience Indigenous suffering, but that it allows for the transmission of empathy and understanding, thereby assisting with the reconfiguration of colonial power relations. Asserting that “colonialism is a pathological condition, a sickness that requires a cure,” the late Métis writer Jo Ann Episkenew claims that “taking the shared truths of Indigenous people to the settler population comprises a component of that cure” (2009: 72).

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

In response to academic criticism monopolized by non-Indigenous scholars employing ethnocentric and essentialist analytic approaches, modern criticism of Indigenous work has been intensely self-reflexive regarding the sociocultural position of the critic. Explicitly rejecting outdated notions of critical and theoretical objectivity, most modern critics and scholars consider accentuation of Indigenous descent, or perhaps even more importantly, a confession of lack of Indigenous ties as a crucial element of contemporary criticism. Given historic disservices to Indigenous artistic production, this is a positive development in critical discussions of Indigenous literature and performance. It can also be argued, however, that this increased self-awareness and cultural sensitivity in critical theory tends to culminate in deterministic and overly cautious approaches to Indigenous work. Identity, even cultural identity, is not constituted by a shared history and ancestry alone. Hall argues that biasedly focusing on intracultural similarities leads to neglecting the “critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute what we really are” (1994: 394). In this respect, cultural identity is as much a process of becoming as being. As Hall argues:

Far from being grounded in mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (1994: 394)

Resistant community cannot be defined by subordinate or colonized status alone. While historical positioning inevitably bears upon identity, this contention disregards the potential for intracultural differences that ultimately determine who and what we are. Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics suggest, but rather the opposite, that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (1991: 1242). These categorical determinations can also make coalition building difficult or impossible. When asked in an interview with Janet Williamson about forging coalitions with people of European descent, Jeannette Armstrong poignantly stated:

If we can connect at that honest level between people, between individuals, between sexes, races or classes, that's what's gonna make the difference and bring about the healing we human beings have to have to bring us closer, to work together and live together, care for and love one another and look at change passing onto the next generation. It's not gonna be politics that will connect people. To touch and understand one another is to bridge our differences. (1992: 29)

Therefore, it has become necessary to exceed the imposition of cultural boundaries. In a globalizing post-colonial world, we must use more intricate, nuanced modes of questioning. As interdisciplinary scholarship readily comes to "address histories of colonialism, capitalism, race and gender as inextricably interrelated, our very conceptual maps must be redrawn and transformed" (Mohanty 2003: 45). As Razack points out, "the cultural differences approach reinforces an important cornerstone of imperialism: the colonized possess a series of knowable characteristics and can be studied, known and managed" (1998: 10). Gloria Anzaldúa observed that binary models are too simplistic: "a counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed" (1987: 78). Given the inescapable possibility of misrepresentation, an entirely ethical engagement with intercultural research material may be nearly impossible, yet ideas of cultural incommensurability are clearly accompanied by far greater dangers.

Rigidly deterministic perspectives concerning Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity suggest a cultural incommensurability which results, inevitably, in intellectual reluctance on behalf of non-Indigenous critics to evaluate Indigenous work. Some critics unequivocally refuse to examine Indigenous-authored texts, particularly in a comparative, post-colonial context. Goldie, for example, avoids approaching Indigenous works in his book *Fear and Temptation* even for the purpose of illustrating sites of literary resistance. He contends that critiques of Indigenous work involve passing cultural judgment and that such a move might misrepresent Indigenous intentions (Goldie 1989: 217). The flaw in this argument lies in the assumption that cross-cultural understanding or close reading is impossible. One might ask also how Indigenous texts could be intelligible to their readerships if Indigenous worldviews are inaccessible to non-Indigenous readers. In fact, Indigenous works often address both non-Indigenous and Indigenous audiences. According to King's

categorization of Indigenous literature, only “tribal” works are intended particularly for Indigenous peoples; the other three types — interfusion, polemic and association — are assigned for non-Indigenous readers (King 2004: 86–88). Furthermore, a refusal by non-Indigenous scholars to look at Indigenous texts or performances could lead to the eventual ghettoization of Indigenous literature and art. Helen Hoy has noted that “even respectful silence can be a form of erasure” (2001: 51). Renate Eigenbrod agrees that engaging with Indigenous literature/performance/art can be “challenging and difficult, non-Indigenous scholars should not abdicate their responsibility of attempting to do so” (2005: 66).

After all, while sociocultural location plays a crucial role in determining understanding, experience and political aims, it is integral that location does not act as the sole indicator of critical and artistic intentions. Categorical dualisms, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, simplify the numerous positions we all necessarily occupy. Indeed, my position as an academic researcher/critic and my own personal identity as the daughter of a Métis mother and a first-generation Scottish immigrant father are by no means less relevant to my interpretive analyses than my commitment — very much in keeping with the intentions of many critics including those who are non-Indigenous — to undoing historic injustices by rebalancing unequal power relations.

My mixed identity leaves me in what Homi Bhabha refers to as an “in-between” place (1994: 13) that is endowed with the inherent privilege of a mixed descent. However, the assumption that Indigenous or non-Western perspectives are necessarily innocent, authentic and anti-colonial “downplays the very real possibility that such representations can be colonialist, while simultaneously obscuring the possibility of non-colonizing representations emerging from non-subjugated standpoints” (Lal 1996: 23). Privileging Indigenous or non-Western voices with unquestioned epistemic authority based upon location alone results in the construction of oppositional identities, such as colonizer and colonized and works against the feminist project of transforming power relations by upholding the binary distinctions they are supposed to erase.

The privileging of Indigenous critics based primarily upon the relationship between Indigenous-authored texts/scripts and Indigenous communities has led some critics to assume that Indigenous production is necessarily aligned with community and inevitably resistant, subversive and an authentic voice of the people (Womack 1999: 149;

Filewod, 994: 363–66; Hargreaves: 2012: 107–108; Haugo 1999: 131–40). Assumptions concerning “authentic” community voice discount the possibility that texts or scripts authored by Indigenous women, Two-Spirit or queer writers may be attempts to subvert violence perpetrated by men within their own communities. Intracultural gendered violence is a disturbingly common manifestation of the “ongoing legacy of settler heteropatriarchy and socially engineered hypermasculinity” embedded in Indigenous communities and the notion of Indigenous community cohesion is thus overly simplistic and dismissive (McKegney 2013: 4). Not only have misinterpretations of Indigenous works as invocations of community inspired talismanic discussions of resistant community representations on the part of critics, but often the question of what community or resistance actually means for the artist and audience remains vague (Appleford 2009: 61–62).

Outdated concepts of community identity are often aligned with language, cultural heritage and biological inheritance. Such skin deep differences hinge upon conventional categories of identity that read location off the bodies of others by abandoning individual life experience; prefixed by an epistemological double standard, where the Indigenous or non-Western voice is essentially aligned with unquestioned resistance to Western authority, location-based analyses risk rewriting colonial power dynamics in which voices of cultural affirmation and resistance are received as testaments of unmediated reality. When fetishizing Indigenous productions, such an analysis depoliticizes present racial conflicts and reifies a romantic stereotype of cultural authenticity and community-affiliated subversive Indigeneity. Any such labelling of Indigenous women's plays within previously constructed boundaries continue to define female Indigenous theatre by the colonial conditions in which it operates, implying an almost inescapable reaction to a dominating system that disallows the agency of resistance itself. Rather than using prescribed responses, the plays that I am examining are characterized by potent artistic agency that represents creative and strategic reconfigurations of colonial violence that empower Indigenous women and promote healing.

Indigenous Women's Drama: Decolonization and Recovery

In order to demonstrate the varying manners in which Indigenous women playwrights address and subvert gendered and racialized colonialist violence, I have strategically selected works that contend with differing aspects of Canada's colonial legacy. Although I have not devoted a chapter to her work, Margot Kane (Cree-Salteaux) has contributed substantially to Indigenous theatre in Canada. Her 1990 play *Moonlodge* is worthy of mention in any comprehensive discussion of Indigenous women's decolonial dramatic activism. In this work, protagonist Agnes is removed from her family and placed in an adoptive home with a white stepmother and is educated in a Christian-run residential school. When she is raped, Agnes sings "On the Street Where You Live," a song from the 1956 musical *My Fair Lady* (Kane 1992: 286–87). The depiction of an Indigenous woman referencing a musical derived from George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1913) is — as Ric Knowles suggests — "a story of class-cultural erasure" (Knowles 2003: 250) and does not examine the personalization of Agnes's victimhood. Actively ironizing the whole scenario, Agnes refuses the denial of personhood that accompanies such a dehumanizing attack. In this scene, Kane ensures that audiences and readers are aware of the use of sexual violence as a genocidal mechanism without disempowering the Indigenous female protagonist. Also significant is the fact that *Moonlodge* concludes upliftingly with Agnes's return to the traditional values of her early upbringing which is representationally reminiscent of precontact cultural harmony.

Six of the seven works that I analyze in the following chapters incorporate scenes of gendered and racialized violence; these portrayals are constructed purposefully by Indigenous women and are mitigated by the plays' ultimate messages of empowerment, recuperation and survival. Due to the fact that colonization is an ongoing process and that attacks against Indigenous women (both systemic and personal) are integral to this process, it is necessary that such violence be represented in decolonial texts and not only for explanative purposes. While the social reality of gendered and racialized violence requires that the aestheticization of this violence be employed with a great degree of caution, it is nonetheless crucial to combat the strategy of forgetfulness that has characterized most of white settler history with subversive and disruptive representations of cultural dispossession. It is impossible to change the horrific injustices of the world without first bringing them

to light. We cannot disregard these collective traumas, yet something else must accompany simple awareness. In terms of the Indigenous women's plays examined in the following chapters, simple sharing is indeed accompanied by overarching authorial commitment to resistance, reclamation and ultimately recovery. These artists literally strive to transform colonized imaginaries by aesthetically and performatively demonstrating decolonization and continuance.

The body of my text is divided into three chapters, over the course of which I aim to demonstrate the manner in which the works examined promote reclamation, empowerment and healing, as well as the ways that these particular plays celebrate coalition building and resistance across differences. My conclusion initiates a discussion concerning the expansive transnational implications of contemporary Indigenous women's dramatic productions. Depictions of colonial deprecation in these women's plays act as reminders of the continued impact of colonization and cultural genocide. However, these representations are used cautiously and in the service of subversion. While altering the terms of colonial discourse is not easily accomplished, in scripts and performances produced over the course of the past three decades, these playwrights have reappropriated stereotypes and disparaging literary tropes and reimagined histories of violence. In doing so, they render apparent the colonial assumptions underlying these depictions; in this way, they work towards reconfiguring historic power relations. In a strategic resistance to misrepresentations, Indigenous women dramatists destabilize the portrayals accorded authenticity by masculinist, colonizing power structures both within their own communities and in society at large. Their works not only revise colonial stereotypes but reimagine incidences of racialized and gendered violence in a manner that empowers Indigenous women, encourages understanding on the part of audiences and ultimately promotes healing. In these plays, gendered violence is represented as an embodied reminder of colonization, with Indigenous women portrayed as active agents of resistance as opposed to emblems or passive victims. Indigenous women's writings and performances demonstrate that memory, testimony and social ritual — including the rituals of writing and performance themselves — are mechanisms through which Indigenous cultures can form coalitions; through collectiveness, *métissage* can be reclaimed, not as an emblem, but as a powerful tool of resistance and ultimately survival. The mounting of resistance across

difference recalls the concept of subversive reverse interpellation, enabled by the differential consciousness, which functions optimally in situations of radical coalition. By envisioning and promoting the development of resistant inclusiveness-based communities, Indigenous women dramatists are able to subvert any dominant “hailing” (Althusser 1971: 78), and thereby engage in an aesthetic decolonial movement characterized by reclamation and healing.

Notes

1. For an interesting analysis of the relationship between human belief, action and social order see Eric Carlton's *Ideology and Social Order*.
2. Helen Betty Osborne (1952–1971) was born on the Norway House Reserve in Manitoba. She was abducted and brutally murdered near The Pas, Manitoba, on the morning of November 13, 1971. Shortly after, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police concluded that four young white men, Dwayne Archie Johnston, James Robert Paul Houghton, Lee Scott Colgan and Norman Bernard Manger, were involved in her death. It was not until December 1987 that Dwayne Johnston was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder. James Houghton was acquitted. Lee Colgan, having received immunity from the prosecution in return for testifying against Houghton and Johnston, went free. Norman Manger was never charged (Amnesty International 2011).