

“‘HOW SHOULD I EAT THESE?’ WITH YOUR MOUTH, ASSHOLE”:

FIRST NATIONS WOMEN’S LITERATURE RESPONDS
TO COLONIAL DISCOURSE

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF ARTS

in

GENDER STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 2005

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395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
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395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-28372-1

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-28372-1

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Abstract

The Canadian Indian Act creates a legal definition of First Nations women's identity based upon the gendered and racial components of colonisation. A number of First Nations women writers articulate the impact of this law as they navigate the literary categories in search of a space for empowered, complex, challenging narratives of Native womanhood. When unable to access powerful and complete representations of female Native sexuality, First Nations women face a false binary of squaw/whore or Indian princess/Pocahontas. This limited sexual representation results in a larger damaging narrative of diminished access to legal protection.

The writings of Eden Robinson, Monique Mojica, Beatrice Culleton (Mosionier), Marilyn Dumont, and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm challenge this false binary and offer provocative and exciting representations of Native womanhood. These challenging narratives are located within the notion of Third Space and hybridity. Third Space allows for the exploration of "less false" images of First Nations women, and feminist standpoint theory highlights the role of the 'outside within' in creating narratives that challenge the colonial perspective. These authors' narratives are neither simple nor easily contained within set boundaries. They differ in their approaches to tradition, identity, and ideas of representation. Yet all these women contribute to a dialogue of passion, life, anger, aggression, and resistance to harmful and damaging stereotypes. First Nations women writers are engaging in a discourse with legal notions of self that will challenge the colonial foundations of contemporary Native women's legal subjectivity.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Dee Horne, and my committee members, Dr. Maryna Romanets and Dr. Robert Budde, for their attention to detail and excellent suggestions during the writing of this thesis. Many thanks to Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske, Dr. Heather Smith, and the late Perry Shawana for their work with me on an earlier incarnation of the legal theory. I also thank my sisters, Leone and Julia Payson, and my fiancé Jim Swingle for their time and comments on this work. My thanks to my parents Jan and Rod Payson for providing the space and love needed to complete this process, and hugs to the Grad Office Girls who remained my reality check. I also thank Coral Edmonds for her continual support and belief that I would succeed.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Grandma Hazel Payson who was an amazing, funny, tough woman who inspired her granddaughters to be the same.

INTRODUCTION

In my work over the past few years, it has become clear to me that there is a legacy of racism and sexism woven throughout the very fabric of our Canadian citizenry via the Indian Act, and this legislation cannot be ignored. Yet this legislation is continually overlooked due to fictional narratives marking a historical closure to all the racism and sexism of the past relationships between First Nations¹ people and European colonisers. Within such narratives, a break with history means issues of racism and sexism no longer require contemporary discussion. As Lawrence points out: "In Canada, few individuals appear to have engaged with the depth of the problem that the Indian Act represents – its overarching nature as a discourse of classification, regulation, and control that has indelibly ordered how Native people think of things 'Indian'"(4). In turn, these narratives are about the interactions between individuals and law. I am intrigued by discussions of legal identities of First Nations women and, in particular, the interaction of these colonial narratives with the construction of literary identities.

Many women writers and theorists discuss the impact racism and sexism has on their lives, and I want to examine specifically a segment of society which has had *legal definitions* of their identity entrenched within the Canadian government for over a hundred years. I am interested in the existence of a legislated notion of 'Indianness' as it relates to an individual's notion of self and positioning. In turn, this examination draws upon the relationship between social

¹ I have elected to use the term First Nations and Native throughout this thesis. I have also used the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Indian when they are used initially by another author or when referencing a specific perspective. For example, the UN uses the term Indigenous when referencing issues of the original peoples in an area. Both Native and First Nations refer to a diverse group of Indigenous peoples from multiple nations.

policy, law, and identities. Feminism has provided my framework for understanding the world as “whether acknowledged or not, every form of feminist politics, and there are many, implies a particular way of understanding patriarchy and the possibilities of change” (Weedon 5). In particular, I am interested in how people can come to understand their own identities through various narratives. These narratives surround us in everyday life in school textbooks, ads on television, characters in movies and novels, and the reporting of the news during the dinner hour. I believe in the power of narratives to have both negative and positive impacts on the construction of a sense of self. Thus, I decided to examine specific narratives of identity within the context of contemporary Native women’s writing.

I have chosen to examine five First Nations women writers and the way they explore expressions of identity in their work. I am interested in the ways identity can be expressed as a direct interaction with the language and terminology of colonisation. I want to keep stressing the link between a history of external-based legal definitions of identity through colonisation and current narratives of Native womanhood.² As Engel and Munger point out, an individual’s relationship with law is articulated and negotiated as “day-to-day talk among friends, [and shapes] the terms of discussion or the images and conceptual categories that are used in everyday interactions” (11). In this manner I am curious how these authors’ texts create interactions with and transformations of the coloniser’s viewership of Native women’s identity. By

² “Native womanhood” is used by Anderson throughout her text and is an extremely positive and empowering way of speaking about the issue of identity.

interacting with each other as a community of writers and forming connections between their own lived experiences and the impacts of colonization, these authors are drawing attention to these sites of resistance and transformation while taking part in a regeneration of their own agency within the construction of Native women's literary representations.

Focusing on First Nations women's literature, I had to reach an understanding of how I would understand that category to exist. It is important to note that the formation and general acceptance of these conceptual boundaries shift, depending on who is defining the terms of definition, and can become particularly problematic when a large institution is responsible for forming the boundaries of 'nativeness'.³ These issues of shifting boundaries occur not only within academia, but between writers themselves. In the same manner as those band leaders who have sought to exclude C-31 women from returning to their homes due to what they termed arbitrary boundaries of Indianness, authors and critics look to construct the same boundaries of exclusion around the definition of Native literature.⁴ Krupat and Swann point out how one writer refused to submit writing to a second edited anthology of Native literature based on what he called a number of "self-nominated Indians" present in the first edition. The editors

³ Heiss discusses this at length with respect to Australian policies for Aborigine peoples. They have attempted to include a number of various approaches to this definition of Aborigine Literature including lived experience, descent and acceptance in community, who the literature is written for, content, what has driven the production of the writing, and how it reflects real life experiences. See pages 207-211.

⁴ With the changes made to the Indian Act in 1985, groups of women regained their Status though Bill C-31. But rather than being accepted back into their familial properties, they were fought by some band leaders who felt a closer affinity to the Canadian government than to the women of their bands. In a number of these situations, the band leaders stated that they felt these Native women had been unduly influenced by white feminists and that they had turned their backs on the greater goals of the Nations. In interviews the Native women replied that to them this all came down to the question of food and shelter for them and their children. See Shirley Bear.

note, “He did not wish to appear in any follow-up volume that might include other, to him, at least, questionable Natives” (Krupat and Swann xii). Such examples of policing the boundaries underline the need for a flexible and responsive understanding about group identities. Boundaries must be able to highlight any necessary reasons for distinctions between people and why there is a group being considered outside of the categories of Canada, North America, or even just people. Yet these categorisations do not represent homogenous groups, and there will not necessarily be a consensus on how any distinctions should be made around questions of Native identity. Issues of group identity will need to be considered on a case by case example. In the end, these boundaries can celebrate “how many different ways there are today to be Indian, and ... how many different ways there are to *write about* being Indian” (Krupat and Swann xiv). Highlighted within these many ways to ‘write about being Indian’ are the narratives of resistance, transformation, and a (re)presenting of Native womanhood.

I have limited my authors due to a number of factors, not the least of which is my close examination of the Indian Act. By using this particular law, I have narrowed my authors to those who have negotiated their identities within what is now known as Canada. Yet many of these authors locate their nationality within altered spheres of influence, and I have respected their self-identifications when they are mentioned as such. In this manner, their literature is sometimes understood as Canadian literature, but I have noted and honoured the specific requests for their identities to be listed as more complex and varied than simply

as 'Canadian'. This is but one further area of negotiation that speaks to the fluid and shifting nature of identity.

I selected the authors due to their interaction the three specific literary genres: novels, plays, and poetry. In this way the analysis is not reliant upon the particular style of the work, but is more reflective of an overarching relationship between the writing and the various narratives of identity. Yet with that all said there is no way this work could address the entire scope of literature or authors available for examination. This work had to be held to five women whose writing sparked a keen desire within me for further exploration of their narratives. Contained within their writings are these questions of identity, exclusion, blood, gender, law, resistance, transformation, and rejuvenation.

Chapter one establishes the groundwork and structure for this research. I provide specific definitions to key terms including those concerned with literary analysis, cultural studies, feminism, colonisation, and legal narratives. This chapter also draws forth the critical writings of those authors who have inspired my ongoing research into language, deconstruction, power, and identity. I am particularly fond of feminist standpoint theory, Third Space, and hybridity for their attention to the intersection of the marginalised subject and an awareness of power dynamics. I explore issues of grouping identities, as well as the questions of difference and "truth." Finally, this chapter highlights the various forms of awareness, resistance, and transformations within the texts.

The second chapter is an important discussion of the connection between history and current identity issues for First Nations women. It traces the origins

of the racism and sexism throughout the Indian Act and, in turn, throughout the current legal categorisations of First Nations women. This chapter calls attention to the history of colonisation and an understanding of the purpose of the legal actions put in place by Canadian law.

My third chapter focuses on the writings of Eden Robinson, Monique Mojica, Beatrice Culleton (Mosionier), Marilyn Dumont, and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm. By exploring these authors and some of their texts, I examine the connections between multiple locations of identity construction. This chapter stresses that the authors are also situated within systems of support and expectation which are, in turn, based upon various boundaries framing First Nations women writers. Connections to community can be both helpful and destructive in a creative exploration of writing as resistance. This chapter further traces the evidence of the ongoing colonisation of First Nations women's identity through various institutions such as school and family services. Finally, I accentuate how literature, itself, can become one more piece connecting women to their various systems of support, articulation, and resistance.

The fourth chapter pushes further into the selected texts and positions them within a framework of transformative resistance. I examine how language, law, history, race and gender create a destructive binary sexual identity which positions First Nations women in disadvantaged legal narratives. As a key point of intersection, the narratives of rape and sexual abuse focus attention on the impact of negative representations of Native womanhood. This chapter explores how the texts identify, respond, and transform this destructive legal narrative.

This brings forward questions of how difficult it can be for a subject to cross certain boundaries and how writers can create narratives to both (re)image Native women's identity and Native women's literature.

I want to acknowledge that my position within this process as one of privilege. I am a white lower-middle class woman writing about First Nations women's literature. This work exists within the framework of a Gender Studies program which seeks to create positions of empowerment, alliances, and responsible actions. The theoretical positioning of 'ally' work provides the context for such awareness of privilege. This follows Anne Bishop's definition of as ally as "a member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression which gives her or him privilege" (126). As such, I position myself as an ally fighting oppression. My work also exists within the responsibilities of a shared citizenship that endeavours to be anti-racist and anti-oppressive. From a feminist perspective, this research ties together multiple locations of discrimination. Bishop states,

All oppressions are interdependent, they all come from the same world-view, and none can be solved in isolation. We can either perpetuate a society based on competition, where some win and some lose, or we can work towards a society based on co-operation, where winning and losing become irrelevant. In the first scenario, oppression will continue to exist for almost everyone; in the second, it will fade away, since it serves no purpose. (11)

Such research pushes non-Native academics towards a better understanding of the influence of race and gender on the creation of identity. I believe these critical examinations are most effective when launched from multiple subject positionings. With that said, there must be a final note about the scope and

intentions of my work. Despite what some might believe, there is no single Native text or story, no single Native character or plot, and no single process of identity formation. My research does not speak to all Native literature, and I have not touched upon numerous examples of Native authors creating resistant and transformative relationships. I hope that my work adds to a body of knowledge which seeks to explore further the various ways in which narratives of representation influence the creation of a sense of self and aspects of group identities.

Questions of legal narratives and identity construction speak to accessing legal rights and demanding changes to legal definitions. I ask myself again and again throughout this process – in what manner are legal definitions of identity challenged via literature, and in what manner is literature’s treatment of identity reflective of our relationship with law? Engel and Munger point out that law “can transform the sense of self simply by increasing individuals’ perceptions of their own worth, or by reminding them of opportunities they could pursue” (11). Yet this recognition of the potential positive influence of law on sense of self needs to be tempered by an awareness of the ongoing damage caused by a law based in racism and sexism. As Lawrence points out:

A history of colonial control and the reality of ongoing genocide is at the root of this fear on the part of many Native people that to lose collective control over even a colonially shaped Native identity is to lose the last vestiges of Native distinctiveness, that last defence against the colonizing culture that some Native activists refer to as ‘the Predator.’ In this resistance to externally imposed change in definitions of Indianness, the role of the Indian Act in actually shaping Native identity over the past century has for the most part been disregarded. (21)

In order to address this question, I ask some further questions about the nature of identity, history, and power. I find the connections between these various conflicting narratives, and I locate some positions of articulation, resistance, and transformation.

CHAPTER ONE: Theory, Issues, and Intersections.

If I draw my thesis out as a map, its sections incorporate various theoretical territories – postcolonial and feminist – and diverse disciplines: sociology, philosophy, and literature. As well, these territories stretch across the terrains of both the humanities and the social sciences. Although there are many approaches to research which keep the humanities and the social sciences separate, their combination expands the available observations. Leavis affirms that the study of social sciences is only enhanced by broadening into aspects of the humanities and literature:

Without the sensitizing familiarity with the subtleties of language, and the insight into the relations between abstract or generalizing thought and the concrete of human experience, that the trained frequentation of literature alone can bring, the thinking that attends social and political studies will not have the edge and force it should. (194)

As I do not subscribe to a notion of grand meta-theories, I approach my research in a multi-disciplinary manner that breaks down any artificial barriers between theories. While some distinctions between different theoretical approaches can be both useful and necessary, I believe that holding too tightly to these divisions can create rigid and unresponsive theoretical perspectives. I need a selection of various lenses which can contribute to a nuanced discussion of what I am examining; the situations I am looking at need to be contextualized, and I must be able to employ different theories for different purposes. I will apply the strongest points of each theory in order to provide a more complete understanding of the intersection between literature, law, identity, and narrative.

My goal is to use those theories which can best challenge dominant systems of epistemology in order to reconceptualise my own understanding and reading of First Nations women's literature. To start, I look to post-modern theory in order to reject the modernist reliance on grand 'meta-narratives' and the beliefs of progress, rationality, and a search for broad definitions and understandings of human nature. Post-modern thought focuses attention on the "fragmented and dispersed nature of contemporary experience" (Seale 328). This theory coupled with post-structuralism allows me to look at the use of language in the negotiation of systems of power, authority, and social interaction. This stands in stark contrast with most realist thought which will focus on the notion of a 'real' world which exists in a state independent from various systems of beliefs, language, or social situations. The important distinction for my work is the influencing impact of language and writing on the creation of various notions of identity. Acoose ties together the issues of language and ideology when reading First Nations writing:

Readers must therefore attempt to understand these stereotypical images in the context of colonialism, be aware of their own ideological assumptions, understand how those assumptions encourage cultural attitudes towards Indigenous women, and approach texts (particularly in relation to images of Indigenous women) in a critical manner. (68)

This highlights the necessary historical considerations, such as colonialism. Examining the history of First Nations women's historical identity leads to other epistemological questions of how knowledge is created, accepted, validated, and dispersed throughout time in society.

I must stress again the importance of challenging the multiple factors influencing ongoing racist and sexist stereotypes. These factors continue to operate within a hegemonic patriarchal system which masks the ongoing damaging effects of such ideologies. As Mamdani states, "Consensual ideologies more often than not tend to obscure the exercise of power" (882). The exercise of power through legal and social narratives often leads to damaging representations of First Nations women's identity. Deconstruction is a key component in disrupting the acceptance of the coloniser's viewership in the creation of texts. Within a discourse of hegemony, this deconstruction focuses on the coloniser's control of identity representation through an unquestioned authority over ideologies, assumptions, and everyday practises. The acceptance of such authority means that control is not held via overt power, but it is rather an outcome of mass acceptance and consent. In disrupting the coloniser's control over representation of identity, First Nations women's writers can push into a Third Space of representation.¹ Soja defines Firstspace and Secondspace being the 'real' and the 'imagined' respectively. Thirdspace, then, "draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning" (11). Rather than approaching this Third Space as somehow either existing between or outside the other two, it is both/and while also being a new conceptualisation of the space altogether.

Bhabha states,

Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of

¹ The term Third Space is also referred to as Thirdspace and third space by various theorists. I have opted to use Third Space unless quoting someone directly who uses another incarnation of the word.

culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (37)

It is within this space that alternative articulations of Native womanhood can be presented.

An individual's location can influence their perception and understanding of narrative meaning. A subject interacting with post-colonial power hierarchies can develop an awareness of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. This is a key component of the hybrid identity which resists a wholesale acceptance of the dominant social influences and seeks to take from two, or more, conflicting manners of seeing the world. The post-colonial subject needs to be recognised as having this hybridity and this perspective of what Hartsock refers to as the "outsider within" (Lenz 98) or what Soja would call "thirding-as-Othering" (5). The subjects in a position of Third Space do not need to prescribe their location as being either within the center or completely marginalised. Rather than choosing one or the other, the subject instead "borrows from them both, claiming hybridity as her right" (Lenz 111). Some might call those moments contradictions and argue that if you are not one, you must be the other. But rather than hold to such simplistic binary notions, I seek an understanding of those moments as Third Space.

Third Space is the conceptualisation of space beyond binaries. To speak of Third Space is to demand an understanding of anOther space altogether. The defining action of this Third Space is its perspective or its standpoint. As Lenz asserts, "it is about power, a conscious decision to create a third space ... and attempts to define that situation in contrast to culturally enforced binary

opposition" (112). A hybrid space can be a powerful location from which to launch a dialogue about either of the other spaces. The standpoint is one of 'outsider within' and allows for both observation and investigation of situations taken for static and unchanging, while at the same time these positions or locations resist simplified or essential notions of the group. Bhabha states that "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the ideas of society itself" (1-2). In the end, this desire for a multitude of voices seeks a method to dislodge the established power structure/discourse. Specific to this disruption of power dynamics is a conceptualisation of the influence of gender, race, power, and language. For the complexity of these interactions, I need to turn to the initial motivation for my research: feminism.

Feminism is a logical choice for understanding questions of Native Literature, identity, and law because it is sensitive to the impact of culture, society, and institutional influences. As Donovan points out:

Numerous parallels exist between Native American literature and feminist literary and cultural theories. Native American literature illumines feminisms, and feminisms help us to understand many of the issues raised by Native writers, especially Native women writers. (7)

Feminism is flexible enough to account for personal identifications, yet also broad enough to exist across other points of oppression such as racism. Feminism is an umbrella term for a multitude of theory. As Weedon states, "If feminism is a politics, it is also a theory, or rather a range of theories" (4). As feminism is a highly individualised personal identification, it follows that there can be no

general consensus as to the parameters of feminist theory. Some individuals consider themselves feminists; some espouse its ideals, but resist the term as a symbol of white middle-class women; and some find the very idea of feminism to stand in direct conflict with the purpose of human and Aboriginal rights. Yet with respects to gender and race there needs to be a recognition of the patriarchal bias that the “assimilationists placed on Aboriginal people aspiring to the values of the dominant society” (Bell 412). Anderson further supports this need for a feminist analysis of the relationship between gender and race. She notes that the images of Native women’s identity were constructed specifically along gender lines in such a manner that “She was invented and then reinforced because she proved useful to the colonizer” (Anderson 100). These gender biased actions of assimilation need to be both articulated and challenged through a feminist analysis of colonisation.

The fluid and changing definitions of feminism mean that the relationship between feminism and First Nations issues is neither simple nor universal. As Donovan notes in her study of Native and non-Native students, this can cause confusion about the use of the term feminism or an omission of Native women from areas of study:

The relevance of even the term ‘feminisms’ to Native American communities is debatable among women. Many white feminist literary theorists have omitted discussion of Native American women from their work for fear of being accused of appropriation.
(7)

DeVault expands on these concerns and notes that “feminist researchers who take such critiques to heart often come to fear that, rather than dismantling

systems of domination, we can only add stones to an edifice of power” (215). The paralysis of fear fails to serve the purpose of anti-oppression and anti-racism. Feminism is a framework to understand the power structures and the pressures at work on individuals. Donovan notes how in resistant writing from both Native and non-Natives “both writers play with language and form, seeking a new way to express a woman-identified resistance to imperialism and dominance” (Donovan 14). As a research tool, feminist theory contains the caveats necessary for careful and critical self-awareness to avoid the continual appropriation or colonisation of Native peoples. DeVault asserts that labelling her strategies feminist “serves two important purposes: it announces that these concerns are still too often absent in the production of knowledge, and it points toward the history of activism and libratory scholarship that has brought them to attention” (231). Feminist theories provide the goals and considerations required for my analysis of the issues of Native literature, legal narratives, identity, and resistant strategies.

Research into these areas of intersection between race, identity, and gender has the potential to be regarded by some critics as research done by white middle class feminists who appropriate the experiences of marginalised women. These concerns only serve to highlight further the need for such a self-critical approach as that which can be found within feminist methodology. Note, I did not say this critical approach is guaranteed. This crucial examination of the theoretical position must be sought out by the researcher. DeVault explores the divide between the legitimate concerns of appropriation and the paralysing

influence of self-doubt. She first identifies the essentialising components which can silence female researchers in case they might speak louder than a whisper from the supportive background, and then she identifies a path through that divide between appropriation and paralyzing self-doubt, advocating self-awareness and self-critique:

I did not want to write only about myself; the point of ethnography, after all, is to spend time in the world, in some other place, and to learn from other people. And while I shared some experiences and perspectives with the women I interviewed, there were profound differences as well. Like every researcher, then, I wrote about others through the lens of self – but a self that developed and changed as I met those others. (DeVault 190)

I am confident that feminist analysis is best suited to address issues of power and dominance while demanding a critical self-awareness of my own positioning and responsibility to this work. Feminist theorists have been highly aware of historical exclusions, appropriations, and miscommunications with respects to various marginalised groups. This has meant the creation of some specific feminist theories which are located within a realm of anti-racist, anti-oppression work. This includes such theorists as bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Anne Bishop who have continually kept a self-critical eye on the actions caught under the umbrella term of feminism. With that said, no writing and no theory can ever please everyone, and I can only state that my desire is to write from a position of awareness and continual self-assessment, with the help of others around me. Any oversight is mine alone. I continually seek to try and access the same internal critical awareness and responsibility as that possessed by those theorists whose work I admire and enjoy. Specifically, I want to reference the anti-oppression work of Peggy McIntosh.

McIntosh demands a critical self-awareness of privilege and power structures and affords a way of comprehending and anticipating the actions and employment of coercion and dominance. I am making note of her work in particular due to its amazing influence on my own positioning and understanding of myself. In drawing a link between sexism and racism, her work highlights how a non-Native woman can take part in responsible anti-racist research. McIntosh is able to apply the reaction she has had during specific encounters with men to her self-awareness in her interactions with women of colour:

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. At the very least, obliviousness of one's privilege state can make a person or group irritating to be with. In my class and place, I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth. (61)

In her one piece asking for an awareness of the invisible nature of white privilege, McIntosh was able to bridge for me different experiences and forms of oppression. Awareness of my own positioning is a necessary tool for working with multiple layers of racism, sexism, and privilege present in colonization and identity formation. And the theory that then pushed me further to articulate the ongoing impact of subject positioning is feminist standpoint theory.

An important addition to my theoretical approach, feminist standpoint theory, brings in elements of various theoretical approaches to my understanding of the location and purpose of both the authors and their literature. Feminist

standpoint theorists have “maintained that marginalized groups of people have less interest in preserving the status quo and occupy a unique position from which to view the culture from which they are marginalized” (98). Standpoint highlights an individual reaching a certain political awareness of the hegemonic power hierarchy and critiquing the dominant ideologies. Theorists are careful to point out this search is not necessarily for truth, but for ‘less false’ viewerships. Harding explains that an “outsider within” is not guaranteed the awareness of these less false perspectives, but their position may provide a vantage point which can see “questions and issues that were not visible, ‘important,’ or legitimate within the dominant institutions, their conceptual frameworks, cultures, and practices” (Science 17).

This ‘standpoint’ is not a position held in rigid notions of categories, or boundaries, or characteristics. Rather, this is a fluid position which gains much of its perspective through its static experience with a dynamic relationship to the dominant ideologies it seeks to examine. So at these times certain voices are extremely important within feminist theorists’ work – not necessarily because they are Other, as such, but because their standpoint begins outside the dominant structures and ideologies. With respect to feminist work in areas of international development, Harding states that it is not “because poor, Third World women are ‘more oppressed’... but, rather because thought that begins from conceptual frameworks developed to answer questions arising in their lives starts from outside the Eurocentric conceptual framework” (“Comments” 53). Lenz then ties this approach directly to literary analysis. Lenz states that

standpoint is a “negotiation of experience and point of view that can be temporarily stabilized in order to interrogate dominant ideologies” (98). At this point, perspectives become more closely tied to a form of knowledge production which is ever changing and shifting. Hekman explains that feminist standpoint theory: “defines knowledge as particular rather than universal; it jettisons the neutral observer of modernist epistemology; it defines subjects as constructed by relational forces rather than as transcendent” (25). In this way, the standpoint locations provide an ongoing discursive articulation of oppression which highlights their moments of intersection within a particular time and place; however, they are fluid. This leaves the option open for a moment of change and restructuring of those universal truths held firm within the hegemonic power structure: an interrogation of dominant epistemologies. This is exactly what Anderson is identifying when she states her awareness that “Native womanhood was constructed” (99).

Theories also located in the social sciences help my literary analysis encompass the multiple perspectives occurring at overlapping intervals.

Niranjana describes the formation of these multiple discourses:

the practices of subjection/subjectification implicit in the colonial enterprise operate not merely through the coercive machinery of the imperial state but also through the discourses of philosophy, history, anthropology, philology, linguistics, and literary interpretation, the colonial ‘subject’ – constructed through technologies or practices of power/knowledge – is brought into being within multiple discourses and on multiple sites. (1-2)

Straddling social science and humanities, I look for theories which satisfy my quest for an understanding of these multiple locations of subject creation.

Through my multifaceted approach connections between people and

representation and theory become logical and knowable, if only for brief moments in time. I needed a way to position the discursive subjects which may or may not be struggling to locate their Third Space or their moments of hybridity. Literary analysis works together with these other theories to find those moments of intersection between law and the impact on identity. As Engel and Munger recognise, “Such subtle yet profound effects may be overlooked in traditional studies of legal impact, yet they can be detected through the analysis of life stories” (11). Literary texts exist in their social and historical contexts as expressions of social change, perhaps pointing to the possibility of new social structures, or can be read as the articulation of an emerging social consciousness – a world vision (Filmer 275-277).

My initial interest in feminist standpoint theory is because of an idea that hybrid or Third Space perspectives can expose particular realities or experiences that are “not apparent to someone more fully assimilated into dominant ideologies” (Lenz 102). Thus, an examination and exploration of the experiences written about by First Nations women would certainly open up challenges and connections which may not be apparent to someone who has not viewed society from that particular vantage point. As well, subjects with multiple standpoints can form both a dialogue between themselves and with others who do not share that perspective. It is here that connections, transformations, and translations are located. This thesis seeks to push into those moments where the texts create such movement away from a stable, stagnant position of acceptance of the

status quo. These moments are what Anderson identifies as writing as resistance (140-145).

At times these texts demand that a reader comes face to face with an interrogation of dominant discourses. These discourses are what Nelson refers to as master narratives. These narratives absorb negative stereotypes into a unified idea of truth in order to enforce their own power structure that is then accepted as a norm and, in turn, stands as a reinforcement of the negative image in a self-sustaining cycle. They “exercise a certain authority over our moral imaginations and play a role in informing our ... institutions” (Nelson 6). To not disrupt the dominant narratives allows hidden dialogues of oppression to remain unchallenged. The disruption of these damaging master narratives creates an awareness which is otherwise lacking within the daily interactions of stereotypes and racist narratives. To those immersed within the dominant ideology of oppression, textual strategies of resistance and transformation expose a power structure which operates at an otherwise unacknowledged level that is neither apparent nor questioned. These oppressive master narratives are much more obvious to the subject located within the standpoint perspective. Anderson observes:

Yet when we consider our lived experience, the drunken, easy squaw is not a character that Aboriginal people know ... so where did these images come from? How did they become so widespread, and how do they affect the day-to-day living of contemporary Native women? (99)

Sharing these alternative identity images, First Nations women writers articulate an understanding of themselves which is radically different from what they face in the viewership of others every day. By talking and sharing stories of what they

really do in their lives, how they really feel about relationships, these women begin to put together a new way of understanding and representing First Nations womanhood. These strategies are what Moses calls “dissenting fictions,” Anderson identifies as “writing as resistance,” and Nelson refers to as “counterstories.” According to Nelson, counterstories are produced in relation to master narratives which claim to represent summaries of socially shared understandings of identity. Counterstories create a narrative from a position which “resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect” (Nelson 6). This process is called many things, but the idea remains the same: create narratives that “talk back to specific, monolithic notions of essential identity” (Moses x). In doing so, these narratives pose questions about how to understand categories, power, and resistance.

When approaching multiple standpoints, a question arises about how to conceptualise the resulting multiple truths of those perspectives. The purpose in my theoretical approach is not to create a single system of understanding which is universally “more true” than others, but to critique the dominant power structure with a desire to influence a restructuring of ideologies and perspective to better incorporate those who have been marginalized. As Jamaica Kincaid states about her own writing: “I aim to be true to something, but it’s not necessarily the facts” (qtd in Bonetti 125). By examining these various perspectives, a complex understanding of reality becomes available. As an activist theorist, adhering to the concept of a non-positional truth is not necessarily an effective route as this path tends to support dominant power

structures and negative stereotypes. To denote the fallibility of this coloniser's notion of truth, feminist standpoint theory uses the term "less false" for the standpoint perspectives. These challenging narratives call into question the ideas of truth placed in positions of privilege through the actions of the colonisers. As Moses explains:

Every story has something to contribute to a larger narrative about power relationships, about relationships between people and between humans and the land.... Thus, the poststructuralist problem of locating historical 'truth' or of the impossibility of doing so, is decentered. New interpretations and 'revisionist' histories become, simply, part of the story. (86)

What this demands is a way to unify an understanding of alternative narratives without the entire group then being understood as a single functioning entity. Universal understandings of groups without any room for differences within the group can cause problems and ultimately run "counter productive to resistance practice" (Moses x). Standpoint creates this space for statements valuing other perspectives, and other searches for representation.

So this search for alternative perspectives needs to be done without establishing yet another rigid set of characteristics to define the groups or the identities of those who have been marginalized. A homogenous understanding of a group is too simplistic and unchallenging. Yet at the same time, there is a need to understand an idea of common characteristics in order to identify anything as Native literature. Otherwise there is no basis upon which to launch resistance if all individuals must act as lone members to their one person group. There must be a way to approach the problems of overgrouping cautiously to prevent further marginalization. This is especially necessary to examine in light

of non-Natives constructing the understanding of Native Literature. As Horne cautions, “a study devoted to American Indian writers can become a means of marginalizing them and of perpetuation of the colonial Manichean opposition of us and them” (xiv). There are ways to group individuals which do not try to limit them into overly simplified points of difference. Rather, these groups can confront and address those forces and factors which initially create various forms of oppression. One needs to emphasize continually the desire never to limit the “transformative potential of women’s insights by removing their analyses from the particularities of their circumstances to an abstract, categorical realm” (Lenz 99). The information gleaned from literary analysis using feminist standpoint theory must be continually placed within the larger context from which the literature came. This is the purpose of including multiple narratives.

Feminist theorist and cultural critic bell hooks states that another way to break down these current systems and to resist further colonization is through both creative and non-fiction writing. She advocates the use of writing to explore a critical examination of black essence. But she also notes there exists a fear that to break down ideas of a homogenous black identity or essence would risk losing all unique notions of culture, history, and community. Moses further expands on this and notes that what arises is a “tension between resistance and unity... at the heart of the conflicts” as the authors are both fighting essential ideas while striving for a “unifying essence that would encourage political solidarity” (x). This is certainly relevant to concerns with respect to First Nations

identity as well. With direct respects to feminism and First Nations women, Donovan asks this question regarding a notion of monolithic Other:

Yet the question must be raised: is there such a thing as commonality of aesthetic and cultural expression? If we look for such commonalities, are we then complicit in cultural obliteration? On the other hand, if we valorize specificity, do we run the risk of further dividing women from seeking solutions to problems they face across the world?" (12)

What hooks is able to offer, though, is a continual stressing of the importance of "the authority of experience" (hooks, "Postmodern Blackness" 426). To demand a criticism of essentialist, stereotypical, assimilationist categories does not mean to demand the erasure of unique historical experiences or community of identity. Rather, this demands an understanding of the unacknowledged privilege which is taking place unquestioned in the coloniser's narrative. The methodology of feminist standpoint theory gives the opportunity for the deconstruction of dominant power structures and ideologies. Lenz states: "thus posits that no truth claims are devoid of political investment; its objective is in part to expose the political investment surrounding otherwise unexamined and generally accepted 'truths'" (101).

Feminism not only allows for a micro examination of power dynamics, at times it *demand*s this level of understanding. Many feminist frameworks require a clear picture and articulation of the micro enactment of relationships and interactions. My use of theory is framed by the thought that "power is 'always already there'... there is no way to disengage from a relationship with power" (Moses 5). Otherwise, gender roles and hierarchies are reinforced and positioned as "unquestioning." The power of unchallenged beliefs and

assumptions is totalizing. When exploring the demands of feminist analysis

DeVault states,

It seems important in every project, therefore, to attend to connections, aiming for an analysis that shows in some way both the consequences of power and how it is exercised. Working in this way will not eliminate the power and privilege of the analyst, but it can make that power more visible and deploy it in ways that chart systems of privilege and inequality, offering road maps to change in those systems for those working from various locations within them. (217)

It is difficult to discuss some of these issues without talking in terms of hierarchy, given colonial hierarchical relationships. However, one does not want to buy in without critical thought to these preconceived notions of hierarchy, which at times seem to dominate theoretical discussions.

The link between power and identity means that the increasing push within Canada towards a unified national identity is speaking about a particular form of power being consolidated. We need to keep in mind that this “single system of power, that of the modern state framing civil society,...[will then turn] into a universal norm against which to measure all performances” (Mamdani 862). This *norm* is the same one which does not recognise the legacy that colonialism has left behind for our country, and this *norm* will then speak for the national identity of which it will authentically know so little. Weedon speaks specifically to the link between the ideals of feminism and the actions of resistant narratives:

[...] yet recognizing contradictions and the power relations and interest which inhere in specific definitions of women's nature and social role is only the first stage in the process of change both for individual women and in the struggle to transform social institutions. This process requires the development of **alternative senses of ourselves as women**, and strategies for transforming existing institutions and practices. (my emphasis added, 5)

While I can agree to the inescapable nature of power relations, I subscribe to a manner of discussion which attempts not to give this hierarchy further validation. Power does exist, but its distribution is not inherent. Power is relative and slippery and always shifting. What I need to avoid are those theorists/theories where power hierarchies are approached as inherent or beyond challenge.

I am aware that the terms master narrative, resistance, counterstories, and counter narrative can perpetuate a binary division. They can frame all these discussions and all these understandings of First Nations women's writing as only being in response to non-Native actions. Yet at the same time, I am attracted to these terms for their emphasis on this very real power imbalance within literary production and identity construction. So I will use them to speak to this reality of the struggle against a legacy of colonial power structures. This resistance is against the overpowering narrative being imposed by colonialism and absorbed into culture via reading and exposure to texts. Master or dominant narratives are multi-layered perceptions constructed over time. These are the standard, homogenizing, 'already understood' ideas that permeate throughout perceptions of various interactions and, as Moses observes, this indicates the need to "address narratives that are concerned with identity both as a multi-layered, shifting cultural construct (rather than as a biological destiny) and as a vehicle for cultural critique"(x). I must also note, though, that to talk of resistant strategies is to acknowledge the overbearing influence of colonizer viewerships. In the end, I would like to suggest the need to shift this language away from unquestioning reinforcement of binaries; instead, I will focus on the construction

of a transformative exploration which highlights the power of words in the creation of positive representations of First Nations womanhood. The reasons for writing can be both to provide a counterstory for other imaginings of Native womanhood, as called for by Anderson, or wanting to create art for the satisfaction of its experience.

Literature interacts with identity by presenting dominant representations, thus reinforcing the ideas of the master narratives. The canon of great literature held up as our cultural foundation reinforces dominant narratives by exalting them (Nelson 7). The impact of what we read is further reinforced by the cultural landscape of media that surrounds us, against which identity is continually compared. We are surrounded by media, texts, books, and images which continually inform our manner of 'reading' our surroundings.

Identities are narratively constructed ... identities are constituted from the first-person perspective through the loosely connected stories we weave around the things about us that matter most to us: the acts, experiences, and characteristics we care most about, and the roles, relationships, and values to which we are most deeply committed. In the course of this narrative construction, we draw on stock plots and character types that we borrow from the familiar stories embodying out culture's socially shared understandings. (Nelson 71)

With respect to First Nations women, Janice Acoose points out how individuals "come to 'know' Indigenous peoples only through highly selective images perpetuated through a similarly highly selective literature, which ultimately maintains the status quo" (34-35). This creates a twofold effect: when First Nations women read texts and are faced with these highly selective images, their own understandings of themselves will be framed within a narrow context that is

prescribed by the texts. In turn, when non-Native peoples are faced with these images, they will continue to build upon a racist and sexist narrative perpetuated by colonialism. The historically constructed image of First Nations women, along with contemporary textual readings of identity, will both “function as ideological filters through which meaning is derived [and] can subliminally encourage readers to adopt specific ideological norms and values” (Acoose 51-52). Identity is a complex interaction between internal and external cues and experiences that includes how individuals see themselves and others. In my work, the focus becomes areas of resistance and transformation. These spaces of tension highlight the inconsistencies between the master narratives and the actual lived realities. Questions and challenges explore the relationship between writing and identity; what we read will have an impact on what we think about individuals, groups, others, and ourselves.

CHAPER TWO: History and Colonisation

Many First Nations women face a multifaceted problem, namely the discrimination and sexism woven throughout federal legislation that regulates their lives, families, and futures. These laws are a direct descendent of earliest colonial relationships and must be examined within such a context. In particular, many Aboriginal women have written about the impact that the Indian Act has had, and continues to have, on their access to residence, their interactions with others, and their sense of self-identification. But these issues are not solely within the sphere of First Nations considerations. Colonisation has had an impact on all aspects of society; sexism and racism permeate language, literature, media, and everyday interactions between Natives and non-Natives. Since an individual's identity can be altered through the public arena, these issues ultimately come to bear on the very construction of society's understanding of Native womanhood. Through the writing and testimonies given by a number of First Nations women, I will explore how a history of colonisation, legislation, and misinformation has worked towards a sexist and racist construction of Aboriginal women's identity. Although these identities of First Nations women are diverse, there is a common bond in this relationship to colonisation. My focus is on the interaction between colonisation and the ways in which literature is both produced and viewed.

This chapter seeks to discuss the impact of various legal definitions on the identity creation of First Nations women within Canada. As Lawrence states, "we should think carefully about the various categories of Native identity that have

been legally defined under federal laws” (4). Prior to discussing the current situation facing First Nations women, we will briefly examine the historical context in which we are operating. This historical context has fostered and reinforced the miscommunications and negative images surrounding Aboriginal issues.

Therefore, it is necessary to take a look at colonisation, its purposes, and its impact on understandings of race and gender. This, in turn, will lead to a discussion of discrimination and identity formation. We must understand the evolution of specific laws within Canada, including the most influential of all: the Indian Act. This Act needs to be examined within the context of its challenges and its changes in defining various levels of what many critics have termed “Indianness.” A main reason I have undertaken this task is that a large segment of Canadian non-Natives do not recognize the impact of past colonial actions upon current experiences of First Nations women. But identity construction is intrinsically tied to history. Engel and Munger stress that “identity reflects a *process of interaction* over an extended period of time” (43). I want to challenge the colonial method of understanding constructions of race and gender with respects to legal narratives. I hope to open a critical space for new connections between non-Natives and Natives about the influencing factors that history, law, and literature can have on the ways we understand identity.

I believe it will be through this discussion of the past that women will be able to celebrate their identities, stories, and histories. The words of Aboriginal women themselves best record what their lives, and those of many other women,

had been like prior to Euro-centric notions of power and value. Anderson explores this process:

Many of the 'traditions' we now know stem from Euro-Christian patriarchal ideals, and many of our own Indigenous traditions have been twisted to meet western patriarchal hegemony....When we begin to reclaim our ways, we must question how these traditions are framed, and whether they are empowering to us. The gendered nature of our tradition can be extremely damaging if interpreted from a western patriarchal framework. (36-37)

This speaks to the challenge in remembering and re-evaluating the presentation and re-enforcement of identity. Whether discussing literature or law, the narratives explored within the framework of identity shape lives and have an impact on both the group as well as the individual. Narratives can clarify these shared experiences and goals; yet my particular examination of literature must take place within an informed space. The purpose of this chapter is to take on the challenge of establishing an understanding between the roles of colonisation, law, and identity formation in order to better articulate this interaction in First Nations women's literature. In the end, this is all reflective and indicative of the greater society in which we live, and where we must navigate various incarnations and representations of both others and self.

This research can neither make generalizations about all current lived realities nor assume a pristine utopia existed pre-Colonisation. Emma LaRocque notes that "we know enough about human history that we cannot assume that all Aboriginal traditions universally respect and honour women ... there are indications of male violence and sexism in some Aboriginal societies prior to European contact and certainly after contact" (Scholar 14). I chose to include

this statement because I will contrast traditional gender relations with colonial constructions. I am not conducting a discussion based on easy or clear generalizations. As LaRocque says, “nonetheless, we are challenged to change, create, and embrace ‘traditions’ consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards” (Scholar 14). These discussions are taking place within contemporary settings, between various actual individuals who are all struggling to break apart some very old, very powerful notions of law, race, and gender. For this to work, we will look at their words and experiences, realizing that real contradictions must be acknowledged and incorporated into this discussion.

Colonialism has resulted in a warped relationship between race and gender that affects the interaction between identity and law. Through education, media viewership, and language, colonisation has set up a system for understanding the “Indianness” of Aboriginal women, which has far reaching ramification within legal narratives. Narratives of Native womanhood are fragmented and externally constructed. As Mamdani points out, to “refract the identity of race through several ethnically-defined identities [was to ensure that] the very basis of incorporation was a fragmented identity” (870). Identity becomes key in this debate since law can determine an individual’s ability to access natural resources based upon their categorization: citizens, Natives, or indigenous peoples (Benda-Beckmann VIII). Essentially, colonisation involves attempts by colonisers to engage in “warfare to control those peoples who lived in areas deemed necessary to this ‘Eurocentric economy’” (Goehring 19). At the level of economy, politics, and spirituality, colonisation asserts its control through

assimilation and cultural genocide. Economic domination necessitated political control and, ironically, “the Christian religion fit European man to embark on the economic subjugation of the world” (Goehring 11). Through the use of law and space, the coloniser altered the landscape of North America to reflect the new dominant institutions and governments. Colonisers had multiple purposes in mind when they “sought to reproduce two connected political identities: race as an identity that unified its beneficiaries as citizens, and ethnicity as an identity that fragmented its victims as subjects” (Mamdani 862). My discussion of colonised women takes on added weight when we consider the role that the coloniser played in actively constructing particular gendered identities.

At the same time as establishing all the constructions surrounding ‘Indianness,’ the dominant colonial powers were also setting up a system of understanding First Nations women as the same but different from white women. In order to ‘Incorporate the Familiar,’ Aboriginal women had to be seen as both Aboriginal (other, ethnic, brown, savage) and as women (white women/brown women, but still women). This distinctive treatment of First Nations women needs specific focus. LaRocque notes:

Typically, the emphasis has been on the harm done by colonial forces to men, without due regard to the damage done to women ... there is no question that colonisation has wreaked havoc in the lives of men, but colonial oppression is not equally experienced within Native communities; it has a different impact on Native women than on Native men. Women continue to bear the brunt of social disintegration while being alienated from decolonisation efforts. (Models 89)

Some understandings of Native womanhood have been studied, but as Bell notes in her examination of historically produced anthropological texts, “We

certainly do not hear from women, though we hear *of* them; and the information is usually about their bodies as sites of pleasure, reproduction and disease” (emphasis added, 458). First Nations women suffered a double discrimination in the way colonisers viewed them. They were subordinate due to both their ethnicity and their gender. This viewership was not limited to only two fractures. Colonisers constructed First Nations women into multiple contradictory roles which would ensure the lowest, and most disadvantaged, position. In order to employ a resistant sensibility, there must be an understanding of the historical factors which influence the discursive production of subjectivity.

Legislated in 1869, the Indian Act is crucial to my discussion because it forms the basis for definitions of Indian status on marriage, rather than blood or family. In 1860 Canada gained full control over Indian Affairs from the British government who had managed affairs through “the diplomatic tools of cajolery, coercion... and bribery” (Milloy 56). As the newly formed Province of Canada slowly gained jurisdiction from Britain the “nation-to-nation relationship was to all intents and purposes abandoned by Canada at that point” (Lawrence 7).¹ From 1869 until 1985, the Act was strictly bound by patrilinear ties. If a woman with status married any non-status man, even if he was Native or Métis, she lost her band membership, property, inheritance, burial, medical, educational, and voting rights on the reserve. But, a non-status woman would be given all those same rights when she married a status male (Bear 198). The Indian Act pre 1985 was characterized by its determination of ‘Indianness’ based on gender. This

¹ For further discussion of these laws and others which effect First Nations within Canada, please see Barron and Waldram 1986, Holmes 1987, Miller 1989, Milloy 1983, and Weaver 1998.

legislation was brutally clear on the *status* of these women; many women who separated from their non-status spouses experience homelessness for themselves and their children.

In the 1950s, women began organizing around that section of the Indian Act that strips them of their rights after marrying a non-status man. Bear notes how “some women were returning to their original home communities only to realize for the first time that they did not belong” (204). Mary Two Axe Early was the first to speak out publicly after returning to her Mohawk reserve in Quebec only to find out she was not able to access her previous rights as a status Indian. Although the Mohawk culture was matrilineal and guaranteed her right to residence, she could not access financial support or be buried in the community. The actions of these women gained momentum in the 1970s. In 1973 Lavell and Bedard went to the Supreme Court of Canada over Section 12(1)(b). A five to four decision ruled that the “Indian Act was *exempt* from the Canadian Bill of Rights” (Bear 205). Actions such as these were cited as divisionary by some Native organizations, and the National Indian Brotherhood argued that Indian Act must remain intact (do not amend Section 12(1)(b) in any way). But in June 1985, largely due to the work of Native Women’s groups, Bill C-31 was introduced with the intent of ending the legislated gender discrimination of the Indian Act. Tobique Aboriginal Women’s Group Activists challenged the Act through occupation of the Band Office, the 100 Mile Walk, and the Sandra Lovelace court case.² In 1981 the UN found Canada in breach of the

² Sandra Lovelace-Sappier who, in 1977, went to the United Nations Human Rights Committee over her lost status due to clause 12(1)(b). She talks about her early childhood experience with nuns teaching that

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights over sexual discrimination (Bear 214). It was through international embarrassment that Lovelace's case was able to realize a change to the Act. With this said, it still took four more years of work by the Tobique "seasoned lobbyists" until the changes were made.

The implementation of Bill C-31 resulted in a number of changes to the Indian Act which sought to end the sex-discrimination previously experienced by many First Nations women. The first, and extremely emotional, result of Bill C-31 was the reinstatement of band membership to all those women who had married non-status males: "The grandmothers of the community express the joy that they feel for the return of their daughters who, through no fault of their own, were treated with such disrespect under and over the Canadian law" (Bear 217). But government money did not follow in a proportionate manner and problems began to develop surrounding resources and service provision. In a series of interviews, Huntley and Blaney expand on the effects that Bill C-31 has on Native women living in BC, where ongoing displacement and assimilation tactics seek to control, regulate, and divide the ability of individuals to "legitimately" claim Native identification (np). Bear states, "the realities of reserve life still reflect colonial influences"(219). These divisions took place for multiple generations, and the eventual search for a solution did not have the required foresight necessary for adequate provision of support services. As well, women spoke of their inability to access the information and education services to better understand how they fit into the registration categories provided.

"we couldn't talk Indian. They used to tell us we were dirty. They made us ashamed we were Indians" (Quoted in Bear 203).

Further problems with the altered Indian Act are based on the Act's continual reference to arbitrary determinants of "Indianness." One example is that band membership (now split from status) requirement must now be in agreement with the Constitution Act, and no discrimination based on sex is allowed. But, as women have found out in the years since its alteration, the new Indian Act does not guarantee against "hidden sex discrimination" (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 123). A number of difficulties arose from an acceptance of the Euro-Canadian patrilinear notions of power and status. Some bands felt that the revised Indian Act was in violation of "their traditional culture" (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 124). Many women anticipated a problem with their band upon return, and have chosen not to relocate. Legally women have an avenue for recourse, yet they often have limited abilities to use their legal options due to issues of sociopolitical, cultural, and economic power. There have been cases of bands creating loopholes to prevent women's reinstatement to the membership, and there have been protests from bands to the inclusion of someone's – mostly a woman's – name (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 123). The most common problem appears to be a lack of available resources for the specific function of reinstating band membership to women and their families. This has resulted in a hardship being placed on the band and in further hard feelings from existing reserve members. Lawrence points out, "a narrow but powerful sense of Native identity has been fuelled by the profound gap between the lived experiences of the majority of Native people – who continue to face the reality of brutal racism, poverty, violent death, and struggles with addictions" (22).

The impact of colonisation on contemporary constructions of First Nations women's identity must be considered due to the very nature of power and hegemony. Anderson stresses this is the "deliberate dismantling" of the Native culture through its women (69). Located within this discussion is the integral component centred on the construction and constraining of identity formation. Power and hegemony are reliant on miscommunications and identity formation. The Indian Act is a very interesting example of legislation that has an impact on identity because of the arbitrary boundaries it places around the definition of status Indian and how it uses both marriage and identity in its assimilation attempts (Anderson 70). Because of these interactions between identity and power, we need a current understanding of this historical legacy of colonisation's impact on First Nations women. Legislation can be changed at the level of the nation, but when alterations are made without a clear understanding of the impact sexism has on social and political institutions, these underlying power dynamics will not be addressed. The Tobique Women's Group fight for media and political attention resulted in what proved to be superficial changes. Despite the attempt to remedy sex discrimination, the amended Act still discriminates against grandchildren of women who have 'married out.' Women who had married non-status men prior to the 1985 revision found their children were much more vulnerable to the second generation rule. The policies and legislations that continue to regulate issues of identity are being determined by the coloniser's social and political systems. But this is not a point of failure; rather, this points to the underlying narratives of miscommunication about power and value.

Acknowledging and reframing these narratives is where new resistances and challenges can take place.

Colonisers have often used the law to construct very specific understandings of First Nations women's identity for the purpose of controlling and weakening First Nations communities. Laws like the Indian Act have a widespread and devastating impact on the construction (destruction) of First Nations women's identities. Lawrence argues that "because identities are embedded in systems of power based on race, class, and gender, identity is a highly political issue, with ramifications for how contemporary and historical collective experience is understood" (4). Again I must stress that colonisers had a specific goal in mind with this destruction; Aboriginal women were an integral piece of First Nations' social fabric, and altering women's economic, political, and spiritual power would weaken the power of entire Nations. Stereotypes, destructive attitudes, and violence have had a huge impact on "the self-images of native men and women, respectively, and on their relationship with each other as well" (LaRocque Scholar 12). I will examine how, in particular, this weakens communities.

In many accounts, First Nations women existed within a structure of power and authority. This is not to say that women and men were completely equal within traditional communities or that all communities had the same gender relations and power structures. But this history opens up alternative ways to understand power, gender, and the value of reproductive work. These narratives speak of First Nations women's traditional positionings in terms of their value in

their communities. Anderson traces a number of these stories which encourage her to “contribute to the future by sharing the information imparted to me about the sacredness, the power and the beauty of womanhood as it is understood through various Native cultures” (17). Gender can have its differences, but individuals each have their own roles, responsibilities, and worthiness which can value the relationship between Indian women and their reproductive role in society (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 107). Within a European context, women have been historically linked with the space of the private/home that is understood only in reference with the masculine occupation of the public/work sphere.

Krosenbrink-Gelissen questions whether or not these similar linkings of roles and identity has led First Nations cultures to a similarly inferior positioning of women within their society where this value of public over private had not previously existed (108).

Women’s power within traditional settings was based on their abilities to both produce and reproduce. As Krosenbrink-Gelissen points out, the value system of “[pre-colonial] Indian households had no dichotomy between the domestic and public” (108). She is careful to note that while these are generalized statements, traditional narratives consistently link First Nations women to their reproductive and caring responsibilities. Although this can be considered similar to a European understanding of women’s roles, it is noted that while still based on “their reproductive roles ... in this case it was *evaluated* differently” (Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 109 emphasis added). Anderson quotes the words of Kaaren Olsen: “The divisions of labour were based on practical needs.

Because women were reproducers as well as producers, their labour consisted mainly of work at the home” (59). An alternative valuing of public work versus private work is an important distinction between traditional Aboriginal and European gender relations:

Within our land-based systems of labour, Native men’s work was never considered to be more valuable than Native women’s work The incoming European division of labour trapped out women within the limitations of the western domestic role. Such a system, in which men were to go out and do the ‘real’ work, while women had to play a secondary, supporting and inherently less important role in the home made no sense to our people. (Anderson 60)

The split between public and private understanding of space alters the expectations of autonomy for an individual’s creation of identity. The coloniser sets up a societal order where “neither the Aboriginal home nor any Aboriginal person was ever seen as ‘private’” (Bartlett 15). If people are forced to create their understanding of their identity in a space which is never given the respect of privacy, then the very basis to their conceptualisation of their role within society (and their value within this same society) is compromised. Within the domestic sphere, indigenous women were either stripped of their own traditional culture outright, or convinced there just needed to be some slight modifications to their traditions through a combination of education and surveillance.

Not only do these alterations of Native women’s reproductive value create a specific internal or personal understanding for Aboriginal but also a particular external expectation. This means that even when colonised individuals decide to move outside their prescribed identity constructions, they quickly find out that the external holds much more power over these boundaries between reality and

perception. As well, economic-based identity construction has a unique external relationship with law. Culhane quotes the British theorist E.P. Thompson:

Well, for the most of the time when I was watching, law was running quite free of economy, doing its errands, defending its property, preparing the way for it, and so on ... but ... on several occasions, while I was actually watching, the lonely hour of the last instance actually came. The last instance, like an unholy ghost, actually grabbed hold of law, throttled it, and forced it to change its language and to will into existence forms appropriate to the mode of production, such as enclosure acts and new case-law excluding customary common rights. But was law 'relatively autonomous'? Oh, yes. Sometimes. *Relatively*. Of course. (72)

At this point, there are multiple external narratives interacting with one another about the construction of First Nations women's identity. When the economy has such influence over law, the courts have a difficult time executing that objective positioning they claim for themselves. This was covered most effectively by Culhane in her discussion of the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on the *Delgamuukw v. R.* appeal (360-370). It was found that the trial judge had "erred when he dismissed the oral history evidence of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Chiefs and Elders" (Culhane 360). When institutions are dominated by misunderstandings and miscommunications regarding the traditional economical, political, and social construction of First Nations' communities, the racist and sexist ideas of the original colonisation are allowed to continue.

One of the most difficult relationships to come to terms with in the legal system is that between tradition and identity. Tradition runs the risk of forming a notion of Aboriginal identity frozen in the past. This would make it "virtually impossible for Native people to engage in contemporary right debates such as freedom of religion, speech, personal choice, citizenship, or women's rights"

(LaRocque Models 90). At times this would suit the purposes of the dominant legal narrative because keeping First Nations culture as a category only understood as existing in the historical past allows for a generalised and simplified identity. Thus an individual possessing these traditional characteristics is never allowed to mature into an entity complex enough for contemporary discussion (LaRocque Models 77). Ultimately, the role of tradition in determining a legal subjectivity is dictated by the coloniser. Tradition becomes one more tool that can be used to contain the understanding of Aboriginal women's identities. It must be stressed at this point that my discussion does not revolve around any further essential notion of any woman's role within any society. There is a risk when talking about tradition that it might become positioned as the only option and just as bad as legislation in prescribing a role for First Nations women in their lives and identities. My exploration of the past events attempts to reiterate what has been written by First Nations women time and time again: traditionally women had positions of respect and power within their communities. This is not a discussion about "equality." Monture-Angus points out that "definitions of equality often fail to recognize that not all people or peoples are the same" (31). At no time do I seek out sameness; I maintain a commitment to understanding power dynamics and value. Specifically, when I discuss Aboriginal women's value within their social structure, I am not stating that all First Nations communities were devoid of sexism, violence, or gender differences. This is not a universal history, and LaRocque points out that we cannot assume all Aboriginal traditions approached women with comparable "respect and

honour”(Scholar 14). I must clearly state that the differences I examine are based on value and power.

What seems to have been lost at times is the interconnectedness between women’s rights and Native rights. LaRocque calls attention to this fact when she notes that “If we wish to act on history rather than be acted on, we can ill afford to be silent or stay content in the shallows of our male contemporaries History demands of us to assume our dignity, our equality, and our humanity. We must not move towards the future with anything less. Nor can we pursue scholarship any other way” (Scholar 15). Many women have articulated that sexual discrimination is the biggest barrier to Aboriginal women’s equal rights, but as LaRocque states:

When Aboriginal women demand justice in a contemporary context, they are accused of betraying ‘solidarity,’ putting them, in effect, in an absolutely no-win situation between justice and community. Clearly, ‘tradition,’ culture,’ and ‘history’ are political handles with many twists that result in the continual oppression and silencing of women. (Models 90)

The current mood surrounding Aboriginal issues only increases this crisis of identity for Aboriginal women. Some believe that such questions on “race, class, and gender superiority ... were supposed to have been effectively challenged, if not overrun, in the 1960s” (Wainwright 59). This means that within the Canadian mindset of neo-liberal paternalistic recognition of equal rights, any problems of racism towards Aboriginals should have already been solved.³ Those issues of

³Wainwright goes on to explain: “Kahn-Tineta Horn had tried to raise our ire about mistreatment of Native peoples, but it was clear that we didn’t know what she was talking about. Even twenty-six years later, when she appeared on national television as a spokesperson during the Oka crisis, most of us didn’t understand Horn’s concerns. Those sorts of politics of experience were to be found...in marches against segregation of American blacks” (65).

protest and equal rights which were 'dealt with' in the 1960s could not still be ongoing. Wainwright contends that writers such as Michael Adams believe that "there will be no identity crisis because the old essentialist Canadian identity is being fairly painlessly replaced by new plicancies of self-definition and collective personality" (56). Wainwright points out that he "cannot ignore, however, the great number of empowered Canadians who respond with self-protective concern to what they consider threatening to their political, social, and economic influence" (56). There is a resistance to any new understandings of subordinate identities: specifically those of Aboriginal women. In this way, one of the "most persistent and frustrating stereotypes about native cultures is their relegation to the past ... [which] makes it virtually impossible for Native people to engage in contemporary rights debates such as freedom of religion, speech, personal choice, citizenship, or women's rights" (LaRocque Models 90).

In this increasingly fragmented landscape, identity continues to play an important role in feminist mobilisation as we are "undoing identity on the grounds of identity" (Landry and MacLean 145). So if we are to understand 'woman' to be an ever-changing category, which encompasses a multitude of possible individual positionings and which has been "historically, discursively constructed and always relative to other categories" (Riley 241)—which are, themselves, under constant change—then narratives of identity become telling examples of the multiple possibilities for legal subjectivity. The construction of identity can be either regarded as a "passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which ... the will determines a cultural meaning for

itself” (Butler 281). But is that true for indigenous women who have had their identity determined for them by such a powerful colonial force? The layerings are created by a history which has made it so that “she is unable to represent herself. Her identity is over-determined by the factors of race, class, and gender within her own culture that have nearly overpowered her” (Katrak 67). When we have these overlapping social influences, what is remembered and what is held up as historically accurate can be warped. Turpel notes that even the first steps towards ending the legacy of colonialism would require:

Recognizing aboriginal peoples’ presence as political communities in Canada with distinct cultural, linguistic and social systems. It would require ending bureaucratic regulation of Indian life through the Indian Act. No court has been honest enough or reflective enough to acknowledge the colonial character of the regulation of aboriginal life in Canada. (280)

Under Colonisation, the current notions of traditional Native identity have been formed by “a single institution [which] was to privilege a particular authority ... defined in terms of both masculinity and seniority” (Mamdani 872). First Nations women’s issues run the risk of continually being dismissed “by pitting women against ‘their own people,’ and putting them in an untenable position of having to choose between gender and culture – as if gender rights were never, or should never be, an issue within Native families, homes, and traditions” (LaRocque Models 87). For First Nations women this remembering of tradition must continually take place with a very clear notion of the residuals left behind from colonisation and the purposes of that process.

Canadian legislation must be critically examined in terms of its roots within a sexist and racist framework. Chatterjee states that law is implicated in the creation of identity:

The normative qualities of law mean that it is a very powerful tool in the creation, expression, and also importantly – protection – of identities. As queer theorists point out, law controls the access to the means of cultural production ... through which identity is expressed. As a binaristic structure, law has a vested interest in maintaining the traditional oppositional forms of identity categories such as subject/object. (np)

This calls for an important re-evaluation of certain discriminations within the Canadian system, because “meanwhile, aboriginal peoples have had to endure the violence of a colonial regime which silences aboriginal reality and displays disregard for aboriginal peoples’ suffering” (Turpel 280). Without a clear understanding of the impact colonisation has had on legislation and society’s values, there will not be the required remembering of Aboriginal women’s traditional identification within Aboriginal society. In this discussion of altering law and the coloniser’s narratives, Engel and Munger provide further hope that “the two-way relationship between law and society is ‘mutually constitutive,’ which means that law both affects and is affected by those for whom it is intended and by society in general” (78). To alter the narratives of society is, in turn, to have an impact on the very law which has attempted an ongoing destruction of First Nations women’s identity.

CHAPTER THREE: Connecting the Pieces

There is an intersection between the literary construction of First Nations women's identity and the narratives of identity offered by colonisation, racism, and law. Academics, authors, writers, and activists point to the role of narratives in identity construction, and there needs to be a clear examination of the connections between 'creation of self' and society. Authors and texts must be looked at within their greater context. The experiences and articulations of the authors illustrate the influence of social factors and external constructions of identity. Nelson observes, "equally necessary to our identities is the narrative activity that takes place from the third-person perspective: other people weave the things about us that matter most to *them* into stories that also constitute our identities" (71). This includes placing the interviews and actions of writers within the context of history and colonisation. These connections can both expose and create transformative space. Anderson addresses this space of transformation when she describes how "with each piece of her own truth-telling writing, she found more strength in her ability to define herself outside of racist paradigms" (141). The long struggle for strong representations of First Nations images created by and for First Nations has been marked by marginalization and barriers. Vizenor states that "Native American Indian histories and literatures, oral and written, are imagined from 'wisps of narratives'" (3). The position of resistance is very rarely one that is offered much visibility; my goal is to offer a further exploration of the works of Eden Robinson (Haisla), Monique Mojica

(Rappahannock, Kuna), Beatrice Culleton (Métis), Marilyn Dumont (Cree, Métis), and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishnaabe).

Reading, writing, and community have a massive effect on an author's identity creation. Writers speak of their childhood experiences and the impact of what they found (or at times did not find) within their reading history. These moments of intersection between pre-existing literature and the creation of new literature expose the influence of literature found within schools, homes, and communities. Such connections between internal identity formation and external experiences of literature contextualise the relationship between authors and their surroundings. I am drawn to the relationships and questions highlighted by Shumaker:

True literary study consists not of breaking apart but of making connections. When we ask, 'why this word?' what we mean is 'How does this mean in relation to the story, to everything else in the work? What other stories does this image bring to the work, and how can we tell those so that others will see the connections?' No word or image or story can be known by itself. (88-89)

Through their various interviews and texts, these authors have made it clear their work does not stand in isolation. Rather, writing is both a reflection of the literature the writer reads, and the responsibility a writer feels toward a community. Through this connection to community, First Nations women's writing can contain political implications even when politics are not discussed directly.

As well, many of the authors talk about the powerful position of reading and writing on their identity formation. Specifically, authors note the ways reading is a direct external experience of identity construction. A legacy of

colonisation ties the writers to inherently political issues, and the political nature of their work has a distinct influence when they reference other writers within a text. Akiwenzie-Damm stresses the political nature of First Nations writing:

As far as whether it's a political act, I do think that when Aboriginal people or Indigenous people write that yeah, it necessarily is. It's like our community, fishing, which we've always done, is a political act because we've had to fight for our fishing rights. [Are] really basic things – getting up in the morning and just living in my community – a political act? Well, in a way, it is. We're in a highly politicized environment all the time. (qtd in Boucher 3)

Akiwenzie-Damm stresses the political nature of ordinary lives that exist within a context of colonisation and a history of oppression. Dialogue between these writers often creates mutual support. Over time, these conversations are the basis for the formation of literary history. This literary history then forms the basis upon which to build a further foundation of support for First Nations women writers and create even more varied representations of Native womanhood.

Such a dialogue between authors exists within Mojica's play, Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots. The beginning "Notes" (12) of her play lists the quotations and excerpts she used within the text of the play and the original sources. From traditional Cheyenne phrases to speeches at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto to Chrystos to Paula Gunn Allen to "You Light Up My Life" by Joe Brooks, Mojica has skillfully woven numerous snippets and flashes of various ways in which people talk about themselves and others. By weaving their words throughout the written text for the actors, Mojica is creating a performance of the very literary community which has influenced her to produce such work herself. This is a key strategy that articulates the importance of "the

interactivity of identity formation and the importance of narrative in constructing a self" (Engel and Munger 47). By referencing other writers and their words, Mojica is reinforcing the notion of solidarity, political activism, and transformation of the landscape of literature. These links have not been lost on the authors and, in many instances, they have referenced this relationship to a literary community within their own writing.

Given the relatively new experience of written versus oral traditions, contemporary First Nations authors are continually breaking new ground and creating a new community of authors. This has created a new notion of how First Nations authors can fit into their community. Culleton addresses this shift by not thinking of herself as a storyteller, but as a writer. She notes that First Nations peoples are not even really 'supposed' to write at all: "I'm not one of those storytellers. Indians are supposed to be good storytellers, I'm not. I've got to write it down" (qtd in Silvera 323). In this way a new notion of interaction forms around writing. While a writer referencing other writers is not uncommon, in the case of Eden Robinson, the author is referencing a very close connection to a newly created legacy of Haisla literary history. Robinson describes the influence of her uncle, Gordon Robinson, who was the first Haisla to be published: "He wrote the non-fiction *Tales of the Kitamaat* in 1956 or /57. He wrote down stories he didn't want people to forget" (qtd in Methot 12). Eden Robinson, in turn, is the first Haisla to write a novel. Anishnaabe writer and publisher Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm also references her connection to both a history and future of Native writing. She started her own publishing press, Kegedonce Press, specifically to

promote First Nations writing. She points to the need for support and nurturing of more marginal work such as poetry and erotica. She states specifically that she does not “see many Inuit writers, and I look for them. And I don’t see many young Native women writers. There are Native women writing, but I haven’t seen many who are able to stay in it for a while, so I think they need to have their work supported and to be nurtured” (qtd in Boucher 2). These authors are building a strong supportive community of writers in order to facilitate future alternative narratives.

Within interviews and prologues, these authors discuss their identity construction as a process of interactions with reading, writing, and community. Robinson states: “what makes me is definitely family. I am surrounded by a family that supports artistic drive. I never felt like I was letting anybody down by being a Crazy artist” (qtd in Methot 12). Yet this relationship with their work can also be a painful one. The reason for writing can become more closely tied to a notion of activism: “But when I think of the characters, for instance, I feel really sad for what they went through, or I think of myself as that little girl. I guess that’s why we do the work we do. Because we do care” (Culleton qtd in Silvera 324). Authors talk about their relationship to writing and the external environment. The writer can be, in her text, working towards her goal while still creating a piece of writing that exists within a broader understanding of politicized action. Akiwenzie-Damm notes, “we’re in a highly politicized environment all the time. We’re ‘under the authority’ of the *Indian Act*. From the time you’re born, whether you’re status or non-status, you’re politicized. So I think [writing] really is a

political act. It doesn't matter if the work is overly political" (qtd in Boucher 3). So the literary community becomes automatically political in so many ways. When the very choice to write is a political action, the content can only serve to heighten this issue. Culleton references the community of authors and their political nature, and she refers to writing as therapeutic and the support in attending writing workshops and speaking at workshops. "Every writer I know is political in some way. You have to be. Part of why I write is hoping to change things. People will read my work and think about what I'm writing" (Culleton qtd in Silvera 327).

With these connections and support systems also comes responsibility. As mentioned above, Robinson's uncle had to contend with breaking new ground by writing down the knowledge of his community. He speaks of the pressure by the community to be responsible for the knowledge, "but he got some flack for it. He was told, 'you're not supposed to write them down.' All our stories are oral" (Robinson qtd in Methot 12). There is vulnerability in writing down information.¹ All members of his community did not entirely embrace this writing, and some felt this information should never have been recorded in this manner. He had to make his own choice then based on what he felt and believed and on the feedback of others. This is a significant responsibility. Robinson encountered similar issues and was certain to talk to her Elders in order to "get it right." Yet even here she later found that she had missed something and information was recorded that should not have been: "I wrote about a feast, and I found out later

¹ See for example D. Bell's work on Aboriginal Australian interactions with law and strategic silences.

that you're not supposed to write about feasts in Haisla culture" (qtd in Methot 12).

A significant portion of this responsibility comes about due to the automatic link made between works of fiction and the communities from which the writers come. Robinson notes that she feels comfortable using general information, but she shies away from specific Native traditions: "I keep some scenes more or less as they would happen, but I reworked stuff and made certain parts up" (qtd in Methot 12). Culleton also felt this responsibility to her community when she was writing April Raintree. She picked that name in particular because there were no Raintrees in her community and she had never met a Raintree. She was aware of how readers attribute truth-telling to literature produced by a First Nations writer. Possibly due to the early hybrids of fiction and autobiography, current works of fiction can be held up to closer scrutiny both by the author's First Nations community and as representative of all First Nations peoples by non-Native readers: "I didn't write about my own sisters because they had family, and I didn't want to write about and intrude on the privacy of other people. So, of course, that's why I wrote fiction" (Culleton qtd in Silvera 312). Again with care, Culleton chooses the last name Raintree because she did not know of any Métis or Native people in Manitoba with that name (qtd in Silvera 313). Authors face issues of identity when reading, and they are aware of this connection with their writing. These links to their communities cannot be separated from the creation of their art, and this can lead to difficult decisions about the intentions of writing. Robinson points out: "I'm a selfish writer. The

best stuff I write comes when I'm not thinking about an audience, when I don't think about who's going to read this, what market it's going to" (qtd in Methot 12). This begs the question of the external expectations readers and theorists can place on artists and how they respond.

While they speak of balancing these pressures in their lives and in their efforts to create the space to write for their purposes, the authors also talk about the interaction of multiple layering historical, familial, and political/legal pressures on the creation of identity. These are the connections within communities of writers and communities of family. But internal/external pressures can also exist from non-Native sources that create various expectations towards First Nations women's writing. Specifically of interest are the issues of cross-cultural transaction/translation as readers incorporate these stories into the broader notion of western literary canon. Robinson writes that her first priority is to herself. This creates a rather divided intent when there are so many pressures put onto minority authors to create for political reasons, yet they are ultimately writers who need to answer their craft. King points out that there is a complex interaction between all these variables: "these terms, 'Indian' and 'Native,' are historical and literary terms much like 'continent' and 'narrative,' which seem to suggest specific, known qualities but which hint at vast geographies and varied voices" (9).

The questioning of Robinson's 'credentials' or her choice of genre fundamentally tie into a colonial desire to keep clear boundaries between classifications. "People assumed I couldn't write about anything that wasn't

Native because I'm Native ... but I'm fascinated with serial killers, psychopaths, and sociopaths. I wrote about non-Native characters [in Traplines] just to show them I could" (qtd in Methot 12). These questioning glances cast at Robinson are at the very heart of what is meant when saying an author is a First Nations writer. Robinson talks directly to internal and external pressures and those who attempted to define her and tell her what she is qualified/expected to write about in her literature. Robinson's transformations and transgressions of these boundaries are key to my examination of the significance of her work.

Akiwenzie-Damm replies to the question of boundaries around identity and writing:

Could I write from a white Canadian perspective? Probably, yeah ... we've been forced into those school systems, we've been forced into mainstream society. We're fluent in the language. Many of us are forced to be bi-cultural. So it's not really being untrue because it's already part of who we are and part of our knowledge base. (qtd in Boucher 3)

There is a power of translation available to individuals who have known themselves in both, or multiple, worlds. Continually First Nations women are not only denied this power of translation between identifications, but they are held to an unrealistic notion of unity and cohesiveness.

The expectation of First Nations women's unity in form and structure is another example of boundaries others place around Native women's self-construction. There needs to be an open approach because even as Mojica finds her story to create a non-linear structure, Dumont resists this as a pre-ordained necessity of First Nations writing. Writers and their structure and their construction of narrative will all vary. As Mojica explains, she is writing according

to another set of values. Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots has 13 transformations to coordinate with each moon of the lunar year. As well, there are 4 directions or four sections: “This is the inherent structure of the play, it is not a structure that was imposed on the story, but rather, a structure that was informed by the characters I learned a lot about trusting my own way of working” (Mojica 16). Mojica did not set out to write a specific narrative in her play. Her structure offers up an alternative to the linear norm. Meanwhile Dumont, in “Circle the Wagons,” pushes against any expectation that Native authors must always incorporate the circular, non-linear structure. She sees these expectations as boundaries others form around literary identity representation:

There it is again, the circle, that goddamned circle, as if we thought in circles, judged things on the merit of their circularity, as if all we ate was bologna and bannock, drank Tetley tea, so many times ‘we are’ the circle, the medicine wheel, the moon, the womb, and sacred hoops, you’d think we were one big tribe, is there nothing more than the circle in the deep structure of Native literature? (57)

Both these authors state outright how their identities create an expectation of a particular style of writing. This is a beautiful contradiction, if viewed one way, and a perfect example of the inability to ever say what, exactly, is a Native style of writing; a Native structure.

Authors who stand in contrast to one another defy the attempts to bind Native literature into a simple category. Or, as Krupat explains:

The consequence of this situation is that one feels put in the position of having to choose between the two terms set in putative opposition, as if it were not really possible to write on Indian subjects without presenting one’s bona fides in terms of having danced at powwows with so and so or having been taken as blood brother by so and so, as if one’s analyses

required the authority of personal experience to be valid, as if he who had much experience of Native culture must automatically produce valid analyses of it. (7)

This calls for an understanding that writers cannot be held to frozen notions of what is traditional, what is historical, or what has been designated as Native within the understanding of literature, identity, and society. The ties that may bind together various communities, families, and writers are not a universal declaration of unity. To understand the processes or outcomes as unified is to establish further false notions of boundaries and commonalities. Akiwenzie-Damm makes the comparison, “it’s like asking why all European nations aren’t cohesive, why they don’t agree on everything But there’s an expectation that we should all get along and have the same perspective on things” (qtd in Boucher 3). In creating a representation of Native women’s identity for a cross-cultural transaction, these authors are finding ways to use their ultimate authority as First Nations women to represent First Nations women.

There is a risk in external factors deciding what is appropriate or suitable for First Nations women’s identity. There is also a risk in never pushing beyond community. First Nations women’s identities are complex entities which have to somehow allow for the inclusion of history, tradition, contemporary issues, and change. These authors are both exploring and transforming their own representations with their work. In order to understand what they are doing, many of their images must be seen within a context of their specific references to history, colonisation, and family. In turn, the authors must find ways to express their identity creation with this interaction between the internal experience of self

and the external pressures for identification. As noted, these pressures come from themselves, their community, and non-Native power structures all attempting to understand or, at times, regulate the boundaries of identity. So while the pressures exist to regulate their boundaries as writers, that very same dynamic plays out with their characters' own understanding of self.

Native literature can produce narratives to counter the damaging effects of negative images on the identity construction of First Nations women. Acoose states: "Canadian literature as an expression of the nation's prevailing ideological structures continues to erode the ethos of Indigenous peoples generally, and relative to this discussion, Indigenous women specifically" (51). But through the production of alternative texts being written by First Nations women, themselves, the content of 'Canadian literature' is changing. The hegemonic representations of First Nations women's identity is no longer standing in isolation. King explains,

these narratives, originally seen as 'sources of fact,' have become occasion for a creative examination by contemporary writers of the literary tension created by the existence of North America and its peoples and the failure of language to transcend the 'discourse of conquest.' (11)

The literature and narratives offered up as the colonisers' perspectives on Native identity are being countered by the literature and texts written from resistant positions of creative re-examination, renewal, and celebration by First Nations women writers.

Literature can illustrate the connection between colonisation and current influences of literature, information, family, and support on identity formation. In turn, literature can recontextualize various 'sources of fact.' These authors and their work stress how history and colonisation have an impact on identity

creation. Nelson points out, this is an opportunity for an author to “use the story to repudiate an incorrect understanding of who she is, and replaces this with a more accurate self-understanding”(19). Counterstories tell those ‘facts’ which may have been altered, misremembered, or forgotten all together within the coloniser’s narrative. First Nations women’s literature contains many instances of these specific types of counterstories. They are significant because they present the opportunity to articulate a wrong to a greater audience. Akiwenzie-Damm states:

Most of us believe our creative work has a function well beyond self-expression. It expresses the values and aesthetics of our people and connects us to them and to our ancestors and future generations. It is a form of activism that both maintains and affirms who we are and protests against colonisation and assimilation. (*Skins* vi)

The writing process becomes a political link to everyday lives, and literature connects to the society in which it is created.

The first connection is that between contemporary identity creation and history. By acknowledging the women of the past and the difficulties they faced, authors situate the contemporary discussion of First Nations women’s identity within a continual experience of colonisation. Dumont’s poem “Helen Betty Osborne” references historical experiences to highlight the conflict between Native women and non-Native expressions of womanhood. She says:

it might even turn out to be
about our grandmothers,
beasts of burden in the fur trade
skinning, scraping, pounding, packing,
left behind for ‘British Standards of Womanhood,’
left for white-melting-skinned women,
not bits-of-brown women
left here in this wilderness, this colony. (20)

Mojica's contemporary women – they are actually called Contemporary Woman #1 and #2 – further solidify this connection to history as they act out the various roles and transformations from past and present. Marie is one of the three incarnations of Cree and Métis women “who portaged across Canada with white men on their backs and were then systemically discarded” (15). The scene starts with the words of Marie who then transforms herself into a contemporary woman in order to have a dialogue between the two:

‘We women,
make moccasins/ string showshoes / teach them to
walk in the snow/ make canoes.
We,
Hunt/ fish/ put food away for the winter/ teach them to
survive. We,’
in voice of CONTEMPORARY WOMAN #1
‘translate/ navigate/ build alliances with our bodies/
loyalties through our blood.’ (43)

These historical representations of Native womanhood link to contemporary issues. By making these connections obvious, Dumont and Mojica bind their explorations of identity to misrepresented ‘sources of facts’ which offer only negative identities. First Nations women face these images of the past in their identity creation. Dialogues across history run throughout Princess Pocahontas as Mojica connects moments of racism and sexism to Contemporary Women's expressions of self.

The divided representations of identity offered by April and Cheryl Raintree further explore this question of dialogue between women. Culleton has resisted overly romanticized notions of Native identity and presents a brutally honest examination of what can occur with the internalisation of racism. To read

April and Cheryl as a single Métis individual allows for a clear picture of the negative impact colonisation has on identity formation. This combined character articulates the struggle against both internal and external forces regulating and placing value on identity. Cheryl finally states to her sister: “Half-breeds aren’t good enough for you. You’re a bigot against your own people” (Culleton 175). April’s voice is, at times, overly simplified, but she is articulating the accusations of outsiders/racists. And, in doing so, April is a manifestation of the impact of these binaries:

It would be better to be a full-blooded Indian or full-blooded Caucasian. But being a half-breed, well, there’s just nothing there. You can admire Indian people for what they once were. They had a distinct heritage, or is it culture? Anyway, you can see how much was taken from them. And white people, well, they’ve convinced each other they are the superior race, and you can see they are responsible for the progress we have today ... but what have the Métis people got? Nothing. Being half-breed, you feel only the shortcomings of both sides. (Culleton 142-143)

These bindings around identity are not only being imposed from the outside; the legacy of colonisation ensures an internal policing takes place as well. Fee argues “identity is policed from both the outside and inside a minority group, the temptation for Aboriginal people to privilege so-called racial purity is at least as great as the temptation for non-Aboriginal people” (Fee 212).

Dumont recognizes and further explores the establishment of boundaries around Métis identity. In “Leather and Naughahyde”[sic] (58) the woman narrator articulates this negotiation of value:

I say I’m Métis
like it’s an apology and he says, ‘mmh,’ like he forgives me, like
he’s got a big heart and mine’s pumping diluted blood and his voice
has sounded well-fed up till this point, but now it goes thin like
he’s across the room taking another look and when he returns he’s

got 'this look,' that says he's leather and I'm naughahyde.

The idea behind any judgment on Métis is that the Native/non-Native is somehow a clear grouping of identity. These narratives expose the difficulty in determining boundaries around identity. In establishing concrete notions of what box contains Native and what box contain non-Native traits, the coloniser's false binary cannot conceptualise anything in between; and this reflects the difficulties with regulating status and Métis rights through law.

Monica Mojica navigates various expressions of Native identity throughout her work, Princess Pocahontas. Her examples run a range of textual explorations of identity creation with respects to history, colonisation, law, and community. At one point Mojica traces the issues of blood and mixed blood from generation to generation:

When I was born, my mother turned me over to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine – the sign of Indian blood. When my child was born, after counting the fingers and the toes, I turned it over to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine. Even among the half-breeds, it's one of the last things to go. (20)

Mojica is talking about what can be held forefront in a mixing of Native and non-Native blood. She notes how this occurs despite the continual mixing, that the child is still Native. At this point the woman is able to articulate what cannot be taken away or diluted from her child's blood: her child is Native. Yet she is living within a system of governance which continually seeks to regulate varying levels of 'nativeness' based upon this very process of blood quantum. There is a battle to regulate identity both from the inside and the outside, but this mother is

tapping into a history of familial identification which is as undeniable as a mark on the skin.

Authors make reference within their work to the relationship between literature and identity construction. Dumont references this intertextuality and the power of language and school in creating this certain 'standard':

I have since reconsidered Eliot
and the Great White way of writing English
standard that is
the great white way
has measured, judged and assessed me all my life
... one wrong sound and you're shelved in the Native Literature section
resistance writing
a mad Indian
unpredictable
on the war path
native ethnic protest
the Great White way could silence us all
... it's had its hand over my mouth since my first day of school
since Dick and Jane, ABC's and fingernail checks
syntactic laws: use the wrong order or
register and you're a dumb Indian
dumb, drunk, or violent. ("The Devil's Language" 54)

Mojica carries this theme throughout her text. Found in everything from the Production Notes, to the character descriptions, to the quotations and excerpts, and finally the bibliography – Mojica continually references the impact of words and literature. Her bibliography is split into those books which are recommended and "Not Recommended (but still useful from the dominant culture perspective)" (62); Mojica references the texts which contextualise her writing. This is also the case with the bibliography for her second play Birdwoman and the Suffragettes where we have two texts "Recommended (with a historical grain of salt)" and "Not Recommended (romanticized historical novels; good source material for

satire)” (85). At this point the very texts which have been pointed to as harmful become fodder for creative transformation. So the literature itself is making reference to literature’s role in identity construction and, in doing so, literature is both reference and content.

Culleton also works with the idea of good and bad books and positive and negative representations. April and Cheryl’s diverging childhood experiences with literature produces very different contextualising of their identity. Cheryl’s foster home has access to a collection of books which counter the history and teachings offered in school: “Mrs. MacAdams is a Métis you know They got a lot of books on Indian tribes and how they used to live a long time ago Mrs. MacAdams gave them to me to read because no one at school would talk or play with me. They call me names and things, or else they make like I’m not there at all” (Culleton 43). Meanwhile, April’s experience with literature stressed the coloniser’s perspective on history:

I knew all about Louis Riel. He was a rebel who had been hanged for treason. Worse, he had been a crazy half-breed. I had learned about his folly in history. Also, I had read about the Indians and the various methods of tortures they had put the missionaries through. No wonder they were known as savages. So, anything to do with Indians, I despised. (Culleton 42)

Cheryl’s exposure to positive representations within the MacAdams’ household led her to writing pro-Native school papers and, later in life, political activism and social action. Culleton is working through all the highs and lows associated with identity construction within a setting of colonial legacies. Through April and Cheryl, Culleton is playing out an internal struggle. Cheryl’s childhood is much more empowering than April’s due to the support and exposure she has to

positive representations.² April is very resistant to Cheryl's writing and speaking out about positive Native history or experience. Yet when April has no other means to access help, it is through writing her story that she is finally able to gain support (Culleton 76). Culleton has April access support through her own literary truth-telling.

Robinson also references books and reading within Monkey Beach, and Lisamarie's experience is resistant and transformative. Lisamarie starts in a common enough setting of early schooling where "Nothing they taught me meant anything. None of the stories I read in English had anything to do with my life"(166). A conflict occurs between Lisamarie and the one teacher who "forced us to read a book that said that the Indians of the northwest coast of British Columbia had killed and eaten people as religious sacrifices. My teacher had made us each read a paragraph out loud. When my turn came, I sat there shaking, absolutely furious"(68). Lisamarie's experiences reflect what Acoose articulated about her own experiences with school texts that are not representative of self-identification and which she called "an apparatus of the prevailing ideology" (40). Acoose further expands on this process of self-identification:

I learned to passively accept and internalize the easy squaw, Indian-whore, dirty Indian, and drunken Indian stereotypes that subsequently imprisoned me, and all Indigenous peoples, regardless of our ... differences ... becoming, to a certain extent, what was encouraged by the ideological collusiveness of textbooks, and the ignorant comments and peer pressure from non-Indigenous students. (29)

² Culleton's book must be approached as individual issues being played out between these two characters. She is not so much plotting a path as she is working through these single instances of difficulty.

But Lisamarie neither passively accepts nor internalises the school texts. Lisamarie refuses, refutes and, when silenced by the teacher, begins singing “Fuck the Oppressors” and is sent to the principal’s office. Strategically located within this interaction is how Robinson takes the resistance further and is able to find power for Lisamarie. She links this resistance of Lisamarie to her activist Uncle Mick, his actions, and his music (68). His support greatly influences Lisamarie’s identity construction, and when she returns home with the disciplinary note from the school, “Mick went out and had the teacher’s note laminated and framed. He hammered a nail into his wall and hung the note in the centre of the living room. He put his arm around me, swallowed hard a few times and looked misty. ‘My little warrior’”(69). Mick offers Lisamarie a very specific viewership – framing – of the note sent home. Intended to be a text of shame, the note is, within the family structure, positioned by Mick as a text of pride. At these moments Robinson moves beyond the articulation of the resistance and is able to create a bond to a source of power. This is why Lisamarie is, in the end, an empowered, sophisticated, sympathetic character. Lisamarie’s connection to her family is the most influential factor in her abilities to survive.

This is similar to the actions and punishments doled out to Cheryl as she fought the racism of her school environment, yet Cheryl is unable to access this family or community support system. In a very similar school setting to Lisamarie’s, Cheryl defies her teacher’s authority:

Her teacher had been reading to the class how the Indians scalped, tortured, and massacred brave white explorers and missionaries. Cheryl’s

anger began to build. All of a sudden she had loudly exclaimed, "This is all a bunch of lies!I'm not going to learn this garbage about Indian people.... Lies! Lies! Lies! Your history books don't say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. That's all you white people can do is teach a bunch of lies to cover your own tracks!" (53-54)

When challenged further by the teacher, Cheryl – like Lisamarie – was able to respond: "Cheryl had been scared, but she was also stubborn. She believed she was right, and she intended to stand up for her beliefs, no matter what they dished out" (54). But rather than her family being a source of support, the power dynamic established with a foster care system is such that family is more of a liability. When called in by the principal, Mrs. DesRosier is able to exert power over Cheryl by threatening her access to her sister: "You're going to do exactly as they wish or else I'll call your worker, have you moved, and then I'll make sure you never see April again. Now, are you going to co-operate?" (54). With this Cheryl agrees to apologize to the teacher. The differing forms of power allotted to Lisamarie and Cheryl are related to the support they have for an alternative expression of pride in their identity. Both Cheryl and April are continually denied agency, and lack the support of family or community. Identity, history, legacy, and representation are significant factors. A community of support can allow an individual to "reimagine oneself, to create ever more expansive identities" and these changing identities can lay claim to altered societal boundaries and "lead to the conclusion that the individual is positioned on the wrong side of a social boundary, that she is being treated unfairly, and even that her rights have been violated" (Engel and Munger 41).

The legally enforced removal of children from First Nations families affects the creation of identity. Running throughout Monkey Beach is the legacy of residential schools, of colonial relations. This history is the source of conflict between siblings, parents and children, and loved ones. Uncle Mick often provides this information and describes the impact of what occurred:

You look at your precious church. You look at what they did. You never went to residential school. You can't tell me what I fucking went through and what I didn't You don't get it. You really don't get it. You're buying into a religion that thought the best way to make us white was to fucking torture children. (Robinson 109-110)

Foster Care is an important contemporary legal issue within First Nations communities and brings forward a number of considerations for identity formation, cultural continuity, and stands as a stark reminder of the legacy of colonisation. Culleton establishes April as a good kid early on in the novel so we can see the changes that take place later on in reference to her foster homes and what she faces in terms of identity. The identity offered to April by the second foster home is full of words such as “squaw,” “half-breed,” “dirty,” and so on. This is a process of assimilation; these situations are linked to the history of colonisation. So when Culleton and Robinson address foster care and residential schools as legacies of colonisation, they are talking about the ongoing ramifications of colonisation.³

This literature points to the importance of family – or a re-creation of family – to access information, wisdom, strength, and support. This is how knowledge is passed on to the next generation. In the telling, the texts themselves become

³ I cannot fully explore all the legal and political implications of child welfare issues within the scope of this thesis. For some excellent sources on these policies, please see Monture-Angus, Kelm, Buenafe, and Fournier and Crey.

a connection to traditional support. Mick and Ma-ma-oo pass on information to Lisamarie and provide her with the knowledge and the awareness of her strengths. It is her connection to her family and her community that provides her power. In turn, this is what April and Cheryl lack because of this legacy of colonisation. April and Cheryl's removal from their parents denied them the opportunity to access this information and support. Dumont questions the ability to return to the support of family in her poem "It Crosses My Mind":

and what will I know of my own
kin in my old age, will they still welcome me, share their stew and
tea, pass me the bannock like it's mine, will they continue to greet
me in the old way, hand me their babies as my own and send me
away with gifts when I leave and what name will I know them by in
these multicultural intentions. (59)

Robinson stresses the importance of historical knowledge and awareness for Lisamarie via her talks to Ma-ma-oo and Uncle Mick. It is from these interactions that Lisamarie is ultimately given the tools to deal with all that comes her way. From this she gains awareness of herself, her strengths, and her heritage.

To articulate the importance of family support systems, Culleton exposes what happens when they are not there. The reality is that Native family structures have been horribly damaged by colonisation. By resisting romanticized notions of Native identity and very honestly looking at some of the current issues of constructing a First Nations woman's identity, Culleton is able to trace these forces of colonisation and explore the effects of internalized negative stereotypes. April's actions and responses are, at times, harsh and troubling – but the character represents a culmination of a lifetime of racism and sexism. Culleton's book also stresses the need for a balanced approach to

representation. Although Cheryl has access to many positive representations, she is also sheltered from some very harsh realities. By never really having to confront the reality of her childhood and her parents, Cheryl is left to construct idealistic illusions of her past. She is never allowed to access the more difficult images and find her own method of coping with these problems; she has been denied the opportunity to formulate her own way of understanding the effect colonisation continues to have on people. When Cheryl finally finds their long-lost father, she is unable to rectify her illusions of the past with the man standing before her:

I stand quietly, hiding the horror which is boiling inside of me. I hadn't known what to expect. But it wasn't this, this bent, wasted human form in front of me. My father! I am horrified and repulsed: by him All my dreams to rebuild the spirit of a once proud nation are destroyed in this instant. I study the pitiful creature in front of me. My father! A gutter-creature! (Culleton 197-8)

Because of this imbalance, Cheryl is going into her adulthood without the tools to survive. Although she states her work is not autobiographical, Culleton's life has provided the incentive for this type of representation (Culleton qtd in Silvera 312). She speaks of her two sisters committing suicide and the impact of that on her way of understanding relationships with identity. She needed to write a book which captured both the positive and the negative images of her life, and this narrative then functions both as a healing process and as a preventative strategy.

Family structures and support systems are vital in passing on knowledge and wisdom and taking the opportunity to present alternative stories. Dumont holds onto the power of her family in "The Devil's Language" and asks the reader

to think “back to your mother’s sound, your mother’s tongue, your mother’s language” (55). Dumont positions the pieces of familiarity amongst the challenges of colonisation. She questions how to maintain this identity of her childhood, while being so firmly situated within an English dominated society.

She again reminds the reader:

where you sat on her knee in a canvas tent
and she fed you bannock and tea
and syllables
that echo in your mind, now
that you can’t make the sound
of that voice that rocks you and sings you to sleep
in the devil’s language. (55)

Robinson is able to use Uncle Mick’s activism and Ma-ma-oo’s knowledge to pass on crucial information to Lisamarie. These counter colonial stories are providing both Lisamarie and the reader with missing or misinformed facts and traditions. A significant example is when telling of how her grandfather Ba-ba-oo had lost his arm in the Second World War, Lisamarie gains further knowledge of her family’s past from Uncle Mick. She learns how:

When he came home, he couldn’t get a job or get the money he thought he should get from Veterans Affairs because they said Indian Affairs was taking care of him. Indian Affairs said if he wanted the same benefits as a white vet, he should move off the reserve and give up his status. If he did that, they’d lose their house and by this time, they had three children and my dad, Albert, was on the way. (81)

The author further addresses, here, misinformation or ‘sources of facts.’ April Raintree also highlights the various facts of Métis history with Cheryl replying through her knowledge and by what was passed on to her from her good foster family. Cheryl ‘tells’ April, but this is another example of Culleton telling herself, telling her community, and telling the external reader what can be known about

Métis history. Literature plays an important role in clarifying the link between the impact of colonisation and the current representations of First Nations peoples.

Colonial cultures absorb colonised identities and then reflect them back to First Nations women with parameters and boundaries on what they should express of themselves. Between the expectation of external groups and the internalization of these images, this hegemonic discourse confines First Nations women to a specific identity that then becomes self-reinforcing, reproducing the hegemonic notion of First Nations women. The influence of these hegemonic images stresses the importance of “identity’s interactive and intersubjective development and the importance of the narrative process itself in the formation of identity” (Engel and Munger 43). But literature can create alternative narratives to these belief systems. As bell hooks declares, this “coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless – our being defined and interpreted by others” (Talking Back 12). The connections between authors and their acts of reading and writing form a dialogue of renewed representation. Spahr asserts that “once reading is recognized as dependent on community, and on the relationship between reader and works as a form of community itself, reading [and writing] turns into a force that can be manipulated and used as a tool of resistance” (3).

Texts and their production become a connection to support and healing. Anderson ties together the act of writing and the greater Native community:

Writing also gives women a means of surviving oppression and a way to engage in a healing process The process of writing creates a space where they can deal with anger, pain and sadness, and then begin to kindle positive feelings about their identity. As women heal and reclaim their identity, the overall healing movement for Indigenous people takes hold. (Anderson 141)

The writing process connects between the writers and their communities, the writers and other writers, the writers and themselves. These systems of support perpetuate the continual production of texts. Robinson knew this and sought out the community of writers to facilitate her craft: "I knew I wanted to write, but I was really struggling. At home, there were no writers. I didn't know any writers, I didn't know what they did, I didn't know how they got from A to B. So I needed to hear and see and talk to other writers" (qtd in Methot 12). The creation of these texts includes both the support and the responsibility of having these connections to others. Akiwenzie-Damm notes that "despite these differences, what all of the writers share is our connection to our homelands, our histories of colonisation, genocide, and displacement, and our will to survive and pass the treasures of our cultures to future generations" (*Skins* vi). In turn, the texts act as methods of exploring the connection between writers and the boundaries of Native identities. Those characteristics which can lead to a community of First Nations writers can also set the bookends on what belongs on that shelf.

CHAPTER FOUR: Challenges and Transformations

Language is an influential, powerful and transformative tool, and these characteristics reflect the interaction between narratives and identity. Language is a tool of change, but it is also one of the means by which the coloniser attempts to perpetuate damaging identity destruction for First Nations women. By identifying the coloniser's construction of an oppressive narrative, First Nations women authors retell the story and "make visible the relevant details that the master narrative suppressed" (Nelson 7). They make evident the relationship between narratives, power, and identity. First Nations women's narratives have been linked to gendered identities of oppression and colonisation specifically through the use of naming. Robinson's Ma-ma-oo understands the power and the danger of this: "Names have power. This is the fundamental principle of magic everywhere. Call out the name of a supernatural being, and you will have its instant and undivided attention" (Robinson, Monkey Beach 180). Words and names contain the power to call forth particular images as well as the power to draw connections between an individual and a disadvantaged subjectivity.

When a group is given limited access to positive self naming, this can limit the legal narratives available for empowerment and protection. First Nations women have expressly noted the lack of positive identities made available through either naming or literature and the importance in challenging the colonial production of these names. Akiwenzie-Damm stresses the role of colonisation and genocide in this scarcity of sexually positive narratives for First Nations women. She explains, "we were defined and categorized by the colonisers ... we

were renamed and then those names were defined and legislated so as to separate us from the colonisers and settlers” (Addressing, 144-145). Lawrence adds that more generally “‘Indianness’ had to be codified to make it a category that could be granted or withheld, according to the needs of the settler society” (7). The importance of legal narratives is highlighted throughout these texts from First Nations women’s authors as they explore issues of gendered violence. But through their articulation of these names, their identification of the coloniser’s perspective, their anger, rejection, and refusal – each of these authors have used literature to create their own space of resistance, celebration, and transformation.

Mojica recognizes the role of naming and history on the current images of First Nations women. Specifically, she notes how the coloniser altered First Nations women’s names depending on their relationship to non-Native men. The three names Pocahontas, Lady Rebecca, and Matoaka all refer to the same Powhatan woman known for saving Captain John Smith, yet the different names indicate a variety of situations and ways in which she is viewed. As Mojica points out, Lady Rebecca is the name which indicates religion, location, and marriage to a white man, and the name Pocahontas became “the archetype of the ‘good indian’” while this woman’s initial name is lost from the popular narratives (14). This is indicative of a cycle of altered naming First Nations women faced during colonisation. This interaction between a name and a connection to a community is the same process described by Shirley Bear in her contemporary interaction with the Indian Act. She struggled to regain access to the name and the resources available to her prior to her marriage to a non-Native man.

As names change, so do various external and internal notions of identity, agency, and access to support and community. Mojica creatively re-examines this particular issue in history through the transfiguration of a Métis woman from Marie to Margaret to Madelaine. This third and final transformation – Madelaine – married a white man only to be abandoned and left with a different name and no connections to her family or her home: “I am – was married to James Johnston for fifteen years Two days! They left me only two days to get out. Fifteen years null and void! Null and void in two days! It is called ‘turning off’” (Mojica 46). The first incarnation, Marie, had altered her name and committed herself to a life separate from her support structures. She was assimilated into an identity that did not afford her protection when she was replaced by a more legitimate representation of womanhood: a white one. At this point she begins to speak Cree and Contemporary Woman #1 takes the stage to translate and confirm her own connection to these historical events as “an essential fiber in the fabric of our contemporary lives” (Mojica 47).¹ Images of Native womanhood are positioned in relation to white womanhood, and the coloniser makes clear a desire to recreate the familiar in order to control Native women’s gendered identity. The coloniser’s external perspective seeks to recreate a disadvantaged notion of Native womanhood.

Culleton further explores the interaction between external and internal influences on identity through April’s experiences of family support. April’s early years were spent with two parents struggling with their own interaction with

¹ In fact, the same actress plays the character and a connection is further solidified between the historical experiences of this Métis woman and her contemporary counterpart as Madelaine is transformed into Contemporary Woman #1.

colonisation, and they offered limited support to April. Her father suffered from tuberculosis, and her mother had been raised in a residential school and then worked as a housekeeper for the priest in her hometown (11-13). Both parents struggled with being on welfare, the racism in town, and alcohol abuse. During this time, April's internal dialogues were marked by confusion about race and agency. She attempted to situate herself between the two groups of children she saw at the park. She noted that one group was "brown-skinned children who looked like Cheryl in most ways ... but they were dirty looking and they dressed in really raggedy clothes" while the other was "white-skinned, and I used to envy them, especially the girls with blond hair and blue eyes" (16). She is unsure of her positioning with respect to her family and the external representations of Native and non-Native children. This becomes more complex when April enters the foster care system and must begin to form her self-concept in fluctuating situations of support and care.

Vastly altered internal dialogues mark the changes in family support throughout April's childhood. Her time with the Dions is characterised by positive and supportive comments towards her by the family. Specifically Mrs. Dion is kind and caring towards April: "You poor angel. It must be so hard on you" (30). Then during April's last visit with Maman Dion in the hospital, she states: "April, you're a very special person. Always remember that" (36). During her stay with the Dions, April's external actions are positive as she provides emotional support to her sister, comforts Papa Dion, and forms compassion towards her parents' situation. But when April moves from the care of the Dions' to the mistreatment of

the DeRosiers a change in her familiar support leads to a change in self-understanding. This period of April's life is characterised by increasingly harsh internalised racist comments. Within the first day at the new foster home, April is told by Mrs. DeRosier that "you half-breeds, you love to wallow in filth" (37), and later by one of the DeRosier children that "[April] doesn't look like the last squaw"(38). The transformation of April's naming alters her internalized notions of self and her family. Throughout her stay at the DeRosiers, April struggles to maintain a relationship with her positively Native-identified younger sister. She internalizes the racism and begins to project it forward from herself. April can no longer accept any positive Native identification and, in turn, believes that anything negative that happens to her must be because of her Nateness. The representations available to her for her construction of a self-narrative do not afford her any positive options for being both respected and valued and a Native woman. In particular, the above mentioned use of the word squaw marks a deliberate attack on a positive sexual identity, and this colonial perspective runs throughout the other texts as well.

Much of Mojica's Princess Pocahontas explores the alteration of First Nations women's identities based on their gender. Specifically, she articulates the active destruction of images of Native women's sexual power. Mojica exposes the modification of Indigenous Mexican women's deities from women in roles of power to Catholic virgins with new names. The "Deity/ Woman of the Puna/ Virgin Transfiguration" (35) speaks directly to the attempts to desexualise

and *purify* these powerful women in order to view them as controlled and contained:

scrubbed clean
made lighter, non threatening
chastebarren.
No longer allied with the darkness
of moon tides
but twisted and misaligned
with the darkness of evil
the invaders sinful apple
in my hand! (37)

Mojica reveals the assaulting nature of this coloniser action when she tells how the Deities are transfigured into Virgins: “stripped – of our names and our light” (37). Through this act of stripping and exposing the Deities, the colonial perspective leaves them with only a weakened identification. Mojica illustrates the contrast between the coloniser’s dark negative representations of Indigenous women’s sexuality with her description of the inherent light contained within the sexualised powerful Deities. With this she highlights the tension between representations and the power in controlling the boundaries around identity. First Nations women’s representation on the coloniser’s terms does not afford the same illustration Mojica offers here. There is only a binary, and this binary does not ever propose a powerful position.

Native women have two choices within these gendered representations by the coloniser. One option is a stark, unthreatening non-sexuality, while the other is a sexuality that can only be labelled as squaw or whore. This lack of positive or powerful sexual images and ideas is exactly what Akiwenzie-Damm noticed about erotic writing and the sexual identities available for First Nations women.

She could not locate any realistic scope of Native women's sexuality.

Discovering *any* sex-positive Native writing was difficult. She notes, "there was some erotic writing by Indigenous writers around – it just took some searching. A lot of searching. Too much searching" (Addressing, 143). The representations of First Nations women's sexuality were only offered from the coloniser's perspective.

In the short story "Queen of the North" Robinson exposes this as a consumable sexuality.² Karaoke must interact with the attempted consumption of her exotic Otherness by Arnold, the observer:

'Would you - ' he blushed harder, 'shake your hair out of that baseball cap?'

I shrugged, pulled the cap off, and let my hair loose. It hung limply down to my waist. My scalp felt like it was oozing enough oil to cause environmental damage.

'You should keep it down all times,' he said. (Robinson Traplines 208-9)

Arnold wants to view Karaoke as one more item for him to purchase and consume, and he is unwilling to view her outside of an exotic sexual representation. He does not see Karaoke as a fundraiser or a volunteer. She is a Native woman who should have her hair down at all times. At this moment, Arnold's positioning of Karaoke is limited to the damaging negative stereotypes of First Nations women's representation. The coloniser has reinforced this racist and sexist understanding of who Karaoke is within this interaction. Robinson is highlighting the limited options Karaoke faces for her viewership from a colonial perspective. There is no space allotted for a complex, realistic representation of

² Robinson introduces the character of Karaoke which starts the storyline to be continued in Monkey Beach.

Karaoke's Native womanhood. Anderson observes, "When negative images of Native women are so ingrained in the Canadian consciousness ... is it easy to see how Native women might begin to think of themselves as 'easy squaws'" (106). As Arnold wants to perceive Karaoke as the sexualised Other, he must also believe that she is deserving of specific treatment from the coloniser. This means she is available for his particular perception, interaction, and consumption. Despite Karaoke's own experience of her hair being greasy and decidedly not sexy, Arnold insists that she wear it down for the fulfilment of his coloniser viewership.

Dumont explores these issues of the coloniser's perspective and identity in her "Squaw Poems" (18). Through this poem Dumont exposes the physical impact of words on a woman as she is struck by the shout of "hey squaw!" and in response to that blow "her ears stung and she shook, fearful of the other words/ like fists that would follow" (18). The external physical reaction is then explained at a deeper level: "For a moment her spirit drained like/ water from a basin" (18). She is well aware of the meaning of that word and notes the relationship between labels as "squaw is to whore/ as/ Indian maiden is to virgin/ squaw is to shore/ as/ Indian princess is to lady" (19). Dumont takes this choice between Princess and squaw and explores how this is a bound notion of Native womanhood determined by external expectations and limitations. Dumont explores the confines of the available images: "I would become the Indian princess, not the squaw dragging/ her soul after laundry, meals, needy kids and abusive husbands. These were my choices" (19). By highlighting the binary choices for

Native women's sexuality, Dumont stresses the role of the coloniser's perspective in the representation of Native women. The only 'respectful' sexual option becomes a whitewashed sexuality that does not contain passion or desire and which is bound by rules to avoid certain lipstick colours and styles of shoe. The risk, otherwise, is to be understood in an unprotected representation, so Dumont states that she "never moved in ways that might be interpreted as loose" (18). The external viewership polices continually and Dumont confirms, "I became what Jean Rhys phrased, 'aggressively/ respectable.' I'd be so god-damned respectable that white people/ would feel slovenly in my presence" (18). What has been established by such naming is that Native women can somehow be constructed as 'deserving' of different treatment, protection, and respect.

Sexual identity is political. When First Nations women are only offered limited binary choices these unrealistic representations are damaging and dangerous. Akiwenzie-Damm struggles against "the hang ups that I acquired as an Anishnaabe woman who was raised under the Indian Act, as a Roman Catholic, without having seen an erotic story or poem by an Indigenous writer until I was in my late 20's" (Addressing 150-151).³ She notes specifically that they lack the positive images that would be contained in love poetry or erotics. As Chrystos states, "American Indian writing is invisible; American Indian women's writing is more invisible; American Indian women's poetry, still more invisible. Native women's love poetry and erotics are so invisible, so far back in the closet, that they're practically in somebody else's apartment" (qtd in Miranda,

³ The specific damages and dangers were discovered by Akiwenzie-Damm when she began doing AIDS work in First Nations communities and experienced the silence around discussions of sexuality.

146). This image of a healthy, passionate sexuality is widely unavailable, and then not seen when it is produced. Miranda proposes that this might be because “stereotypes about Native women, for example, may take up all the available space in the American public’s head, leaving no room for writers who are not either squaw sluts, Pocahontas, or Indian princesses” (138). The limited positive sexual representations are then tied to specific constructions of vulnerable legal identities.

Legal narratives are also about expectations of safety and treatment. The critical moment of considering these gendered narratives is within the articulation of this viewership and an acknowledgement of the impact that a defined legal categorisation has on individuals. Janice Acoose states clearly that “the legal categorization as ‘Indian’ traumatically altered my life” (23). As a damning blow, this colonial legacy has resulted in a notion that First Nations women’s identity does not avail itself to the same rights or protection as others. Literature’s examination of rape and First Nations women further reflects this lack of protection. The representations offered contemporary Native women cannot be separated from the coloniser’s attitude about Native women’s sexuality, womanhood or value. Miranda lists the histories of Canada, the United States, and Mexico which include purposeful death by rape, the epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases, the kidnapping of young women, breaking up of families, sterilization campaigns and so on. At the end of this brutal and violent list of those “historical traumas that directly targeted Native women’s bodies and our ability to express ourselves in language and literacy,” Miranda simply states that

“all of this was legal” (138). The law sanctioned all these interactions between Indigenous women of North America and the institutions of governments and colonisation. The legal subjectivities of those women did not afford them protection from harm.

Dumont links current violence against Native women with historical events in her poem “Helen Betty Osborne.” She ties this poem to herself, her family, and a shared ancestry. Dumont wonders,

if I set out to write this poem about you
it might turn out instead to be about me [...]
it might even turn out to be
about our grandmothers,
beasts of burden in the fur trade. (20)

This poem is about the 1971 murder of a 19-year-old high school student in The Pas, Manitoba.⁴ It took 16 years to finally prosecute one of the four men.

Dumont posits that this poem “might turn out to be/ about this young Native girl/ growing up in rural Alberta” (20). Four white men forced Helen Betty Osborne into a car, beat her, raped her, and eventually stabbed her over 50 times with what is believed to be a screwdriver. Dumont states, “it might turn out to be/ about hunting season instead,/ about ‘open season’ on Native women” (20). She was left naked and dead, wearing only her winter boots. Dumont tells us about “bits-of-brown women/ left here in this wilderness, this colony” (20). Many believed that the 16-year delay in prosecution was due to Osborne being Native and the reluctance of witnesses and the police to solve this murder. Dumont summarizes:

⁴ See the full report of the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission regarding the 1987 trial for the murder of Helen Betty Osborne and the question of police involvement with the death of JJ Harper in 1988.

it might be about the 'townsfolk' (gentle word)
 townsfolk who 'believed Native girls were easy'
 and 'less likely to complain if a sexual proposition led to violence.'
 Betty, if I write this poem. (20)

The provincial Inquiry formed to investigate the delay in prosecution notes that there is "very real racism (intentional and unintentional) which underlies the attitude of our society generally toward the original people of this country" (AJIC, Racism, np). The report further notes segregated public facilities, differential treatment by police officials, failure to investigate violence against Native peoples in the town, and that "Police refused to take seriously the stories of Aboriginal women being sexually harassed by non-Aboriginal men" (np). Further, the report asserts that the method of questioning suspects – initially only Native men – was based on race, and the lack of care in the initial processing of evidence was based on the suspect's race and community status. The difficulties in solving this murder and the inability to gain support from the *townsfolk* "undoubtedly was motivated in part by the fact that the victim was an Indian woman" (np).⁵ Both this crime and this poem are about Helen Betty Osborne's legal narrative and her ability to access protection and justice.

April Raintree's sexual assault is another example of this link between a literary narrative and the destructive legal narratives available to First Nations women. The words of April's rapists establish a link between a legacy of colonisation, racism, and assault. The language continually denies April's right to

⁵ From the report: "It is clear that Betty Osborne would not have been killed if she had not been Aboriginal Those who abducted her showed a total lack of regard for her person or her rights as an individual. Those who stood by while the physical assault took place, while sexual advances were made and while she was being beaten to death showed their own racism, sexism and indifference. Those who knew the story and remained silent must share their guilt." (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, Conclusion, np)

access safety: “you fucking little savage. You’re asking for it you little savages like it rough, eh?” (130). These words reinforce the violently damaging identity offered to April. The fact that this is a ‘mistaken identity’ is significant in positioning April’s identity in contrast to her sister’s. April has turned away from all identifications with First Nations women, and believes herself to be immune from their ‘fate’ as she puts it. Her identity construction at this point in the text relies on her passing as non-Native. She wonders “how he knew I was part-Indian. Just because I had long black hair?”(128). Engel and Munger state that one’s “sense of self determines the perceptions of fairness and unfairness” (16).

April decided that she must have been known as a Native woman. If she can position the assault as having been committed on a Native prostitute, she can understand the violence with her internalized racist view of Native women’s identity.⁶ In turn, this separates April’s own self-identification with the person who was attacked – April understands the assault to have happened to someone who must not have deserved the same rights to protection. Even within the rape scene, April comments on issues of rights: “he hit back much harder, as if he had a right to do whatever he pleased” (128).⁷ April’s beliefs about her own rights change depending on how she believes herself to be perceived by others, and she has a form of relief when she finds out that the rape was supposed to happen to a prostitute. This indicates April’s attitude about what treatment or protection can be expected towards Native women, sex-trade workers, as

⁶ See Fee’s discussion regarding April’s feelings about the rape (220-221).

⁷ This reference to colonisers’ ‘rights’ runs throughout the text and is an important questioning moment for identity formation. This stresses the variation in legal subjectivity for both April and Cheryl. See for example p40 where April openly questions what her rights were in a situation.

opposed to 'passing' Métis and white women. She has no positive representations to draw on that say otherwise.

Destructive legal narratives position First Nations women as more vulnerable to violence.⁸ These narratives do not resist notions of traditionalism, nor decode images of identity, nor resist those constructions of identity that have been brought forth in a setting of colonialism. Legal narratives are highly susceptible to the coloniser's construction of Native womanhood, and violent acts against First Nations women perpetuate them. April Raintree's sexual assault ties her experience of violence to a narrative undeserving of protection or respect. During her brutal rape she is called "bitch"(127), "a real fighting squaw"(128), and "whore"(130). Her identity is used to imply that she is somehow less deserving of access to safety. This is why rape is about law, colonisation, racism, and sexism. The ability to access safety depends on your identity as articulated to Lisamarie by her Aunt Trudy, "Honey ... if you were some little white girl, that would be true. But you're a mouthy Indian, and everyone thinks we're born sluts ... no one would have cared. You would have been hurt or dead, and no one would have given a flying fuck" (255). Dumont addresses this in her examination of the damaging identity boundaries created by the label squaw: "As a young/ girl I held the image of that woman in my mind and she became/ the measure of what I should never be" (18). Through such

⁸ See J. Fiske's work on the creation of unequal legal subjectivities for First Nations women within the Canadian Courts. As well see Patti Ginn's work on legal subjectivities and the ability of Native males to call forth a legitimate subject of 'renewed' native spirituality whereas Native women cannot do the same with a notion of feminist identity. As well, The Story of Jane Doe documents how in a situation of rape, violence, and sexuality there can be limitations of choices of identity available to be drawn upon. One example in Jane Doe was the woman whose complaint of sexual assault was not even documented because of the presence of sex toys in her apartment. Of course, this could also turn into a conversation about sex trade workers, race, and the disappearing women of the Lower East Side in Vancouver.

articulations, these authors explore the coloniser's understanding of Native women's access to safety. This perspective seeks to set boundaries around both internal and external expectations of agency for First Nations women.

Through transformative narratives, First Nations women authors can challenge the harmful and negative colonial images and reclaim their rights to create their own legal subjectivity. Engel and Munger highlight the role of law as an integral player in this interaction between identity, boundaries, and perception:

the 'mutually constitutive' relationship between law and its social context ... legal rights and social and cultural settings 'mutually shape' one another Law is one of the elements that constitute the categories and routines of everyday life; and, in turn, these very categories and routines – and the individuals who participate in them – give form and meaning to the law. The term 'legal consciousness' is now widely used to characterize this two-way process and the behaviour and cognition of the social actors who participate in it. (11)

The above discussions of identities and narratives highlight the interaction between self-perceptions and action. In this manner law contains elements of “discourse, process, practice, and systems of domination *and* resistance” (Hirsch and Lazarus-Black 4, emphasis added). Lazarus-Black goes on to state that law both enforces a “subordinate subjectivity” by perpetuating the patriarchal framework, but also provides the basic tools necessary to challenge this system (6). For these reasons power, resistance, and identity can be linked to the notion of a legal subject.

These authors all find their own ways to reply to the coloniser's destructive approach to First Nations women's identity. They do so with their anger, their articulation of injustice, and – ultimately – their transformation of the available

images of sexual Native womanhood. For example, April accesses the legal courts and is given a chance to reply with a narrative of survival. Most importantly, her assault did not end in her death and she survives to provide her own legal narrative, unlike Helen Betty Osborne. These authors also reply with anger. As Dumont describes within her “Squaw Poems,” there is that key moment when resistance is articulated: “But she breathed and drew inside her fierce/ face and screamed till his image disappeared like vapour” (18). In the Deity/Virgin transfiguration Mojica tells of the women who refused to be Christianized and “in the high tablelands/ my sisters and I/ refuse to weep,/ our eyes, instead, spit fire” (36). Lisamarie also uses anger as motivation throughout Monkey Beach and Ma-ma-oo can see the power in this:

‘You been in a lot of trouble these days.’
 I stared at my feet and waited for the lecture.
 ‘Your ba-ba-oo was a fighter too. Second war. I was so proud of him.’
 (173)

Moses points out that these moments in dissenting fictions are forged in struggle and they “posit a dissenting subject, a subject who is an agent in her (or his) own construction and who positions herself in relation to historical experience and current forces that would determine her identity” (12). These moments seek to alter the monologue of the coloniser.

Resistance is found in a direct dialogue with the coloniser(s). Lisamarie’s confrontation with a carload of men eerily mimics real events:

All three guys in the car were wearing black baseball caps and sunglasses even though it was cloudy. I couldn’t tell what colour their hair was, and there was mud all over their license plates. One of them had a black moustache, but it was obviously fake. (250)

Robinson gives Lisamarie the opportunity to reply to the group of men in the car, and she does so with a vengeance: "Yeah, show me what a man you are, dickless" (251). Her encounter with the men has her articulating the true cowardly behaviour of such men, "Yeah, you're so brave with a girl, aren't you, asswipe? Can't stand up to someone your own size, can you? Cowards like you gotta pick on girls to feel like men" (250). These are the articulations of the struggle, of the battle. April did not have the same anger, but she is able to *survive* the painful story so similar to that of Helen Betty Osborne. She survives and is able to tell her story to police, have it taken seriously, and have her story validated as a legal narrative. She is also able to articulate her own private reply to the rapists. During one of her ritualistic baths she screams "you bastards! You lousy dirty bastards. I wish you were all dead!" (164). After the guilty verdict she "sighed with relief. Justice, to a certain point, had been done" (170). Unlike Helen Betty Osborne, April and Lisamarie survived and had the opportunity to reply to these men. Through these articulations of literature, these two characters are able to create the space of justified anger and rebuttal and a refusal to be constructed solely within the coloniser's perspective.

Mojica further disrupts the coloniser's construction of First Nations women's identities. She calls upon the audience to resist the damaging images; instead, she invites the audience to view the performances as a transformation of identity construction. The opening scene sets the tone clearly as Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides enters in a "white 'buckskin' dress and carrying an oversized ear of corn" (18). She offers up those visual cues which are supposed to

remain subtle and unquestioned, here, for ridicule and spectacle. This trickster character goes on to perform as the Cigar Store Squaw as a resistance to the historical representations of Native women. The character exclaims to the audience:

I wanna be the girl next door! (removes buckskin yoke in exasperation) I wanna have lots and lots of blonde hair – great big blonde hair. I wanna be – Doris Day, Farrah Fawcett, Daryl Hannah – Oh, you know the one – Christie Brinkley! (hums “Uptown Girl” while putting on white buckskin mini-dress) I wanna be a cover girl, a beauty queen, Miss America, Miss North American Indian! (49)

In her transformation of the coloniser’s perspective, Mojica continually transforms both subjects and objects on stage within view of the audience. She makes them take part in the disruption of appearances and preconceived ideas. Mojica notes in her preamble that the “Objects and set pieces appear to be one thing but become something else; they can be turned inside-out to reveal another reality” (17). Princess Pocahontas takes part in a creative re-examination of various representations and is part of what Tompkins refers to as post-colonial metatheatre (47). This is also what Bhabha calls “spectacular resistance”:

To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. When the words of the master become the site of hybridity – the warlike sign of the Native – then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain. (121)

While Mojica plays off the damaging images and “Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides performs a Hollywood ‘Injun dance’”(19), the clichéd image must intersect with the twists and turns of contemporary tensions as the Trickster goes on to offer the audience “handfuls of cornnuts from the plastic bag she bought them in”

(18). Princess Pocahontas is a play within a play calling attention to its own self-referentiality and asking the audience to do the same to their images and ideas about the construction of First Nations womanhood.

Robinson also identifies and replies to the perspective of the coloniser. In her short story "Queen of the North," Robinson exposes Arnold's attempt to situate Karaoke firmly as the Other to be consumed, like fry bread. This is the moment where literature offers an alternative reading of this attempted identity construction. Arnold persists in understanding Karaoke as exotic and other, but Karaoke replies to the reader rather than to the coloniser directly:

We said nothing more until I'd fried the last piece of bread. I handed him the plate and bowed. I expected him to leave then, but he bowed back to me and said, 'thank you.'

'No,' I said. 'Thank you. The money's going to a good cause. It'll-'

'How should I eat these?' he interrupted me.

With your mouth, asshole. 'Put some syrup on them, or jam, or honey. Anything you want.'

'Anything?' he said, staring deep into my eyes.

Oh, barf. 'Whatever.' (208)

Robinson transforms this dialogue, not in the event itself, but in the words that are written for Karaoke and the reader only. The coloniser is oblivious, but the reader knows what has been said about him, and Robinson repositions the coloniser's perspective as ridiculous. This is a powerful unity created with the reader which refuses an Othering of Karaoke and her identity, "'Good-bye, Arnold,' I said, picking up the money and starting towards the cashiers. He said something else but I kept on walking ..." ("Queen" 208-9). Arnold wants to see

Karaoke as his own Pocahontas. By repositioning the gaze of the coloniser, Robinson articulates the frustration in being placed within this positioning and highlights the scene as absurd. She transforms the interaction and Karaoke does not hear Arnold's final words. Robinson silences the coloniser in the end. In doing so, she creates the only legitimate dialogue as that existing between the reader and Karaoke. What Arnold "hears" is not the actual message and the reader exists in a conspiracy relationship with both Karaoke and Robinson.

First Nations women writing erotica transform the landscape of what is available to read as a representation of sexual desire outside the coloniser's binary. The coloniser, though, resists this transformation of representation. Miranda argues that as Native women's love poetry and erotics become visible, so too do the histories of violence and gendered colonisation. She reasons that "we cannot be allowed to see Indigenous women in all their erotic glory without also seeing and acknowledging all that has been done to make those women – their bodies and culture – extinct" (145). This is unsettling to the coloniser, and Miranda notes that the articulation of Native women's stories risk threatening the greater national identities with "the jarring intersection of a democratic 'nation' and genocide"(145). Love poetry and erotics transform First Nations women's representation by forming new links and connections to their sexual desire and passion. Reading and writing these stories make a "more 'real,' less stereotypical, artificially constructed American Indian woman visible" (Miranda 145).

Akiwenzie-Damm approached her collection of Indigenous Erotica as counterstory to articulate these missing representations. She states that “from the outset, the intention of the project was to advance an alternative to some of the stereotypes and misconceptions about indigenous peoples, particularly with regards to relationship and sexuality” (Addressing 146). The ability to write and collect this material is a struggle. Akiwenzie-Damm acknowledges the internal and external barriers to produce this writing without feeling judged or ashamed. But Miranda states that “the repression of such writing accomplishes nothing less than the shutting down of our best writers based on fears of the transformational potential of their work” (147). With respect to her erotic writing, Akiwenzie-Damm states, “In my own work, I believe I am finally breaking through most barriers and can write freely” (Addressing 150-151). In doing so, First Nations women writers transform the availability of positive passionate representations of Native women’s sexual desires – desires which are not produced and consumed by the coloniser’s perspective.

Having established the probable experience of living one’s whole life without ever encountering “a single erotic poem or story by an Indigenous writer” (143), Akiwenzie-Damm took control of the situation and began writing and collecting these stories herself. Within her poem “daughter of Pele,” Akiwenzie-Damm tells the reader “i am a volcano shuddering/ hot magma flowing beneath the surface/ ready to erupt” (np). Akiwenzie-Damm’s reply is passion. The literature of love and erotics is sexual desire not contained within the coloniser’s binary. Again drawing on the heat and power of the volcano, Akiwenzie-Damm’s

“lehua flower” reveals that “i touched the lehua flower/ and recognized at once/ the vital beauty of woman” (np). The life-affirming power of passionate desire stands in stark contrast to the goals of the coloniser. Akiwenzie-Damm links this all to a refusal to partake in the genocide:

Neither the colonizing governments with their missions of genocide and assimilation nor the missionaries with their sexually repressive dogma of ‘good and ‘evil cared to accept our attitudes to sexuality and certainly not any open expression of it, cultural, artistic, creative or not! ... we were supposed to vanish, to die, to assimilate into oblivion, not to procreate for God’s sake! (Akiwenzie-Damm, Addressing, 145)

By doing so Akiwenzie-Damm has been able to place First Nations women’s desire and sexuality within a broader community of erotic writing, and she works to further that community by collecting and releasing her edition of Native women’s erotics.⁹

Dumont celebrates Native womanhood in the poem “A Bowl of Smooth Brown Wood” (42). She provides a swaying, curved, smooth, fertile, floral poem in stark contrast to the harsh binary divisions offered in “Squaw Poems”(18). After articulating the coloniser’s images of Native womanhood, she goes to reinforce her own understanding and experience which values the “round, space in the curve of, the curl of your belly bow, in the curl of your belly-body, arms and legs, a bowl of smooth brown wood” (42). She speaks of the freedom in this representation found in the “woman’s space, space free of rule or sin,/ free to move, thrust out and back and around without censor” (42). Specifically Dumont references the external viewership, but this time – unlike in Squaw Poems – she excludes the coloniser. She states that this woman’s experience takes place

⁹ In 2003 Akiwenzie-Damm released Without Reservation: Indigenous Literary Erotica through her publishing company Kagedonce Press.

“without viewer except the mind’s eye of the wise woman, the compassionate woman inside who loves the gentle swish of her womb in hips free of scrutiny” (42). This representation is being offered in a safe welcoming space that reminds the reader that this body, this Native woman’s body, is able to be imaged as a celebration. She stresses the timeless nature of this image; it is “older than the memory of itself, the memory of itself changing” (42).

First Nations women writers resist and transform the coloniser’s representation of Native womanhood. Through their production of questioning and resistant texts these authors have challenged the colonial historical production of First Nations women’s identities. By replacing stereotypical binary options of Pocahontas or squaw with sexually positive erotics and transformative narratives, they offer alternative expressions of Native womanhood. These narratives also expose the relationship between identity and the production of a legal narrative for women whose very Nativeness is encoded in law. In the production of these texts, these authors propose an understanding of Native womanhood from their own perspectives. Narratives are continually produced and these “ever-changing stories give meaning to past experiences, prepare the individual for future experiences, and help to integrate the individual’s understanding of social interactions” (Engel and Munger 12). Specifically, literature that disrupts the coloniser’s binary construction of First Nations women’s gendered identity will also challenge their legal subjectivity. The relationship between First Nations women’s identities and their legal narratives reflects the manner in which law seeks to maintain binaries of representation.

Chatterjee states that “law shows profound difficulties in reacting to non-binaristic, fluid, post-modern subjectivities” (93) and that these transformative narratives serve to solidify alternative legal narratives. As Nelson points out, these literatures of resistance challenge the coloniser’s perspective by “rejecting its assumptions that people with a particular group identity are to be subordinated to others or denied access to personal and social goods” (8). Transformative literature provides the reader with an ally in a renewed articulation of what it means to be a Native woman. Acoose notes that through interaction with resistant and transformative literature her students:

become encouraged and empowered because they understand that our numerous cultures, languages, and belief systems have survived. Finding reflections of that peculiar ideology within the literature encourages students to understand that we are evolving, intelligent, and contributing members of the world community. (37)

This produces alternative expectations for personal safety, expressions of sexuality, and celebrations of identity.

CONCLUSION: Provoking Narratives

The writings of Robinson, Culleton, Mojica, Dumont, and Akiwenzie-Damm all add to a body of knowledge which resists the damaging history of colonisation. Their narratives explore and articulate the ways in which contemporary First Nations women still interact with a colonised subjectivity. By highlighting this connection, these authors draw attention to the points of tension between tradition and contemporary issues. In turn, the authors' creation of challenging, resistant, transformative, and celebratory narratives offers a representation beyond a binary understanding of Native womanhood. By resisting legal identities, these authors counter notions of us/them, inside/outside, and simple divisions of who is and who is not Native. The transformative power of language provides writing as a counterbalance to the already existing negative representations which are firmly entrenched in various texts, including literature. First Nations women writers expose the boundaries limiting the representations of Native womanhood, but they also point to the difficulty in negotiating these transformative texts and their feelings of responsibility to their communities and families. These difficulties highlight the homogenizing effects of generalisations in approaching First Nations literature.

While Third Space and hybridity counter the rigid ideas of binary divisions, these discussions can sometimes risk only reinforcing the very boundaries they seek to explode. This same tension exists for me in my exploration of First Nations women's literature. I have continually struggled to find a way to talk about my experience of this literature without totalizing these women's writing

into pat categorisations. Dumont's "The Devil's Language" (54) states that "one wrong sound and you're shelved in the Native Literature section/ resistance writing/ a mad Indian" (54). I tried in many ways to use language that reflects various reactions and readings of these authors. I want to resist an academic drive within me to locate hard and fast rules of conduct with the texts. Instead, I wanted an interactive examination of the ongoing relationship between the coloniser's perspective and First Nations women's creation of literary narratives of self. The texts exposed moments of provocation, aggression, confusion, and anger. The narratives created by First Nations women are complex constructions incorporating the inherent difficulties of externally policed identities. These are narratives of inspiration, rejuvenation, transformation, and – yes – resistance.

Beatrice Culleton's writing provides a space of awareness and healing by identifying the damaging effects of racism and colonisation. The brutal honesty of April is key in this discussion. By placing a character such as April alongside Cheryl, Culleton explores very difficult questions about identity construction within a context of racism and sexism. April's difficulties in dealing with her own Native identity, her anger, and her prejudice all stem from Culleton's own experience and loss. By producing a narrative that has crossed the boundary from autobiography to narrative, Culleton re-examines the internalised messages of race and gender. April struggles to make various connections to self and identity within a context of law, violence, and colonisation. As character with a shifting or confused identity, April can offer a more "complex and powerful

understanding of her position” through her attempts to locate her own identity within a shifting landscape of belonging and changing standpoint (Lenz 102). The shifting self does not muddy the water, but rather it exposes the very real situation of identity creation within fluid borders and shifting landscapes. This is the struggle of attempting to categorise Native women within a context of overbearing destructive legal narratives. In the end, April states that she does this all “For my sister and her son. For my parents. For my people” (Culleton 228).

Eden Robinson’s writing draws from the strength and support of her family and community. Her narratives reflect this connection as they provide the details to keep her culture alive and moving forward in regenerative and challenging ways. Her writing of family maintains a connection to the past. Ma-ma-oo struggles to grant Lisamarie access to what is necessary to find the strength in both her family traditions and her access to contemporary knowledge and strength. In the hybridity of traditions and the contemporary fantastic, Lisamarie locates her most powerful tools of survival and empowerment. She takes her family history and combines it with strategic current images, creating a moment of connection between tradition and contemporary interactions. In doing so, Robinson creates a hybrid genre which explodes the coloniser’s bound notions of First Nations literature and identity creation.

The poetry of Marilyn Dumont also juxtaposes images as a challenge to the ludicrous nature of the binary. She articulates the physical effects of labels, while using language to articulate the physical violence acted upon one woman.

In doing so, Dumont allows the reader to wonder with her what it would mean to write that poem – what would it say to write a poem about Helen Betty Osborne. In doing so, Dumont draws multi-generational connections between contemporary First Nations women, a woman who was murdered in 1971, and the grandmothers of the fur trade. In writing poems about language, violence, beauty, and selfhood, Dumont positions First Nations women's identity as an ongoing contemporary discussion which continues to challenge the notion of a frozen or unchanging First Nations womanhood.

Monique Mojica's Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots performs the written word as resistance in an important re-examination of history, naming, and transformation. As for the construction of traditional notions of identity with this text, it is done with tongue planted quite firmly in cheek. The play performs multiple layerings of messages and the set, costumes and props themselves all transform as well as the roles of the two women within the play. The mimicking theatre being presented within the play of Princess Pocahontas is a resistant strategy. The two women of the play are then, in turn, playing multiple roles – giving the two “contemporary native women” a connection to all the cumulative historical images of First Nations womanhood and, in turn, giving these women active roles in the construction of their current identities. Their transformative performance of multiple roles places the notion of rigid identity into contention. In turn, this approach to identity is then reflected in a fluid approach to other items which may be thought of as ‘known.’

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm explores the significance of erotica and positive sexual representations for First Nations women. The coloniser's ongoing viewership of First Nations women's sexuality only exists within a damaging binary of squaw/whore or Indian princess – and neither of these options offers a full representation of Native womanhood. In the end, the history of such naming has resulted in a limited legal narrative concerning protection and respect for First Nations women. Akiwenzie-Damm confirms the limiting effect of this binary and seeks to explode these boundaries with her collections of erotic writing. Positive sensual representations provide a space of provocative and challenging renewal for First Nations women's sexual identities. When looking at erotica and the issues surrounding its production, collection and distribution, Akinwenzie-Damm immediately locates the power in these narratives beyond the coloniser's binary:

Very clearly that this is a huge political statement. To reclaim and express our sexuality is part of the larger path to de-colonisation and freedom we'll not only free our minds, we'll free our bodies, our spirits, our whole selves. We'll live without reservation. (Addressing 151)

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