

WINTER 2017

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EDITORIAL

Boozhoo/Tansi/Hello,

It is my pleasure as a guest editor to introduce *quint's* readers to a special June edition and the first volume with its entire focus on Indigenous centered articles. All selected articles have appeared in *the quint*. The selected works takes a wide-array of Indigenous perspectives in relation to Indigenous sovereignty, reclamation, and preservation. Subjects vary from justice, social, witnessing, and the trickster. The issue takes a transnational approach from writers as far as Hawaii and as close as Northern Manitoba. Each article demonstrates a degree of colonialism, resistance, and resurgence of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and practice. As the continuity of Indigenous knowledge is at the forefront of Indigenous scholarly writing, criticism, and literature, it is important that we not forget the past. The republished articles, from past issues, illustrates the significance of returning to our roots, but also, begs the reader to look at Indigenous issues in contemporary times and ask, what has changed? Although the answers will vary, the articles will offer insight and shape the answers in and for future writing.

Olúkáyòdé R. Adéşuyì opens the discussion with, “Re-Appraising Colonialism: Indigenous Colonialism in Focus” that speaks towards colonization followed by Sharon McLeod’s “Museums as Keepers of Aboriginal and Northern Knowledge in Northern Manitoba” which is an observation of Northern Manitoba museums, as the keepers of Aboriginal and Northern knowledge. McLeod’s piece paves the way for Sarah Antinora’s discussion on commodification, specifically Native Hawaiians in “The Rhetoric of Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement: Resistance against Commodification, Consumption, and “Social Death.” Antinora demonstrates that using Hawaiian poetry as ‘resistance rhetoric’ acts as a means of fending off “social death” which, in turn, leads to sovereignty movement. John E. Charlton and John G. Hansen’s collaborative essay, “Poona yetum: Shatter Justice Barriers through Forgiving,” offers a restorative justice system approach with empathy and forgiveness as key concepts. In “Critical Compassion: The Reader as Witness in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*” Keely Cronin places responsibility on the reader by challenging them to act as a witness which dares to stimulate the reader to feel compassion and empathy towards the colonial experience and to generate social change.

As the above, listed articles build a foundation to Indigenous sovereign movement, the next set of works focuses on trickster, but before delving into the character, Kahente Horn-Miller’s article, “IO STER IS (It’s funny): Humour as Medicine in Kanienkehaka Society,” sets the base. Horn-Miller begins the conversation by extensively defining humour in which she argues that ‘humor is medicine.’ Melanie Belmore’s essay, “Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen: The Trickster’s Dual Representation—Colonization and Decolonization at the Birch River Settlement School*” continues with a viewpoint of the dual representation of trickster. Although Belmore speaks of trickster characteristics, Hannah Green takes another approach. In “Find the “I” in Irony: Thomas King as Trickster, Narrator, and Creator,” Green writes how Thomas King is narrator and creator, but he also acts as trickster.

This issue wraps up with the short narrative, “Soft Like Fry Bread,” by Helen Knott. Without further ado, I would like to present this special issue of *The Quint*. So sit back, grab a coffee, or a cup of tea, maybe some bannock, but do not forget the jam, and be prepared to go on an adventure. Happy reading!

Miigwech/Ekosi/Thank you.

Melanie Belmore

Guest Editor



Re-Appraising Colonialism: Indigenous Colonialism in Focus¹

by **Olúkáyòdé R. ADÉŞUYÌ**, Adekunle Ajasin University,
Kungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

Introduction

It has become a household story that nations were colonized and gained independence at some particular times. To some the freedom is still being celebrated, for it is considered a great achievement for these people to have been free from the hands of those who did not want good things for them. Nigerians are well acquainted with accounts of colonialism (Falola and Genova, 2006) that are attributed to the foreigners who came to colonize them. While celebrating the freedom from the hands of the foreigners, they themselves have not realized that they are not free in the real sense of the word. One question here is that why are they not free? What is it that remains in the country signifying the presence of colonialism? Are they still governed by the foreigners? The first question above attracts neo-colonialism as the answer. Many people have argued for this as well. This may be

correct, but it is not the focus of this paper. The second question will most likely attract

1. Published in *the quint* 8.2 (March 2016): 126-38. The initial title of this paper was “Re-Appraising Colonialism: Necessarily Committing Fallacy” which was presented at the Annual Ife Humanities Conference on March 23-25, 2015. Suggestions from co-participants necessitated this new title. I acknowledge the positive contributions of my co-participants.

NO as the answer. It is very obvious that the people in question are not being governed by foreigners; rather, they are governed by themselves.

This paper tries to depart itself from both answers given above. The position maintained here may share the view of the former question and response; it will not align itself with the latter response. It will, however, not argue for neo-colonialism. What it intends to argue for is that colonialism has never for once left the soil of Nigerians, especially the Yorùbá. It shall draw instances from Yorùbá to buttress its points. It shall argue, by deliberately committing Tu quo que fallacy to drive home its point.

Colonialism Re-Visited

Fallacy, simply put, is said to be erroneous assumption, proposition or statement in an argument. It is any error, mistaken idea or false belief. It is a mistake in any reasoning that exhibits a pattern that can be identified and named. It is an incorrect argument (Copi, Cohen and McMahon, 2012: 105). It is sometimes described as a type of argument that seems to be correct, but contains a mistake in reasoning (Copi, Cohen and McMahon 2012: 105). In other words, fallacy is a deceptive argument that appears sufficiently acceptable but contains errors (Oke and Amodu, 2006: 107). Any evidence of fallacy in an argument automatically renders such an argument defective, for it is an error of reasoning (Blackburn, 2005: 130).

The above descriptions of fallacy show that it is not a welcome idea in reasoning and argument generally. When detected in an argument, that reasoning becomes invalid. But what about a case of somebody intentionally committing fallacy for the sake of

making case or establishing a position? Is it permissible? If it is not permissible as it will be commonly agreed among logicians, then, one has to reconsider reductio ad-absurdum in an argument. A logician who wants to prove that X is the case first assumes that $\neg X$ is the case. At the end, he arrives at two propositions where he gets X and $\neg X$ in the second to the last and last lines or vice versa. Having arrived at this, he celebrates his logical prowess. He then pronounces that he has been able to show or prove that that X is the case. He considers this argument a valid one. This same logician is also aware of the laws of thought especially law of contradiction – something cannot be $P \wedge \neg P$. If this is true and correct, then, deliberate attempt at committing an intended fallacy ought to be welcome; or put in a more convenient way, it is welcome.

Tu Quo Que (What about you) is one of such fallacies considered to be a bad way of reasoning in critical thinking. It is committed when, in an argument, it is concluded that a claim should not be accepted by appealing to the fact that the opponent does the same thing (Moses and Amodu, 2006: 130). As mentioned above, committing such a fallacy here will be pardonable for it is intended to make a point. It is self explanatory. Instead of reacting to the argument (especially the premises) to debunk the claim, s/he makes reference to the fact that the opponent does similar or exactly the same thing.

Many scholars, especially historians, political scientists, scholars researching in African studies have written enough on colonialism from the perspective of African experience and, of course, that of global world in general. Considering the African scholars, the common ground among these scholars is that African nations have experienced colonialism and suffered a great deal in the hands of the colonialists. When such issue

is discussed, while some of them are fair in their analysis to attribute some good things their nations have benefitted from colonialism, although still maintain that colonialism did more harm than good (Igboin, 2011:101); some have seen colonialism as outrightly a bad phenomenon and something bad that has ever happened to the continent of Africa. Except if one wants to be deliberately pretentious, there are good and equally bad impacts of colonialism on the continent of Africa and especially Nigeria the context of this paper.

Also, while much has been written about the Europe colonizing Africans, no one has identified or talked about Africans colonizing Africans. In another way, while it has been established that the British colonized Nigerians, no scholar has acknowledged the fact that Nigerians also colonized Nigerians. It is possible that they have but with another coinage. This is where the deliberate attempt to commit Tu quo que fallacy comes in with the intention of making some points clear. Why have scholars, especially historians, 'deliberately' neglected this important aspect of history of humanity? Can't this be termed sacrilege? They pretend as if such never happened; or is it because it was from their own people? This paper realises this negligence and tries to remind them of this. Given this, colonialism shall be looked at from two perspectives – foreign and indigenous colonialisms. While the former is already flawed, although still adduced to, in scholarship, as it shall be done here as well, the latter is relatively unknown.

The activities of the missionaries are some of the factors that prepared the ground for colonialism. Although, their mission might be, according to Falola and Heaton (2008: 86) to liberate the minds of the people. Spreading the gospel was instrumental and antecedent to this phenomenon. The two factors that helped the missionaries spread

in those colonized regions, where they gained ground, were identified as admitability. Many indigenous communities saw colonialism as being in their best interests to admit and encourage Christian missionaries at those times (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 86).

Foreign Colonialism

Colonialism in Africa is usually linked with the Berlin conference of 1885 for the purpose of exploitation, subjugation and domination (Jinadu, 2014: 183). Justifying Jinadu's assertion, A. P. Thornton (1962: 336) sees it as "the system in which a country maintains foreign colonies for their economic exploitation." Still following the same line of reasoning, it is seen as "the seizure of a country or region by imperialists, accompanied by the subjection, brutal exploitation, and sometimes annihilation of the local population" (Thornton, 1962: 336). This may not be regarded as colonialism, if it is welcomed by people assumed to have been colonized. By implication, those people who 'have received' agents of colonialism may not see anything wrong. In fact, it may be perceived as those coming to help them develop their area. It, however becomes problematic and colonialism comes into being only when the status of subordination is recognised unwelcome (Thornton, 1962: 346). Once unwelcome attitude is recognised, two parties already involved, which are, according to Thornton (1962: 341), agents and patients. The agents do not see anything wrong with whatever they have done. In fact, they feel justified for doing so, and their target is power. The patients find every means to eradicate it. It is in line with this that Stephen W. Silliman (2005: 58) defines colonialism as "the process by which a city-or nation-state exerts control over people – termed indigenous – and territories outside of its geographical boundaries."

With the different views identified above, it is evident that most scholars are seeing colonialism as evil that has not offered any good thing for the colonized. Is it the case that it has not done any good? Benson O. Igboin (2011: 101) argues differently. For him, it is not the case that it is entirely bad. Some good things also came through colonialism which the colonized have greatly benefited. The only area where Igboin sees problem is the area of cultural values which have been eroded away as a result of colonialism. Pannikar (2003: 3-16) has earlier argued in this line that there are some good things about colonialism. It is not as if it is entirely bad. Some others see it as a bad omen on any land. For instance, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986: 2) believes that its effect is to "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves."

Another problem seen in colonialism is the fact that it is considered as a means to corruption. Some see it synonymous with corruption, where corruption is conceived in two senses. They are petty corruption and grand corruption. The former usually arises from economic necessity, while the latter embodies greed and lust for power by those who already possess considerable wealth and power (Wong and Gomes, 2014: 78). Mulinge and Lesetedi (1998: 15-28) have expressed similar view, although, they have not been able to distinguish between the two senses of corruption. In a way, it is believed that he who has the economic power possesses the political power, the reverse is also possible. The colonized believe that sending away colonizers will give them the privilege to maintain "inalienable right... to control their own destiny" (Emerson, 1969: 4). All these are usually said of what is termed foreign colonialism. There is the other form of

colonialism termed indigenous colonialism, which shall be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Indigenous Colonialism

Colonialism "denoted a loss of identity and the formation of new one, a forced one" (Pannikar, 2003: 7). The marginalization and, in some cases, even irretrievable loss of the indigenous knowledge system are felt. In some other cases, replacement of the culture of the patients (colonized) with that of the agents (colonizers) with the belief that theirs is superior is also evident (Panniker, 2003: 7-8). Could these be a descriptive meant for foreign colonialism alone? Were these not happening even before the advent of foreign colonialism? Colonialism is not alien to Africans and especially Nigerians. The Yorùbá, focal point of this paper, are also aware of the fact there, indeed, was colonialism in their lands. It was only that they had no name to call it. In fact, they had a concept for it, but felt that the concept would not be useful for them, but for the foreigners. *Ìjẹkàbà* (dominion) is a concept that describes colonialism. It cannot be denied that this was present among the Yorùbá before foreign colonial rules. Attempt to resist *ìjẹkàbà* always led to war (Crowder, 1968: 4-9).

Colonialism must not be necessary external. In other words, there is no principle that says the invasion by foreigners only is what should be referred to as colonialism (Mitchell and Williams, 1978: 125-126). This has not been probably realised by scholars. In this regard, it seems indigenous colonialism has not been identified in history; something similar has, however, been mentioned. Internal colonialism has been discussed in place

of indigenous colonialism. Chaloult and Chaloult (1979: 85-99) have identified this form of colonialism and discussed it extensively. They see internal colonialism as the notion of domination and exploitation of natives by natives (Chaloult and Chaloult, 1979: 85). This does not suit the purpose of the indigenous. The phrase 'natives by natives' is problematic. The problem is the ambiguity involved in natives, where native will mean a candidate of a particular place. The British are natives of a place as well. This means internal colonialism should be replaced with indigenous colonialism. Indigenous colonialism will rather be defined as members of the same group that is attempting or has attempted or has colonised others. These people share some striking features: they see some subjective justifiable reasons to colonise their people.

Given the Yorùbá scenario, is the above description the case? Those who are claiming to be Yorùbá are not Yorùbá proper. It will be of note to mention here that there are two categories of Yorùbá. They are proper and non-proper Yorùbá. This has since been said by Samuel Johnson in his famous book, *The History of the Yorubas...* This shows that even those who are claiming to be Yorùbá are not. For Johnson (1921), only the people who speak Ọ̀yọ́ dialect are said to be proper Yorùbá. This is also shared by Falola and Genova (2006: 1). The non-proper Yorùbá trace their source to the same place the proper Yorùbá trace theirs to. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that they have adopted this, will this still justify that they have not been colonized? How did others, who do not speak Ọ̀yọ́ but their dialects, get to know they are also Yorùbá? No other way, but through indigenous colonialism.

Two broad myths concerning the origins of Yorùbá are ascribed to; they are the

creation and migration myths (Ojo, 2002: 86). It is suggestive to say that the two be reduced to one (migration). It is true that both appear to be migration accounts. The distinction is, however, necessary for the purpose of this discussion. Also, while the latter has to do with leaving a place for another with no act of creating involved, the former is specifically for the purpose of creation. While the former may be facing some challenges, which may be inability to establish empirically some of the issues surrounding it, the latter may not be faced with such challenges. This migration story is the one being supported by the historians (See Johnson, 1921: 5). The way the Yorùbá people spread to found kingdoms also is additional justification for this. According to Ojo (2002: 91); the traditions of the various Yorùbá kingdoms 'founded' by sons and grandsons of Oduduwa seem to agree that as the emigrants from Ife spread out, they almost everywhere earlier settlers (aborigines) who, though were very hostile to the new comers, were conquered by them (the new comers).

Some of the people who claim to be Yorùbá speak dialects different from the one spoken by Yorùbá. "Some of these groups speak some dialects that are mutually unintelligible" (Falola, 2006: 29).

The above illustration is nothing but colonialism; there was presence of culture contact (Silliman, 2005: 58). In this case, a culture will bow for another. This has been the experience of the non-Yorùbá proper. It is still recognized by them. Today, many of their indigenous cultural practices have eroded away. This is the form of colonialism that has been abandoned. People colonized sometimes think if they had not been colonized, many things would have come to their advantage. As aptly put by Emerson (1969: 7);

It is manifestly highly consoling to believe that one's present woes, weakness, poverty, and internal divisions derive, not from anything inherent in one's race, society, or history, but from the wounds inflicted on an otherwise sound body by those who encroached on it and exploited it for their profit and pleasure.

Conclusion

While foreign colonialists have left, and even if they have not left for their lands, it is not difficult for them to leave—the reason being that they see themselves as different from the people they colonized. But what about indigenous colonialists? Obviously, it will be impossible to ask any of them to go away. Migration stories show that many of the people regarding themselves as Yorùbá today are not. They were colonized, and the colonizers imposed many of their cultural practices on them. People of different ethnic groups should retrace their steps.

It must be emphasized that while the impacts of foreign colonialism could be done away with due to the clamour for a return to indigenous cultural practices; it may be difficult to do away with the impacts of indigenous colonialism which are already deeply rooted in the various cultural practices where they are evident.

Language is instrumental to development of an ethnic group. This is not to be seen in terms of communications alone, although it is part of it, but in terms of using some basic concepts inherent in that language for developmental purpose. An instance is in relation to traditional medicine, especially herbal practices. The proper Yorùbá have their names for leaves and trees; non-proper Yorùbá have theirs for the same leaves and trees.

Now that many of these people do not know the names, perhaps in their native dialects, will it not be difficult for them to comprehend their development?

It is obvious that the indigenous colonialists cannot be sent away. By implication, it will be impossible for the aborigines to seek for independence the way a nation-state does. What is left for them is to accept their fate. This also may not assist them, since many of their survivors don't even know where to start. Historians, archaeologists, and of course, other relevant professionals can still be of help. They can help them trace many of their lost identities.

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Museums as Keepers of Aboriginal and Northern Knowledge and Heritage in Northern Manitoba¹

by Sharon McLeod, University College of the North, Thompson, Manitoba

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on and raise the level of public awareness about the multi-dimensional role of museums in northern Manitoba to act as storehouses and to preserve and interpret of aboriginal and northern heritage. The role of northern museums, the people and places that provide a meaningful balance in the preservation, interpretation, and exhibition of the diversity of aboriginal and northern histories and cultures in northern Manitoba, is a complex web of undertakings. As a result, there is an imminent awareness of the increasing pressures that are placed on locally-based museums in northern Manitoba to fulfill their social responsibilities, which is to remain relevant and fully engaged with their northern and aboriginal communities, while at the same time, interpret northern and aboriginal heritage to the wider national and international publics.

There are eight community museums in northern Manitoba. They are located in the communities of Flin Flon, The Pas, Snow Lake, Wabowden, Thompson, Leaf Rapids, Lynn Lake, and Churchill. Each facility was created for the purpose of showcasing

1. Published in *the quint* 4.1 (Dec 2011): 13-17.

aspects of their community heritage, linking their community stories and histories to the broader northern and aboriginal audience, and displaying these materials to national and international visitors to the north. Their efforts to act as platforms for the particular aspects of northern and aboriginal heritage in their regions and to fulfill their social responsibilities in northern Manitoba have required endless hours of service from the staff and volunteers of these small museums to ensure that their visitors experience authentic representations of northern and aboriginal values and customs.

Several factors are involved when one considers these museums' efforts to interpret northern and aboriginal heritage in northern Manitoba: the lack of attention by Canadian historians and historiographers to the North, the newcomers' interactions with the North, the original inhabitant's orally-based understandings of the northern landscape, the cultural and social interchange between newcomers to the North and the original inhabitants, and finally, the accumulation of knowledge about the North that results because of this interaction.

In particular, the lack of attention to the North by Canadian historians has resulted in a situation where the North continues to be considered a marginal place with regard to Canada's historical past. W.L. Morton in his assessment of northern history initiated the call for Canadian historians to reassess their thinking about the North. He advocated that the North needs to be better understood. In his 1970 paper "The North in Canadian History", he states that "the ultimate and the comprehensive meaning of Canadian history is to be found where there has been no Canadian history, in the North."²

2. W. L. Morton, "The North in Canadian History," in A. B. McKillop, ed., *Contexts of Canada's Past* (Toronto: Carleton University Press, 1980).

This absence of historiography regarding the North places museums in northern Manitoba in an important situation. By definition, they are the sole storehouses of a particular aspect of Canadian history that for the most part, goes unnoticed. Museums in northern Manitoba play a dual role by interpreting Canada's forgotten history and at the same time advocating to a wider audience the importance of their own and their country's northern heritage.

The newcomers' interaction with the North continues to be an integral undertaking for museums in northern Manitoba. Archeological evidence continues to provide countless of evidence of newcomers' interaction in the North with the local inhabitants of the land. Newcomers to Manitoba brought with them various aspects of their own unique language and cultural heritage and with their interactions with the original inhabitants of the land a distinctive northern and aboriginal heritage has been created of which they and their descendants are proud. There are many personal stories that have been and can continue to be told about their work and lives that are a valuable source of local northern knowledge for the rest of the world. Many came to northern Manitoba to live as prospectors, loggers, miners, civil services workers, medical practitioners, NGO's, and educators. These individuals participated in a northern life way of life that they constantly talk about as part of their own histories. By doing so, they have created a brand of northern knowledge that is characterized by personal sacrifice and adaptation, surviving in a climate that was very different than they originally knew. Northern museums play an integral role in documenting and preserving these regional stories and histories.

Currently, there are no community-based Aboriginal museums and/or locally-based cultural centers in northern Manitoba that preserve, maintain and enhance the oral traditions, stories and material histories of the First Nations in northern Manitoba. Northern Manitoba Cree, Dene, Inuit, Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Metis, Scottish Half-breeds, and/or non-status Indians, as constitutionally defined by the government of Canada, make up more than 60% of northern Manitoba's population. Although it is considered small compared to the rest of Canada, Northern Manitoba's population base is culturally diverse and rapidly changing. It is growing and adapting to global change. The Aboriginal part of northern Manitoba's aboriginal and northern heritage has yet to be shared with their fellow northern Manitoba neighbors and the rest of Canada.

Northern Manitoba's Elders and traditional storytellers and teachers share and pass on their oral knowledge through cultural ceremonial practices, celebrations, and community gatherings. Many of these community gatherings are locally organized and often held in the heart of the northern landscape—according to traditional values, beliefs and customs. According to cultural custom, the northern Elders validate the sacred oral knowledge that has become both oral and written in our modern world. These Elders constantly remind one and all of the imposed threats to their oral knowledge and language. With support from the traditional teachers and learners they are advocating for and have become participants in a cultural rebirth of the oral traditions and customs in northern Manitoba. Part of this increasingly broadening trend, is their call for a cultural healing of the land and its people in northern Manitoba. This call raises awareness of the need for a spiritual awakening and the rekindling of the northern value-based teachings that

were once prevalent in the lives of aboriginal peoples who lived in close proximity with the northern landscape and the aboriginal cultures of northern Manitoba.

Northern museums recognize the need to partner with this orally-based way of life in order to complete their obligations and social responsibilities of preserving northern and aboriginal heritage. Nonetheless, need for a northern aboriginal museum in which to preserve and practice this cultural way of life should be addressed. Such a physical place would further the Elders' spiritual and cultural understandings of aboriginal culture and preserving the languages of northern Manitoba.

Northern museums are founded on a long legacy of historic land use and occupation of various cultures in northern Manitoba that require a certain degree of reflection and contemplation. Much of the northern landscape is currently situated on surrendered Crown Land through the numbered treaty-making process that began in 1875 with the signing of Treaty Number 5 in Norway House. The division of the northern Manitoba landscape is represented by Treaty Numbers 5 and 10. Much earlier, northern Manitoba has been the heart of the fur trade district for the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trade activities. The provincial and national archival records contain information that helps to tell the story of industrial and resource development in northern Manitoba. Before these activities, however, the original inhabitants of the land lived their lives in harmony with the resources that were necessary for their collective survival, according to the traditional and spiritual governance systems that directed their lives. As western expansion progressed and the coming of the railway line in the early 19th century spread from The Pas towards Churchill, northern Manitoba was experienced continued economic, political and social

growth and development.

The cultural and social interchange between the newcomers and the original inhabitants in northern Manitoba produced and continues to produce a wealth of invaluable information that northern museums have the important mission to preserve. Continuing to undergo constant transformation, this cultural and social interchange is never static. It is an interchange worthy of appropriate authentication according to provincial and national museum and/or archival practice and standards. Localized heritage training continues to be the underlying factor to create cultural momentum in northern Manitoba. The broader question then becomes that of the extent of heritage resources that will be necessary to engage northern Manitoba community into mobilizing in order to create a heritage, a lasting legacy, in which northern Manitobans participate and share.

Finally, the accumulation of centuries of northern and aboriginal historical knowledge in northern Manitoba has created a treasure house of resources upon which northern museums can continue to build. If it is the role of northern Manitoba museums to engage in preserving, interpreting, and showcasing the diversity of northern and aboriginal history of their local communities, now is the time to spring forward. When cultural and heritage institutions are continually looking to preserve under-recognized aspects of their regions' pasts, these northern museums may look forward to playing an important role in the continuing cultural development of the North. With their communities, these museums have captivating stories to showcase and share with the rest of society.

It is the time for northern and aboriginal community members to assess their local cultural resources and assist their northern museums to move beyond their present platforms to reclaim and broaden northern Manitoba's cultural capacity and to utilize their forgotten histories. A North in continual cultural transition, northern Manitoba has an important and over-looked legacy to share.



The Rhetoric of the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement: Resistance against Commodification, Consumption, and "Social Death"¹

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Introduction

Haunani-Kay Trask opens her *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii* (1993), with the following assertion: “Despite American political and territorial control of Hawai’i since 1898, Hawaiians are not Americans. Nor are we Europeans, or Asians. We are not from the Pacific Rim, nor are we immigrants to the Pacific. We are the children of Papa—earth mother, and Wākea—sky father—who created the sacred lands of Hawai’i Nei.” With this short passage, Trask asserts sovereignty for Native Hawaiians by engaging in the rhetorical tropes emblematic of the movement. She references the date of 1898, the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani and the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, as the beginning of colonization. The movement uses the term

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“colonization,” as it not only denies statehood, but it also highlights the subjugation and marginalization of Native Hawaiians. Hence, Trask denounces her American status and instead identifies herself as *kanaka maoli*, or “real or true people” (Okamura 99). Trask names Papa and Wākea, the earth and sky, as her grandparents, referencing a Hawaiian mythos and theology which allow Native Hawaiians to claim a spiritual connection and sole entitlement to the land. Trask’s words are therefore emblematic of the three grand rhetorical moves of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement: claiming colonized status, utilizing Hawaiian mythos and language, and reaffirming the interconnectedness between the Native Hawaiians and the Hawaiian Islands.

Work defining the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement is largely lacking, stemming from a greater issue—the absence of Hawaiian studies in academia. Hawaiian literature and studies of Hawaiian rhetoric are usually not examined in isolation. Instead, Hawaiian works are included in the genre of “Pacific literature,” as in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999), or of “indigenous rhetoric,” as in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* (2005). While both of these anthologies prove useful in examining the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, and should not be dismissed as homogenizations of cultural productions, they do however demonstrate that scholarly endeavors in this field are deficient. Notable exceptions include Houston Wood’s *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai’i* (1999), which examines the ways in which textual production of Native Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture mirrors their physical displacement, and a paper presented by Carissa Dunlap at the National Communication Association Women’s Caucus (2007) linking feminist rhetorical theory

with Trask’s rhetoric for sovereignty. However, these exceptions merely work to prove the rule that Hawaiian rhetoric, and rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in particular, has been largely ignored by academia.

The aim of this project is not only to establish Native Hawaiian singularity, but to uncover Native Hawaiian ethnicity as epistemic. While Trask’s work provides rich ground for rhetorical analysis, what little work that has been done with the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement has centered on her. Her poetry and prose is in danger of supplanting the work of the entire movement if analysis does not engage with its other voices. Although her theoretical work will be incorporated here, most of the investigation will center on the poetry of arguably the most recognizable voice and body of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, universally known as just “Iz.” While an analysis of Israel Kamakawiwo’ole’s lyrics and sound will allow for a richer discussion of the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty, this artist’s work has also been selected as it is so exemplary of the consumption of Hawaiiana. Employing a similar methodology to Arlene Dávila’s *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of People* (2001), the appropriation and commodification of Kamakawiwo’ole’s image and music as symbolic of the romanticized Hawaiian will first be examined. This will in turn lead to a discussion of “Pacific orientalism” and its use as a tool to enforce what Raúl Homero Villa calls “social death.” An examination will then be conducted to determine how the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty resists “social death” and asserts “rhetorical agency,” approaching Kamakawiwo’ole’s musical calls for Hawaiian sovereignty, such as “Hawai’i 78” (1993) and “Living in a Sovereign Land” (1996), as what Mira Chieko Shimabukuro calls “resistant rhetoric” (128). Additional theories informing this project include Scott Lyons’ “rhetorical sovereignty” and

the rhetorical concept of “space” as seen in Villa and Roxanne Mountford. Lastly, not only Kamakawiwo'ole's image but his medley “Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” (1993) in particular will be reclaimed as an exemplar of the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty.

The hope is that this work will help those outside the movement for Hawaiian independence to engage in what Jon Cruz calls “pathos-oriented hearing.” Specifically, it attempts to further resist the “social death” of the Native Hawaiian—the byproduct of attempts to freeze them in a romanticized past.

“Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World”: An Orientalized Icon

Although recorded in 1993, Kamakawiwo'ole's medley of “Somewhere over the Rainbow” and “What a Wonderful World” did not become popular around the world until almost a decade later. In fact, it reached its peak position of #12 on the Billboard's Hot Digital Track in 2004, almost seven years after Kamakawiwo'ole's death. An acoustic 'ukulele cover of the popular *Wizard of Oz* song, Kamakawiwo'ole's version intermingles verses from Louis Armstrong's “What a Wonderful World” with those from the original track. This song would inspire native Hawaiian filmmaker Chris Lee to claim that Kamakawiwo'ole “gave voice to the Hawaiian people” (“IZ”). For, even if the average listeners “can't pronounce his name, they know they're hearing the voice of Hawai'i.... They know the sound and the emotion” (“IZ”).

However, the status of the song is problematic. While it has popularized the Hawaiian sound around the world, many now consider it to be *the* Hawaiian song, much

as Don Ho's “Tiny Bubbles” and Andy Williams' “The Hawaiian Wedding Song” were in past decades. While it is troubling when any song or artist becomes synonymous with a culture or ethnicity, this particular case is even more so as the song is viewed separately from Kamakawiwo'ole's body of work—work that consistently called for Hawaiian sovereignty. Further, the largest circulating Hawaiian newspaper, the *Honolulu Advertiser*, has erected a memorial to Kamakawiwo'ole on its website stating, “He has, arguably, achieved iconic status; that his fame was built in large part on a medley of two songs with no connection to Hawai'i seems almost irrelevant” (“IZ”). Here, the newspaper claims Kamakawiwo'ole as an icon for Hawai'i while simultaneously asserting his (or at least the song's) disconnect from the culture. While this claim is problematic, the perception still remains. The song is “Hawaiian” rather than Hawaiian; it is viewed as a romanticized version of the Hawaiian Islands as opposed to an authentic voicing of Native Hawaiian rhetoric.

Giving credence to this perception is the song's multiple appearances in television and movies, as commodification is indelibly linked with the essentializing of ethnicity. Internet Movie Database (IMDb) lists nearly twenty movies and television episodes which have featured the medley, all after his death in 1997. These range from the Kauai-filmed *50 First Dates* (2004) to a “bikini challenge” on Rachael Ray (2008). Additionally, the song has been used in many television commercials, many promoting Hawaiian tourism. Strikingly, IMDb makes no mention of Kamakawiwo'ole's support for the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in its biography of the performer, although it does mention his highest weight. Similarly, Answers.com states that Kamakawiwo'ole is “best known as [the] Super-sized Hawaiian singer of ‘Over the Rainbow.’” While neither of these web-

sites would be considered academic or scholarly sources, they do carry credibility in that they reflect the mainstream public's perceptions and values. What can be derived from both sites is that his excessive size is more recognizable in American culture than his message. As can be seen here, the iconic status of both the medley and his body has become synonymous with perceptions of Native Hawaiians, defining the "decorum," or what is appropriate, for Hawaiian ethnicity (*Silva Rhetoricae: The Forest of Rhetoric*). Leading one to wonder, which elements of "Hawaiian" culture have been deemed decorous?

One answer can be seen in a visit to Maui Wowi, a coffee and smoothie establishment. In these shops, surfboards hang on "koa" walls alongside posters proclaiming "Eddie Would Go." Grass rooftops are perched over each table to create an "authentic" environment. Shapely Hawaiian dolls wear coconut bras and grass skirts, and Kamakawio'ole's medley "Somewhere over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World" plays often through the sound system. While two of these icons represent the Hawaiian sovereignty movement—Eddie and Iz—nothing sanitizes them more than being surrounded by coconut bras and smoothies. Here it can be deduced that part of how the hegemony has defined the decorum of Hawaiian ethnicity is that it must be nonthreatening. While the implications of this threat will be included in a discussion of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement below, it is clear that just for the purposes of commodification, placing Kamakawio'ole and Aikau alongside romanticized icons of Hawaiiana allows for these figures of Hawaiian sovereignty to be subsumed into what Rob Wilson calls "Pacific orientalism" (2). This repackaging of Hawaiiana for consumption could easily be entitled Hawaii, Inc. Dávila's *Latinos, Inc.* examines how marketing not only commodifies Latino ethnicity, but also defines what it means to be "Hispanic." Her works uncovers the

way in which Latino-based television helps to construct a vision of the "right way," or a decorum, of being Hispanic. While Dávila's work sheds light on how commodification of ethnicity shapes decorum, it also highlights a major difference between the "incorporation" of Latino/a ethnicity and Hawaiian ethnicity. Dávila traces the "reconstitution of individuals into consumers and populations into markets" as the "central fields of cultural production," a neoliberal project that sees Latino/as as consumers (2). Further, she uncovers the "involvement of 'natives'—that is, of 'Hispanics'—in their very production" (3). Dávila's research highlights the ambivalent nature of such a type of commodification, for while it promotes stereotypes and homogenization, it also validates Latino/as as viable consumers and business leaders. However, the commodification of Hawaiian ethnicity lacks this ambiguity. Here, predominantly white American tourists are targeted as consumers while Native Hawaiians are largely consumed. Further, Native Hawaiians, while not entirely removed from some aspects of the tourism industry, are largely absent from any positions of power in the neoliberal production of Hawaiian culture. Instead, the orientalizing of Hawaiiana silences or marginalizes contemporary Native Hawaiians, and the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in particular, while simultaneously freezing them in a romanticized past.

"Pacific Orientalism" and "Social Death"

In an orientalizing version of "Hawaii," the lei is no longer a gesture of love and compassion, but a pun for the "clever" innuendo of "I got lei'd in Hawaii." "The Spirit of Aloha" is about tourism rather than a spiritual belief grounded in centuries of theology. And, as Trask notes in her description of a magazine advert, the luau is a space where the

Hawaiian language, dance, people, and even customs of eating are “used to ensnare tourists” (*From a Native Daughter* 193). Instead of a celebration of Native Hawaiian culture, Trask declares that “a tinsel version of Hawaiian culture adorns the tourist industry, prostituting not only our lands and waters, but also our customs and our people” (“Writing in Captivity” 17).

“Hawai’i as paradise” has allowed for the marginalization of Native Hawaiians. In fact, Native Hawaiians have been almost entirely removed from these visions of Hawai’i. Case in point, Trask relates a story in the introduction to her poetry collection *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994) in which an American tourist approaches her in the airport and exclaims, “Oh, you look just like the postcard.” Trask responds, “No, the postcard looks like me” (xvii). When David Barsamian asks her about this incident in an interview for *The Progressive Magazine*, she notes that “it reveals how distant we Hawaiians are as human beings from the image that tourists have of us...as an object of desire” (92 ellipses in original). This desire is one which silences the corporeal Native Hawaiians in favor of a romanticized, picture postcard image.

Vilsoni Hereniko highlights the removal of the Native Hawaiian from “paradise” in his “Representations of Cultural Identities.” Hereniko describes a typical day in Waikiki: white sandy beaches, “semi-naked tourists lounging on the beach,” and rows of coconut palms. However, the fruit of the coconut palms, the coconuts themselves, are removed on a daily basis. It is thought that actual coconuts ruin the created image of paradise. While this anecdote emphasizes the absurdity of the romanticized version of Hawai’i, it also mirrors the removal of Native Hawaiians from the area. Hereniko points out that Waikiki, although being the most populated area of Hawai’i, has the lowest percentage

of Native Hawaiian residents in the entire islands. This claim is supported through Census 2000 data, which indicates that there are fewer than 500 Native Hawaiians residing in each of the divisioned areas that comprise Waikiki and Honolulu (*Native Hawaiian Population by Census Tracts: 2000*). Geographically, the Native Hawaiians have been segregated. While this stems from a desire to meet tourist expectations, it also reveals an underlying prejudice. Hereniko notes, pakeha, or the white population of Hawai’i, often uses the term “coconut” to refer to islanders, “a metaphor with connotations akin to ‘nigger’” (137). And, as can be seen in Waikiki, both types of “coconuts” have been excised.

The above discussion has shown that Native Hawaiian ethnicity has been commodified, allowing for a sanitized and romanticized representation to supplant any authentic voices in mainstream American culture. It is also clear that the Native Hawaiians themselves have been subject to orientalizing and geographically segregated away from the state’s most populated areas. In other words, Native Hawaiians are in danger of becoming “socially dead.” Although “Social death” is a term that was used by Zygmunt Bauman and Orlando Patterson to describe the lack of any socially recognized existence outside of Nazi Germany for Jews and white masters for the black slave respectively, Villa’s discussion of “social death” in his *Barrio-Logos* (2008) is more fitting for this project. Villa spends much of his work detailing how Chicano/as have used space, rhetoric, and art to ward off “social death;” however, he first establishes how white Southern Californians worked to enact a social death on the Chicano/a community.

One method was to establish residential segregation. Mexican-Americans were portrayed as alternately dirty, uneducated, violent, primitive, and lazy. Areas heavily populated by Latino/as were viewed as “blighted areas” (72), with the solution being to

strategically build freeways and ramps in order to prevent motorists from even having to view them. Beautification projects were adopted in order to tear down Chicano/a-owned buildings and rebuild in a style (and price) that targeted white consumers and drove the Chicano/a community into the barrios. Although this residential segregation, coupled with economic marginalization, takes great strides toward inflicting “social death” upon this community, it is further accomplished when in conjunction with a romanticization of Southern California’s Spanish roots. Villa relates the celebrations of the “Old Spanish Fiesta,” a glorification of the original rancheros, as an orientalizing of the Spanish-influenced culture. “Spanish romance,” complete with castanets and tiered skirts, is embraced while simultaneously “attacking the “Mexican problem” (156). It is this exaltation of the imagined past which serves to eradicate the present, as freezing people in time denies any current cultural experience.

Much of Villa’s Barrio-Logos reads as a discussion of the plight facing Native Hawaiians, for while each ethnic group’s experience is unique, the methodology for marginalization is often the same. Wood’s work traces how Hollywood films promote Native Hawaiians as sexually primitive and promiscuous. Other stereotypes that have endured include Native Hawaiians being “dumb, lazy, violent, and criminally inclined” (Okamura 100). Michael Kioni Dudley and Keoni Kealoha Agard in *A Call for Sovereignty* (1993) note that Native Hawaiians “hold the lowest paying jobs in the state, they have the greatest number on welfare, [and] they have the worst housing, if they have housing at all” (77). Dudley and Agard provide further data supporting the assertion that Native Hawaiians have been marginalized, including that they outnumber any other nationalities in the prison population and have the shortest life expectancy of any of the ethnici-

ties in the state (77). These social and economic realities are coupled with a geographic segregation, aimed at denying the Native Hawaiians their very means of life. Dudley and Agard write, “By executive and legislative fiat they have again and again been driven from areas where they have tried to live a traditional subsistence lifestyle” (78). Hence, not only have Native Hawaiians been excised from the well-populated areas in order to guarantee that the tourists’ image of paradise is met, but they have also been removed from outlying areas when they have attempted to live according to tradition. While social, economic, and geographic segregation supports the myth of the “vanishing Hawaiian”—much like the myth of the “vanishing Indian”—Trask claims this as “the great American lie” (“Writing in Captivity” 20). She writes, “Hawaiians are still here, we are still creating, still resisting” (29). As will be seen below, resistance takes many forms, many of which serve to define the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, ultimately, warding off “social death.”

Native Hawaiian Resistant Rhetoric

In “Relocating Authority: Coauthor(iz)ing a Japanese American Ethos of Resistance under Mass Incarceration,” Shimabukuro explores the writings of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee as “resistant rhetoric.” Shimabukuro defines “resistant rhetoric” as claiming “rhetorical agency” with words and “explicitly resist[ing] oppression through writing” (129). Much of Kamakawiwo’ole’s music works to resist oppression, explicitly calling for the sovereignty of the Native Hawaiian nation. Before examining his “Living in a Sovereign Land” directly as rhetoric of resistance, it must be made clear that the movement itself is the primary act of resistance against “social death” and oppression.

Just as there are many voices in the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, multiple strands of the movement argue for varying degrees of independence. However, the largest call for sovereignty supports some version of the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, known as the Akaka Bill, which would allow for Native Hawaiians to gain federal recognition as a nation. This would allow for a nation-within-a-nation, where Native Hawaiians work cooperatively with the United States but are respected and recognized as a sovereign nation. Dudley and Agard define the goals for the movement as having their “own territory, their own governmental structures, their own laws; they collect their own taxes; and they are protected by American federal law in the practice of their culture and religion” (xi). Notice that the goal is two-fold: one establishing self-governance and independence and one preserving and protecting Native Hawaiian culture. As their national culture, or their ethnicity, becomes more orientalized in the name of consumerism, the Native Hawaiians have become a “very endangered species living in their one and only homeland” (79).

Yet, defining the call for Hawaiian independence as merely legal sovereignty would be incomplete. Kilipaka Kawaihonu Nahili Pae Ontai instead reminds her readers that *ea*, the Hawaiian word for “sovereignty” actually has a dual meaning. In the 1957 edition of the *Hawaiian Dictionary*, Mary Kawena Pukui combines the traditional definition of the term with the Euro-American translation. Thus, while the Euro-American connotation is “sovereignty, rule, independence,” the traditional definition allows for a spiritual denotation of the term: “life, breath...Spirit” (154). *Ea* then comes to mean “life of the land” (156). Therefore, a reaffirmation of the Native Hawaiian culture and ethnicity via an emphasis of its interconnectedness to the land resists against “social death.”

One form that this rhetoric of resistant takes is in merely proclaiming sovereignty in writing. Maile Kēhaulani Sing writes the following in her poem “Thinking about Hawaiian Identity”:

Hawaii is paradise
Up for grabs
Full of aloha
And hula dance
An image of smiling natives
That everyone would love to be
The only obstacle that complicates
Is the call to discriminate
For the sake of sovereignty
Self determination fueled
By genealogical identity (in Kauanui 32-42)

Sing begins by referencing the “paradise” envisioned by tourists to Hawaii, with its orientalized versions of “aloha,” “hula,” and “smiling natives.” She then asserts that the call for Hawaiian sovereignty resists, or “complicates,” this created image. Finally, Sing writes that the right to be sovereign in this land is genealogically determined. Here she is asserting the singularity of Native Hawaiian ethnicity as not merely what the hegemony has orientalized and commodified for consumption, but that it rests in something intrinsic.

Kamakawiwo'ole's “Living in a Sovereign Land” mirrors Sing's rhetoric of resis-

tance. In the first verse he sings the following:

There's a celebration on the palace grounds
People need to know...just what's going down
There's a proclamation from the powers that lead
Says our island nation has got to be free!
Living in a sovereign land (1-5)

Kamakawiwo'ole references 'Iolani Palace, the space where annexation occurred when Queen Liliuokalani was abdicated from her throne and the location of celebration of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement one hundred later. The proclamation came in the form of an Apology Resolution signed by President Clinton in 1993. By referencing these two events, this song acts as rhetoric that resists "social death." Instead of a silenced, invisible ethnic group, the Native Hawaiians are asserting their right to sovereignty and their right to be heard, both in song and in political venues. Further, by playing with verb tense, Kamakawiwo'ole presents the envisioned future of a sovereign land as a current state of independence, demonstrating that a critical component of self-governance, and resistance, is the assertion to this right.

Assertions of "Rhetorical Sovereignty"

In his "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" Lyons outlines the ways in which writing and the agency it provides have been denied to the Native American nations and how contemporary Native American writers now assert "rhetorical sovereignty" through their work. Lyons defines "rhetorical sovereignty"

as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit [of sovereignty], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (449-450 emphasis in original). While Lyons is inspired by the traditional connotation of sovereignty, which he defines as "the right of a people to conduct its own affairs, in its own place, in its own way" (450), he claims the term as a rhetorical device, granting words the power to effect change and establish agency. Upon examining the poetry of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, what Dunlap calls its "primary rhetorical document," it becomes clear that this is the rhetorical space in which the movement defines its goals, modes, styles, and languages, or where it asserts "rhetorical sovereignty" (3).

Hawaiian poetry has always included a combination of mele, song, music, hula, and poetry. Although writings calling for Hawaiian sovereignty periodically take the form of prose or legal document, the predominant mode of expression occurs in poetry. Clearly, this is not the mode of rhetoric most often used by those who oppose Hawaiian sovereignty. Solely by choosing to speak through poetry, as both Trask, Kamakawiwo'ole, and many other writers do, Native Hawaiians have asserted "rhetorical sovereignty."

Poetry calling for Hawaiian independence also asserts "rhetorical sovereignty" through its use of the Native Hawaiian language, recurring tropes, and incorporation of traditional Hawaiian cultural elements. One such poem is Keith Haugen's "I Ka La 'Apopo (Tomorrow)." Here a portion of the song is translated:

Hu mai ke aloha no keia 'aina nei (Love for this land swells forth)

Mai ke kabuli 'ana a ke ea hou (From the overthrow until the new

independence)

E ku hou ana na keiki o ka 'aina (The children of the land will rise up

again)

A kahea no ke ku 'oko 'a (And call out for freedom)

Pono kakou e malama i ka 'aina (We should care for the land)

Pono kakou e kako'o in a pua (We should care for the children) (13-18)

As Lyons notes, choice of language is an essential element to asserting “rhetorical sovereignty.” Poetry uses the element of language in a dual move, as it not only works to define the terms of the conversation (as seen in Native Hawaiian references to “colonization” rather than “statehood”), but also preserves Hawaiian culture. Trask calls using the native language an act of resistance, explaining this rationale in her interview with Barsamian. She claims, “One way to decolonize is to recover your own metaphors, your own pronunciations, the language that is the language of the place from whence you come” (98). When Native Hawaiian poets write in their native language, they carry the history of those words and their culture in its entirety into their poems, not the re-visioned history portrayed in mainstream American culture.

While Haugen’s choice to write in the native Hawaiian language in and of itself claims “rhetorical sovereignty,” centering his poem on the Native Hawaiian children and tying their futures to that of the land also furthers that aim. Children have traditionally been the focus of Hawaiian poetry, as they are not only viewed as the inheritors of the land but they are also the targeted audience for many of these poems. Chants traditionally use repetition, small words, and clear ideas in order for children to not only under-

stand them but so that they could sing them. One such traditional chant entitled “Ke Ao Nani (The Beautiful World),” presented here only in translation, serves as an example:

Up above, above

Birds of the heavens

Below, below

Flowers of the earth

In the mountains, mountains

The forests

In the sea, the sea

Fishes of the ocean

Tell the refrain

Of the beautiful world

In the name of the children (1-11)

In this poem, the birds, flowers, forests, and fish are all called upon to celebrate nature. The directional phrases “up above,” “below,” and “in” allows for a synchronous relationship between the lyrics and the movements performed by the singers. Although these lines are in translation, the vocabulary used here is accessible to all. “Ke Ao Nani (The Beautiful World)” demonstrates Hawaiian poetry’s use of repetition, invocation of its children, and its epistemic view of an interconnectedness between the Native Hawaiians the land of Hawaii. Hence, when Haugen references these same elements in his “I Ka La ‘Apopo (Tomorrow),” he is using the traditional elements of Hawaiian poetry as a way to (re)define the terms of Hawaiian sovereignty—in essence, he is asserting “rhetori-

cal sovereignty.”

Many of these same elements can be seen in Kamakawiwo'ole's music and “Living in a Sovereign Land” in particular. Although “Living in a Sovereign Land” is predominantly sung in English, which cannot be said of most of Kamakawiwo'ole's songs, he does include “*e ola*”—which has connotations of long life, survival, and healing—in the refrain. Kamakawiwo'ole also incorporates repetition, as “living in a sovereign land” is repeated five times while “*e ola, living in a sovereign land*” is repeated four. Like Haugen, Kamakawiwo'ole centers this song on the Native Hawaiian children. He writes, “Our children deserve to know/ What went down a hundred years ago.” While the repetition in the song allows for it to be reminiscent of a traditional *keiki* chant, this line indicates that the future of Hawai'i lies in the children's hands, that they are the future of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

Lastly, Kamakawiwo'ole incorporates the terminology of “theft” that prevails through the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty. Invoking the children again, he writes, “What's been taken must be returned/ Give our children what they deserve.” Here, Kamakawiwo'ole chooses the word “taken” rather than “annexed.” “Annexation” implies not only a legal incorporation of one territory into the domain of a state, but it also has the connotation of “adding to.” Conversely, “taken” implies an illegal theft, or a loss. While the United States may use “annex,” Native Hawaiians use the terms of theft. By defining the terms of the discussion, the historicity of the action can be reinterpreted with the goals of the Hawaiian sovereignty in mind. As Lyons indicated, “rhetorical sovereignty” involves the pursuit to define the “goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse,” and clearly Kamakawiwo'ole works towards this pursuit.

Native Hawaiian “Rhetorical Space”

In “On Gender and Rhetorical Space,” Mountford notes that the concept of “rhetorical space” is not a new one. She cites Gaston Bachelard and Lorraine Code as theorists who work in “the geography of argument,” or the concepts of “here” and “there,” and “outside” and “inside” (41). This type of “rhetorical space,” or “rhetorical situation,” is the theoretical foundation for Hereniko and Wilson's *Inside Out*. The authors use this titular term to highlight its two connotations. First, they note that it works against the notion of “blood-based ‘cultural insiderism,’” as an inextricable hybridity already exists in the Pacific where the “‘outside’ is already very much ‘inside’” (2). However, the term also implies a certain type of knowledge. To know something “inside out” is “to know [it] intimately and in struggle,” to tell one's own story rather than having someone from the outside tell it (3). While Hereniko and Wilson's work encompasses literature from various islands in the Pacific, their theory is especially fitting for the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, as one of its aims is to promote Native Hawaiian authors. As O.A. Bushnell, a Hawaiian novelist, states in a purposeful use of pidgin English, “And when there aren't any more novels being produced by novelists in Hawai'i, we goin' be sad and sorry. Because all those outsiders coming...to tell us about ourselves. Instead of ourselves, from inside, telling us about ourselves” (qtd in Hereniko and Wilson 11).

However, Mountford argues for a new application of “rhetorical space” to “the effect of physical spaces on a communicative event” (41-42). Although words have histories, Michel Foucault's statement that “space itself has a history” is equally valid (qtd in Mountford 41). Villa works within this definition of space in *Barrio-Logos*, linking

the geographical segregation of the Chicano/a community to its resistant rhetoric. He notes how Chicano/a artists incorporate aspects of their space, especially those that represent their marginalization such as the freeway and bridge pillars, into their art, as either canvas or motif. These artists resist “social death” by utilizing the very elements of their physical space which were intended for marginalization. As an ethnicity that has been geographically segregated in its own homeland, in a territory that has been military occupied and now Americanized, Native Hawaiian artists have also embraced the rhetoric of space in their work.

One element of Hawaiian independence rhetoric which has already been discussed supports Mountford’s definition of “rhetorical space,” that of nature and the islands themselves. It is rare to encounter rhetoric from this movement that does not use the motif of land, both in its current occupied state and in its connection to Native Hawaiian theology. Returning to Trask’s introduction to *From a Native Daughter*, it is clear that theological beliefs connect Native Hawaiians to the Hawaiian Islands. In Hawaiian mythos, Papa and Wākea, the earth and sky, had two children, the ancestor to all Native Hawaiians and Haloa, the son who was stillborn and reborn as kalo, the taro plant (Ontai 156-7). The land is mother, the sky father, the flora brother. Hence, mention of the islands, or the gods who inhabit them, allows for reassertion of the Native Hawaiians as spiritually and genealogically connected to them. When Haugen writes that “We should care for the land/ We should support the children,” he is portraying these notions as one and the same. Caring for the land is synonymous to caring for the children.

However, the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movements is just as likely to mention freeways and traffic as the natural elements of the land. Because freeways were

constructed in the 1950’s to connect the military bases on Oahu, the freeways represent military occupation to the Native Hawaiians. Although the freeways are now used by military personnel, Hawaiian residents, and tourists alike, they are most heavily congested in the areas of Honolulu and Waikiki, thereby allowing the freeway to have a double connotation of military occupation and tourism as prostitution. Therefore, the freeway is often seen in the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement as indicator of the effect of space.

Kamakawiwo’ole’s cover of “Hawai’i ‘78” serves as an exemplar of Native Hawaiian use of “rhetorical space.” Although originally recorded in 1978, Kamakawiwo’ole’s interpretation is by far the most well-known and most associated with the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. The song wonders how the king and queen would feel if they returned to Hawaii in its current state, with its “modern city life” and “condominiums” (18, 24). In its lament, both Native Hawaiian motifs of “rhetorical space” are seen.

First, the song is written and performed from an insider perspective, a Native Hawaiian perspective, but one that has also lived with the influence of “outsiders.” Kamakawiwo’ole, as a Native Hawaiian born in Honolulu after Hawaii became a state, has lived the “inside out,” hybrid experience, as opposed to a Native Hawaiian that might live on the islands of Molokai or Ni’ihau. Kamakawiwo’ole also references the interconnectedness between the land and the Native Hawaiians. He sings, “Cry for the gods, cry for the people/ cry for the lands” (13-14), indicating that the survival of the gods, people, and land are inextricably linked. He makes a similar move when he changes the line, “Our people are in great, great danger now” in the first verse to “Our land is in great, great danger now” in the second (9, 21). However, it is the song’s reference to the modern

freeways that overwhelms the song. In addition to naming the “traffic lights” as a source of the king and queen’s sadness, he sings, “Could you just imagine if they were around/ and saw highways on their sacred grounds” (17, 4-5). It is this traffic, these freeways, that highlight the rhetorical space of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement—traffic that is a symptom of the orientalized culture of the Native Hawaiians marketed to tourists as authentic ethnicity, and freeways that symbolize not only the military overthrow of their nation but their current geographic segregation.

“Pathos Oriented Hearing”: Reclaiming Iz for the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement

Iliia Beniamina, Kamakawiwo'ole's cousin, remembers the performer as an activist for the movement of Hawaiian independence. She recalls that he sought out the song, “E Ala E,” or “wake up,” as a way to bring its message to the Native Hawaiian people. “He was telling the Hawaiians, ‘Wake up, we’re sleeping and as we’re sleeping, our land is slowly being eroded to foreigners’ (‘IZ’). Similarly, the author Margaret Jolly recalls how she first discovered the ideas of nationalism and sovereignty in the Pacific: “I heard many expressions of nationalist passions in English and Hawaiian through listening to compact discs by artists like the late Israel Kamakawiwo'ole” (145). Inside the movement, inside Hawaii, Kamakawiwo'ole is known as a voice calling for sovereignty.

However, outside, mainstream American culture is guilty of what Jon Cruz calls “instrumental hearing.” In *Culture on the Margins* (1999), Cruz defines three types of hearing: “incidental hearing” engaged by those who merely stumble upon a sound; “instrumental hearing” involving “attempts by overseers to use music for nonmusical pur-

poses;” and “pathos-oriented hearing” or the “humanistic turn” to make meaning (43). As Cruz's work centers on uncovering how slave owners heard black music before the abolitionist movement, his examples of “instrumental hearing” reflect the prominent inclination to view music as a means to increase the value of the slave as a commodity and source of production. While the music itself was considered insignificant, and the words meaningless, slave holders believed that when slaves sang up-tempo songs, they worked faster, increasing productivity. It was also understood that a slave who could sing and dance would garner a higher price than one who did not have the skills to entertain his/her new masters. Hence, “instrumental hearing” means hearing black music as a source of revenue that can only be understood as it is being repurposed away from the song's intent.

In examining how Kamakawiwo'ole's medley of “Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” has been sanitized and commodified, it is clear that it has fallen victim to “instrumental hearing.” The lyrics and performance of the song are not heard in and of themselves. Instead, the song has been repurposed to sell the constructed image of Hawaiian paradise to American consumers. Any singularity or message of sovereignty, by both Kamakawiwo'ole and the song, are denied, as only non-threatening music garners the greatest sales.

However, a re-examination of “Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” will allow for those outside the Hawaiian sovereignty movement to get a few steps closer to “pathos-oriented hearing.” A closer look indicates that the song uses many of the rhetorical acts of resistance that are emblematic of the movement for independence. First he engages in “rhetorical sovereignty” by performing the song with an acoustic ‘uke-

lele, the quintessential Hawaiian instrument. No other instrument creates as authentic of a Hawaiian sound as the 'ukelele, and by choosing to perform this song with only that instrument, Kamakawiwo'ole defines the mode of the conversation.

Similarly, his playfulness with the lyrics also asserts “rhetorical sovereignty.” Since Hawaiian poetry was traditionally orature, or not in written form, precise language is not valued. Instead, wording and phrasing often change in performance. Here, Kamakawiwo'ole combines three separate stanzas to create the following: “Somewhere over the rainbow/ Bluebirds fly/ And the dreams that you dream of/ Dreams really do come true” (4-7). He also changes the phrase “Away above the chimney top/ That’s where you’ll find me” to “High above the chiminey top/ That’s where you’ll find me” (11-12). Notice here that he not only changes a word, but also uses pidgin English to pronounce “chimney” as “chiminey.” Finally, he engages in vast repetition, mixing up phrases from his own constructed verses, in a method harkening back to the *keiki* chants employed by Native Hawaiians for centuries. As “rhetorical sovereignty” involves choices made in language, mode, and genre, it is clear that Kamakawiwo'ole’s medley works towards that aim.

However, the song also demonstrates an understanding of “rhetorical space.” Kamakawiwo'ole chooses to merge verses from two songs, allowing the lyrics of both to speak to each other. While Judy Garland’s version of “Somewhere over the Rainbow” allows her to dream of a place elsewhere, over the rainbow, where her dreams could come true, Kamakawiwo'ole’s interpretation shows that this place is Hawai’i. Louis Armstrong’s “What a Wonderful World” depicts a space of natural beauty and its connectedness with humans. This space of “trees of green” and “skies of blue” represent Kamakawiwo'ole’s

Hawai’i, with the “colors of the rainbow” connecting both the sky and the “faces of the people passing by.” His rhetoric, the choice to merge these two songs together, is shaped by the space of Hawai’i and the Native Hawaiian belief in a familial relationship between the Islands and its inhabitants. Kamakawiwo'ole’s version is a song for sovereignty. What he envisions “over the rainbow” is a sovereign Hawai’i, where a natural balance can be restored without outside influence and control.

Conclusion

“Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” is not merely a medley that connotes Hawaiiana. Although it has been sanitized through its association with tourism and a romanticized cultural past, the song itself resists that type of classification. When placed within Kamakawiwo'ole’s larger body of work and alongside that of other voices calling for sovereignty, it is clear that the song is an anthem for the Native Hawaiian independence movement--using a form of resistance rhetoric that claims both “rhetorical sovereignty” and sovereignty for his people. While the refusal to hear much of the poetry of this movement, including Kamakawiwo'ole’s other songs, is indicative of the attempts to deny this movement its voice, the repurposing of this medley is perhaps the greatest example of mainstream American culture’s role in enacting “social death” against the Native Hawaiian.

Although admittedly this project has been limited in scope, when Kamakawiwo'ole’s work is examined alongside the other voices of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, the singularity of the Native Hawaiian ethnicity becomes clear. Although their culture has been orientalized and “othered” in relation to mainstream American culture, this singu-

larity remains. The rhetoric of the movement indicates a unique epistemic world view, while also demonstrating a resistance to their social, economic, and geographic segregation. Incorporating the theories of “rhetoric as resistance,” “rhetorical sovereignty,” and “rhetorical space” allows those of us outside the movement to more clearly hear the voices from inside. While there is much work left to be done in defining the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty, examinations like this one help to allow those voices of resistance against the “social death” of the Native Hawaiian people to be heard.

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Poonā yétum: Shatter Justice Barriers through Forgiving¹

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Introduction

Considered the outcome of a resolved conflict, forgiveness is one of the most conflicted. Providing a way for victims to move on with their lives, forgiveness is a basic indication that a victim has healed from crime. Acquiring forgiveness can produce some incredible results, among them, increased feelings of wellbeing, reduced anxiety, improved recovery, positive self-esteem, and greater outlook on life. This article considers an array of Indigenous and non-Indigenous views on forgiveness.

Empathy, Forgiveness, and the Politics of Restorative Justice

While the debate around the definition of forgiveness shows little sign of reaching consensus (Worthington, 1998), there is research evidence pointing toward the necessity of empathy as a necessary underlying psychological constituent of the process (Doyle, 1999; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Worthington, 1998). For Hoffman (2000), "empathy is the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social

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life possible” (p. 3). In other words, empathy has to do with the ability to exercise concern for another’s situation.

Without empathy it is questionable whether forgiveness is truly possible. This is problematic. Why? Because research has shown that the way we respond to others who have wronged us can significantly affect our health (McCullough, Sandage, & Worthington, 1997; McCullough, & Worthington, 1994; Thoresen, Harris, & Lusking, 1999). Unforgiving responses to others (i.e., anger, blame, and hostility) are considered health eroding, whereas forgiving responses (i.e., empathizing) are thought to be health enhancing. For example, hostility has been linked to coronary heart disease (Miller, Smith, Turner, Guijarro, & Hallet, 1996), and Kaplan (1992) has shown that reductions in hostility levels correlate to reductions in coronary problems.

If justice is to be considered a social construct (Polizzi, 2011), understanding restorative justice through the acceptance of Marshall’s (1999: 5) contention that it is “a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future” is somewhat simplistic. Why? Because on the heels of such a contention, one may easily follow Fisk’s (1993: 1) basic definition of justice, one based upon problem solving, as “a way out of a morass of conflicting claims.” If such is the case, two results may be expected. First, as justice is based on finding a way out of conflicting claims, the process can be, and probably is, adversarial. Second, as the response, restorative or otherwise, commences after an offense, the trigger for the said response will, in all likelihood, lie within the procedural residue of the laying of a criminal charge. This is precisely the state of affairs

that led Pavlich (2005) to conclude that restorative justice is too dependent on criminal justice reasoning.

This situation appears firmly rooted within the bedrock philosophy of restorative justice. In 1990, Howard Zehr called for a paradigm shift in *Changing Lenses*. Zehr’s project was grounded within a call to shift away from a punitive worldview toward a restorative one, by drawing a series of opposites between the retributive and restorative camps. While Zehr was attempting to show the ‘community’ bent of restorative justice, the end result was that restorative justice was defined in terms of what it is not. For Pavlich (2005), this definition, by negation, ended up allowing the criminal justice system, precisely because restorative justice uses it as its reference point, to set the terms of the debate.

The logical way out of such a conundrum is to cease focusing upon crime, an offense, as the trigger for a restorative response. Taking Habermas’ (1990) lead, we note, as did Polizzi, that justice is political. The consequences of this are twofold. First, we argue, strongly, that restorative justice must be taken as a political project, as a cultural movement working toward social change. Second, rather than pinning our reference to the ever-present forces of power and domination, which work to maintain and entrench the current state of affairs, (the status quo by any other name), we will look toward those to whom injustice is directed for guidance.

Such thinking leads Sharpe (2004) to identify ‘injustice’ as the proper trigger for a restorative justice initiative. How do we discern injustice? Derrida (1992) points toward deconstruction, the taking apart our common-sense views, as a way to expose how the

status quo is a reflection of the economic and political interests of the dominant forces in society. For Derrida, justice enters into the equation when we have, as our concern, the humanity of the other. Derrida is an anticipation (almost ten years before) of our earlier discussion with Hoffman concerning empathy.

To this end, it is noted that Turiel (2002: 5) observed that justice entails “equal respect for persons along with freedom from oppression as the standards by which individuals and society should be guided.” Cone (1975), a well-known African American theologian, echoed the fact that justice entails freedom from oppression. King (1963: 3) famously stated that “there is a tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depth of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.” The tension King was referring to was the demand by the oppressed for justice; that is, freedom from oppression.

Following this vein, Braithwaite (2003) offers a convincing argument that “providing social support to develop human capabilities to the full is one particularly indispensable principle [of restorative justice] because it marks the need for a consideration of transforming as well as restoring or healing values” (p. 12). To bring this discussion back around to restorative justice’s transformative capacity, restorative justice must be examined not as a restorative response to an offence committed, but as a healing endeavour to an injustice.

Poonā yétum and the Victim

The Swampy Cree of northern Manitoba have an expression to convey forgiveness; *poonā*

yétum means to forgive someone. In the n-dialect of the Omushdegowuk (Swampy Cree) language, *poonā yétum* refers loosely to not thinking about the offense anymore. *Poonā yétum* can be interpreted as a situation that has resulted when a resolved conflict has allowed someone to achieve healing (Hansen & Antsanen, 2012). Granting forgiveness has empathy at its core (McCullough et al, 1997). Forgiveness has nothing to do with forgetting (Allender, 1999). Forgiveness allows for holding the offender responsible for transgressions, and does not involve denying, minimizing or condoning behaviour (Enright & Coyle, 1998). Forgiveness is about letting go of negative feeling (Thoresen, Lusking, & Harris, 1998): it is about

Letting go of the power the offense and offender have over a person. It means no longer letting that offense and offender dominate... Real forgiveness, then, is an act of empowerment and healing. It allows one to move from victim to survivor (Zehr, 1995: 47).

As discussed, forgiveness, at least a forgiveness that leads to healing, has to be seen as being contingent upon empathy; that spark of human concern for another (Hoffman, 2000). *Omushkegowuk* restorative justice has such concern as an underlying philosophy.

The Praxis of Omushkegowuk Restorative Justice and Poonā yétum

If Restorative Justice is a political enterprise, the people of Opaskwayak can experience the process as either a political project working toward social change (decolonization) or as an extension of colonialism working to maintain the current state of affairs as presently defined by First Nation and Métis marginalization (Bourassa, 2011).

The *Opaskwyak* Justice Committee situated on the reserve across the north side of the Saskatchewan River adjacent from the town of The Pas, Manitoba suggests that First Nations are utilizing Restorative Justice as a political and decolonizing project.

Within the context of healing, restorative justice harmonizes with the holistic approach of traditional Indigenous teachings. The force of justice for Indigenous people has been principally that of communal efforts for healing and restoration (Johnstone, 2002; Ross, 1996; Weitcampe, 1999; Monture-Agnus, 1995). Consciousness of restorative justice is reflected in the stories elders described in the work of Hansen & Charlton (2013). Restorative justice, for these elders, comprised the notions of reconciliation, restoration, accountability, responsibility, community involvement, balance, and an explicit focus on healing. Further, such notions are grounded within action.

According to Cree elder John Martin, Indigenous understanding of philosophy is derived from praxis. Such praxis is based upon the understanding, as expressed by Dennis Thorne, another Cree elder, that *Omushkegowuk* justice must emphasize healing not punishment (Hansen & Charlton, 2013). This understanding is indicative of an empathetic response. *Omushkegowuk* justice is based upon a healing philosophy grounded upon, and within, a concern for others.

Such response is community building, not dividing, and is therefore pro-social. In relating her understanding of Cree justice, elder Stella Neff utilized the Cree word *poonā yétum* to describe the ability for forgive. For Stella Neff, “*No more thinking about it is what poonā yétum means. After the conflict has been resolved... you’re not thinking about it... but if you keep thinking about it, then it’s not resolved*” (Hansen & Charlton, 2012: 102).

Stella Neff, a Cree elder from northern Manitoba, is talking about the same concept that Zehr, a Western academic from Harrisonburg Pennsylvania, is. Both are discussing a process that allows the victim to put an offense behind them, and thus a process that empowers them. As Hansen & Charlton (2013: 151) note, “this does not mean that we just forget about wrongdoing. It means that when we heal, we are able to forget about our wounds). Healing from our wounds has three, (victim-offender-community) dimensions.

Victims

Strang & Sherman (2003) note that while claims abound pertaining to victim needs in regard to retribution, there is strong evidence suggesting the contrary. Zedner (2002) was able to report, after extensive research, that victims are not overly punitive. In fact, Strang & Sherman (2003: 18) note that, “large proportions of crime victims surveyed are willing to consider alternatives to imprisonment for their offenders if they can play a part in the way their case is handled.” With such evidence in hand, one could argue that calls for retribution are self-serving for the powers-that-be. It may serve us all well to remember New Zealand theologian Christopher Marshall’s (2003: 2) quip: “Can anyone imagine a political party going on the *hustings*² with a promise to reduce prison populations?” Calls for retribution may be more about those we elect, and those we employ to deal with crime, showing us they are doing something about the problem when in fact they are making things worse.

Hansen (2013) and Hansen & Charlton (2013) note that *Omushkegowuk* justice

2. **Emphasis added.**

emphasizes healing not punishment. Stella Neff (Hansen, 2013: 138) notes how traditional Cree values were passed on in regard to misbehaviour.

We didn't get the stick, or a strap like we got in school. It was by a gentle teaching. Values were passed on like respect and love for the land and honesty and good behaviour... so the values were priceless for me and I'm so sorry that the system is gone.

Such thinking is indicative of empathy and interaction between the parties when it comes to finding a solution. Within the traditional *Omushkegowuk* understanding of justice, victims most certainly did not “represent footnotes to the crime” as Zehr notes they do in State run justice (Zehr, 1995: 31).

Importantly, Stella Neff noted that she is sorry that the traditional understanding of *Omushkegowuk* justice has been co-opted by retribution. First Nations victims' problematic experience of justice, at the hands of the State, can in part be explained by their un-involvement in the process/outcome. Elder John Martin explains it this way:

Now we call in the RCMP. We no longer take that responsibility to find out why that person's like that. At one time justice was based on healing and the Cree used that process. Our peacemaking circles became no longer viable for us because we become dependent on the system...

As we noted earlier, if victims are not able to put the offense behind them, they are hampered in their ability to move on. *Poonā yétum*, for First Nation victims, may in fact reside just beyond their fingertips when justice is run through State institutions.

Offenders

State run criminal justice is largely an adversarial process. As Fisk noted, above, such a system may well produce a situation that leads to a winner-looser dichotomy. This situation led Zehr (1995: 33) to observe that throughout the criminal justice process, an offenders'... “primary focus has been on his own situation and future.” Another expected result will be that throughout the process, both offender and victim have been separated. If the offender comes through the process as victor, then the victim receives little, or nothing, out of the deal; other than the entrenchment of difference. If the offender is found guilty, and subjected to punishment without accepting accountability, then their sentence will likely “further strip away his sense of worth and autonomy, leaving him with even fewer resources for obtaining a sense of worth and autonomy in legitimate ways” (Zehr, 1995: 36).

Downey & Feldman (1996:1327) note, “[t]he desire to achieve acceptance and to avoid rejection is widely acknowledged to be a central human motive.” Research pertaining to apprehensive anticipation of prejudice, by Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, & Pietrzak (2002), found that both direct and vicarious experiences of exclusion might lead people to anxiously anticipate that they will be similarly treated in new contexts where the possibility of such treatment exists. Responses to perceived rejection have been found to include hostility, dejection, emotional withdrawal and jealousy (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Medical research, utilizing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has shown that social rejection results in the activation of similar brain regions to those triggered by physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Not

only is society producing angry, disengaged individuals who are mentally and physically hurting, the deleterious results of our rejection continues to resonate long after each interaction and in a cumulative fashion (Baldwin, 2005).

Community

It has been said of Indigenous justice that crime is a community matter that should be centered on delivering the best results possible while also improving the healing capacity of both the victim and offender. Indigenous models of justice puts focus on community inclusion to drive healing. For example, “The purpose of a justice system in an Aboriginal society is to restore the peace and equilibrium within the community, and to reconcile the accused with his or her own conscience and with the individual or family who has been wronged” (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, 1999: 22. Cited in Hansen, 2013). As we have seen, from our discussion pertaining to offenders, this is not the experience First Nation individuals receive at the hand of State run criminal justice.

Society’s ‘war on crime’ has seen government propaganda, undergirded by a bedrock commitment to the punitive philosophy of deterrence, foster a political environment that has created a culture of fear, which, in the end, has created an ever increasing call for tougher sanctions. Dominant society is punitive, and its proclivity for vindictiveness has been well captured by Albany Law School’s, James Campbell Matthews Distinguished Professor of Jurisprudence, Anthony Paul Farley (2002: 1494), who states:

We take monstrous pleasure in creating monsters. Our monsters, to the

surprise of no one, behave monstrously. For this, their monstrous behaviour, they are monstrously punished... We take a monstrous pleasure in punishing our monsters. Our punishments, our pleasures, create our monsters – and so it goes, we the people [the state] versus them.

Farley suggests that buried deep beneath law and procedure, the criminal justice system is a human process predicated upon a purpose of social control, punishment and the creation of the other in order to comfortably distance the middle and upper classes from fear, the unknown, and perhaps a deeper social responsibility for their own individual and collective actions. The investable side effect of such is that the criminal justice system, as an instrument of control, cannot help but promote negative relations. As Hansen maintains:

The force of justice for the Cree has been principally that of making reparations, healing and capacity for *poonā yétum*, to forgive. However, the criminal justice system has long suppressed the reality of that approach. Indigenous justice systems have been dismissed or marginalized while our overrepresentation in the prisons increases (2012: 15).

Agenw (1992) argues that these negative relations with others can lead to pessimistic emotions and encourage some type of coping. That coping is more likely to be criminal when the strains are severe, seen as unjust, and are linked with anger.

Cree elder Stella Neff (Hansen, 2013: 167) speaks to this issue when she talks about the First Nation reaction to the residential schools, and by extension, society’s reaction to

First Nation communities.

When the residential schools took the children away that had an impact on our people... When that happened it was a disaster... because when they lost their children that's when they started fighting. The angry aggression was a disaster for our community. The men started going to jail...

The repercussions for First Nation communities were excruciatingly painful. Life without the children was so empty and depressing, that it should not be surprising that First Nations reacted badly, (as witnessed by the levels of violence and addiction issues) to the State's attempt at cultural genocide. Rather than accepting responsibility and working toward a solution, the State historically relied upon incarcerating the problem. Today, Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in the prisons and jails based on this colonial project (Hansen & Charlton, 2013; CFNMP, 2004; Hansen, 2012; Comack, 2012). The sociologists Wotherspoon & Hansen note that, "Indigenous populations have a high degree of being excluded with respect to virtually every dimension around which social inclusion and exclusion is considered significant" (2013: 30). Since the colonization of the Indigenous world most Indigenous peoples have experienced some form of social exclusion. Wotherspoon & Hansen observe:

The phenomenon of over-representation by Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, which has for several decades been the focus of periodic inquiries and reports by governments and other agencies in Canada, offers striking evidence of that exclusion... There is extensive evidence of how discourses of colonialism, racism and social exclusion have been exhibited

by the police, courts and others in the process of interpreting Indigeneity in accordance with racial constructs (2013: 30).

It is important to understand that like the concept of 'race' the criminal justice is a social construct. The implication here is two-fold. The dominant society is collectively showing signs of being caught up in the fear that has been produced from government propaganda, which has resulted in an actuarial risk assessment of the other, while, research suggests that this necessarily is not the case when, on the individual level, that fear of the unknown other has been satisfied.

Both Strang & Sherman (2003) along with Zedner (2002) note that repeated polls measuring public attitude toward the criminal justice system reveal widespread dissatisfaction. Drawing upon research conducted by Francis Cullen et al (2000), Strang & Sherman (2003) note that, when presented with options, the public is much more supportive of treatment and supervision than they are of incarceration.

On the whole, it appears that, at the individual and community levels, First Nation's and the general public have common ground. Both wish to get past the offense and be able to carry on with their lives. While Strang & Sherman (2003) note that this involves a system which allows individuals and community to experience the following five things: (i) information, (ii) participation, (iii) emotional restoration (e.g., an apology), (iv) material reparation, and (v) fairness and respect. Stella Neff finds these experiences in the concept of *poonā yétum*.

Conclusion

Forgiveness may not be a popular justice idea, but it does play a key role in the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health of human beings. *Poonā yétum*, or forgiveness, can support a healthy state of mind as a way of healing from crime. One mechanism by which forgiveness improves the wellbeing of victims is by increasing the activity of moving on with life rather than entrenching the effects of the harm in their daily lives. The Swampy Cree believe that *poonā yétum* can be particularly be effective at healing from damage specifically caused by wrongful behaviour or crime. Unlike retribution and punishment, one can experience the healing effects of *poonā yétum* immediately upon embracing it. If increased positive outlook on life is what you're looking for, then try to achieve *poonā yétum*. This is what the Swampy Cree peoples have did in the past, and this is what we should also continue to do if we want to improve our future and live a life of peace. The last word comes from Kahente Horn Miller (2010) a Mohawk scholar, who in her discussion of the meaning of the Warrior Flag states:

The Indigenous profile serves as a reminder to the men of their path in life, their responsibilities to their clan, community and nation enacted through daily life, ceremonies and community protection. Though commonly known as 'warriors', the male role in Indigenous societies is much more comprehensive than the English term implies. *Rotiskenrakete* the word from the Mohawk language that is translated into English as 'warrior' has a meaning that might more literally be translated as 'he is carrying the burden of peace'.

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Sue Matheson

Critical Compassion: The Reader as Witness in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*¹

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In Maria Campbell's autobiography, *Halfbreed*, the narrator often speaks directly to the reader, asking questions and provoking a dialogue with the text. While some critics have indicated that Campbell intends to enact an "explicitly didactic purpose" towards potential white readers (Keahey 101), and others assert that she hopes to inspire and comfort Indigenous readers (Episkenew), I would suggest that this direct address in fact establishes Campbell's story as testimony, and therefore figures the reader as a witness to the victories, tragedies, hopes, and injustices that Campbell experiences as a Metis woman in Canada. As a witness, the reader bears the responsibility of creating meaning in the text, which I will argue is crucial in determining the effectiveness of Campbell's autobiography. Of course, all readers will react to and engage with the text differently, but I suggest that investing readers with the responsibility of witnessing can encourage particular behaviours and promote certain outcomes in the reading process. There are three aspects to the act of witnessing: an affective response, an intellectual engagement, and an ethical responsibility to the narrative and its narrator. Each of these necessitates

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the others, and can facilitate a reading in which the witness engages in a dialogue with the testimony, and allows her politics, ethics, and actions to be influenced by it. To establish such a dialogue, Campbell connects to her witness emotionally, encouraging the reader to identify with the narrator as well as other characters in the text, and to exercise compassion and empathy through these connections. However, one must also problematize an exclusively emotional response to the text, in that it can easily overlook the complexities of context, racial difference, or one's own privilege. As such, critical self-reflection is necessary to acknowledge one's prejudice and understand how it influences a reading of the autobiography. In fact, Campbell models the kind of compassionate and critical responses she hopes to find in a witness, and indicates that the appropriate affective and intellectual reading of the text can provoke a sense of ethical responsibility to the narrative and its narrator, allowing the autobiography to fulfill its purpose of not only testifying "what it is like" to be Metis in Canada, but also transforming the witness and promoting action. As such, reading *Halfbreed* as a witness to Campbell's testimony creates a productive reading practice in which the autobiography achieves its aims: to communicate an alternative to the dominant narratives in Canadian history, and to incite emotion, thought, and action in the engaged reader.

First, Campbell establishes her autobiography as a counter-narrative to the discourse of Canadian history. In doing so, she portrays the particular experience of the Metis in Canada, but also establishes a point of common interest with the reader. From the beginning of *Halfbreed*, she clearly addresses her intended audience, stating "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want

to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams" (Campbell 8). The emphasis on the reader, "you," is noteworthy here, in that it sets her apart from the narrator, indicating that Campbell will provide a perspective on life in Canada to which the reader may not otherwise have access. However, Campbell also refers to Canada as "our" country, aligning herself to some extent with the Canadian reader as she presents this alternate history. Campbell presents her memoir as "what it was like . . . what it is still like," asserting the reality of the life she writes and challenging the reader to see both the historical truth and the present reality of the Metis people (13). She details the early lives of the Metis as hunters and fur-traders, as well as the intrusion of white settlers and resulting disruption of Metis economics, government, and traditions. According to Campbell, because the Metis people found that their "way of life" was suddenly "a part of Canada's past," their future became one of "poverty" and "shame" (13). Christine Crowe indicates that when an "Aboriginal auto-biographer makes a truth-claim, the implicit question that follows that claim - "Do you believe me?" - creates a critical dialogic site between the author/narrator and the reader within specific historical and political contexts" (190). In Campbell's text, the implicit "Do you believe me?" is followed by explicit direct addresses and questions to the reader, which reinforce and maintain this dialogue. Additionally, the fact that Campbell opens her narrative with a historical account of her people situates it within a greater narrative, suggesting that it is just as historically accurate, significant, and powerful as anything that "the history books say" (Campbell 11). I would indicate that, in Campbell's efforts to define her story as taking place outside of the dominant Canadian discourse, while also aligning herself with the reader as a fellow Canadian, she establishes the text as what A.E. Janetta calls a

site of both “dialogue and difference” (Jannetta 63). Campbell engages the reader in her narrative through points of comparison, while also specifying that this text will challenge the assumptions of the prevailing national narrative, creating alignment with the reader while also maintaining difference.

The creation of both unity and distance between reader and narrator contributes to the witness-testimony dynamic, as it is clear that the reader, while certainly apart from the events testified to, also has a stake in the narrative. As Dori Laub indicates in her book *Testimony*, which addresses the position of the witness in Holocaust studies, the role of the reader or listener is necessary for the testimony to succeed; there needs to be “a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other - the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude” (71). For *Halfbreed* to satisfy its purpose, the reader must act as a witness to the events and conditions described in the text, and be emotionally involved in the testimony: “the listener has to feel the victim’s victories, defeats, and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony” (58). This degree of participation in the traumatic narrative will create for the reader an “ethical imperative” to engage with and even experience “part of the original trauma, albeit in a secondary manner” (Rak 56). By directly addressing the reader, asking questions, and trusting the witness with personal, painful details, Campbell asserts that her work is not a monologue, but a dialogue in which she expects the reader to participate. It is important to note, however, that the witness also “stands at a distance” from the events represented in the text (Bernard-Donals and Glazjer 15), and she must be aware of this distance so as to avoid falsely

identifying with the narrator of the testimony. Therefore, Campbell provides cues along the way for the witness, to promote an understanding of the connections being made, as well as the moments at which the reader must be conscious of her distance. Campbell’s autobiography provides opportunities for the reader to recognize shared interests and develop an intimacy with the narrator, but also cultivates awareness of where she does not or cannot align with the perspective of the Metis narrator.

The witness-testimony framework places significant responsibility on the reader to form a connection with the text, just as the writer must facilitate that connection. Laub asserts that there are three levels of witnessing: “the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (75). I would suggest that, in the narrator-reader dynamic of Campbell’s autobiography, the reader acts as the second form of witness, as she is involved “not in the events, but in the account given of them” (76); in her position as listener, she is required to support and bring to life the narrator’s testimony. As Jo-Ann Episknew indicates in *Taking Back Our Spirits*, Indigenous autobiography such as *Halfbreed* works “on a moral level” by “inspiring empathy in its readers and by appealing to their sense of justice” (75). The emotional connection that Episknew refers to will establish the necessary intimacy between narrator and reader, and encourage the witness to participate in a dialogue with the text through her own emotional responses. The reader should also, however, enact witnessing on the third level, as witness to the “process of witnessing itself,” to “realize [the] dimensions” of the testimony and to “reflect on . . . memories as they are spoken, so as to reassert the veracity

of the past and build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present-day life” (Laub 76). This third level is particularly important in that Canadian history is called into question and rewritten as Campbell presents the events of the Red River Rebellion from the perspective of the Metis. She provides contextual details and the motivation of her people, “decolonizing the history of the colonial regime and, by extension, the national collective myth” of Canada (Episkenew 79). She also emphasizes the contemporary circumstances of the Metis, providing an opportunity for her witness to reflect on the social and political conditions that disenfranchise Campbell’s people so as to “build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present-day life” (Laub 76). As a witness, the reader will participate in Campbell’s testimony, but by practicing awareness of her role in this process, she will complete the important work of reflecting thoughtfully to develop a sense of responsibility to the text.

Having established the three fundamental responsibilities of the witness, one must investigate how Campbell facilitates both emotional connection and critical engagement with the text in order to develop in the reader an ethical motivation to effect change. First, Campbell appeals to the reader on an affective level, provoking emotions such as empathy or compassion in her narrative. Early in the text, Campbell frequently addresses the reader directly, inviting her to witness life within a Metis home and community. Describing her childhood home in Chapter 3, for example, Campbell begins with what is essentially an invitation into the text: “I should tell you now about our home before I go any further” (19). She then details the colourful “braided rugs,” the “special smell,” and the “kitchen and living room . . . combined into one of the most beautiful rooms” she has

ever seen (19, 20). Though it is clear that the family lives in poverty, this warm, intimate description of a place that is dear to the narrator reinforces her connection to the reader, who is invited into a space that is sacred to the narrator, implying trust and closeness between Campbell and the witness. In addition, she also provides opportunities for the reader to identify with her experience through small details and common childhood adventures. In “But Enough about Me, What do You Think of my Memoir?,” Nancy K. Miller suggests that autobiography establishes a “relational mode” between writers and their readers that “creates identifications . . . conscious or unconscious, across a broad spectrum of so-called personal experience” (Miller). In one childhood anecdote, Campbell states “like many other kids, I ran away from home,” providing an opportunity for the reader to draw a parallel to her own life before reading the rest of the anecdote, which is both humorous and indicative of the care of her family and community. Such opportunities for identification also address more serious subjects, such as the poverty and disenfranchisement of her people. Later in the autobiography, after her father’s involvement in Metis politics ends in frustration, Campbell details the detrimental effect that this disappointment has on her entire family and asks “Have you ever watched a man die inside?” (68). Here, she asks the reader a direct question, provoking a dialogue in which the reader must consider her own experience as well as her potential complicity in the events that led to the devastation of Campbell’s father. Again, the inclusion of this very personal detail establishes a point of connection that has the potential to elicit an emotional response or even a point of identification. The witness to this event can certainly recognize and perhaps even understand the pain that a child might feel at seeing her father so disheartened. By providing such opportunities for empathetic connection

and identification for the reader, Campbell facilitates the project of witnessing for the reader.

Though the process of identification is important in establishing a connection between witness and narrator, it can also sometimes work to emphasize the differences between the two. For example, when Maria is fourteen, she befriends a young white girl named Karen, with whom she becomes very close. I would suggest that, for a potential white and/or middle-class reader, Karen provides an opportunity for the witness to identify with someone other than Maria in the narrative. Campbell states that “Karen was the first person that [she] ever confided in,” and that her friend understood the “fears and poverty” of her family and “helped . . . when she could” (82), a parallel to the intimacy, empathy, and kindness of Campbell’s reader. She fondly remembers sharing her dreams with Karen, but realizes that these dreams were “so different from each other’s”; while Karen “admires” and romanticizes the poverty in which the Campbells live, Maria sees that Karen takes “her lovely home for granted” and fervently wishes to some day be able to “finish school and take [her] family away to the city,” things that, for Karen, are unquestioned (83). In this instance, Campbell directly refers to the privilege of her white friend and the advantages it will bring in her future, as well as Karen’s apparent ignorance of this privilege. For a white settler reader, this is an opportunity to draw parallels between her own life and Karen’s, and therefore to reflect upon the text to develop an understanding of how her own privilege has come at the expense of others, and how this might affect her reading process. In such an instance, the emotions that a reader will experience in identifying with Karen might not be positive, but the event of

witnessing demands that the witness not “simply recognize the event but . . . confront it” (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 12). Identifying with Karen in this instance forces the witness to confront her feelings of guilt and and sadness at her complicity in the colonial structures that so severely oppress Campbell’s family and community and, as Bernard-Donals and Glejzer indicate, this is a necessary process if the the witness is to fulfill her responsibility to the text.

A reader-as-witness structure provides the possibility for an affective reaction to the text; the reader can identify and empathize with the protagonist or with other characters in the narrative, cultivating emotions of compassion, happiness, frustration, pity, and guilt. However, an exclusively emotional response in the reader could potentially be problematic in that it may not adequately acknowledge the effects of racial difference that are unavoidable if the reader is, in fact, a white reader, as some suggest Campbell intended. According to Julie Watson and Sidonie Smith, “the axes of the subject’s identifications and experiences are multiple, because locations in gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality complicate one another . . . [and] do [not] overlap neatly or entirely” (xiv). In other words, the perspectives of both narrator and reader are complicated by various factors, and the reader must be aware of these complications rather than assuming that she fully comprehends or empathizes with the testified experience of the narrator. For example, some readers may identify with Maria on the basis of gender, responding emotionally to the challenges of motherhood, femininity, vulnerability, and sexism in their reading. However, one cannot assume an “undifferentiated (read normatively white) global “sisterhood,”” and therefore a white female reader can only identify with Maria

to a certain extent (Watson and Smith xv). Alternatively, as Roxanne Rimstead points out, *Halfbreed* is also a poverty narrative, which provides the opportunity for a witness to identify with the protagonist through “her struggle to support her brothers and sisters through extreme poverty, which includes dropping out of public school, working . . . at cleaning and other forms of child labour, scrounging for food, and hiding from the welfare agency” (156). In fact, Campbell herself refers to this potential similarity, saying “I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too” (13). However, she immediately expands on this potential point of connection to emphasize the difference, noting “but in those earlier days, at least you had dreams, you had a tomorrow” (13). For Maria, discrimination occurs not on one of these axes, but on all three: gender, class, and race. Cheryl Suzack points out that “Campbell’s story . . . articulates how social and political discourses intersect to facilitate her disempowerment along axes of race and gender” (132), creating a particular narrative of discrimination that is unique to Campbell’s experience. As such, identification with Maria or her family on the basis of gender or class risks minimizing the racial difference that informs Maria’s experience as a Metis woman living in poverty. Rather, the witness must negotiate her own privilege and engage critically with the text to understand how racial difference can make full identification with the narrator impossible, even if she can identify on other axes.

If the reader has an affective response to the narrative by identifying with Maria as a woman, or as one who has lived in poverty, there must be an intentional consideration of how these aspects are impacted and exacerbated by Campbell’s position as a racial “other.” When Maria drops out of school to help support her siblings by cleaning houses

for women in her community, her employers often discriminate against her on all three axes of race, class, and gender. One of her employers, Mr. Grey’s oldest daughter, “didn’t like Indians and talked in front of [Maria] as if [she] was deaf. She would tell her visitors that [they] were only good for two things - working and fucking, if someone could get [them] to do either” (Campbell 94). Other employers show prejudice because she is poor, watching her “in case [she] stole something,” or on the basis of her gender, worrying that she will “lead sons or husbands down the garden path” (94). In these instances, the witness-reader may identify with Maria because of the classist or sexist treatment she experiences, but a white reader cannot identify fully because Maria’s race exacerbates and intensifies the discrimination against her. As Anne Whitehead notes in “Reading with Empathy,” an analysis of similar issues in Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother*, sometimes “‘being moved’ can too easily blur into ‘moving on,’ which in turn fails to recognize the ongoing struggle” of the racially oppressed; therefore, an experience of *Halfbreed* in which the reader empathizes on the basis of class or gender without considering how her own racial privilege differs from Maria’s is a problematic and incomplete reading (193). Whitehead also quotes Hemmings, who asserts that “empathy may alter the white subject by ‘expanding her horizons’ but it ‘in many ways reinforces the position that she (always already) occupies in relation to the racialized Other’” (185). A text such as *Halfbreed* emphasizes the necessity of self-reflection and intellectual engagement on the part of the reader-witness so as to identify instances in which emotional identification is appropriate, and others in which it is impossible.

I would suggest that placing the responsibility of the witness upon the reader

can potentially prevent some of the aforementioned problems that can occur when a reader has a visceral response to a text. The act of witnessing requires not only emotional participation, but a critical, intellectual engagement in which the reader determines her own relationship “to [the] atrocity” (Rak 57). In her discussion about teaching trauma narratives in universities, Julie Rak suggests that “the witness helps to make the human effects of history both visible and communal [and] . . . must confront the trauma of her own history as part of the witnessing process” (57). Rather than responding to Campbell’s autobiography with pity, or inappropriately identifying with her without proper regard for racial difference, the witness must instead reflect on her own complicity in the oppression of the Metis in Canada. Campbell indicates her desire for such a response in a 1991 interview with Hartmut Lutz, in which she says

if you sit across the table from me, and you say “You poor thing, you’ve been oppressed, you live under colonization” . . . you cop out from what your people came from. And we’re no longer equal sitting across the table from each other. What happens then is, I become the poor oppressed person, and you have power over me.” (59-60)

Campbell’s statement that to pity someone is to have power over that person suggests that an affective response to her work can potentially reinscribe the racial hierarchy in which the white reader has power over the Metis writer. She states, however, that if both reader and writer “acknowledge that [their] grandfathers and grandmothers came through great struggles, then [they] can talk to one another . . . and appreciate and value what [they] have to say” (Interview 60). An openness on the part of both narrator and

witness creates a dialogue in which “the autobiographical occasion . . . becomes a site on which cultural ideologies intersect and dissect one another, in contradiction, consonance, and adjacency. Thus the site is rife with potentials” (Smith and Watson xix). If the reader acknowledges that Campbell’s life story has been impacted by a long history of political disenfranchisement specific to the Metis people, and recognizes her own part in it, just as Campbell acknowledges the faults and difficulties of her people, reader and narrator have the potential to bring about a future of people “com[ing] together as one” that Maria hopes for at the end of *Halfbreed* (Campbell 156).

As I have indicated, it is important for Campbell to cultivate both an affective response and a critical self-awareness in her reader in order to create an ideal witness to her life story. To encourage this level of engagement, Campbell herself models the compassion, respect, and empathy that she hopes to find in her reader-witness. Beginning in Chapter 16, she details her descent into prostitution and drug abuse after Darrel leaves her, and takes full responsibility for her decisions in this instance, saying “I could say at this point I was innocent and had no idea what I was getting into . . . [but] I knew . . . There was all the opportunity in the world to run away those first few months, but instead I made myself believe that one day I would wake up and there would be all the things in life which were important to me” (Campbell 116). Immediately after this statement, however, she models the compassion and empathy that she hopes to find in the reader, saying “I feel an overwhelming compassion and understanding for another human being caught in a situation where the way out is so obvious to others but not to him” (116). Here, the reader might be tempted to criticize Campbell’s decisions, but she reminds the

witness of her responsibility to reflect upon her reaction and to consider the context in which Maria makes this decision. At this point in the narrative, Campbell specifies that she still dreams of “symbols of white ideals of success,” which “when followed blindly . . . can lead to the disintegration of one’s soul,” and it is because of these dreams that she resorts to prostitution and then drugs (Campbell 116). With this statement, Campbell reminds the reader of the social and political factors that have brought Maria to a point in her life in which prostitution seems like a viable option, and therefore reinforces the importance of compassion and awareness of the larger issues at hand.

I would indicate that Campbell also models the self-awareness that her readers must practice after many of the anecdotes in which she is inclined to judge others based on their actions. This self-awareness is central to the act of witnessing; as Rak indicates, the witness has an “ethical imperative to . . . hear the survivor’s story (and importantly, the silences which make up part of that story) and understand her own reactions to the story as it is being made” (Rak 56 emphasis mine). Throughout *Halfbreed*, Campbell often discusses her own process of self-reflection; she reveals her judgements and prejudices, often towards her own people, but also indicates how she negotiates a more nuanced, thoughtful response in which she is sensitive to the context of the situation and the humanity of those whom she is inclined to judge, as well as her own similar faults. Near the end of her autobiography, Campbell states that a close friend, Edith, taught her a valuable lesson: “to look at [herself] as critically as [she] looked at [others], and to believe that the same thing that drove [her], drove them to being what they were, that basically we had all suffered trouble and misery, and that their problems were as

big and as important as [hers], regardless of how unimportant [she] thought they were” (Campbell 143). In Chapter 21, Maria puts this self-reflection into practice as she finds herself tempted to judge a mother who leaves her young children vulnerable to racism. When Maria is working in a restaurant in a small town in Alberta, “two little Indian boys came in” to use the bathroom, and the white patrons in the establishment mocked the children, saying “Watch it! The bow and arrows are coming” (136). Maria makes sure the children return to their parents, and for a moment is tempted to criticize their mother for being “too gutless” to enter the restaurant and protect her sons (136). However, she realizes that she cannot blame these parents because she “understood why they were afraid,” and recognizes that she too sometimes hides under the blanket of shame to avoid facing reality, “ugly as it was” (137). After the anecdote, Campbell reflects on the social conditions that have shaped this family before she passes judgement, and in doing so, prompts the reader, who has witnessed this event through Campbell’s telling, to be equally thoughtful and consider context before judging. Though the witness may not be able to identify with the experience of racial prejudice as Maria can in this situation, she can at least consider the social and political forces that have contributed to the debilitating shame of the parents before judging their inability to protect their children.

For the reader, recognizing one’s privilege and admitting the benefits of this privilege may be difficult both intellectually and emotionally, but it is this very process that allows the event of testimony to fulfill its purpose. Therefore, the witness must face “difficult knowledges” in a process of “intellectual, emotional, and ethical engagement that exerts enormous demands on the reader” (Perreault and Kadar 6). As Sara Ahmed indicates in

The Cultural Poetics of Emotion, maintaining consciousness of context, racial difference, and one's own privilege will not necessarily be an easy task in that it will not "transform bad feeling into good feeling" (193). Therefore, engaging critically with a text such as *Halfbreed* does not leave the reader free of guilt or shame at her complicity in Canadian oppression of Indigenous populations. These lingering feelings are significant in that they do not allow "being moved" to easily lead to "moving on," preventing the affective response from being the only response (Whitehead 193). However, Ahmed notes that

to recognise the injustices of colonisation as a history of the present is to rewrite history . . . If the violence of what happened is recognised, as a violence that shapes the present, then the 'truths' of history are called into question . . . Recognition is . . . about claiming that an injustice did happen; the claim is a radical one in the face of the forgetting of such injustices. (200)

Ahmed's statement reinforces the importance of the role of the witness to Campbell's autobiography, in that she must face the "difficult knowledges" she encounters in the text, including her own struggles with complex emotions and reactions (Perreault and Kadar 6), in order to carry out her responsibility to "recognize the injustices of colonisation" (Ahmed 200). Though such a task will certainly be difficult for the witness, Ahmed asserts that the simple act of recognition, free of condescension, co-option, or pity, has power in itself.

As I have demonstrated, figuring the reader as a witness to the events of Campbell's life and the condition of her people encourages a response that is both emotional and

intellectual. This complex dialogue with Campbell's autobiography also facilitates in the reader an ethical obligation to the text and its narrator, which can potentially encourage the kind of political and social change that Campbell hopes for at the end of the text. Though Western critical practices tend to privilege reason over emotion, I would suggest that it is the combination of the two that can be powerful and influential in determining the political engagement of a citizen. As Diana Brydon theorizes in "Dionne Brand's *Global Intimacies*," one must accept that, in addition to reason, "emotion plays a part in determining the ways in which citizens make sense of political reality" to create an appropriate response to political events and social conditions (1002). Brydon identifies significant power in the "emotional registers of the political" that can allow one to challenge the "dominant imaginaries" that continue to oppress and victimize the Other (997). Therefore, the witness can cultivate both reason and emotion to motivate political action and contribute to Craig Womack's vision of "relating literature to the real world in the hopes of seeing social change" (96). Similarly, Episkenew asserts that the power of Indigenous stories lies in their transformative abilities, and insists that identification and transformation are available even to a white settler reader. She suggests that Indigenous literature allows the witness to "come to understand Indigenous people as fellow human beings," which, in turn, "has the potential to create a groundswell of support for social-justice initiatives to improve the lot of Indigenous people" (190-1). Such a paradigm relies on the reader to connect with and show compassion for the Indigenous lives portrayed in literature, and to recognize her "own unearned advantage, [her] own complicity" rather than to simply "enact an externalized form of recognition relative to Indigenous people's truths" (Hargreaves 96). As Crowe indicates, witnessing is "a political and "dynamic"

process whereby society both receives and is altered by the testimony,” suggesting that there is significant potential for action and transformation in the witness, who is “charged with the responsibility of carrying on the story and ensuring its continued transmittal” (190). Indeed, considering the reader as a witness to Campbell’s testimony involves her emotionally, intellectually, and ethically, rather than constructing her as outside of the text. Such participation and investment work to engender political motivation, and the reader may be involved in work to “improve the lot” of Indigenous people in Canada as a result.

It seems that Campbell may indeed intend to incite action in her readers through her autobiography, as she frequently expresses her belief that unity among Canadians would benefit us all. Though she certainly recognizes the importance of acknowledging difference, and encourages readers to be aware of privilege, Campbell also prompts them to establish connections with one another in whatever way possible. In many cases, she speaks of the plight of Canada’s poor, and indicates that these people should develop a “united voice on many issues affecting both whites and Natives” (155). Campbell’s activism begins when she is just a young girl, inspired by Jim Brady’s declaration that “many people were poor, not just [the Metis]” and his hope that “maybe someday we could put all our differences aside and walk together and build a better country for our children” (65). Though Brady’s later actions disappoint Campbell, his sentiments seem to stay with her. She states at the beginning of *Halfbreed* that “poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too,” and later expresses her sadness that “poor people, both white and Native, who are trapped within a certain kind of life, can never look to the

business and political leaders of this country for help” (118). Here, it is Campbell who exercises empathy, as she acknowledges the plight of the poor across Canada, regardless of race. However, she also empowers them by suggesting that, if they unite, they have the potential to effect change in Canadian society. She states

I realize that an armed revolution of Native people will never come about; even if such a thing were possible what would we achieve? We would only end up oppressing someone else. I believe that one day, very soon, people will set aside their differences and come together. Maybe not because we love each other, but because we will need each other to survive. Then together we will fight our common enemies. Change will come because this time we won’t give up. (156-157)

Here, the “we” shifts from the “we” of the Metis people at the beginning to the “we” of all Canadians, and though she states just moments earlier that she is not the “idealistically shiny-eyed young woman” she once was, this statement is nonetheless hopeful and inclusive, as Campbell envisions “our country” as truly united (156, 8). For Campbell, “ultimately the notion of connection and relation is more important than the notion of difference,” and she hopes that literature can facilitate alternative modes of connection to inspire different groups of people to create change (Jannetta 64).

As I have established, reading Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* as a witness to the events to which she testifies encourages both emotional participation in and critical engagement with the autobiography. This involves identification with characters in the text and self-awareness on the part of the witness, in that she must align herself with the narrator

while also maintaining consciousness of her own privilege and prejudices. As Hargreaves indicates, a text that figures the reader as witness “invites the more profound recognition” of her complicity in the oppression of and discrimination against Indigenous populations (Hargreaves 96). Campbell facilitates such an emotional stake on the part of the witness by speaking directly to her, inviting her into the narrative, and asking questions to request her participation. As I have suggested, however, an exclusively emotional relationship to a text can be problematic in that the reader may not reflect upon her own privilege or consider how this has affected her connection to the narrative. Therefore, Campbell models the compassionate, thoughtful response she hopes to find in her reader, which can provide the impetus needed for the text to effect change by inspiring action on the part of the witness. As Episknew indicates, Indigenous autobiography “is an act of imagination that inspires social regeneration by providing eyewitness testimony to historical injustices” (75). It is, therefore, both political, “which requires action,” and ethical, which “requires moral engagement” (Ross, qtd. in Episknew 75). By provoking empathy in the reader while also necessitating self-reflection and participation, Indigenous autobiography such as *Halfbreed* can encourage readers to seek “social change by challenging [them] to take action to redress injustices” (75). However, the act of witnessing Campbell’s *Halfbreed* poses a particularly complex process for the reader, as “a more radical reckoning with . . . privilege . . . offers no immediate comforts, but instead much uncertainty and work” (Hargreaves 98). It is just this “radical reckoning” that, one hopes, will motivate the reader to fulfill her ethical responsibility to the text, to become politically involved, working toward the unity for which Campbell still hopes (Hargreaves 98). As such, reading-as-witness is a particularly productive practice in which the reader can allow her emotional

investment and critical engagement to develop a sense of ethical responsibility towards the text, which will, in turn, incite action and create change.

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IO STER IS (It's funny):

Humor as medicine in Kanienkehaka society¹

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Indigenous peoples have an immense capacity for laughing in the face of adversity. As a part of the Kanienkehaka² community of Kahnawake, I often hear laughter somewhere in the crowd at public gatherings and I have been witness to its ability to diffuse tense situations. As such, political events, ceremonies, and even funerals are never without their requisite humor. In times of high tension, someone somewhere can be heard to crack a joke with a responding raucous laughter erupting from the crowd. Many would ask why this occurs; humor it seems is not usually found in such situations. It is this aspect of Kanienkehaka humor which sparked this work.

I have often heard a story about Lasagna³, a Warrior who participated in the 78 day standoff at the Kanehsatake Pines during the summer of 1990. He made a particular joke during a high point in the tension. Originally a patient at the Kanehsatake Treatment Centre for Drug and Alcohol Abuse, he chose to remain in the Pines with the people

1. Published in *the quint* 7.3 (Jun 2015): 21-49.

2. Kanienkehaka means 'people of the flint'. It will be used instead of the word 'Mohawk'.

3. See York and Pindera, 1991; Sévigny, 1993.

of Kanehsatake when the dispute broke out. As they faced the Canadian Army and the Sureté du Québec during that long hot summer Lasagna was heard to say “You know what? I don’t like this part of the treatment!” in reference to his previous status as a patient at the Centre. This provoked much laughter and is still talked about today, some twenty-five years later.

Humor is found in every culture and takes on different forms, from the obvious like clown characters honking their noses and making faces to the more subtle phrases in dialogue like the remark made by Lasagna during the Oka Crisis. What makes Lasagna’s statement so funny? This line of questioning leads us to ask what purpose does humor serve for the Kanienkehaka more specifically? Humor, it seems, is integral to any gathering in Indian Country. Expressed verbally, physically or visually, diverse forms of humor have specific meaning and usage within Indigenous cultures which relate closely to our world view and philosophy. As a result, what may appear to be funny to some may not be funny at all to others, depending on who makes fun, how it is used and how it is perceived across cultures. Oftentimes, because of these differences in its appreciation, usage, it is misunderstood and misinterpreted. Although, what is the same about humor in all cultures is the ability of laughter to bring together a group of people who speak the same language and recognize the same nuances inherent in the humorous dialogue and visual illustrations.

Indigenous humor is easy to recognize and we always welcome the chance to laugh at a good joke. For First Nations cultures and more specifically the Kanienkehaka people, humor serves to turn colonization on its back exposing its fleshy underside. Our people

are experiencing its after effects and so we are always ready for the chance to stare it down and laugh in its face. Beyond exercising the belly muscles, humor serves as a survival mechanism meant to bring about balance in an unbalanced world. In order to understand how this works in Kanienkehaka culture, it is first necessary to illustrate who we are and our underlying world view and philosophy in which balance plays an important role. With this in mind, humor will then be looked at in terms of its function as a balancing mechanism used by the people. This aspect of humor presents itself in various forms, most notably in the artwork of Kanienkehaka artists such as Bill Powless, Shelley Niro and Louis Karoniaktajeh Hall. Their work can be perceived not as art in terms of the Western canon but as a self referencing tool used to exercise the mind of the viewer and their relationship to colonization. It is this skewed relationship that we laugh at as we look to their work; we are not laughing so much at the images but at our reality as Onkwehonwe⁴ people. In our view, if we can keep on laughing then we keep on surviving.

The Kanienkehaka are one nation in an alliance of six nations called the Haudenosaunee⁵ Confederacy. The six nations: Kanienkehaka, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora⁶ are organized into a symbolic longhouse⁷ structure with the Kaienerekowa or Great Law of Peace as its governing constitution. The Confederacy was formed to stop the warfare and fighting that was occurring between the original

4. Onkwehonwe means ‘the original people’ and is used by Kanienkehaka people to reference all Indigenous peoples.
5. Haudenosaunee means ‘people of the longhouse’ or ‘people who make the long house’. It is used by the people instead of the term ‘Iroquois’.

6. In the early 1700’s, the Tuscarora nation began the long process of joining the Confederacy as the sixth nation. They went in under the wing of the Seneca who acted as their elder brother and now they sit beside the Senecas when there is a Grand Council. This is why the Confederacy is sometimes called the Six Nations Confederacy.

7. The longhouse was the original dwelling of the Haudenosaunee People.

five nations. Due to various circumstances, the Kaienerekowa did not spread to other parts of the world and unite other nations in peace as it was originally intended to do. The Covenant Circle Wampum represents this unification of the six nations under the principles of the Kaienerekowa.

The very nature of the culture and world view from which I gather my strength, thoughts, and understanding of the world is based on maintaining this equal relationship with the natural world. An attitude of thankfulness and acknowledgement is a guiding principle of the culture that I come from.⁸ The Kanienkehaka have ceremonies and political procedures that embody these principles. When the Haudenosaunee people tell the story of the founding of the Confederacy, we speak of Dekanawidah or the Peacemaker who delivered a message of peace. This message, the Great Law or Kaienerekowa, was a way to find peace involving three fundamental principles – righteousness, meaning justice practiced among people using unselfish minds in harmony with the flow of the universe; reason, meaning soundness of mind and body to include the peace that comes when the minds are sane the body is cared for; and power, meaning the authority of Indigenous law and custom.⁹

The Kaienerekowa is designed to affirm the independent status of nations and individuals engaged in the quest for a unified approach to mutual problems. These dependent relationships are patterned after the natural world, so the symbolism is easy to understand and follow. As a governing constitution, it encompasses all aspects of the social, political and spiritual lives of the Haudenosaunee people and contains all

8. For further discussion on the themes of renewal, dualism and continuity in two versions of the Thanksgiving Address in the Great Law of Peace and the Code of Handsome Lake, see Carol Cornelius, 1992.

9. Mohawk Nation Office, 1982, p. 3.

the codes of conduct, thought and knowledge needed for the people to function, to understand our ceremonies and to maintain social and political life. The Law and the story of its development provides for a method of counseling and decision-making, involving ceremonies and procedures which build toward a consensus of the people. This consensus denotes a relationship between the people that reveals true equality, the same sense of equality that is reflected in our relationship with the natural world.

An important aspect of any meeting or ceremony is the Thanksgiving Address or Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen which means ‘words that come before all else’.¹⁰ The use of this has been outlined in the Kaienerekowa and serves as a constant reminder for us to be mindful of this special relationship that we have to Mother Earth¹¹. Its recitation achieves the similar effects as storytelling, in that it captures the audience in a dialogic/visual space where they activate their imagination and can ‘see’ the words and engage with what the teller is saying. The Thanksgiving Address itself speaks to the balance that must be maintained, which is not simply a balance between good and evil or a polarization between two opposing forces. In our way we don’t ask for anything, we can only thank creation for what has been provided.

These words give thanks to the natural world, the earth, and all that is over, under and upon it. The Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen reflects our relationship to our ‘mother’,
10. Whenever the statesmen of the League shall assemble for the purpose of holding a council, the Onondaga statesmen shall open it by expressing their gratitude to their cousin statesmen, and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the polls and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, and to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers; to the Sun, the mighty warrior; to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveals his wishes, and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life. Then shall the Onondaga statesmen declare the Council open. Wampum #7. Ohontsa Films, 1993, p. 9.
11. ‘Mother Earth’ is a common term used to describe the earth and references the world-view and philosophy of Indigenous cultures.

who we are, how we think and how we feel. Not only do we see it in the real world around us, but we also ‘see’ it each time it is recited. Through its continued recitation it serves to help us remember what this earth offers to keep us alive; our duty to take care of it; and how to maintain an equal and balanced relationship with it. This basic premise is what serves as a guide for our everyday actions. As we conduct ourselves in our lives, dealing with political issues, conducting our ceremonies, singing our songs, dancing our dances, planting our gardens, this thankfulness and sense of responsibility to one another is inherent in our actions and words. As we do these things, we work to maintain balance, peace, and a rational mind. The way to achieving a rational mind is to maintain an equal relationship to the earth and to one another. If this is achieved, then we continue to survive as Onkwehonwe.

The governing constitution of the Kanienkehaka peoples, the Kaienerekowa¹² is a tangible manifestation of this balanced relationship with nature. One simply has to look at the world around them to understand the Kaienerekowa in its strength and elusive simplicity. Today we have a culture surrounding us that is completely opposite to the tenets of the Kaienerekowa – individualistic, self-centered, and materialistic – separated from the natural world.¹³ We are quick to observe how out of balance the contrasting world views are. These humorous comparisons are the basis of stories and are fodder for a number of jokes. Kenneth Lincoln in his seminal work on Indian humor describes this

12. This relationship with the Kaienerekowa is what the western culture would call ideology but the word that we use to describe this is the word ‘tsionkwetáh:kwen’. This word, literally translated, means ‘the things that we really believe in’. It reflects our connections to one another and to nature, in that these are natural connection, ones that we don’t have to think about and analyze. They are from nature and so they just are there to exist with us. So, we don’t have to think about whether it is true or not, it just comes from inside, from that very core that is tied to Mother Earth when our mothers place our placenta in the ground after birth.

13. See Battiste and Henderson (year) who describe the contrasting Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views.

difference – “Indian-White tragedies can be alchemized through the alembic of modern red humor; intercultural differences shift toward seriously playful texts, which tell us much about ourselves, American and Native American.”¹⁴ These playful texts are found everywhere in Indian country, in stories, songs, visual imagery including in more formal fine arts.

For many Indigenous artists, their art is a commentary on the effects of colonization.¹⁵ Particularly, humor in Kanienkehaka art serves the same function as a ‘balancer’. For the viewer, our world-view, social, political and spiritual context shapes how we respond to art. Taking it one step further, with reference to maps, Robert David Sack describes the context specific affect of symbols—“feelings are most successfully and naturally expressed by symbols whose meanings seem to be in part affixed to the vehicle themselves. They do not appear to be conventionally or arbitrarily decided. These symbols are said to present rather than represent. Their meanings, unlike the scientific ones, are not clearly specified and stable, but rather depend far more on the contexts in which they appear. In terms of the objective side, such symbols seem to be over-determined, fluid and context-dependent.”¹⁶ Taking this one step further, if we look to art as symbol, the meaning of art shifts and changes according to the viewer and the context. If we look at art then as a form of language, and apply Sack’s theory, the language of art then is not fixed and there are no rules. The elements of an artistic creation depend on the whole for their identification and meaning and in turn that meaning can shift and change. In essence, the art of Kanienkehaka people maps our world-view and our current situation and

14. Lincoln 1993:27.

15. Put source here about art as commentary. (ask Rachele)

16. Sack 1980:29.

change with each viewer and in each context.

Humor is in every Indigenous culture and may be indicative of survival through the worst parts of colonization. Sharon Many Beads Bowers described societies without humor as neither great nor healthy. Humor then is a sign of a healthy community.¹⁷ Humor takes on different forms with many similar functions. It can be seen as an art form as Lincoln describes, “Telling or penning a joke is risky business...and crafting a good joke, telling a comic story, or simply conveying one’s humor may be the highest verbal (and transverbal) interactive art of all... joking is a kind of daily cultural poetry.”¹⁸ Oftentimes, because of the differences in its usage, it is misunderstood and misinterpreted. This exclusionary aspect of humor is explored by Henri Bergson in R.D.V. Glasgow’s work on laughter. Bergson is described as an echo—

“Listen to it carefully: it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound: it is something which yearns for prolongation by reverberating from one person to the next, something which—beginning with a bang—rumbles on like thunder in the mountains. And yet this reverberation cannot go on for ever. It can make its way through as wide a circle as you please: the circle will still remain closed.”¹⁹ The usage of humor speaks to a desire to be on the same wavelength. Laughter also has that special ability to bring together a group of people and uplift their spirit and strengthen their resolve. I would like to now bring you in to the circle and explore Kanienkehaka humor.

You’re a half black and half Indian. You poor slob. Not only did they steal your land, but they make your work on it for free!

Oneida Comedian, Charlie Hill

Humor in Kanienkehaka culture takes on the role of a balancer. I have attempted to illustrate our world view in citing the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen at the beginning and in discussing the Kaienerekowa. If we can recall, within it we find four main elements: balance, life, peace, and a rational mind. These are important aspects of our culture and have a role to play in our use of humor. It is through our ceremony, songs, and dances we achieve this balance, but humor also serves as a mechanism we use to bring about balance, peace and a rational mind. When we are confronted with change, fear, death, and colonization to name a few, humor is enacted using the things we see. We use humor as a form of commentary on those things and to bring us together on a deeper level. These codes are based in nature. So the symbolism is easy to understand and follow. Our language that we use to describe humor shows the deep connection between the act of laughing and the self.

There is no one Kanienkeha²⁰ word used to denote humor; rather it is a series of words that make interplay around the idea of the person, the soul and balance as they relate to the individual. There is a word *ahsé’iatsteriste* which literally means ‘to touch someone’, not in the physical sense but to reach out and touch someone with your spirit. Laughter is spontaneous, in our view it is an opening up of the spirit. When we laugh

17. Bowers1992:140.

18. Lincoln 1993:7.

19. Bergson in Glasgow 1997:64.

20. ‘Kanienkeha’ is the word for the Mohawk language.

we open up ourselves to each other which promotes unity and balance. Thus, it serves to bring us out of the depths of sorrow, fear, disillusionment, confusion, and back to a rational mind. And, if we have a rational mind, then we can think, act, and ultimately live.

This aspect of humor as balancer has been illustrated by people that spoke of it in relation to the funeral setting. When someone dies, we hold a three day wake. During this time, the body is laid out and people come and go, some staying all night. Inevitably at any time, laughter can be heard in the room, and it is not a hidden laughter behind hands but sometimes a huge great guffaw that erupts from the belly. While this might be offensive to others, this is acceptable in Kanienkehaka culture. In our view, death and serious situations can push the inner soul of a person down and it is very important to bring them back to life. Laughter serves to bring up the spirit of the people. There are words that we use to describe this process such as *teshako:nikonhrawniet*²¹ which literally means ‘he stirs their minds to bring about humor’, like stirring up the bottom of a lake. What is important about this word is the ‘kon’ within it. This comes from the word for spirit which is *sa:ton’hets*, which when literally translated means ‘your inner body comes to life’ or you are going from a state of being inert to action. There is an action as laughter evokes your inner spirit and you come to life again. Another word used is *tesakone’konrawnien*, which literally means ‘to make the body come to life’. Thus there are two important functions of humor in the funeral setting, it is meant to stir up the mind and also to bring the body to life not only through the cerebral aspect but

21. The root of this word is ‘nikonra’, meaning the main element of love. As someone described, meanness is not funny. While, ‘onikonra’ is the mind.

literally through the large intake of breath that we do when we laugh, oxygen feeds the blood and the brain. Humor then, in this situation is a positive healthy thing, helping to bring the family out of depression. Humor brings about a rational mind, which leads to peace and balance.

This use of humor has been described by Loran, a traditional Kanienkehaka who said “You need to bring it back up. That’s why we have [it] within the ceremony of the ten days, and the wake. Within that you say *sewat:nikonkwatare*- you on that side of the house, your minds are down here [a hand indicates a lowered position of the mind or ‘sadness’]. *Kni:i ionkwa:nikon kets kwen*, our minds are picked up here. So we come into the meeting, we say all of the words that are supposed to be said and then we go on with things that we normally do, when we finish, we sit down with people we are comfortable and we start talking about joking and humorous stories and so on. And we bring life back into the gathering.” The laughter serves then to balance the sadness. Humor uplifts the family so they can continue to live. Loran says - “Your inner body comes to life. Without thinking, you’re laughing. You are finding everything so humorous and then you come to life.” In conversation, he went on to describe the spreading of laughter through a ceremonial crowd – “When you bring that life in, if you have certain people, you have to be careful...because sometimes the family that is ‘heavy in the mind’²² might be offended by a certain individual that is just laughing. So he’ll go over there and he’ll start talking with certain people that he is comfortable, and they’ll start a little laughter here and a little laughter there. And then it will catch on until somebody close to that

22. This is a saying that comes from a literal translation of the Kanienkeha word for sadness. The English translation is commonly used in conversation.

family who they are comfortable with will slowly come up with issues too, all of the sudden they're into the stories too and now they're laughing too. And that's what we need to happen within that whole wake ceremony."

When asked by anthropologist what the Indians called America before the white man came, an Indian said simply, "Ours."²³

Sioux author and scholar, Vine Deloria

This central idea of achieving balance and uplifting the minds of the people through humor also serves in other situations besides funerals. It has been widely documented that First Nations communities face epidemic rates of suicide, incarceration, drug and alcohol addictions, along with other numerous health and social problems. These are some of the effects of colonialism, and they are proving difficult to overcome. As a result, we are often confronted with stereotypes that verify to the non-native observer how eroded our culture and communities are. Although, we are beginning to interpret them differently and are reclaiming them to reflect the light and laughter that still survives.²⁴ This same light and laughter can be seen in Kanienkehaka artist Bill Powless' work *Indians' Summer* (1984) (Fig. 1).



(Fig. 1) **Bill Powless** *Indians' Summer*, 1984 Acrylic on canvas 177 x 97 cm

In this work, the modern day image of the 'Indian' is recovered by Powless. This work not only reflects the complexity of the contemporary Onkwehonwe identity after

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23. Notable Quotables <http://www.geocities.com/snoopythewriter/DELORIA.html> (date needed)

24. See Kanietio Horn video short "The Smoke Shack" (date) for a humorous commentary on the proliferation of tobacco industry in Kanienkehaka communities.

colonization but the difficulty in reaffirming it beyond the stereotypes as well. Through humor, he portrays an accurate and naturalistic image of the native man in all his fleshy corporeal glory. What we see is our brother, our uncle, and our neighbor. It is a way of inverting these stereotypes so that reality is in your face and for the Indigenous viewer, you can't help but laugh because you are laughing at the reality. This is the guy back home on the 'rez' sitting on the porch every summer with a beer in his hand as you drive by. The double chin, breasts, big belly, and red bikini briefs reminds us not to be so closed about who we are physically and what we have become. Indigenous people joke a lot about body parts. The body is natural and joking serves to remind us of that. Our bodies have functions and we have been taught to be ashamed of them by the Church. We joke about our bodies to make them less sacred. Looking deeper, this painting also comments on what colonization has taken away from Indigenous peoples. Our land was taken away, our source of food was taken away, our culture, traditions, our life style was all taken away and replaced with colonial junk. As a result we are fat, we are unhealthy, we have high rates of diabetes and so we are left with a men, women and children who look like this. But, despite this transformation, a certain dignity and nobility remains. The feeling we are left with is a comfort, a confidence in what our spirit has surpassed – colonialism. Therefore, we laugh because what we see is so true and it is much easier to laugh. Laughter helps us not get so angry and overwhelmed with what we are confronted with. It helps us to push away that GMO piece of cake and get on that treadmill and fight for our survival.

The light and laughter that we seen in the eyes of Powless' subject and ultimately

recognize in ourselves, also serves to bring back the balance and rational minds of the people by dispelling the anger also stirred up by serious political issues and most especially during tense standoffs. This aspect of humor in these times also been described by Loran – “your actions...You don't have to say anything. You just have to do something...you know people are watching. You just do something that catches their humor...it's the relaxing key to the society and we don't know how to use it anymore. Very seldom you'll see in a tense situation someone try to break that air that you can crack. You need to make it flexible...Like our people [say], how come he looks so peaceful just sitting there? The military's comin' in, they are going to attack. How come he looks so peaceful? One is we are not afraid to die. We are always prepared to die. The other thing is he is lookin' around like this, and he sees tanks comin' at us and helicopters comin' at is, what do we got? We got sticks with nails in them, and young people running around and they saying we are gonna win this with sticks with the nails in it...He sees the humor in that. But he also sees the importance of that event happening because we are still alive. The way that was given to us by the creator and the responsibility that was given to us it's still alive and he is there to see it still alive. He might be gone tomorrow but he's gonna' die standing up for what the creator gave to us. And if it takes a good laugh to bring him through it then that's what's gonna' do it.” Humor rears its head often in Indigenous communities in response to the effects of colonialism and we all agree that laughter as a response is preferable to sadness and anger.

My people have a great capacity for laughing at ourselves, and at the world at large, most particularly in times of crisis. Laughter to us, denotes survival. Vine Deloria,

wrote in his seminal work *Custer Died for Your Sins*, “Humor, all Indians will agree, is the cement by which the coming Indian movement is held together. When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive to extremes, then it seems to me that people can survive.”²⁵ Tewenhitoken, a Kanienkehaka language teacher spoke of this same aspect of humor as a survival mechanism – “Rather than looking at things and really complaining about it, we look at things and laugh about it. And I think that goes with all races, Onkwehonwe races. There are the few that you will find that complain about all the atrocities that have happened to us, okay yeah, but that’s in the past. Because it doesn’t make us any better, if we complain about it. Positive energy, negative energy. Maybe that’s part of [it] there, rather than dwelling on it, and complaining about it, making ourselves sick about it, we’ve just learned to accept it and laugh about it, turn something negative into something positive...it’s almost like self preservation, but it’s automatic. Without thinking we seem to laugh at things rather than having it eat at us.” This perception was apparent after the 1990 Oka Crisis, with charges looming over the heads of most of the Indigenous participants, it left many with post-traumatic stress syndrome and other problems, but throughout you could hear the peoples’ laughter. Kahentinetha, a Kanienkehaka woman who helped to defend the Pines during that summer talked of how she dealt with the stress, “The Department of Indian Affairs was trying to fire my boyfriend after the 1990 Mohawk Oka crisis, but they could not find him because they did not know what he looked like, I took a picture of a laughing Yassar Arafat with the notation “Has anybody seen Dave St---y?” and put it on all the bulletin boards in the department. It was hilarious

25. Deloria 1969: 167.

to the Indigenous employees but made the ‘colonialists’ mad.” It was her way of laughing in the face of adversity.

Throughout our struggles with serious health, social and political issues we have manage to continue laughing. As they say, ‘it is much easier to laugh than to cry’. In our way, there is a running humorous commentary on these issues. Kahentinetha also spoke of how this happens in the community of Kahnawake. She described one of the colorful characters of her youth – “The late Charlie Canadian, a longtime taxi driver, would give you tales of woe about our community throughout your entire ride, and then in the end he would always say, “But it’s no use”. So we nicknamed him “It’s No Use” just to take the bite off of the seriousness of what he was telling us.” The tales of woe presented with the running of the meter, and the hopelessness that followed reflect the seeming insurmountability of the enduring Canadian colonial ideologies, yet without fail they are always contradicted with humor as illustrated by the nickname. Shelley Niro’s *Standing on Guard For Thee* (1991) (Fig. 2), as part of a series titled *Mohawks in Beehives* embodies this same pervasiveness of Kanienkehaka spirit through the balancing of the positive and negative. Characterized as her ‘personal antidote to Oka’, Niro states “...this is my way of being able to deal with those sorts of things. Being able to deal with a feeling of absolute dread – the sky is falling – and I felt like I was really being pushed up against a wall. So it’s a psychological exercise in ‘surviving.’”²⁶ As part of this series, *Standing on Guard For Thee* makes play of symbols of colonial intrusion and sovereign authority that were so much a part of the Oka Crisis.

26. Ryan 1999:72.



(Fig. 2) Shelley Niro *Standing on Guard for Thee*, 1991

Hand-tinted black and white photograph

36 x 28 cm

The ability to play before the commemoration of the Canadian colonial process illustrates the power of Kanienkehaka world-view in the face of adversity. As the women clearly enjoy themselves before the towering monument, they simultaneously render that monument null, immovable and distill the commemoration to decoration. The strength of Kanienkehaka identity throughout the colonial process is celebrated with life, movement and color. The bodies of the women are tinted and are in contrast with the monument and along with their posture of all-out laughter emphasize their vitality and enjoyment. The framing of the photo crops the figure and renders its subject unidentifiable, if only to the non-Kanienkehaka observer. Joseph Brant, the figure on the top of the monument, has played a dominant role in the history of the Kanienkehaka written by non-native historians. It is a role that is often contradicted by the oral history of the people. In Niro's piece, Brant's role is de-emphasized and he is placed in the background to the current realities of the Kanienkehaka, therefore flipping colonial identity construction on its head. It is the statue that is left unnamed as the women dance and laugh before an empty symbol, one that no longer has the power to designate authority. As the image renders the monument null and celebrates the confidence and enjoyment of the women, the title drives the last ironic nail into the coffin of colonial 'success'. The realities of colonial patriarchy embodied in the monument dissolve in the face of three women whose identity is clearly intact. The monument's permanence is the reality that Charlie Canadian was talking about, but the women demonstrate the reality of Kanienkehaka survival through humor and irony. These elements are in constant negotiation with one another and as such it is the women that bring balance into this image, tipping the scales of power through play and laughter. Laughter takes the edge off, bringing our minds

back into balance. Through the expression of it and the resultant laughter that erupts from our throats and bellies, we achieve a state of rationality. It clears the mind and allows us to live again.

Through humor then, we are able to look at the difficult things and make fun, which enables us to deal with some very serious issues. After a good laugh, things are not so hard anymore. As Sharon Many Beads Bowers describes, humor gives us the social sanction to look at things a little differently.²⁷

This man could not speak English and had to get his test results from the hospital. He took his friend with him to translate. His friend came out of the doctor's office shaking his head. "what did he say I have". "I never heard of this before, but you have sugar by Jesus."

Humor is also part of personal commentary about another individual. Many define this sort of humor as public ridicule, which can be harmful. R.D.V. Glasgow describes how the harm comes about. Ridicule is an imitation of healing aspect of humor. In cheap reflection, these kinds of jokes took become a point of social interaction and exchange with their own repercussions - "Most immediately, it may offend and hurt those attacked, undermining their identity, threatening their security and in general lowering the quality of their lives. But it may also insidiously foster and propagate harmful stereotypes and

prejudices which then become a pretext for actual aggression."²⁸ In Kanienkehaka culture, humor is used in a way to train the mind and to bring an individual back into the group. Often misinterpreted as disrespect, it serves a bonding function. This is described by Lincoln as a sort of permission that takes place. It is a sort of familial or social agreement – "It's a way of circling pain...of encompassing reality's 'threat' to the ego by using that very threat to *open* an audience to its common, if not bonding, values. 'One' may tease oneself in an existential or academic vacuum, but as with most things human, a cultural 'other' makes it more fun; and three draws a crowd."²⁹ The Kanienkeha word we use to describe this type of humor is *tehar wa kwen:te* which means 'he makes it flat'. It denotes a sort of dry humor, in that the seriousness is taken out of it. It is a coded form of learning. You have to figure out they are saying because the norm is being stretched and tested. Richard William Hill describes this clearly, "behind every joke is a social norm being stretched and tested, and I would suggest that our laughter might also serve as a release of anxiety over these symbolic transgressions. In this sense, jokes remain both outside and within the rules; they are, within varying limits, a socially sanctioned form of social transgression."³⁰ Jokes and humor then, allow us to critique, to probe the limits of our values and to suggest new possibilities. Something is said and later you figure it out, then you burst out laughing. It is also meant to ensure you are not too serious and experience the joy in life. In making fun of someone who looks ridiculous, you are trying to get that person to think about what they are doing and challenge them to think beyond what they deem as normal and everyday. This has been described by Loran within the context

28.. Glasgow 1997:57.

29.. Lincoln 1993:26.

30. Hill 2001:22.

27. Bowers 1992:140.

of education – “we are so busy trying to survive in the white man’s world that we can’t take the time to teach our children what we were taught. The way we were taught. We were taught in the family unit. Now schools are teaching us, now the pre-k is teaching us, now the babysitter is teaching us, but all through that whole thing, that great big screen, that four-foot screen is teaching. Then we wonder why how come these young kids are, we are laughing at them these young kids running around here with the crotch way down to their knees, and trying to walk like someone they’re not. We look at them we say something is wrong with them, something is wrong with their mind...why does he want to be something else he’s not? He’s going to teach his kid how to be a city person. Those people down in Harlem, he’s going to teach all about their culture and the way they are. That is what we look at and we say – *te tat ni kon rok te*. And the way you say *te tat ni kon rok te*, its serious but its funny...you are saying his mind is not all there. He doesn’t have enough mind, brain.” In essence, the humor is used to make a commentary as a way to bring the individual back to a rational mind with the intent that they will see what they are doing and correct it.

When commentary is made on the situation of First nations in a particular art piece, like Bill Powless’ *Indians’ Summer* or Shelley Niro’s *Standing on Guard For Thee*, a First Nations person viewing it is going to invariably laugh. Why? Because it is better to laugh than to cry. Niro, illustrates many of the same points in her other work. In this piece entitled *The Rebel* (1987) (Fig. 3), Niro has photographed her mother laying ‘babe-like’ on the back of an old ‘Rebel Charger’ car.



(Fig. 3)

Shelley Niro

The Rebel, 1987

Hand-tinted black and white photograph

21.2 x 26.5 cm

This hand-tinted picture celebrates the life, light, power and enjoyment of Kanienkehaka women. Niro’s audience is one that is close to her – she says “It comes back to being with your brothers and sisters and knowing what is going to make them laugh when I create something. I think a lot about them when I am doing that... It’s bringing your audience down to one person and that one person represents the community that you do come from.” If it is going to make her family laugh then it is going to have the same effect on the rest of us. In it we see our own sisters, mothers, aunts and the lady at the bingo hall sitting in her polyester pants, drinking a Pepsi, with the curlers in her hair smokin’ a cigarette and dabbing her bingo cards, not giving a damn what anybody thinks of her. It makes us laugh because we recognize ourselves as reservation women. If we look closer, we can also see what Kanienkehaka women have become. How colonization

has changed us. Niro views the humor that comes out of her work as having a healing element. She states - “I think it is a healing element, if everyone is stuck in that place where every one is sad...it could lead to sickness. I think we are brought up to think that humor is important, because it stimulates and it keeps your mind working trying to think of sharing something with somebody else so that they don’t get into that dark dark spot. I think it is a gift that we have with each other and we know we have to do it and we know we have to use it.” Niro goes on to speak of the responsibility one has to take if using humor – “I think we are pretty intellectual...we have gone through the teachings and as a collective we know what the stories are supposed to mean...it’s bringing people out of the darkness and enlightening other people and being aware that what you do or what you produce has an effect on other people. I think that we are always trying to keep that in front of us. Once you establish yourself as an Iroquois artist, you take on this huge responsibility not only as an artist but as a community person...from the odd bits that I do, there is a responsibility that we have to really be serious about. Humor is one of those things that I think is a serious responsibility that it has to be...something that is very spontaneous and natural.”

This same serious use of humor in art is seen in the work of Kanienkehaka Louis Karoniaktajeh Hall. Not a well-known artist outside of the Kanienkehaka communities, his work is a reinterpretation of the history and culture of the Kanienkehaka.³¹ Self-taught, his art portrays evocative images of strong men and beautiful sensuous women, all in an effort to change the stereotypes and bring about an awareness of the effects of

31. See Horn-Miller, Kahente “The Emergence of The Mohawk Warrior Flag: a symbol of indigenous unification and impetus to assertion of identity and rights commencing in the Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) community of Kahnawake” (Master of Arts, unpublished).

colonization on our people. His work often evokes a loud laugh from the Indigenous observer while a sharp intake of breath can be heard from the non-native observer. The Catholic Church was the subject of many of Karoniaktajeh’s paintings and drawings. This one in particular, *Holder of Heaven. Toroniawakon* (date unknown) (Fig. 4) is a statement on the usurpation of the free will of the Kanienkehaka people by the Catholic Church.



(Fig. 4)

Louis Karoniaktajeh Hall

Holder of Heaven. Toroniawakon, (unknown)

Acrylic on wood

Unknown

If you look closely you can see the bus in the lower right corner called the Purgatory Express. On it is written “There’s one born every minute and we’re ready to take him...”

Below that is “Believers in front and “Born again pagans in the rear.” A humorous take on the good Catholic life that many people attempt to live, this work denotes a certain powerlessness of the individual once they ‘get on the bus’ also known as Catholicism. Once on, you are along for the ride. And, in moving away from the church, you are a pagan once more. This is a take on the issue of segregation in the United States where black people had to sit in the back of the bus. This work provides key symbols that can easily be understood. A Kanienkeha word that could be used to describe this is *sako’ti nikon:ra seron:nis* which literally means ‘to help to bring the mind to balance’. When we look at this work, we laugh. It evokes that knowing kind of laughter, that comes from shared collective experiences and knowing the history of colonization and the role that the Church has played in it. This same laughter can be heard in the Kanienkehaka community of Kahnawake. The former Priest at the Francis Xavier Church used to wear a long scarf down the front of his tunic. On it were three clans – bear, wolf and turtle. Anyone who was traditional longhouse³², when they looked at it would frequently laugh. When I asked about this, they expressed that this was ridiculous to them. Why was a priest wearing the symbols of the longhouse? It’s contradictory to what we know of the church’s involvement in colonization. In order to be able to rationalize it one has to laugh first. This laughter prevents us from being overwhelmed by feelings of rage, frustration and loss that come with these shared experiences with Catholicism. Beyond religion, we laugh at all that colonialism has attempted to do to us. It is this response to what Canada was attempting to do that provoked Lasagna’s comment at Oka.

32. ‘Traditional longhouse’ is a term used to describe those who follow traditional beliefs and ceremonies and are not part of any other kind of religious denomination.

In Kanienkehaka culture we teach our children to laugh instead of cry when they are hurt or sad or find themselves having done something wrong. Rather than a mother screaming while the child is falling, then racing over to grab and console the child, we go over calmly to see if they are alright and then say, “Anything wrong? No. Well, that was a silly thing you did. Don’t do it again”. If the child is hurt, the mother still goes calmly to investigate and does what has to be done. My own mother used to say to me, “Stop climbing that tree. If you fall down and break both your legs, don’t come running to me”. This teaching is the beginning for learning to laugh in the face of adversity. Laughter then is a way to change the mental thought from a negative to a positive, so that the rational mind is brought back into balance in order that you may continue to follow your natural instructions, which is to live. If we allow ourselves to wallow in sadness, we would not look after our kids, we would not look after ourselves and we would eventually die. Humor has played an important part in our survival as Onkwehonwe. Kakaiosta, an elder and former school principle in Kahnawake says that we live according to what we carry in our soul. We go with our instinct. There is a separation between the soul and the cognitive. We see now that for the Kanienkehaka, the emotion of laughter is not cognitive. Laughter, in our understanding is a spontaneous thing that occurs naturally yet serves as very important function. The Kanienkeha language has a definite word for that - *tekaton ha:rikte* which literally means ‘what’s inside your center being is your spirit and when it explodes into laughter’, it comes from *te sa ton tak ton* which means ‘your soul or spirit in your center comes out’. It refers to that aspect of laughter where we open ourselves to each other spontaneously, naturally much like medicinal plants that also grow naturally. Laughter then is like a medicine. It enables us to survive and to begin

to heal from the effects of colonization. As Tewenhitoken said - “I think it’s like all that everybody says about laughter, that its medicine. But we ourselves, I think, laugh more than most races...there’s humor in whatever we do. It’s something that is always a part of us.”

Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*: Trickster’s Dual Representation as Colonization and Decolonization at the Birch River Indian Settlement School¹

by Melanie Belmore, University College of the North, The Pas, Manitoba

Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* portrays a trickster figure that symbolizes colonization and decolonization. The Fur Queen’s dual representation brings the Western concept of hybridity to mind. Niigonwedom James Sinclair discusses a hybridity approach as a reclamation of Aboriginal Culture in his article “Tending to Ourselves: Hybridity and Native Literary Criticism” in which he says, “hybridity can be a theory that empowers Native writers to open up notions of their identities and grow, hopefully enriching the ways our stories can be told, examined and used” (Sinclair “Tending” 241). Highway’s writing is empowered through a Cree storytelling approach, the trickster narrative. *Kiss* will be examined in a trickster narrative form.

Sinclair begins “Tending” with a story, which other Indigenous literary theorists commonly do. Sinclair uses a blue tarp to demonstrate a hybrid approach argument. In

1. Published in *the quint* 8.1 (December 2015): 111-22.

brief, Sinclair says:

Boozhoo.

I have a memory. One evening I helped prepare a sweat lodge [...] we began to remove the animal furs from the top, so we could fortify the structure of the saplings [...] they were frozen to the wood, many of them ripped, creating problems in the roof – an obviously essential element needed to keep the heat required [...] Our elder laughed, opened up the back of his truck, pulled out a large sheet of insulated blue-padded plastic and placed it on top of the ripped furs. (239)

The blue tarp becomes part of the Aboriginal ceremony; the modern Western device acts as a substitute for the ripped fur. The substitution of the modern for traditional material is not assimilation to Western Culture, but rather an adaptation. The difference between assimilation and adaptation lies in having no choice and having a choice. As history has proven, assimilation doesn't allow for choice. Aboriginal peoples were not given the choice to their Culture, belief's, practices, and lives. Using adaptation, Aboriginal people can decide and choose what is needed in order to continue Aboriginal tradition, practices, ceremonies, and even their stories. Likewise, Highway's hybrid approach to the Fur Queen allows for the use of the trickster's duality as a method by which the residential school experience in the narrative may be understood.

Adaptation is found at the heart of the trickster narrative or trickster story. Sinclair recalls trickster stories being told to him as a child. He describes these trickster narratives

as a “very old Anishnaabeg intellectual tradition” (Sinclair “Trickster Reflections I” 22). He goes on to say that these stories that once were “exchange[d] ... in the winter” (22) are now being told “over kitchen tables, at universities, and – in my [Sinclair's] case – on living room couches” (22). Trickster narratives are passed down through generations, although, at one time, the passing of these stories was done through oral tradition. Today trickster has made its way to a written context. The oral traditional method of trickster storytelling has been adapted and used in literature, but whether a trickster narrative is told in an oral tradition context, it must have a “threefold” purpose (Keeshig-Tobias in Moses 110): “[the] first [is] to humour [the] second [is] to educate [and the] third [is] to heal” (110). Trickster narratives have changed from their traditional formats, told during certain times of the year, trickster narratives are told today anytime, anywhere and in literature. In short, this form of storytelling has evolved and adapted to the modern world. Sinclair points out that although the method of trickster storytelling has adapted, trickster should always serve an “educational, medicinal and community-building purpose” (Sinclair “Trickster” 21). Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is able to accomplish all three purposes.

As Deanna Reder remarks in the preface of *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversation*, a book she co-edited with Linda Morra: “the ‘Indian is a European invention,’ that no Indigenous person [...] called themselves “Indian” before the arrival of Columbus [...] no Indigenous community had “tricksters” – the term is the invention of a nineteenth-century anthropologist” (vii). Reder continues by saying, “Anishinnaabe told stories about Nanabush, the Cree told stories about Wesakecak, the Blackfoot told

stories about Naapi, the Sto:lo told stories about Coyote [and] many Indigenous people in North America now refer to themselves as Indians, and many storytellers talk and write about tricksters” (vii). As Reder points out, Aboriginal peoples have adapted to the terms “Indian” and “trickster”. Authors have not ignored the terms, “Wesakecak”, “Naapi” or “Coyote”, but have disguised trickster in other forms. Writers have adapted the trickster in a written context, but the old traditional oral trickster narrative still continues. Using concepts of hybridity, this paper examines how Tomson Highway uses the Fur Queen as a trickster in the written context and the residential school experience to discuss traumatic events that Aboriginal peoples experienced during the assimilation process.

The Fur Queen appears as a colonial image, when she represents the Western Culture during the Fur Queen Beauty Pageant scene. In “The Trickster Wink: Storytelling and Resistance in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*” Rubelise daCunha connects the significance of the color white with Northern Manitoba and royalty:

White is repeated many times throughout the novel in association with the Fur Queen. This color not only emphasizes the white atmosphere of snowy Northern Manitoba, where Weesageechak stories are told, but also signals that the figure of the Fur Queen is emblematic of the presence of the white colonizers in the continent, and will always remind the Okimasis of colonial experience. (daCunha102)

In this passage the repetition of white is linked to the north, in which the setting of the Beauty Pageant takes place, and to European colonizers, which the Fur Queen represents

at this point in the text. The Fur Queen is presented as “Miss Julie Pembroke [...] draped not only with a white satin sash but with a floor-length cape fashioned from the fur of arctic fox, white as day [...] with a fox-fur tiara” (Highway 9). The Fur Queen is positioned early in the text in human form and a representation of the British Queen. As daCunha writes, “[t]he luxurious form that emerges has the image of a Queen, which is a reference to the Queen of the British Empire” (daCunha 103). The Fur Queen’s representation of Western Culture is demonstrated through the whiteness and royalty that is associated with the British Queen, but the white fox fur that she wears also represents Aboriginal Culture. Furs were retrieved by Aboriginal people through trapping, an Aboriginal practice. The Fur Queen is therefore emblematic of colonization and decolonization. Highway’s dual representation can be seen throughout the text, but the residential school scene is where the trickster is able to perform the “threefold” purpose of storytelling incorporating its “education, medicinal and community-building” aspect.

First, the residential school becomes a focal point in the text in illustrating the Fur Queen’s dual representation. Rublise daCunha says, “Highway’s Trickster in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be read within a coalitional politics that merges Cree storytelling and Western discourse in order to promote healing and redemption for those who have faced colonial oppression, represented in the novel by the residential school experience” (da Cunha 95). In short, Highway merges a trickster narrative with the Western approach of written literature.

In “Nanabush in the City” Nancy Wigston speaks with Highway, who says, “Indian children between six and 16 were forced to go to schools where they were ‘missionized’

by the Roman Catholics. It was an allout policy of assimilation. The intent was to turn Indian kids into white kids” (Wigston 8). *Kiss of the Fur Queen* demonstrates this policy of assimilation with Jeremiah being the Indian kid who goes to residential school and wants to be white. Jeremiah’s loss of his Cree identity is a result of the traumatic events that occurred at the Birch River Settlement School. Prior to Jeremiah’s departure to the school he lived with his family in Northern Manitoba. He was raised in an Aboriginal traditional manner: hunting, trapping, fishing and living off the land. When Jeremiah is sent to the school his hair is cut, his clothes and language stripped away and he is sexually abused. Jeremiah’s abuse is indirectly illustrated in the text; Gabriel, Jeremiah’s brother, is the victim that illustrates the sexual abuse that occurred in residential school.

In the scene depicting Gabriel’s sexual abuse, the Fur Queen’s dual representation is heightened. The first night Father Lafleur visits Gabriel and on his second visit he rapes Gabriel. At first the Fur Queen acts as protector, the second night she neglects to protect him, signalling her shift from decolonization to colonization. “The implication of a “hybrid” identity is that it is always shifting, with positions continually informing each other through their presence and influence” (Sinclair “Tending” 242). The Fur Queen’s contrary shift to the colonial position allows a bad thing to happen and thereby implicates her in the rape itself. Because of her dual nature, she neglects and protects, being at once a representation of colonization and decolonization.

When Gabriel goes to residential school, Jeremiah is beginning his third year. Father Lafleur meets Gabriel for the first time. During their first meeting, Father Lafleur feels a hunger for the boy. He sees Jeremiah and says to him “you’ve decided to come

back for a third year” (Highway 69). When Jeremiah comes back Lafleur sees Jeremiah as coming back for more abuse; he says, “You’ve gained some weight” (69). Jeremiah has spent the summer with his family; he puts some weight on suggesting that his parents fed him well. During the residential school era, European colonizers believed that the Aboriginal family and community were not tending well to their children. When in the matter, children were more harmed while forcibly attending residential schools. When Lafleur meets Gabriel, he “saves [him] from falling into the lake by clamping his hand onto the [his] thigh” (69). Lafleur’s appetite has established when he sees Jeremiah has more meat on his bones, but when Lafleur grasps Gabriel’s thigh, hunger sets in. Father Lafleur turns to Jeremiah and says, “So Jeremiah [...] you’ve brought your little brother this time” (70). Later that night when the boys have gone to bed Father Lafleur’s hunger for the boy leads him to slither into the dormitory. He makes his way to Gabriel’s bed and sees Jeremiah sleeping beside him. He wakes Jeremiah and takes him back to his own bed, Lafleur doesn’t want Jeremiah and his attention is now focused on Gabriel. Father Lafleur “turned back to Gabriel” (74) but then his eye was caught by the Fur Queen’s photo. Mariesis, the mother, packs the photo of the Fur Queen in Gabriel’s suitcase and tells him that the “Fur Queen will watch over you [and] will protect you from evil men” (74). The Fur Queen winks and the priest sees this, at which time he “slink[s] down [the] aisle towards the door” (74). daCunha says the Fur Queen’s wink “signals complicity with Gabriel, [and] also works as protection” (daCunha 106). Present at this time, the image of the Fur Queen protects Gabriel and represents Cree Culture.

While Highway uses trickster, the Fur Queen to represent the dual experience of

the colonized, he also uses the Weetigo figure to demonstrate colonial oppression. As the Fur Queen was “transform[ed] into a saint to protect the Okimasis brothers, Father Lafleur is transformed [...] into the Weetigo, an Indigenous evil figure who feasts on human flesh, a beast, a cannibal spirit” (daCunha 106). It is the Fur Queen’s hybrid nature that allows for the Weetigo, Father Lafleur, to overpower the Cree Culture and Gabriel falls victim. Basil Johnston’s describes Weetigo as “a giant Manitou [2] in the form of a man or a woman, who towered five to eight times above the height of a tall man” (Johnston 221). The imagery of Weetigo is seen in the description of Father Lafleur when he approaches Gabriel’s bed the second time. When Lafleur is raping Gabriel, Jeremiah awakens he looks over and notices that “Gabriel [is] not alone” (Highway 79). Jeremiah sees a “dark, hulking figure hovered over [Gabriel]” (79). The hovering illustrates Father Lafleur as a large figure. For a child lying on a bed Lafleur looks ‘five or eight times’ taller. The image Jeremiah sees of this figure “is in a silhouette” (79). The silhouette traces the outline of Father Lafleur. His dark shadow is described to be as black as “a crow” (79). The image of a “bear devouring a honey-comb or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh” (79) conveys the hunger of Weetigo, which Lafleur has already experienced for Gabriel. Then Jeremiah sees the sheets moving up and down; he knows what is happening because it had happened to him. A Weetigo is devouring Gabriel; he is being raped.

Gabriel’s rape demonstrates the sexual abuse that children encountered at residential school and also symbolizes the act of colonization. In “From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics: Substantiating Survivance in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the*

2. Weetigo has different spelling. The spelling will be in respect to the author’s spelling. Great Spirit also called Kiche-Manitou.

Fur Queen” Sam McKegney argues that Father Lafleur’s actions become “the symbolic rape [of] Indigenous Culture” (McKegney 89) and daCunha also remarks, “[f]rom an Indigenous point of view, the Weetigo is the best representation of the beast of colonialism and capitalism that is going to threaten and devour Indigenous people, represented in the novel by the sacrificial victim: Gabriel, the dancer” (daCunha 107). Both McKegney and daCunha read the rape as being a colonial attack that becomes a colonial oppression of Aboriginal Culture.

Residential schools were set in place to dehumanize Aboriginal peoples. They were used to rid “get rid of the Indian problem. I [Scott] do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department” (Scott). Residential school stories share a commonality created by the sexual abuse that occurred while children were at the school. Highway takes the sexual abuse that occurred at the schools and uses it as a metaphor to signify the destruction of Aboriginal Culture. Father Lafleur’s actions metaphorically enact this destruction and the Fur Queen’s hybridity allows for this attack. She becomes a contrary through her negation of her Aboriginal nature: at first, the Fur Queen is protector of Gabriel that identifies her as an agent of decolonization. Then her contradictory nature makes her a representation of colonization. Because of the Fur Queen’s hybridity, the Weetigo overpowers Cree Culture by using Gabriel as the sacrificial victim. Aligned with the Weetigo, Christianity became a vehicle for colonial oppression.

Niigonwedom James Sinclair's insight into hybridity is an important approach in the critical analysis of the Trickster in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. The Fur Queen's representation of both colonization and decolonization offers a dual approach that reclaims Aboriginal Culture while disempowering colonization. This approach enables the Fur Queen to establish reclamation by incorporating a Western philosophy into Cree perspectives. While incorporating Western perspectives the Fur Queen disempowers colonization by using only the tools that suit Aboriginal people. In *Kiss*, Highway uses trickster in the written context to open up a discussion on residential school sexual abuse. The approach allows for Highway to incorporate the Western method of storytelling with the Cree trickster narrative. The new tools that are created out of this melding are then applied to Aboriginal Culture and/or practices; in effect, these tools become Highway's 'blue tarp.' That is hybridity demonstrates an adaption of Aboriginal peoples within the modern world. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* illustrates Aboriginal people moving past colonial oppression by adapting Western perspectives that suit the Aboriginal Cultures' needs. By no means does this mean Aboriginal people have become assimilated. As in *Kiss*, assimilation was attempted through the residential school system and has failed. Aboriginal peoples have overcome the residential school era and have continued their existence.

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NORTHERN LIGHTS



Sarah Warner

Finding the “I” in Irony: Thomas King as Trickster, Narrator, and Creator¹

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“Only Coyotes can write about Coyotes.”

— Robin Ridington

Thomas King’s (Cherokee) *Green Grass, Running Water* is a complex novel in which the fabric of the real world characters is threaded with traditional Native American beliefs and practices, intertextual references, and retellings of Judeo-Christian creation narratives. In this multifaceted, multilayered novel, Coyote appears to play the role of the trickster figure, common in Native American narratives, as Coyote creates, directs, and disrupts many events in this story. However, Coyote is not the real trickster figure in *Green Grass*. Instead, the mysterious unnamed narrator is the true trickster figure, and King himself is the unnamed narrator, thus making the author Thomas King trickster, narrator, and creator. The evidence for this claim lies in an analysis of how King structures the novel

based on a combination of oral and written narrative storytelling methods and a mixture of Native American and Western cultures, texts, and beliefs within the text.

For Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), “American Indian and Western literary traditions differ greatly in the assumed purposes they serve” (“The Sacred Hoop” 4). Where Western literature seeks to portray individual emotions and experiences and to provide a representation of the real world, Native American literature uses narratives to create a world through which individuals can connect and share experiences. In telling stories, the Native American “people do not content themselves with simple preachments of this truth, but through the sacred power of utterance they seek to shape and mold, to direct and determine, the forces that surround and govern human life and the related lives of all things” (Allen 4). In *Green Grass*, King does just this. He intertwines elements of different cultures to critique the beliefs and influences of both the dominant and minority cultures while drawing attention to the possibility of their interconnectedness. This interconnectedness stems from the decolonial nature of this text in which King deliberately attempts to undo the effects of colonization (Ludlow). He achieves this through balancing sections of the novel that have the characteristics of either written or oral narratives, simultaneously contrasting both styles and showing how they can work together.

This novel is, theorists claim, “King’s reading of North American literature, literary theory, Native American history, and popular culture through the images and genre conventions of American Indian oral tradition” (Ridington 343). *Green Grass* is heavily laden with a multitude of canonical, biblical, and cultural references in an intricately and

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intentionally crafted web. Coyote, a typical representation of the trickster figure, appears to construct this web as he directs much of the action within the novel. However, if Coyote weaves this intricate web, it is King who makes the threads.

Trickster figures often appear in traditional Native American storytelling. These figures, such as Coyote, are also common in contemporary Native American literature, as they provide “a method of coping with the dominant cultural oppression that surrounds [trickster figures] and the Native Americans. As he survives nature and humankind, Coyote serves as a symbol of Native Americans’ experience” (Pettigrew 217). The trickster character is multifaceted, as he or she becomes a means of creation and destruction, gain and loss, truth and falsity, masculinity and femininity. King’s Coyote shows a number “of the features we associate with trickster figures in Native stories: he is versatile and ambiguous, a deceiver, shape-shifter and situation-invertor, and he is a sacred and lewd bricoleur” (Ibarrola-Armendariz 81). The trickster’s antics often result in humor or hilarity, but this thinly veils his or her confrontation with “the tragic issues of economic underdevelopment, social dysfunction, and personal frustration with well-intentioned conniving” (Pettigrew 219). Because Coyote is, by nature, a mixture of contradictions (s)he is well suited to creating implicit and explicit meanings and thus the actions and reactions of Coyote often create layers of irony within a text, and irony is King’s most notable tool as a trickster.

King plays with words, ideas, and histories in a way that portrays them in a new light and gives them a different meaning than the one originally ascribed to them. The creation of different meanings, of combining the said and the unsaid, is a form of irony

but irony needs more than just the author for it to be effective. There are two participants involved in the creation of irony, the first is the ironist who creates irony, and the second is the ironist’s intended audience, the reader (Hutcheon 10). In *Green Grass*, King is the ironist and the audience is the interpreter who identifies irony and then attributes meaning to these ironic utterances.

For Linda Hutcheon, irony is “the superimposition or rubbing together of these meanings (the said and the plural unsaid) with a critical edge created by a difference of context that makes irony happen” (19). But irony is not found in either what is said or not said, instead it “happens in the space *between* (and including) the said and unsaid; it needs both to happen” [emphasis original] (Hutcheon 12). This ‘difference of context’ occurs repeatedly in *Green Grass* when King mixes different cultures and ideas. For example, King removes thoughts and ideas from their usual context, such as the characters Adam and Eve from the Judeo-Christian creation narrative, and places them in the unfamiliar context of Native American creation stories. However, irony is more complicated than a simple figure of speech used to create a difference between implicit and explicit meanings.

According to Hutcheon, one should treat irony “not as a limited rhetorical trope or as an extended attitude to life, but as a discursive strategy operating at the level of language (verbal) or form (musical, visual, textual)” (10). Irony operates at the level of language by shifting the typically ascribed meaning of a word or phrase into a different light to encourage the reader to question that meaning and create a new one. People often equate irony with humor as changing meanings can be humorous, but humor is

more an after effect of irony than a necessary component as the primary purpose of irony is to help the reader view old ideas in a new light.

By placing irony in the context of discourse, one can “ensure a consideration of the social and interactive dimensions of irony’s functioning, whether the situation be a conversation or the reading of a novel” (Hutcheon 10). To better understand irony in the context of *Green Grass*, one must look towards the trickster figure as (s)he is the creator of irony—the one that places each instance of irony in the context that makes it ironic. When one understands how and why the trickster does this, one can better understand the “social and interactive dimensions of irony’s functioning” (Hutcheon 10). It is important to acknowledge that King is the true trickster figure because the function of his irony is not to destroy or discredit but instead to create new meaning.

Throughout *Green Grass*, King combines traditional Judeo-Christian creation narratives with traditional Native American creation narratives, as well as uses written and oral narrative techniques to deconstruct meaning, thus forcing the reader to reassess their beliefs and opinions and ultimately create new meanings. One problem with irony is that in any instance of irony the interpreter is not guaranteed to always ‘get’ it (Hutcheon 10). This is because the original meaning of words and phrases is created in social and historical contexts, and thus to create a new meaning one must understand the original meaning and so an understanding of the original social or historical context is needed. While irony does not necessarily lead to humor, many instances of King’s irony are humorous, and “in order to really ‘get’ the whole joke, one has to learn not only the facts, but also come to terms with a sense of humour that can only be described as subversive” (Fee

and Flick 134). King risks offending some of his readers as the humor his irony invokes may come across as politically incorrect. According to Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibwa), “Native humor often crosses the tenuous and ambiguous boundary between politically correct and politically incorrect. Native humor pushes the envelope. It asks questions. It makes statements. It goes places polite and civil humor won’t go” (69). For this reason, readers need to understand the functions, actions, and purpose of King as the trickster so as to avoid misinterpreting his actions as he attempts to recreate meaning.

Tricksters are like magicians in that they “are playful creatures, given to pranks and misdirection, and so their victories are often accomplished through deception and sly humor” (Watts 284). Trickster figures are common to most readers and easily identifiable by their characteristics as the “trickster-tale genre of folklore appears in some form in every culture” (“Trickster tale”). Coyote is the character most readers will assume is the trickster figure because of his or her wily and mischievous nature and because folklore tales often have only one trickster figure, but to make this assumption is to fall into the trap of reading *Green Grass* through a restricted lens. These restricted lenses are explained in Allen’s claim that readers are accustomed to reading literature from their own culture, and so they have “no problem seeing the relevance, the level of complexity, or the symbolic significance of that culture’s literature” (“The Sacred Hoop” 3). When exposed to symbolism and techniques they are not familiar with, readers may fail to see the purpose behind part of a text or fail to understand the depth of meaning. In other words, the reader may fail to see the gap between the said and unsaid and thus fail to create new meanings. Western readers that are unfamiliar with oral storytelling norms

might find techniques such as repetition boring and redundant and may write it off as ‘bad writing’ instead of seeing the intentional strategy behind it. *Green Grass* should not be read through a culturally restricted lens; instead, its readers need to remain aware of elements in this book that are different to the literatures they are accustomed to reading and be open to changing their already established opinions and points of views.

King’s novel shows evidence of double-consciousness, an awareness of both his and his book’s relation to the dominant culture and he “takes advantage of his knowledge from both cultures when he switches between them, thereby establishing dialogue between the two” (Stigter 77). As a result, James Ruppert claims, King locates himself “[a]s a participant in two literary and cultural traditions—Western and Native” (qtd. in Stigter 77). But more than that, “King’s work [requires] a similar bicultural awareness from his literary audience—many of whom will not belong to a Native tradition” (Stigter 84). It is in this way that King tricks his readers into stepping outside of their accustomed viewpoint and requires them to change their stance on how they read and interpret his text. One way King requires this change in stance from the reader is in the way he structures his novel.

King develops a number of plot lines in *Green Grass*. The first plot is hegemonic in that it unfolds in the linear structure typical of Western written narratives and follows the characters as they battle through everyday struggles imposed on them by the dominant Western culture. This plot follows three main characters through their everyday struggles on the Blackfoot reservation. Lionel is an under motivated electronics salesman who is dating Alberta Frank, a woman struggling to reconcile her desire for two men with wanting

to have a baby without being married to either man. Charlie Looking Bear is a lawyer and Alberta’s other love interest. These three characters face the hardships of everyday life coupled with the ever-present question of what it means to them as individuals to be Native American in a world where Western ideals quash their traditional beliefs and practices. The second plot is a counter narrative that uses oral storytelling techniques to work against the characteristics of the hegemonic narrative. This plot follows Coyote, GOD, and the unnamed narrator through hybrid retellings of the traditional Judeo-Christian and Native American creation narratives by four female figures from Native American cosmology.

In *Green Grass*, King portrays Coyote as the obvious trickster figure, but the overt trickster-ness of Coyote overshadows the true trickster figure. Coyote appears in both the hegemonic and counter narratives, but is seldom noticed when he enters the ‘real world’ of the hegemonic narrative even though he is responsible for influencing events for the main characters. The ‘real world’ is the world closest to the reader in that the structures and hierarchies of the characters, their jobs, and their actions take place within the bounds of the dominant Western culture. However, in the ‘real world,’ it is only the four “old Indians [who] recognize Coyote when he appears, making them tricksters as well; to the remainder of the characters, he is a wild yellow dog” (Heinimann 52). This could be a clue for the reader that the trickster is not as easily identifiable as they think, because it is only the four figures from Native American cosmology in their ‘real world’ forms that can see a trickster for what he really is. As a result, Coyote carries over a degree of resistance from the counter narrative into the hegemonic narrative. Thus in the hegemonic

narrative, Coyote is a successful trickster figure, as he manipulates tradition and time “to benefit Blackfoot characters who attempt to survive life on Canadian reservations in the modern era” (Pettigrew 219). Coyote also plays a trickster role during the creation narratives, as he leads the other characters in their retellings, sometimes keeping them on track and sometimes interrupting them, but it is the unnamed narrator who ultimately directs the creation plot.

The mysterious unnamed narrator always accompanies Coyote in the retelling of the creation narratives. (S)He appears only in the counter narrative, and refers to him or herself as “I.” It is never clear who this narrator is, but (s)he guides Coyote and the other characters through the text. For example, in the start of the third section, the unnamed narrator directs Coyote’s actions, ensuring that the characters stay on track:

‘Okay,’ I says. ‘Let’s get started.’

‘Is it time to apologize?’ says Coyote.

‘Not yet,’ I says.

‘Is it time to be helpful?’ says Coyote. ‘I can be very helpful.’

‘Forget being helpful,’ I says. ‘Sit down and listen.’

(King, *Green Grass* 253)

However, the unnamed narrator does more than direct Coyote’s actions in the creation narrative, (s)he is also responsible for creation. For Robin Ridington, “King’s novel is, among many other things, a Coyote creation story” (348). The novel begins with

Coyote’s dream, and that dream wakes up Coyote, but King as the author creates his version of the trickster in Coyote just as Coyote creates Coyote’s dream who becomes GOD. Ridington claims “creation... has to begin with dialogue. Somewhere, too, there has to be the voice of an author... For King, the first person singular will suffice” (348). Coyote, the unnamed narrator, and Coyote’s dream engage in a conversation that starts the novel and King engages himself with Coyote and GOD through a representation of himself in the first person singular.

However, it is not always clear that King is the unnamed narrator. The question of the identity of the narrator comes into play when the narrator adds the dialogue tag “says” to the lines that (s)he says to the other characters. For example:

“We’re not going to Miami,” I says.

“Fort Lauderdale is okay too,” says Coyote.

“We’re not going there either,” I says. (King, *Green Grass* 105)

This leads one to questions his/her identity because of the subject-verb agreement error. One could read this as a first person singular pronoun where the narrator attributes those lines of dialogue to his or herself, or read the ‘I’ as a proper noun. If King uses ‘I’ as a proper noun, he is giving the narrator the name ‘I’ and is either tricking the reading into thinking that the narrator often struggles with subject-verb agreement errors, or he is encouraging the reader to think the narrator is the ‘I’ of King himself.

However, one cannot take the narrator’s speech out of context by neglecting the

other strategies King uses in these dialogues. Maria Truchan-Tataryn and Susan Gingell argue that in King's use of "often fragmentary [syntax], and the sometimes non-standard grammar ('I says,' 'You got to watch,' 'real sorry,' and 'That one must have been lonely')" there is "arguably a stylistic synecdoche for a working or underclass-based ethnicized lect" (6). The subject-verb agreement error is common in spoken dialogue but less common in Western written dialogue and this reinforces the counter narrative by going against the Western norms.

Another tactic King uses from spoken dialogue is how the unnamed narrator often refers to Coyote as "that Coyote." (S)He tells the readers how "That Coyote was asleep and that Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen" (King, *Green Grass* 1). One could interpret the narrator's use of 'that' as mimicking oral speech patterns. In using words such as 'that,' King is reconstructing "some of his passages in a manner that is imitative of preserved, transcribed and translated texts from oral traditions... A noticeable feature from these early preserved texts is seen in the use of demonstratives such as 'that' and 'those'" (Stigter 79-80). However, one could also claim that the unnamed narrator (King) is differentiating one specific Coyote from a group of Coyotes or identifying a difference between both of their 'Coyote-ness'. While these minor elements of the text may seem unimportant, they exhibit a fundamental part of King's decolonial strategies in *Green Grass*.

Even though the interactions between the unnamed narrator and Coyote are often humorous and thus risk frivolity, these characters perform two fundamental functions. First, Coyote and the unnamed narrator "succeed in recovering a certain balance amid

the apparent chaos of most situations by means of a type of humor that they believe to be integral to all kinds of life on this earth" and second, "they incorporate into the written text some of the key features of Native oral storytelling" (Ibarrola-Armendariz 81). While the reader can find features of oral storytelling throughout the novel, they are most apparent in the counter narrative.

King uses these elements of oral storytelling in the counter narrative to cast the traditional style of the written hegemonic narrative in a new light. In order to understand how King uses elements of oral storytelling to displace the conventions of written narratives, one has to pinpoint what these differences are and how they affect the text.

In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter J. Ong outlines several characteristics of oral story telling based on research and studies of cultures based primarily in orality. By examining Ong's characteristics of oral storytelling, one can see the extent to which King harnesses these techniques in his novel. First, orally told stories are additive rather than subordinative, meaning that oral storytelling focuses more on the convenience of the speaker than on the organization of the discourse itself (Ong 36). For example, "So Old Woman is floating in the water. And she looks around. And she sees a man. A young man. A young man walking on water" (King, *Green Grass* 387). These short sentences are additive in that they help the reader add segments of information that build on one another instead of having the information laid out in a linear manner as it would be in a written narrative. Instead of focusing on grammatical rules to develop meaning, orality relies on simplicity. A written narrative "develops more elaborate and fixed grammar than oral discourse does" because written discourse depends more on linguistic structure as it

lacks the real world, existential contexts that help “determine meaning in oral discourse somewhat independently of grammar” (Ong 37). While the repeated use of ‘and’ seems redundant it is another characteristic of orality that goes against the Western narrative norms. As trickster and creator, King uses these oral storytelling techniques to enhance the counter narrative as it opposes the norms of the hegemonic narrative thus questioning the validity of its rigorously structured grammatical rules.

The “redundancy [and] repetition of the just said, keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track. Since redundancy characterizes oral thought and speech, it is in a profound sense more natural to thought and speech than is sparse linearity” (Ong 40). This repetition ensures that both the teller and the listener remember the plot, events, and characters from the narrative, and serves as a reminder of the purpose or goals of the story. *Green Grass* begins with the lines “So. In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water.” (King, *Green Grass* 1) and ends with the lines “But there is water everywhere,” says Coyote. ‘That’s true,’ I says. ‘And here’s how it happened.’” (King, *Green Grass* 469). By drawing the reader’s attention to water in the creation plot, King emphasizes its meaning throughout the novel. As a result, King helps the reader create and recreate meaning in their interpretation of other creation narratives as well the creation narrative the reader adheres to.

While Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz claims that *Green Grass* “pits two radically different narrative forms—one oral, the other written—against each other” (68), King’s repetition of water imagery in the written and oral narrative styles is not merely a way of contrasting the two. Instead, King reminds the reader that, as with the hybridization of the Native

American and Judeo-Christian creation narratives, he is not mocking or playing the two cultures against each other instead, he is showing a common link between different creation narratives. This repetition of water imagery and references to water in the start of each of the creation narratives has a larger implication as it draws the reader’s attention to both the contradictions and similarities in different cultures as a whole.

While “oral speech employs repetition and additions for emphasis and as a mnemonic device... this oral form on the page creates a humorous visual effect as well” (Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell 12). There are a number of instances where King uses repetition as a means of creating a visual pattern, and this happens in both major plot lines. In an exchange between two major and two minor characters, the repetition has the following effect:

‘What did the water come from?’ said Alberta.

‘What did the water come from?’ said Patrolman Delano.

‘What did the water come from?’ said Sergeant Cereno.

‘What did the water come from?’ said Lionel. (King, *Green Grass* 104)

In this dialogue exchange, the characters are asking a question that the creation plot characters ask in reference to the start of creation. However, these four characters are referring to a puddle of water that Lionel stepped in. While the repetition of these four lines has a comic effect, the repetition and change in dialogue tags also emphasizes the continuous water theme that runs throughout the novel and thus serves as a reminder

that the novel is questioning where it all began. Through using these oral storytelling techniques, King contrasts the ways different cultures tell a story showing that the rigid written narrative can be combined with oral story telling techniques to create a closer connection between the reader and the text. And by showing how oral techniques can be transferred onto a page, King creates a visual representation of these techniques, further merging the two genres and creating a hybrid text.

Ong also claims that oral discourse must relate to the listeners' and tellers' experiences in order for the narrator to fully engage the reader because:

in the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings. (42)

Dialogue does not follow the grammatical rules of written discourse. When people converse, they use sentence fragments, colloquialisms, and dialects. People interrupt one another as they talk and change topics and directions in their conversations, as does Coyote. By using these techniques, King adds another layer of orality to his text because “digressions and interjections combine with the elements of oral speaking mentioned above to consistently sustain an experience of orality that involves all readers in a dynamic episode of Aboriginal reality” (Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell 12). One of most effective aspects of oral storytelling King uses is repetition, not just of words or phrases but of

ideas and stories. The retelling of similar stories creates different versions that the reader compares based on what is said and what is not said in each retelling. This creates a further space in which the reader synthesizes new meanings and interpretations.

This repetition is most evident in how each character in the counter narrative begins their version of a creation narrative. For example, “And here’s how it happened,” “Once upon a time,” “A long time ago in a faraway land,” “Many moons comechucka,” “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” “Alright. In the beginning there is nothing. Just the water” (King, *Green Grass* 3, 9, 10, 11, 112). With each repetition of the creation story, as with the retelling of every story, the story changes a little (Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell 2). Each of these beginnings has a different feel to them as they link to a variety of genres such as biblical narratives and fairytales or have distinctly a Native American or Western feel to them. Through this method, King is able to show that each style and origin of these beginnings is a valid way to start a story despite the authority traditional Western written narratives such as the Bible claim over fairytales and folklore.

In written narratives, the story does not change because the words on the page stay the same. In oral storytelling, the stories change and adapt depending on the teller and the audience, and as each character in the counter narrative takes their turn at telling the story, they begin their story differently. By changing how a story is told, King subtly shifts that story’s original meaning and with each shift, the gap between the said and unsaid grows. If Western stories were not written, they would be just as susceptible to change as oral stories are and just because the purpose and meanings of stories change it does not negate their validity and importance. If irony takes place in the space between

what is said and not said, then King is using irony to widen the gap and enhance the potential for the creation of different meanings.

It is because the oral storyteller caters to their audience on each occasion that stories evolve, and the “telling of the story becomes an event independent of the previous events of telling the story or of the original event which is presumably the subject of the story” (Bailey 50). No one oral telling of a story is the same, unlike written narratives that, once printed, remain unchanged. In an indirect way, this gives the reader a small participatory role in how the narrative is told and allows them deep immersion in the story. King as the trickster manages to accomplish this feat in the creation narratives of *Green Grass*, despite the story itself being written in the book. However, with each repeated section or anecdote, the reader reflects on and compares different versions of the story, thus synthesizing the meanings as they would after listening to different versions of orally told stories.

King’s use of oral storytelling techniques can be seen on both the micro sentence level and on a macro level within the novel as a whole. The structure of the text jumps between the real and magical worlds, the different plot lines, and it changes focus on different characters and events without warning. Thus even though he “assumes a narrative, conversational style within his novel that is mimetic of oral tradition, narration, and audience interaction, he uses this style within the literary form of the novel, thus combining Native and Western traditions” (Stigter 84). King explains that the purpose “in writing such a broken and discontinuous narrative is to create a sense of movement and the effects of oral storytelling” (qtd. in Ibarrola-Armendariz 71). Not only do the

characters interrupt one another, the different sections of the text do too.

Through his use of oral storytelling techniques, King has the reader become an active participant in the creation of meaning. It is up to the reader to synthesize the countless interpretations they have of both the text and intertextual references within it. This synthesis comes as a result of King’s use of irony as he portrays ideas, events, and texts in a way that puts them in a different light and changes their meaning. King calls his blending of oral and written techniques “interfusional to describe that part of Native literature which is a blending of oral literature and written literature” (“Godzilla” 186). In Western narratives, the process is often linear as the author writes the text that the audience reads with no input from the reader, whereas in oral narratives the author adapts the narrative to the needs of his or her audience. It is through techniques such as repetition, involving the listener in a ‘lifeworld’ experience, and breaking from the grammatical conventions of written texts that oral storytellers are able to engage his or her listeners in the narrative.

It is because “the spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, [that] the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups” (Ong 72). Where written narratives give the reader no say in how the story unfolds, oral narratives give readers a degree of agency. Although King cannot fully achieve these effects because *Green Grass* is ultimately a written narrative, he makes use of oral storytelling techniques to give his readers agency in the sense that they can create, change, and manipulate the meaning of his novel and the events therein. Thus, these interfusional techniques are able to create a world in which

the author, text, and reader interact as opposed to a text that merely relays information from the world as written narratives do.

More than that, however, King has created a text that engages with other texts through his extensive use of intertextuality. Numerous references to canonical texts and films in *Green Grass* serve as an ironic portrayal of the dominant Western culture's beliefs. King uses these to explore issues such as the stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans. For example, Eli is a Native American character who reads pulp westerns even though he can predict the endings because of the formulaic plots and despite the fact that he does not fit into or agree with the perpetuation of the stereotypical representations of Native Americans (Gruber 141). This draws the readers' attention to how the media perpetuates stereotypes and the effects this has on their understanding of Native American culture. It is in this way that King shows how "the main potential of such repetitively mind-numbing texts is soporific rather than culturally representative... humor therefore meets literary/historic stereotypes on their own ground, exposes them to liberating laughter, and reworks them from within" (Gruber 141). By having Eli read pulp westerns, King draws attention to stereotypical representations of Native Americans and the fact that Eli does not fit that representation, thus forcing the reader to reevaluate their assumptions and create new definitions for what it means for an individual to be Native American.

The main texts that King extensively deconstructs are the biblical creation narratives. In the beginning of the novel, Coyote dreams, and this dream creates GOD and GOD in turn creates parts of the world such as the Garden of Eden. The connection between traditional Native American and Judeo-Christian stories is seen in the creation of GOD

and the retelling of traditional biblical narratives. However, these retellings do more than mix cosmological ideas, they also provide a commentary on more recent events as GOD's banishment of First Woman and Ahdamn from Eden becomes a commentary on the Native American's forced removal from their own lands at the hands of the dominant culture (Gruber 178). A similar commentary happens with GOD's actions in Eden when he tells First Woman and Ahdamn the rules of eating his food in the garden:

Anybody who eats my stuff is going to be very sorry says that GOD. There are rules you know.

I didn't eat anything, says Old Coyote.

Christian rules. (King, *Green Grass* 73)

This exchange comes after Ahdamn and First Woman have already eaten food in the garden, and the establishing of rules after the facts shows how meaningless or unfair they can be. The line "Christian rules" reflects on how nonsensical the Western rules forced on the Native Americans seem. In this way, "through the presentation of creation stories from both cultures, King alludes to the oral traditions by incorporating these stories and having them interact with stories from the dominant, literate culture" (Stigter 77). As a trickster, King assimilates these different realms of knowledge and contrasts their similarities and differences in order to confront the reader's beliefs. If irony is found in the gap between the said and the unsaid, then the reader is the wedge that widens this space as they create and recreate meaning.

The trickster figure is "a metaphor for continuance, for Coyote survives and a large
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part of his bag of survival tricks is his irreverence” (Allen, “The Scared Hoop” 158). Readers may view King’s dismantling of Judeo-Christian creation stories as irreverence for those sacred texts, however, in *Green Grass*, King creates a Native American survivance text. By calling a text a survivance story, one is referring to stories that “are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” (Vizenor 1). The tricksters’ irreverence is seen in his breaking down of canonical texts and cosmological beliefs, as the trickster has no respect for the stories and ideas that have been held in such high regard over others. Western settlers tried to crush the Native American beliefs that they viewed as childish or primitive. As a result, the authority of the written text devalued the spoken word. Some readers may take offence at King’s mixing of traditional Judeo-Christian creation narratives, even his mixing of canonical texts, with Native American cosmology. However, “King’s strategy for writing for an audience primarily composed of the uninformed is not to pander to its preconceptions or to produce explanations, but to entice, even trick this audience into finding out for themselves” (Fee and Flick 132). The irreverent attitude of the trickster creates resistance against dominant cultural beliefs and in harnessing this resistance, King is able to deconstruct old beliefs, but not to destroy them, rather to disassemble them so that the reader reconstructs new meanings. King as the trickster uses irony to offer “both familiar situations or images *and* their re-presentations, [as] irony in effect changes readers’ perspectives and allegiances” [emphasis original] (Gruber 58).

Sharon M Bailey argues that the in using oral storytelling techniques, King hinders the authority carried by written narratives. King uses Coyote and the unnamed narrator

“on the basic assumption that oral text can serve as a metalanguage which is capable of conveying the true nature of reality which the written text is unable to represent” (Bailey 46). As each text is retold orally in the novel, it gains a different meaning, and thus by “placing a cleft between the written text and its historical meaning, the text becomes, so to speak, arbitrary” (Bailey 46). In doing this, King as the trickster is forcing the reader to question the meaning and validity of those texts, but once those texts are marked as arbitrary, so too is *Green Grass* viewed as an arbitrary text. If oral storytelling techniques are used as a metalanguage to analyze written texts, then the written narrative of *Green Grass* contradicts itself and brings its own meaning into question. Through creating a critique of his own novel, King continues to play the role of the trickster by “poking fun at his own oral narrator with the same glee with which he lampoons the non-Native icons of culture” (Bailey 46).

By using these techniques, King creates a sense of irony in that he reveals biblical and canonical texts in a way that changes the intended meaning of both Western beliefs and the Native American cosmologies. However, he does the same with *Green Grass*. The novel has an overt sense of playfulness about it, as the characters, events, and slices of reality are coated in irony that often times creates humorous situations. In *Contemporary American Indian Writing: Unsettling Literature*, Dee Horne claims “Settlers who are aware of how King plays on colonial assumptions realize that, in laughing at the text, they are really laughing at themselves. In effect, King plays the part of Coyote, the trickster” (n.p.). This playfulness draws the readers’ attention to their own preconceived ideas and beliefs and makes them question where those ideas and beliefs came from, and what they

really mean.

Perhaps the “most striking effect of *Green Grass* is its ability to arouse readers’ desire to ‘get’ the in-jokes, to track the allusions, and to find answers to a whole series of posed but unanswered questions” (Fee and Flick 131). In this way, King as the trickster is leading the reader to analyze and assess what he has written and to question both the meaning of this text and meaning outside of the text. There is “no reader of this novel, except perhaps Thomas King, who is not outside some of its networks of cultural knowledge. But every reader is also inside at least one network and can therefore work by analogy to cross borders into the others” (Fee and Flick 131). It is because the purpose of the trickster figure is to breakdown set ideas and meanings that King as the trickster harnesses the effects of irony, but more than that, the trickster doesn’t offer new meanings or ideas to the reader, (s)he only guides the reader towards creating their own. In oral storytelling, and to a degree, in the written forms of oral storytelling, “words articulate reality... where thought and feeling are one, where objective and subjective are one, where speaker and listener are one, where sound and sense are one” (Allen, “The Sacred Hoop” 17). It is through his use of oral storytelling techniques that King creates a space for the reader in which words articulate a reality that the reader constructs as they assimilate new meanings. This effect is different to traditional written narratives in which the writer creates a world for the reader where the meaning is set. As a result, instead of telling the reader what it means to deconstruct texts and mix realities, King is making the reader do the work in creating their world of meaning.

King’s use of jokes and humor come from changing the meaning of texts, beliefs,

and ideas through his use of irony. For King, humor “ensures survival and cultivates community” (Andrews 8). Jennifer Andrews claims that “humor is a way of recalling and going beyond tragedy, of working through the hurt of a personal history, of healing old wounds and hearing the truth” (11). While irony is not always humorous, in *Green Grass* it often is. “Because irony... happens in something called ‘discourse,’” Hutcheon claims, “its semantic and syntactic dimensions cannot be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its context of deployment and attribution” (17). This is why it is important to understand the role irony and humor plays in Native America culture. For Taylor, “Native humor comes from five hundred years of colonization, of oppression... often the only way left for Native people to respond to the cruelties of Fourth World existence was in humor” (69). Understanding this will help the reader avoid interpreting King’s humor as politically incorrect and allow them to see that humor is the result of King’s use of irony through which he tries to create new meaning. It is through irony that King plays off different cultures to such an extent that the reader is left laughing at their own ideas when they see past the differences and find the similarities in a variety of cultural beliefs. The trickster is a creator, and King constantly creates and recreates meaning in the text.

If King is the true trickster figure, one may wonder why he needs Coyote as a secondary trickster figure. King engages with Coyote because in “using his own authorial voice in counterpoint to the contrary voice of Coyote, King presents a Native American perspective on the American literary and cultural canon” (Ridington 343). In contemporary literature, the trickster represents “both the play and the politics of current fiction, the

trickster can permit a new narrative route to problems that range from legitimacy of voice to canonicity” (Heinimann 39). King does just this as he questions the authority of written texts and the structure of the literary canon which, when portrayed in a different light, seem arbitrary.

When readers realize that King is the true trickster figure, they gain a better understanding of the author and thus of the cultural context in which the novel is written. This is important because “the significance of a literature can be best understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and the purpose of literature is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the cultural assumptions on which the literature is based” (Allen, “The Sacred Hoop” 3). Native American narratives create a world where individuals share experiences and connect with one another as opposed to traditional Western narratives that focus on the emotions and experiences of individual characters in a way that provides a representation of the real world and allows little room for the creation of new meaning. Irony plays an important role in Native American narratives as it “constitutes a powerful strategy for undermining hegemonic ideologies, authoritative Western claims to Truth and the power ensuing from them” (Gruber 58). Thus it is important to understand that King is the true trickster figure because in accepting this distinction and understanding the cultural assumptions behind King’s work, the reader can understand that the purpose of King’s novel is to challenge the readers’ beliefs and have them assimilate new meanings in the space between the said and unsaid. Understanding King as the true trickster figure also helps readers’ not take offence to his use of irony and humor as they become aware that King’s purpose is not to destroy meaning but instead

to recreate it.

It is in this space between the said and the unsaid that King functions as the trickster and this enables him to “ingratiate and to intimidate, to underline and undermine; [to] bring people together and drive them apart” (Hutcheon 56). If irony is found between the said and the unsaid, then King is the mallet that drives the wedge of the reader into widening this gap where they can find a multitude of meanings.

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INUKINUK



Sue Matheson

Soft Like Fry Bread

by Helen Knott

It was 1965 and one of the coldest winters that decade when Kokum came to my house and found my mother elbow deep in suds, scrubbing a diaper clean. Mother stopped mid-scrub and rushed to my little brother, making it just in time to fish a potato peel out of his mouth with her finger. My brother whined. Mother scolded him, swept the potato peels into a corner, stood there a few moments and sighed.

“He’s still drinking. I haven’t seen him in over two months now, and there’s no money left,” my Mother said, referring to my father’s absence. She returned to her chair, stopping to pick up a half peeled potato. My Kokum nodded silently as she watched my brother crawl toward my two sisters who were playing cards nearby.

“Watch them,” my mother said pointing her lips in our direction as she tugged on her coat, buttoning it up over her swollen belly. “I need to get fire wood.”

Kokum told me I was three years old then, howling like a coyote with snot flowing into my mouth. Mother came back inside with a flurry of snow chasing in after her before she could shut the door. She stoked the fire and started on a supper of boiled potatoes.

My Kokum stood up and pointed at me.

“That one,” she said.

“I’m taking that one,” my Kokum declared.

Kokum told me this story twice but never included my mother’s reply. I like to think my mother put up a fight. I like to think she said no repeatedly, getting louder each time, hitting the top of the stained wooden table with her calloused fingered fist. Maybe she asked, “For how long will you take my son?” I imagine her agreeing with my Kokum, believing I was only going for an overnight visit. Yet I can’t help but picture my mother silently nodding her head without looking up to meet my Kokum’s eyes. Mother probably stayed hunched over peeling potatoes, her shoulders and head heavy with the worry of empty cupboards, the burden of many little bellies to fill, and the weight of an absent husband.

My Kokum loaded me on the toboggan she used to carry potatoes, flour, and on rare occasions, oranges. She pulled me six houses down and took me into my new home. Kokum's house had two small rooms: one belonged to Kokum and the other to my Aunt Liza and her boyfriend. He was always stumbling in while the sky cradled the moon, breathe heavy with the smell of whiskey. At first, I shared Kokum's bed, but when I was five, I started to sleep in the main room with the other boys.

David, Michael, Lawrence, and Charlie were my true brothers in life, all of us taken in by Kokum. We were from families who couldn't, or just plain wouldn't, care for us. Each night, we lined up on the living room floor like sardines in a can. Often we shared the space with a drifter or relative who was passing through. "No" wasn't a word Kokum used when someone needed help.

The Metis people of Chetwynd lived in Moccasin Flats: a string of shack-like houses on the outskirts of town. The doors screeched. The floors had missing planks, yet the homes overflowed with men, women, and children. At night you could hear men hooting and hollering, swollen eyed women crying, and sometimes the sweet sound of a fiddle.

At first, I didn't think it was strange that I lived at Kokum's house. In fact, I believed I lived with her because I was her favourite grandchild. But when I turned eight years

old, my feelings changed and I began to wonder why I had to visit my brothers and sisters instead of live with them. There were other kids in Moccasin Flats being raised by their Kokums, but their parents didn't live a few doors down.

I spent a lot of afternoons at mother's house and sometimes the visit would end with a fat lip or a bloody nose, but I always came back the next day ready to apologize for something I'd never started. When I visited, I swept the floor, did the dishes, or hauled in firewood, hoping mother would see I was a good boy and let me come home. She never noticed. My brothers and sisters didn't care if I came around but I refused to give up. I didn't understand why I was different. My family treated me like a pesky mosquito, but all I wanted was to belong.

"Get out of there!" my sister shrieked as she shoved me away from the cupboard.

"I was just looking!" I yelled back, lying with as much outrage as I could muster.

"You're not allowed to eat our food," she said angrily as she crossed her arms.

"I didn't touch nothin," I pouted.

“Oh yeah? What are those crumbs on your lip then?” she said pointing at my mouth.

I put my head down and said nothing in my defense.

“I’m telling mom,” she smirked.

I left the house and scooped up a few stones just in case I saw a grouse. I had been working on my aim lately and Kokum would be proud of me for bringing home a grouse on my own. My stomach began to feel heavy with regret. They had cookies in their cupboard and I was really hungry. We never had cookies. When I reached Kokum’s house, she was sitting at the table with pink rollers adorning her head and a hand-rolled cigarette dangling from her lips.

“You going to bingo?” I asked her.

“How’d you know?” she asked, cocking her head to the side as if she didn’t know herself.

“Kokum, that’s the only time you curl your hair!” I teased.

The corners of her lips turned up and she put out her cigarette then motioned for me to come over. Kokum pulled me on to her lap and ran her fingers through my hair.

“Your hair is just about long enough to curl too,” she teased.

“Kooooookum,” I squealed as I ripped away from her embrace.

“I’ll cut it tomorrow, my boy. If I win enough, maybe I’ll even give you money to get a haircut,” she cooed. Kokum’s voice was sweet like raspberry jam and soft like her fry bread.

That night I rolled my blanket out on the floor and brought the second one around me sliding the ends snugly under either side of my body, forming a tight cocoon. I never complained to Kokum, but at night I imagined for her a house with a stove so she could be warm in winter. It would have running water, a bathtub, and a flush toilet. I pictured a house with enough rooms and mattresses for all of us boys. I drifted off dreaming of a mattress of my very own.

In the morning, I cut myself a thick slab of bread and used Kokum’s raspberry jam to coat it. After every little crumb had been eaten from the table top, I headed to

my mother's house. As I approached, I could hear the laughter of my eldest sister. I tried the handle but the door was locked. I knocked. Nothing. I knocked again. Still nothing. I knocked harder. The lock slid out of place and the door opened a sliver. My sister's obsidian eyes appeared under a gathered brow.

"Let me in," I said, pushing at the door.

"Mom says you're not allowed," she taunted as she blocked my entrance.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Mom says you're not allowed here unless she's here. She said you can't come in and eat our food. It's not for you!"

"Yea right!" I yelled as I tried to push past her.

She shoved me with the strength of a cow moose and I tumbled backwards. I got up and ran at the door, pounding it with my balled-up brown fists.

"Let me in! Let me in!" I cried.

My sisters and brothers appeared at the window with curious looks upon their faces and watched me as if I was some raging zoo animal. My cheeks burned and my arms began to feel weak.

"I won't eat any more food. I promise. Just let me in!" I shouted as I turned the handle repeatedly.

"Please! I swear I won't do it again. I was just hungry that's all. I won't do it again," I vowed as tears cut tracks down my cheeks.

"I won't eat nothing, I swear," sobbing to an unmoved audience.

One by one they shrugged, shook their heads, then disappeared behind the walls that separated the wanted from the unwanted.

Tears blurred my vision. I ran toward Kokum's and away from what I couldn't understand. Inside, I fell like a rag doll to the floor, unable to pick myself up. Kokum

placed my head in her lap, ran her fingers through my hair, rocked me gently back and forth, all the while humming until I stopped crying.

“Kokum,” I sputtered, “why don’t I belong?”

“My boy,” she sighed. “you look like you did the day I took you home, snot nosed and crying.” She chuckled to herself.

“When I saw you like this many years before, I knew,” she said motioning from her head outwards, “that you belonged with me. You belonged here with us.”

Kokum pulled me up to a sitting position and placed her hands on either side of my face and looked me in the eyes.

“You belong here,” she said as she pointed at her heart.

“My boy,” Kokum said, “come for a walk with me.”

I rose silently and followed her out the door and along the wooded path behind our house. We walked up a low slope, both of us silent, listening to the forest around

us. Nature seemed to make her young again and she blazed a trail ahead of me and I struggled to keep up. She led me into a clearing where all of Moccasin Flats was visible.

“I want you to look at this,” she said as she waved her arm over the land, “The way our people are living are not our ways, they have gotten lost here. Settling in one place has made them crazy and they lost something of themselves my boy. They have become takers, piling up stuff like the white man does, instead of sharing with each other. This isn’t the way of those who went before us. They never come out to the bush to hear what the Creator has to say.”

Kokum drew in a deep long breath before she spoke again, “Your mother... they took her from me. They put her in that residential school and when she came back to us she was different. I don’t know what happened, but she had nightmares after that. Something bad happened, something made her distant like she is. It’s like her spirit follows two steps behind her and her heart, even further back. It’s not her fault my boy and it’s not yours, she needs to call her spirit back to her.”

Her eyes glazed over and she went silent.

“Most of these people that live here went to that bad place too. They are all walking around wounded and angry. No one talks about these things and they carry whatever

happened around with them. That's why they fight so much and drink. I want it to be different for you. A lot of the families here are on welfare. I have seen that the easiest way to kill a man's spirit is to pay him to do nothing. I want you to work hard for what you want. There is more for you than this. You are with me because the Creator meant for it to happen my boy. An easy road makes for a weak spirit, your road is hard but you will be able to gain strength and make it through much. My boy, can't you see? You are mine so that you may see in a new way."

Kokum closed her eyes and began to pray in Cree. Tears flowed down my face and I felt a heaviness lift from my heart. That night I dreamt I was in my mother's backyard looking up at the clotheslines that crisscrossed each other. I stood on one foot and began to flap my arms. The sky was so blue just beyond the wires. I knew that if I flapped hard enough, I would be able to rise up like an eagle. Just as I was about to rise off the ground, I woke up.

That morning I felt calm and hopeful. I knew that I was going to be able to make it through anything. I belonged, with or without the acceptance of my mother and siblings. I would make something of my life, go to school, graduate, have a family of my own and work hard. I closed my eyes again and I whispered a prayer to the Creator for the first time in my life. I was right where I was supposed to be.



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