

Confronting Convention:
Discourse and Innovation in Contemporary Native American Women's Theatre

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I focus on a subset of Native American theatre, one that concentrates on peoples of mixed heritages and the place(s) between worlds that they inhabit. As it is an emergent field of research, one goal of this project is to illuminate its range and depth through an examination of three specific points of focus – plays by Elvira and Hortencia Colorado (Chichimec Otomí/México/US), who create theatre together; Diane Glancy (Cherokee/US); and Marie Clements (Métis/Canada). These plays explore some of the possibilities of (hi)story, culture, and language within the theatrical realm across Turtle Island (North America). I believe the playwrights' positionalities in the liminal space between Native and non-Native realms afford these playwrights a unique ability to facilitate cross-cultural dialogues through recentering Native stories and methodologies.

I examine the theatrical works of this select group of mixed heritage playwrights, while focusing on how they open up dialogue(s) between cultures, the larger cultural discourses with which they engage, and their innovations in creating these dialogues. While each playwright features specific mixed heritage characters in certain plays, the focus is generally on the subject matter – themes central to current Native and mixed heritage daily realities. I concentrate on where they engage in cross-cultural discourses and innovations; while there are some common themes across the dissertation, the specific points of analysis are exclusive to each chapter. I employ an interdisciplinary approach, which includes

theories from theatre and performance studies, indigenous knowledge systems, comparative literary studies, rhetoric, and cultural studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Turtle Island myth.....	1
Overview.....	2
Terms.....	13
<i>Mestizo</i> , Mixed Blood, and Métis.....	17
A Note on (Hi)story.....	29
Borders and Identities.....	32
Theatrical Traditions.....	39
Structuring Stories.....	48
Scope of Project.....	50
2 ELVIRA AND HORTENCIA COLORADO.....	56
Coatlicue myth.....	56
Web of Identity.....	61
Bearing the Border.....	74
¿Do You Habla Español o Nahuatl?.....	85
Conclusion.....	94
3 DIANE GLANCY.....	97
Origin of Strawberries myth.....	97
Of Earthquakes, Car Radios, and the Subconscious.....	102

CHAPTER	PAGE
Pathways and Crossroads.....	112
A Spectrum of Spiritualities.....	125
Conclusion.....	134
4 MARIE CLEMENTS.....	135
Myth of the Sturgeon.....	135
Revealing the Obscured.....	138
Collisions, (Re)Constructions, and Transformations.....	155
Alternate Historiographies.....	169
Conclusion.....	174
5 FURTHER THOUGHTS.....	176
REFERENCES	180

PREFACE

I begin with one of my memories because in some ways, it is the start of my journey towards my dissertation and wider research interests. The power of memory, both personally and within storytelling and performance, is a thread throughout the works of the mixed heritage playwrights I explore – Elvira and Hortencia Colorado (Chichimec Otomí/México/U.S.), Diane Glancy (Cherokee/US), and Marie Clements (Métis/Canada). Memory through story is a connective force within tribal communities and is an integral part of indigenous methodologies (Moses 195-196). “Storyweaving,” a term coined by the women of Spiderwoman Theatre, describes how personal and tribal stories and memories can be woven together to expose points of connection. Inspired by the place of memory within many tribal communities and the process of storyweaving, I intertwine myths and stories as tribal and personal memories into the frameworks of this project in order to recognize the significance of these accounts and to resituate storying into the dissertation process. While these stories may lose some of their meaning through the translation into English, they are still an important method of understanding indigenous cultures. Stories are an essential part of each woman’s plays and thus must be central to this dissertation. This first story not only denotes my personal journey but also points to the myriad of experiences and obstacles lived by individuals of mixed heritage.

Now that I’m a junior in high school, it is time to start thinking about colleges. I am a good student but in need of a scholarship in order to

attend college. My mom suggests that I should think about getting enrolled with the Cherokee tribe as a way to gain more scholarship money. This is a startling moment, as it is the first time I associate myself and my Cherokee heritage with a living culture, a living people. Growing up, I knew in a distant way that some of my ancestry was Cherokee, yet I did not know any Cherokee people. All I knew about the Cherokee came from school and Girl Scouts, that they were remnants of a culture that, according to the Girl Scouts, hardly even exist anymore. I had learned about the Trail of Tears in history class; this history lesson probably led to my naïve belief that all of the Cherokee had been moved from the South to Oklahoma. But my mother's suggestion compels me to consider that there were many people like my ancestors, who remained in the South, refusing to leave their homes, even if it meant hiding from all white people and/or assimilating in order to survive.

Today, I live with the consequences of the decisions of my ancestors. Yes, I have all of the privileges of the white racial label. However, they also left me unable to connect directly with my heritage because of generations of assimilation. The only archival connection I have found dates to the Dawes Commission Roll of 1898. Tribal enrollment requires ancestral names on the Baker Roll of 1924, thus denying me and my generation the possibility of enrollment and acceptance into the tribal nation. In addition to a lack of official acceptance, generations of assimilation have left me and my generation no one to teach us about our tribal nation's history and culture.

My experiences are but one example of the realities for peoples of mixed heritage, especially those of Native and non-Native ancestry; I will lay out some of the many terms that are used to define peoples of mixed heritage as well as the historical precedents in relation to these terms in the introduction. This memory informs my interpretations of the plays that are the focus of this dissertation and provides a shared association with the playwrights while offering alternative insights to the material.

While Native Americans have had complicated relations with México, the United States of America, and Canada (as well as their predecessors, Spain, England, and France), the people whose ancestors intermarried have generally been absented from dominant (as well as tribal) narratives. According to Bonita Lawrence, “On a seemingly routine basis, officials erased all record of Native heritage on adoption forms. . . . Nativeness was erased, however and whenever possible, on many of the official documents that today are used to determine an individual’s identity and heritage. In many cases this deliberate misinformation has made it almost impossible for individuals to recoup any knowledge of their own histories” (vxi). While this has been the case for myself and many other people in North America, still others, like the Colorado Sisters, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements, have (or have reclaimed) connections to their tribal nations respectively, from which they draw inspiration for their plays.

Each of the playwrights discussed in my dissertation has had her own specific journey towards understanding, accepting, and exploring her mixed status. The works of Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements have been

informed by their personal journeys, as well as the struggles of those they know. Each playwright's self-acknowledged space between two societies, cultures, and languages privileges her voice as an explorer of the intersection(s) of the border between Native and non-Native populations. Just as my family had to negotiate between these two populations, many of the characters throughout the works by these playwrights also struggle with living in the middle as peoples of mixed heritages. Therefore, I examine how each playwright frames these negotiations, and I do so by combining theories from both worlds in an effort to begin to articulate the space(s) between worlds that the playwrights explore.

As each of these playwrights has had to confront triple colonization in the forms of racial, patriarchal, and monocultural (I would also add monolingual) prejudice as theorized by Rida Anis (3), they are uniquely situated to initiate intersectional discussions that bridge multiple communities. This triple colonization could also contribute to the fact that while they may self-identify as either *mestizo*, Mixed Blood, or Métis, scholarly circles tend to connect them primarily to their tribal affiliations, which may reflect their own strategic self-positioning within a monocultural theatrical and literary framework.

Yet, the fact that they self-identify as having mixed heritages and not just with their tribal nations presents many complications, including how they view their place(s) in the world as a whole and what social constructions are placed upon them by others (Arrizon; Glancy *West Pole*; Gilbert, Reid). These implications could be a reason why these playwrights have largely been ignored by academia, even though they have each long been producing theatre. For instance, the Colorado sisters have

some of their work archived with the Hemispheric Institute's Digital Video Library ("Coatlucue Theater Company"), and yet there is little research that focuses entirely on them (rather than as part of a larger discussion of Native American women's theatre or in conjunction with their work with Spiderwoman Theatre) (Arrizon; Coronado; Underiner). While Diane Glancy is a well-known novelist and poet, her plays have rarely been explored by academic drama critics, theorists, and historians (Anis; Andrews "A Conversation"; Noell; Stanlake). Likewise, Marie Clements' work has only occasionally been written about, although there has been some discussion of her plays in recent conferences and an upcoming *Theatre Research in Canada* is dedicated to analyzing her works (Copeland; Gilbert, Reid; Read). For each of these cases, the few scholarly explorations of these playwrights and their plays have generally focused on a single play and not each woman's plays as a group. This project is the first to examine the available works of these playwrights as a unit and the first to analyze plays by female playwrights of mixed Native/European heritage. I believe that by delving into each woman's works, many discussions and implications will arise that might not be otherwise recognized.

The Colorado Sisters, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements are among the most established mixed heritage playwrights within a small field, a subset of Native theatre, as they have had the most success having their works produced throughout North America. These three playwrights also demonstrate some of the complexities and issues with contemporary Native American theatre. The plays by the Colorado Sisters, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements represent some of the many variations of Native theatre, and I will be exploring some of the unique properties of their works in

this dissertation. With at least a decade of work from each to examine, these playwrights provide an assortment of works to examine that are wide-ranging in scope, theme, and structure, yet it is an impossible task to completely analyze these bodies of work. It is my hope that this project will encourage future research on the plays by these captivating playwrights.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When time was young, there were two worlds, the upper world and the lower world. Divine Sky People lived in the upper world. Great Water covered the earth in the lower world, and there the only living beings were the animals who knew how to swim. Great Darkness covered everything between Great Water and the upper world.

In the upper world, the Sky People had a great chief, who had a lovely daughter named Atahensic. It came to pass that the goddess Atahensic became very ill with a strange disease. The medicine man tried one remedy after another, but nothing would make her well.

A great corn tree stood near the chief's lodge and provided the Sky People with their principal food. It came to pass that a Sky Person dreamed that the goddess would be cured if the chief placed her on the ground by this tree and then dug up the great tree by its roots.

To the chief, the welfare of his daughter was more important than the welfare of his nation. Consequently, as soon as the chief heard the Sky Person's dream, he decided to follow its prescription without delay. He placed Atahensic beside the great corn tree and directed the other Sky People to dig the earth away from its roots. The great tree soon toppled to the ground with a thunderous crash.

Alarmed by the terrifying sound, another Sky Person – a young man – ran toward the great corn tree and was horrified to see that it had been uprooted. It was clear that the chief had committed an outrageous act! The young man turned to his chief and unleashed his fury. "You have no right to destroy this tree!" he exclaimed. "Without its fruit, we will all die of starvation! Even the life of a chief's daughter is not that important!"

The removal of the corn tree's roots had left a large hole in the ground. The young man was so enraged that, before the chief could stop him, he kicked Atahensic into that hole.

Down, down, down the goddess fell, through the hole that formed a tunnel from the world above into the dark world below. Loon was the first to see the glow that marked the fall of the goddess, and he decided to rescue her. He called out to the other water animals, "Look! Sky Woman is falling into our world! She needs our help, or she will drown!"

Loon caught Atahensic on his wings and then slowly descended with her to the Great Water on which he lived. Meanwhile, many of the animals wished to do their part to save Sky Woman's life, so they gathered together and made a raft of their bodies on which she could rest. Sky Woman landed safely, and the animal raft was able to support her. However, the animals could not live forever in the form of a raft, and Sky

Woman could not live forever upon their backs. The animals needed to rest, and the goddess needed to move about. So it came to pass that the water animals who were forming the raft said, “We must come up with a better plan to care for Sky Woman! We are all tired out! Do any of you have a good idea?”

Great Turtle was the first to volunteer. “Place her upon my back,” he directed. “Mine is larger and stronger than all of yours put together!” Once they had done this, Muskrat said, “That is all well and good, for now! But Sky Woman will surely die unless we can create a bed of earth upon which she can live. It will have to be large enough for her to be able to walk happily during the day and to sleep comfortably at night.”

“I agree,” Great Turtle said. “Those of you who think that you can do it should dive down to the bottom of Great Water, bite off a piece of the earth that you find there, and carry it back up here in your mouth.” It came to pass that Muskrat was the first to muster the courage necessary to make the deep dive. He was followed by Beaver, and then by Otter. Beaver was the first to return alive. He was very tired and very short of breath, but when Great Turtle looked inside his mouth, he could find no earth. Otter returned quite a while after Beaver. He was more tired and more short of breath, but when Great Turtle looked inside his mouth, he could find no earth.

By this time, all of the water animals had become very worried about Muskrat, who had not yet returned from the deep. While they were discussing what to do, Muskrat’s body suddenly reappeared on the surface of the water. He was dead. However, Muskrat had been as skillful as he was courageous, for clutched in his claws and lodged in his mouth was earth from the bottom of the sea.

Great Turtle gave the earth to Sky Woman, who spread it carefully around the edges of Great Turtle’s shell. The more earth she spread, the larger grew Great Turtle’s shell and the more earth there was to spread. In fact, the earth continued to grow broader and deeper until it formed an enormous expanse of dry land, called Great Island. And from that day to this, Great Island has rested upon Great Turtle’s shell.

– from Donna Rosenberg’s *World Mythology*

Although the above story is of Iroquois origin, the Turtle Island¹ creation myth is one that is shared by many tribal nations and has recently become a pan-

¹ The story indicates that Turtle Island represented the whole world. However, when other concepts of the world, especially the individual continents, were introduced after the arrival of European and other immigrants, this tribal concept of the world came to represent their world/land – North America. Some tribal nations, including the Iroquois, have taken Turtle Island to only indicate North

Indian signifier for the continent of North America. The ancestors of the current tribal nations have lived on Turtle Island for many millennia. Yet, even within Turtle Island, people have migrated according to the seasons and when ecological disasters and other factors necessitated. For instance, some Cherokee stories indicate that their nation originated on an island off the coast of South America before migrating to the southeastern portion of North America (Conley 5).

Migration and movement are common themes across many theories of origin for the tribal nations, both Native- and Western-based (Calloway 16-18). Many Western² scholars discount tribal stories as evidence, and instead suggest that people began arriving at the continent from locations throughout the world between twenty and fifty thousand years ago, with the first permanent settlements around fifteen thousand years ago (Dickason 12). Recent anthropological research argues for a theory of successive waves of migration to the Americas, initially from many parts of Asia including what is now Pakistan, India, China, and Japan, and later Egypt, the Polynesian islands, and Scandinavia; these migrations would have occurred over sea as well as land, contrary to previously

America, while others, including the Sioux, have taken it to be all of the Americas. More recently with the advent of the Red Power Movement, it has been strategically used to reappropriate the continent of North America from European understandings through alternative narratives and definitions (Allen *Sacred Hoop* 195; Armstrong 7-27; Waldman 245).

² For this project, I take “Western” to indicate the Enlightenment political philosophy developed in Europe and elaborated in European colonies that became México, the United States, and Canada.

held beliefs of the Bering Strait land bridge as the sole source of migration (Dickason 14-19).

Currently, hundreds of tribal nations, both federally recognized and otherwise, call Turtle Island home, each with their own distinct cultures, traditions, practices, spiritualities, (hi)stories, and languages (Simpson 375). Native theatre reflects the variety of concerns and lived experiences of such a diverse group of people³. As such, Native theatre is difficult to define or pin down precisely, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus on the work meant to be staged theatrically, as it commonly understood from a Western perspective, with the additional criterion that it is written and performed by/for Native Americans. Of course, this definition offers a cursory explanation which hardly begins to encompass the huge variety within the Native theatre repertory. Although some plays may indicate a strict boundary between “tragedy” and “comedy,” often the two are intertwined. In terms of performance conventions, Native playwrights draw from tribal ritual and performance traditions as well as Western theatrical styles; as a result, Native plays interweave these various conventions according to the needs of the playwright’s style and subject matter, creating a range of descriptors by which Native theatre can be recognized.

In this dissertation, I focus on a subset of Native theatre, one that concentrates on peoples of mixed heritages and the place(s) between worlds that they inhabit.

³ It should be noted that it is a recent phenomenon to group the tribal nations, done both in reaction to and conjunction with European constructions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Prior to European arrival, the tribal nations would not have grouped themselves together. It has become a political strategy in an effort to redress power inequalities throughout the Americas.

While there is a growing body of research on Native theatre, little work has been done on theatre that focuses on mixed heritage. I attempt to illuminate the range and depth of this field of study through an examination of three specific points of focus – plays by Elvira and Hortencia Colorado (Chichimec Otomí/México/US), who create theatre together; Diane Glancy (Cherokee/US); and Marie Clements (Métis/Canada). These plays explore some of the possibilities across (hi)story⁴, culture, and language within the theatrical realm on Turtle Island. I take culture to indicate a set of beliefs, knowledges, practices, values, and worldviews, often tied to a geographic area, a language, and a specific group of people. It is important to note that cultures are both dynamic and stable, in that they change as they absorb new information, yet they are tied to location and peoples. While each playwright focuses on specific mixed heritage characters in certain plays, my overall focus is on the subject matter of the plays – themes central to current Native and mixed heritage daily realities, some of which I introduce in this section as they are prevalent in many of their works. These experiences are often reflective of the various discourses with which peoples of mixed heritage engage and negotiate, and by discourse, I mean a formal discussion or system of thought on a given subject, which is ruled by internal conventions yet is often a site of contestation as well. Foucault argues that discourse is a key example of the manifestation of power and knowledge in that there is always a set of texts that have been repressed by the dominant

⁴ I provide discussions of the terms, history and story, in the section, A Note on (Hi)story.

discourse (*Archaeology* 25). I argue that these playwrights engage certain main discourses while also revealing repressed texts, stories, and knowledges.

Many self-identified Native American peoples are actually of mixed heritage, even if it is inter-tribally. Heritage, especially in this context, often describes one's ancestry, or familial genealogy, with particular emphasis on ethnicity⁵. Even so, enmeshed in the concept of heritage is an understanding that aspects of culture and worldviews are passed down through the family; these aspects are an integral part of how one interprets her/his awareness of her/his heritage(s), which in turn influences one's identity (discussed further below). For peoples of mixed heritages, features from more than one culture can be discordant while others are harmonious; as such, the individual must choose how to negotiate these for oneself, particularly how these negotiations can effect one's community. Part of this negotiation of heritage(s) is a performance⁶ by the individual of heritage(s), meaning that the individual performs cultural indicators, often based on communal and/or societal norms and pressures, which can be read as layers

⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation, I choose to define heritage within the realm of ethnicity rather than race, since race is a European construct based on physical characteristics that, over time, has implied a hierarchy in which power and superiority are assumed for people with lighter colored skin and other certain characteristics. Ethnicity indicates a shared culture and worldview, although because of its frequent connection to race, it is also problematic (Brown and Schenck 321-322; Haney López 165).

⁶ According to Richard Schechner, the function of this type of performance is to make and/or change identity, though it could also be argued to also be part of the process of making and/or fostering community since the performance could potentially reinforce communal norms (46).

through physical characteristics, gesture, dress, and language. Judith Butler in her *Bodies That Matter* refers to these indicators within the performance as reiterative and citational practices in that they refer to and reify previous performances, though Butler is specifically referring to the performance of gender while I am applying her concepts to also include heritage and ethnic identity (12-13). Having multiple heritages offers the individual multiple means and combinations with which to perform her/his heritages; however, these choices often influenced by her/his current community, the immediate family's choices, physical appearances, and potential political stances. Within the confines of monocultural practices, the individual is often encouraged to perform the cultural indicators of one community over another. However, as peoples of mixed heritages have begun to identify with their entire ancestral and cultural framework, many have worked to create performances that bridge these divides, challenging previous performances and notions. These challenges can be both rewarding and dangerous, and the playwrights discussed in this dissertation frequently delve into the issues surrounding the performance of mixed heritages.

Mixed heritage issues have often been subsumed into Native discourses due to monocultural prejudices from the non-Native world⁷. Although these playwrights intervene in the discourses of identity politics through characters of mixed heritage, they are nonetheless still a part of these monocultural ideologies.

⁷ Shannon Jackson discusses the development of the genealogies of disciplines within academe in which the “new” genealogies are based on reactions to the exclusions of the “old” genealogies (15-30). However, I would argue the inherent trap the “new” genealogies fall into is that they are still products of hegemonic understandings, such as monocultural prejudice, within academe.

Thus, they identify as *mestizo*, Mixed Blood, and Métis, but also with specific tribal nations. Likewise, I recognize that I have placed theatre that focuses on issues related to mixed heritage under the umbrella of Native theatre, which is a problematic but disciplinary necessity since no one discipline solely examines peoples of mixed heritage, their cultures, or their works. In fact, this area is just barely beginning to be recognized as a fruitful field of study. While many fields within area/ethnic/transformational studies include mixed heritage individuals and groups as scholars and objects of research, it is not necessarily the main focus of each field. Within these fields, one part of the ancestry is frequently privileged above the other (again, pointing to the monocultural prejudices within academe), and the unique properties of the liminal spaces between peoples and cultures often go unexplored. For instance, within African-American studies, scholars may examine the intersections of African and white US American cultures and peoples; however, other ethnic and cultural contributions can be overlooked⁸. While Chicana/o studies may highlight both their Spanish and indigenous heritages, indigeneity is often conflated with Aztec heritage, ignoring the multitude of other indigenous nations in México, not to mention the possibility of African, Asian, or other European heritages. Perhaps most telling is that there is no single word commonly used across disciplines or geographic areas to describe peoples of mixed heritage or the many variations of mixed heritage that might make up their ancestries. While I use the term, peoples of mixed heritage, for this

⁸ For an example of a study of alternate African-American mixed heritage, see Jolivet.

purpose, I also recognize that it would not be likely recognized by all peoples it presumes to describe.

In this project, I contend that each playwright's mixed ancestry informs her understandings of negotiations of multiple worlds, whether theatrical, geopolitical, or spiritual, which provides innovative approaches to potential cross-cultural dialogues that are engaged by their works through the confrontation of various discourses within the confines of their plays. I take innovation in this sense to mean that these playwrights contribute something unique and pioneering to theatre in general and to so-called Native theatre in particular. All of the playwrights interrogate multiple discourses within their plays, and these discourses are central to my analyses of their works. I believe their positionalities in the liminal space between Native and non-Native realms afford them a unique ability to facilitate potential cross-cultural dialogues through recentering Native stories and methodologies.

In each chapter, I focus on some of the discourses with which each playwright engages in her plays. Since I am attempting to demonstrate the range of the works within this field, I do not impose one form of analysis across all of the chapters, but instead allow for the multivocality that I argue is inherent in Native theatre. If as Graham Hingangaroa Smith suggests, "Indigenous peoples must set the agenda for change themselves" (210), I am exposing some of the items on the agendas for each of the playwrights in this dissertation. I also examine some of the forms of theatrical innovation that each playwright has created in an effort to effect change as well as to give voice(s) to the multitude of experiences within mixed heritage identities. To

recognize the importance of storytelling as a method of reclaiming voice and identity(ies), I have chosen to begin with myths and stories that connect to the subject matter of each section in the dissertation (Smith, Linda; Stanlake; Stromberg; Wilde). Leanne Simpson argues:

Recovering and maintaining Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, and ways of knowing and applying those teaching in a contemporary context represents a web of liberation strategies Indigenous Peoples can employ to disentangle themselves from the oppressive control of colonizing state governments. Combined with the political drive toward self-determination, these strategies mark resistance to cultural genocide. . . (373)

In this dissertation, I attempt to respect and include some of these strategies that utilize indigenous worldviews within my analyses as a way to acknowledge and connect to the indigenous aspects of these plays. For this project, worldview is a framework for how a person and/or a community understands her/his/their environment as a whole, and her/his/their relationship to that environment. It also includes a comprehensive set of ideas and beliefs. Worldviews can be a communal understanding, yet there may be individual differences in conception. As I am focusing on the intersections of cultures and peoples, particularly Native and non-Native, I likewise will integrate indigenous knowledges and worldviews with Western philosophies into my analyses.

Elvira and Hortencia Colorado have produced theatre for the past twenty years that speaks to contemporary issues and tensions between the United States, México, and various indigenous tribal nations, whose lands reside within these two

countries. They privilege their *mestiza* heritage within their plays, being two of the few female playwrights to do so. They engage with Chichimec, Otomi, and other indigenous Mexican epistemologies, rituals, and stories, as well as border rhetorics through a Chicana lens.

Over the past 24 years, Glancy has created many characters that explore the intersections of Native and European-American cultures, often from the Mixed Blood subject-position, using theatrical liminal spaces to explore the tensions between cultures. Her plays are informed by her own experiences growing up as an outsider in multiple communities due to her mixed heritage. She teases out multivocality within Mixed Blood identity(ies) through her explorations of daily realities as experienced by members of various tribal nations.

The Métis are one of the few tribal nations in North America to consist entirely of peoples of mixed heritage; as a member of this tribal nation, Marie Clements comes from a different understanding of mixed identity. As such, her plays are less about the struggles of mixed heritage individuals, and more about issues that are common across subjugated peoples in Canada. Since 1993, she has focused on bringing to light many stories that have been invisibilized in the larger Canadian society.

To return to the story that began this section, the focus of this dissertation is geographically bound within Turtle Island in an effort to demonstrate the range of variety within, but also the similarities across, theatre that focuses on peoples of mixed heritage in spite of the many discordant narratives and rhetorics with

which it engages. Most scholarly work on Native or mixed heritage theatre concentrates on plays and playwrights that are situated within Canada or the United States. Since this dissertation will be an intervention into this convention, I feel it is important to acknowledge many of the historical and storied aspects that inform these plays within this introduction. While much of this information is presented in more detail elsewhere, it is rare the space that has these histories encounter each other. In doing so, I hope to illuminate some of the similarities and differences from such culturally and historically diverse narratives.

In the first section, I introduce some of the terms that will be used throughout the dissertation and note some of the tensions inherent in the debate surrounding these terms. Next, I provide a historiographical analysis of the individual terms used to denote peoples of mixed heritages within this dissertation – *mestizo*, Mixed Blood, and Métis – as these relationships greatly affect the development of the identities of the playwrights as well as the subjects of their plays. Then, I discuss some of the tensions inherent in a project that seeks to incorporate history and story as they demonstrate different worldviews. In the following section, I begin to delve into some of the theoretical complications with which I grapple across the chapters of this dissertation. I illuminate some of the major concepts within border and identity theory that each playwright explores. I situate the playwrights within their individual performance fields before I lay out some of the alternate and innovative modes of theatrical structuring the playwrights produce. Finally, I outline the scope of this project.

Terms

Due to the inherent tensions among various communities, nations, and countries that have developed during the colonial and neocolonial periods, there are many terms which are used to define and identify groups of people. These terms are often contentious and vary by region, yet continue to be a necessary part of discourses of the Americas and of this dissertation.

The historically recognized tribal names often did not reflect how tribal members identified themselves as a group. These historical names were assigned by Europeans with various spellings and have been perpetuated throughout European and US American literature and social science fields (Harmon 248-251). Over time, many tribal nations accepted and adopted these European-based names, at least to the outside public; many have also maintained their original tribal names within their communities (Harmon 255). However, some tribal nations have fought, with varying degrees of success, for the general public to recognize their original tribal or communal names (e.g. the Inuit were formerly known as Eskimos) (Dickason xi).

Pre-contact, there was no sense of overarching, pan-American identity in which all indigenous peoples of the Americas recognized themselves outside of their tribal identities. Terms such as indigenous, *indio*, Native American, American Indian, *amérindien*, First Peoples, and Aboriginal are all constructs created by Europeans in order to describe the people they found while exploring

the lands that they were not previously aware of and that they eventually labeled “America”⁹.

Native American is a term used as an alternate to American Indian¹⁰ to indicate a person who identifies as a member of one of the tribal nations that have always called Turtle Island home. Both of these terms are unstable and hotly debated as they are problematic, but they have not been replaced by a wholly stable and accepted term as of yet (see Allen *Off*; Cox; Weaver). The choice of terms is largely a personal one as individuals, academic disciplines, and political groups align themselves with different points of the debate. To some degree, it depends upon geographic location (e.g. Canadians prefer *amérindien*, First Peoples, and Aboriginal, which are rarely used elsewhere in North America), or it can depend upon academic discipline (e.g. historians tend to use American Indian; literary writers use both terms; recent theatre scholars tend to use Native American) (see Allen; Calloway; Dickason; Grace; Larson; Mojica; Penn; Venables; Weaver). While Native can be seen as more reflective of a person’s heritage than Indian, there is some ambiguity with the term as native could also

⁹ For a larger discussion of these terms and their usage, see Dickason x-xii.

¹⁰ American Indian is a term that is very problematic as it references the misnomer “Indian” assigned to the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island by Christopher Columbus and other European sailors. This term also alludes to the centuries of prejudice and oppression experienced by the indigenous peoples since the arrival of the large wave of European immigrants. However, in some circles, American Indian has been reappropriated as a strategic call in an effort to foreground the history of this misdesignation and its continued use within the US governmental agencies and laws; for some, to not use this term would have material and political consequences as it would be seen as a renunciation of agreed-upon treaties and laws. It has been used by Native and non-Natives within academic and political circles (see Calloway; Redbird; Venables).

refer to a person who was born in a given country. Where I cannot use a specific tribal designation, I use the term Native American or Native throughout this dissertation, both for continuity throughout this text and as it is one of the preferred terms (though still contested) in English-speaking Native discourse. It is important to note that Native American can include those also recognized as enrolled, unenrolled, status, non-status, urban, and rez, as well as a host of other terms. I also use the term, indigenous, when referencing certain peoples in the Americas. Indigenous (or in Spanish, *indígena*) refers to the peoples whose ancestors already lived on the land prior to colonization and is applicable worldwide and can be used across ethnicities (Waldman 109). Any other term to indicate the peoples of the tribal nations of the Americas will only be used when quoting other material.

Even though there have been many terms used for peoples of mixed heritages, I use the terms, *mestizo*, Mixed Blood, and Métis, as these are the terms through which the playwrights self-identify. While historically these terms have been used as pejoratives, they have recently been reclaimed as terms to indicate and identify peoples whose ancestral lineages include both Native and European contributions (Brown and Schenck). As each term is different, I have chosen to utilize each term in relation to a specific playwright for the purposes of this dissertation and not to use or create an overlying term that would otherwise homogenize the historical and cultural understandings of each term, which will be discussed in further detail in the next section. Even so, it is important to note these identifiers are questioned in that the populations of these groups are subject

to interpretation and choice; not every mixed heritage person can or will identify her/himself as such. Daniel Justice offers a detailed discussion of the nuances of this issue in his book, *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (xi-xiii) (see also Allen; Larson; Penn; Redbird).

Mestizo indicates Spanish and Native ancestry; *mestizos* now make up the majority of the Mexican population. Within Mexican and Chicano communities, the idea of *mestizo* has come to personify the unique and desirable cultural and ethnic qualities of these populations in relation to European and European-American countries (Anzaldúa; Rebolledo; Vento). In the United States, a Mixed Blood can have any combination of Native and non-Native heritages. It is a term that initially carried prejudicial biological assumptions; however, it has been reclaimed as a method of identification with multiple cultures (Justice; Larson; Penn). Métis, in Canada, refers to a group of people who have both European (mainly French) and Native American ancestry (Dickason; Lischke; Redbird). Unlike *mestizo* and Mixed Blood, Métis is a federally recognized community, in spite of the variations of heritage (Dickason 284).

Mestizo, Mixed Blood, and Métis

Each European country had a separate view of miscegenation for a myriad of reasons. For instance, the Spanish initially did not allow personal relationships between the conquistadors and the indigenous peoples, largely due to the differences in religion. However, since Spanish immigrants were mostly men, miscegenation was tolerated but heavily regulated through the caste system (Kicza 28). As the

English came over with their entire families, there was less reason for inter-societal relations, and thus, miscegenation was discouraged (Kicza 35). Yet, as English settlements spread over time, miscegenation began to occur more frequently, although it was rarely discussed. With the French, miscegenation was encouraged for many years as a method of fostering trade relations and because most French immigrants were men. The children that resulted from these various relations came to be identified according to their mixed heritage (Thornton 75). Each of the terms, *mestizo*, Mixed Blood, and Métis, indicates this heritage, and each has been used alternately as a pejorative and a reclaimed term. Since each of the playwrights has chosen to identify with their mixed heritage, both personally and theatrically, I find it important to lay out the historical development of these terms and associated populations under the differing countries and ideologies as these (hi)stories inform the works by the Colorado sisters, Glancy, and Clements.

In México, it is believed that Malintzin¹¹, or la Malinche as she is known now, gave birth to the first *mestizo*, whose father was Hernán Cortés; she was Cortés' guide, interpreter, and mistress. Many accounts of Malintzin's story developed as she became increasingly significant within the Mexican literary and philosophical imaginary, and therefore it is difficult to determine facts from fiction. What is generally accepted is that she was of the educated and privileged class but somehow became a slave until she was given to Cortés by the Tabascan chief. When it became known that she was a polyglot, Cortés used her as an

¹¹ She has been known by many names including Malinal, Malintzin, Malinche (how she is commonly referred to today), and Doña Marina (the name given at her Christian baptism) (Cypess 2).

interpreter and secretary, promising her freedom. After giving birth to his son, Don Martín, and converting to Catholicism, she was married to Juan Jaramillo, a conquistador (Cypess 31-33). Over time, Malintzin has become a cipher in which she, as a symbol, has been adapted to changing Mexican cultural identities in order to become one of the most complicated figures in Mexican mythology. For example, although she is considered the mother of the *mestizo* population, which has become the center of Mexican national identity, she is also considered a traitor who betrayed the indigenous peoples through her collaboration with Cortés. Within a Chicano/a imaginary, she represents the racial, bilingual, and bicultural nature of their community(ies). For Chicanas, Malintzin is considered “a symbol of the tensions, contradictions, and oppression inherent in their own sexual, racial, and ethnic identity” (Cypess 4), and as such, she needs to be resituated within a corrected cultural and historical context.

Even though Malintzin/Doña Marina was envisioned as a beneficial lady who assisted in the victory over the Aztecs by Spanish colonial literature, her child and other *mestizos* were not held in such esteem. Due to the colonial view that the Spanish were inherently superior to the indigenous populations as well as the mixed populations because of their “non-pure” heritage, *mestizos* were generally oppressed within society, except within one’s family structure. Very few *mestizos* were allowed *vecino* status at this time (only those who became wealthy or enrolled in the militia could attain that status); all others were without rights, land, or often jobs (Hernández Chávez 60). The *mestizo* population was an example of the differences in how ethnicity affected individuals in society by

regulating one's social, political, economic status through the caste system as they were of the lowest castes until after Mexican independence from Spain (Vento 53-55).

The more positive view of the *mestizo* as a new Mexican national subject grew in power beginning at the turn of the 20th century, largely through the work of such writers and philosophers as Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Julio Torri, and José Vasconcelos. Central to this discussion was a valorization of *mestizaje*, as they determined that it was precisely this mixing of races that was key to the separation between their country and other countries, especially Spain (Hernández Chávez 240-241). Although the Spanish had viewed Natives and thus *mestizos*, due to their partial indigenous heritage, as inferior to themselves individually, culturally, religiously, and socially, Mexicans began to embrace the combination of indigenous and European, at least in theory. *Mestizaje* was theorized by these intellectuals as a continual process in which new hereditary lines are introduced to the “mix”, therefore strengthening the populace by adding preferred traits while diminishing the weaker traits. Vasconcelos is particularly known for his theories of the importance of *mestizaje* in the building of a superior populace – of which Mexicans were an example – in *The Cosmic Race (La raza cósmica)*; in doing so, he challenged and attempted to reverse the previous European ontological theories of race by offering an alternative preferred “mixture” over so-called purity of

race¹². Thus, *mestizaje* became a fundamental element of Mexican national identity, and later, of Chicana/o identity.

Instead of associating with just their Mexican heritage as a way of separating themselves ideologically from white U.S. Americans, Chicanos¹³ began to identify themselves as *mestizos*, acknowledging their indigenous roots while seeing themselves as fundamentally bi-cultural and bi-lingual in a monocultural and monolingual country. This understanding of *mestizo* became more specific in terms of an imagined ancestral community during the 1960s and 1970s Chicano movement of intellectual, philosophical, and artistic resistance to assimilation. During this time, the Chicano population at large began to associate with their Spanish heritage (as had the Mexican population), but they simultaneously fixated on the Aztlán heritage/mythology; this focus on Aztlán differed from the Mexican concept of *mestizo*, which had included all indigenous peoples in pre-colonial México. Aztlán was the lost ancestral home of the Nahua (Aztec) people and was considered a seat of great power (Vento 243).

Throughout much of Chicano literature, Aztlán has been featured as the theoretical homeland – a place that has been lost but can be regained through a catastrophic change in current epistemology. Although this *mestizo*/Aztlán

¹² However, in his response to European ideologies of the “purity of race,” Vasconcelos’ theories were also very essentialist, demonstrating many of the prejudices inherent in racialist discourses.

¹³ According to Arnaldo Vento, the term Chicano is best defined as “A person of Mexican descent that resides in the U.S. who has suffered cultural and racial discrimination by the Anglo-American dominant culture who recognizes his culture both past and present in socio-political, economic-historical terms” (117-8).

identity is pervasive in the current Chicano community, Mexican-Americans/Chicanos began their process of identification as an imagined community separate from the United States imaginary before the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Even those who were primarily of indigenous heritage found themselves labeled as *mestizos* (or “half-breeds”) because both European-American and Mexican-American populations did not allow for a spectrum of heritages and identities within Chicano identity. This suppression of multiple identities has effectively made indigenous Mexican-Americans an invisible population in spite of the fact that for many, where they currently reside is their ancestral homeland.

Elvira and Hortencia Colorado engage with *mestizo* identity through their explorations of heritage, particularly their mother’s refusal to recognize their indigenous ancestry within her conception of Mexican identity within the US. The two also play with Chicana identity through investigations into sociocultural effects of politicized identity and representations of Malintzin and her virginal double, the Virgin of Guadalupe, thus further complicating their identity(ies) (Romero 28-41).

Also in the United States, Mixed Bloods have held a largely invisible role within dominant narratives because English, and later US Americans, opposed miscegenation. Even in important US American stories such as that of Pocahontas and John Rolfe¹⁴, the resulting child is rarely mentioned,

¹⁴ Captain John Smith is the figure most connected to Pocahontas in US American narratives, but John Rolfe was her second husband and the father of one of her

demonstrating the silence surrounding the existence of Mixed Blood individuals (Venables 71). Until recently, Mixed Blood individuals were pushed to be completely incorporated into their tribal nations, or to assimilate into European-American society. Due to the 19th and early 20th century assimilationist policies of the US, an ever-whitening ethnic identity was forced upon many Mixed Bloods. According to Bonita Lawrence:

Government policies of deliberate interference in Native family life, such as residential school, loss of Indian status, and the forced adoption of Native children, as well as termination and relocation policies (in the United States) have resulted in individuals being permanently exiled from what was once home. . . . On a seemingly routine basis, officials erased all record of Native heritage on adoption forms. . . . Nativeness was erased, however and whenever possible, on many of the official documents that today are used to determine an individual's identity and heritage. In many cases this deliberate misinformation has made it almost impossible for individuals to recoup any knowledge of their own histories. (vxi)

Lawrence also claims these government policies are akin to cultural genocide with the ultimate aim being the complete destruction of the Native population and their ways of life (vxiii).

While these tactics have had many effects on contemporary Native life, one significant impact has been on Mixed Bloods who have been forced to choose

sons. Descendants of her people claim that she had a child by a Native husband previously; this husband was killed by the English (see Custalow).

to identify with one heritage over another. There are many factors in which heritage one chooses to identify with and perform (when there is a choice), including physical appearance, birthplace, ties to the Native community, where one currently lives, and the ethnic background of friends. Those who wish to identify with Native communities must often “perform Indianness” (Lawrence 8) in order to be recognized; elsewhere, many Mixed Blood children are taught to identify with their European-American heritage, often even to “pass” as racially white. Even when one identifies with one heritage or the other, the person is frequently discriminated against for not being racially “pure” (Anis 3-4).

For those individuals whose ancestors assimilated for a variety of reasons, (re)claiming their mixed heritage can be challenging because these definitions are generally placed upon these individuals by national governments (whether tribal or US or Canadian) as part of decades-old power and civil rights struggles (Forsyth 145-146). As with all such national identificatory regimes, the Mixed Blood identification process depends upon archival “proof” of ancestry, which includes recognition of dual ancestry on the birth certificate with proof of relation to an enrolled tribal member or an ancestor listed on one of the US/Canadian governments’ census lists; family tribal land ownership; and formal recognition by tribal elders. For those who are not identified as Mixed Blood at birth and embraced by the tribal community at that time, many obstacles stand in the way of reclamation of one’s tribal ties, such as the fact that many Native ancestors purposely avoided US and Canadian governments’ attempts at assimilation and removal, which resulted in a familial absence of a governmental paper trail (Bizzaro; Lawrence). Also, there has been and currently are certain social

constructions of what it means to be Mixed Blood in which peoples of mixed heritages are not considered part of Native or non-Native communities and are associated with many negative stereotypes. Some people are complicit in perpetuating these constructions, others find forms of resistance, and still others fluctuate between the two. Prejudice against Mixed Bloods still exists from both within and without tribal communities, particularly for those who reclaim their heritage later in life or those who resist social norms, which can lead to a variety of consequences for the individual (Bizzaro 72).

Diane Glancy is an example of a Mixed Blood who was encouraged to “pass” by her mother, yet she resisted in order to (re)claim her Cherokee heritage. In her formative years, her self-identification was challenged by her (German heritage) mother’s prejudice towards her father’s Cherokee heritage as well as a result of living in tribal communities that were predominantly non-Cherokee. Thus, she was constantly presented by her *otherness*, as she explicitly explores in her book, *The West Pole*. As a writer and academic, her self-identification and status has also been questioned in reference to the positioning of her works as “Native.”¹⁵ These challenges to Glancy’s identity(ies) are an example of some of the dilemmas and tensions faced by Mixed Bloods. Inspired by prejudicial experiences within her life, Glancy often focuses on Mixed Blood characters within the tribal community. Within the scope of her works, she provides a range of Mixed Blood lived identities and

¹⁵ See, for example, Paul Rathbun’s dissertation, “American Indian Dramaturgy” (347).

associated experiences, which reflect many daily realities for individuals of mixed heritage.

Certainly, the English set precedents that insured that Mixed Blood individuals have had to fight constantly in order to gain any visibility within the US society. For Canada, the French established several other standards that were continued even after the English acquired most of the land. Miscegenation between the French and tribal nations occurred to such an extent that a new nation of people emerged – the Métis. This term was not used in print until the mid-19th century by Louis Riel, who was one of the first iconic Métis advocates facing governmental legislation that sought to make the Métis invisible by not including them in either the treaties with the indigenous tribal nations (though some nations did insist upon Métis inclusion) nor in citizenry definition (Dickason 166-169). However, Métis lineage dates back to the first arrival of French explorers, though this history has been largely overlooked because they were often conflated with either their Native or their French heritage for more than 200 years (Dickason 67-68). As a result of these “blind spots” in history and legislation, the Métis are considered “The Forgotten People” (Redbird 7). Yet, Métis culture and stories are more than the simple combination of the two genealogies. For much of early Canadian (European) history, they were imperative as liaisons because they were bi-cultural and bi- (or multi-)lingual. Additionally, the Métis developed a mixed language, Michif, which “. . . combines French nouns and noun phrases with the Plains Cree verbal system” (Dickason 111). Michif is a rare instance of a fully

formed mixed language, different from most pidgin examples found throughout the world.

Although the focus of the fight for lands in the mid-19th century centered on the Red River area of now-Manitoba, it is important to note that the Métis did not all reside there; they lived throughout what is now Canada. However, the Red River area is where many Métis settled, intermarried with local tribal nations and with other Métis, and formed a separate culture, independent of Native or European-Canadian cultures (Redbird 2). As many Métis were trappers in the interior of present-day Canada, they were important to the trade industry as well as serving as guides and translators for European traders and settlers. Those who lived in the East largely chose to live with and identify as exclusively Native or Canadian.

In the creation of these policies in regard to the Native populations, the Canadian/English government had to define who was an “Indian,” which was first done in the 1851 Act for Canada East. These definitions determined status Indians, or those were officially recognized, and non-status Indians; after the 1869 Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians, blood-quantums were required, so that only a person with at least one Native grandparent (considered one-quarter blood quantum) would qualify as a status Indian (Dickason 155-156). Over time, these qualifications varied, particularly for people who intermarried or their descendents. Consequently, the Métis were rarely considered “Indians” until 1982, more than one hundred years later (Dickason 284). As such, they have absorbed many other non-status individuals over time because those who were

non-status did not qualify for any of the land grants or annuities offered to status Indians and thus were legally dissociated from their tribal nations and cultures without being provided alternatives. Yet not all non-status individuals have chosen to identify as Métis. Who would/could be considered Métis has changed over time based on legislation and individual identity (Dickason 238; Redbird).

Some of these questions of identity within the Métis are explored by Marie Clements in her plays. She draws from a variety of Métis and tribal heritages for the backgrounds of her characters, reflecting variations of Métis identity. As such, she is able to interrogate many diverse stories that have been overlooked within dominant Canadian society.

As individuals who by definition exist between cultures, *mestizos*, Mixed Bloods, and Métis have struggled since the arrival of the Europeans for visibility and recognition. Each group has faced different challenges, depending upon the historical precedents that were established. Yet, for individuals of mixed heritage currently identifying themselves as such, the historical models must still be confronted in modern-day realities. As such, these issues are a source of dramatic inspiration for the Colorado sisters, Glancy, and Clements, and I explore their interventions into these topics in later chapters.

A Note on (Hi)story

As this dissertation draws upon indigenous knowledges and Western epistemologies, it is important to discuss past events, relationships, and (mis)understandings. However, how this material is presented, who presents it,

what types of evidence are accepted, and how it is received are hotly contested debates within many communities. The playwrights discussed within this project engage these debates through an interflow of story and history within their plays; I also seek to negotiate history and story in my analyses as one aspect of my methodology.

History is a Western thought structure that is produced within hegemonic institutions for an assumed majoritarian audience, reified by similar hegemonic institutions. As such, it creates a system of archiving the past through the gaze of Western worldviews. For instance, history focuses on a chronological narration of events and societies, which often center on shifts in ruling bodies (governments and/or states) as a way to systematize a certain understanding of the world in a linear fashion. Historiographers tend to focus on the written archive as evidence to support historical claims because the written is seen as unchanging and verifiable (Taylor *Archive* 19). According to Michel de Certeau in his *The Writing of History*, the creation of histories is a discursive formation that is indicative of power relations in the present through the interpretation of the past. While one can find traces of aspects of the past of tribal nations within European-American histories, these traces are still presented from Western perspectives using only evidence that is accepted by the hegemonic institutions.

On the other hand, tribal nations have long recorded their own past through oral traditions, such as storying, which is a key facet of indigenous

knowledges¹⁶. These stories are reflective of the lived experiences of peoples as communities but also integrate their belief systems and worldviews. Stories are an integral part of the learning experience for members of each community as they are passed from elders to younger generations. They are also a significant method of insuring communal survival through the transmission of culture and knowledges (Brayboy *Toward* 439). Throughout the dissertation, I also use the term, myth, as story that is central to a spiritual belief system; I particularly use the term in relation to creation stories. I separate myth from story because I take myth to focus on aspects of the spiritual past while stories can have multi-leveled planes of existence in that beings from multiple planes can interact within a single story. While some definitions of myth may involve concepts of invention or untruth, I situate myth within an indigenous understanding in which it is not just operative within a spiritual belief system but also in everyday life and worldviews.

It is important to note that there is great diversity across indigenous storying traditions, in that each tribal nation has their own stories, belief systems, and worldviews, just as there is diversity within the traditions of each tribal nation. Storying is foundational to indigenous worldviews as it embodies the complex relationships between present, past, and future as well as between the physical and the spiritual, all of which can overlap (Archibald 11). This tradition can change and adapt according to the needs and experiences of the community,

¹⁶ There are also many examples of indigenous archival recordings of the past, whether through a pictographic form or a written language.

although the core often remains the same. The adaptability of storying, which Diana Taylor would term an example of the repertoire – or embodied memory – is what challenges Western notions of evidence (20).

Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements all play with interactions between history and story through a combination of archival and embodied memory in that their plays are an example of the ephemerality of theatre, but they have also been recorded, whether in print or on film. The playwrights often directly challenge historical perspectives of indigenous pasts; the Colorado sisters and Glancy both reimagine initial points of contact between Europeans and tribal nations. Clements searches for traces of indigenous pasts within historical events such as the race for nuclear weaponry that resulted in the devastation of two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, the playwrights also feature stories within their plays, stories of their communities and personal stories. I argue that in combining communal and personal stories with historical references, they strive to create alternate historiographies that challenge perspectives on given events through an inclusion of multiple worldviews. I particularly explore this theory in the chapter that focuses on Clements' work. Like the playwrights, I also combine story and history within my analysis of their works; I maintain that in the interflow between these two traditions, the playwrights can inform both traditions as well as bridge communities within their theatrical audiences while exploring events that are best represented between story and history.

Borders and Identities

One of the major themes which cuts across the plays that are the center of this dissertation is that of borders; specifically how these borders engage with history and story across political, social, economic, communal, and personal factors. These plays focus not just on borders between countries, but also borders between countries and tribal nations and between communities. As numerous scholars in the fields of border studies, international relations, and postcolonial literary theory have demonstrated, a border is not just a legal/spatial line but is also a theoretical concept that generates a group of associated practices (culture), language, and people. Although seemingly fixed in geopolitical imaginings, the practices associated with a borderlands (whether geographical or metaphorical) constantly fluctuate and adapt as new laws, individuals, and customs become discursively involved. As the world has moved towards economic globalization, where most countries' economies have become elaborately integrated, borders have become more porous as people, objects, and ideas have migrated with increasing speed and regularity. In times of economic downturn in the "host" country, as is clear in the United States at the time of this writing, these flows of people and ideas become increasingly politicized.

For example, for those who have crossed the border into the US (or whose family has in the past) and who have not easily assimilated into the dominant, Western European-American population and associated culture, have been likely targets of this politicization and have been labeled as "unwanted" people. This rhetoric selectively ignores the historical oppression of the original peoples who

inhabited the Americas (as well as the immigrant nature of the vast majority of the US population) or essentializes them into negative historical stereotypes. Perhaps the best example of this anxiety is discussed by Samuel P. Huntington. In his book, *Who Are We?*, he argues that the Western European heritage and culture has been fundamental to the establishment of the US American imagined identity. Migration from México and Latin America forces a reevaluation of the scope of identity in regards to ethnicity, language, and transnational connections that have then produced a range of reactions, including the exclusionist movement, which has been visible particularly in Arizona recently.

The anxiety surrounding the México/US border, especially as perpetuated by recent anti-immigrant “nativist” leanings, has created a climate in which México is excluded from North America within the popular imaginary because Canada and the United States are seen as sharing a history, culture, and language, whereas México is perceived as separate in all of these categories and closer to Latin America. Yet what is now México is geographically within those boundaries as determined through Western constructions of the so-called “New World,” and many who are part of the Mexican transnational communities reside along both sides of the border as well as in many cities far from this border within the United States. In response to these narratives that essentialize and seek to whiten North America, I seek to intervene in these discourses by narratively resituating México within North America in my dissertation and demonstrating that for all of the perceived differences, there are many similarities within indigenous relations with dominant societies, whether México, the US, or Canada.

Unlike many scholars who simply focus on the México/US border, I mark this discussion within Turtle Island, inclusive of all borders as currently conceived within North America (Perea; Michaelson). As such, I flip the North-to-South power relations¹⁷ across my ordering of chapters in an effort to destabilize the hegemonic assumptions associated with divisions by country, rather than tribal nation. These decisions reflect some of the varied tensions with which I engage within academic discourses and also reflect the complexity of discourses that examine liminal spaces between worlds.

Border theory has generally concentrated on the México/US border as this is viewed as a site of heated contestations by those seeking to protect nationalist rhetoric (both Mexican and US) as well as by those who inhabit borderlands.

Néstor Rodríguez argues that nativist narratives are constructed so that the México/US border is seen as a place of crisis as border and various transnational communities are associated with “illegal aliens,” who are seen as a US national security threat (223-232). These narratives also essentialize racial/ethnic differences between new immigrants and established residents (239). Through the use of terms like “illegal aliens,” these narratives heighten a perception that this one border is a dangerous and uncontrolled space.

Conversely, shared borders with Canada or with tribal nations are not viewed with the same tensions; Canada is seen as sharing similar ethnicities,

¹⁷ The unequal power relations between the North/South areas of North America are evident in many ideological and political discourses, among them, the discourses surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement and the multitude of issues that surround the México/US border (Rodríguez, Néstor 225).

values, and worldviews. I contend that tribal borders are viewed by dominant Mexican/US/Canadian societies as controllable because the larger narratives hold that such peoples have already been conquered. In addition, the lessened anxiety about tribal borders from the Western perspective is amplified by the existence of reserves/reservations, which are historically restricting and restrictable areas. However, from indigenous perspectives, these borders are part of the fight for sovereignty, which is in itself an effort towards the survival of the community (see Alfred; Dickason; Venables; Weaver). Also, these borders are not as restrictive as they often seem to be, because many Native peoples live outside of tribal lands, ancestral and/or reservation. Thus, just as there are communities that inhabit the spaces between the México/US border, such as the ones that the Colorado sisters delve, there are also communities that bridge borders between nations, tribal and Western, which are communities with which Glancy and Clements are concerned.

Communities that bridge borders are frequently inclusive of both cultures and peoples while also including unique qualities, leading them to create their own imagined space(s). This inclusivity allows for more interflow through a border, often leading to a new border culture and (hybrid) language. Since it has its own imagined space, a bridging community is able to call into question individual worlds on either side of the given border. However, it is important to note that the act of creating a community that bridges borders creates new border lines, which I maintain are more porous in that they allow more interflow between cultures, yet they also reinscribe difference through the process of creating an

imagined community. A significant aspect of these new formulations is the performance of a bridging community's border culture, which functions to foster the new community (Schechner 46). In creating the various modes of performance (setting, physicality for the performers, even language), the everyday performances help solidify the differences and similarities with other communities, in essence, creating identity for the bridging community. These performances are partially controlled by various discourses surrounding the community since discursive formation centers around perception of a subject, in this case, the border. I argue that the playwrights, as members of bridging communities, creatively explore the freedoms and restrictions that such communities afford. In doing so, they are taking the knowledges given to them, uncovering and sharing them, via theatre, with the next generation, to help ensure their communities' survival.

Individual identity is also affected by discourses that focus on the spaces between borders. Identity is often viewed on two axes, the constituted identity and the lived identity. The constituted identity is the one formed by others, whether one's family, community, society, or other individuals and groups. For instance, borders and the performances of borders frequently mark the body through stereotype and discourses; people marked by a border are assumed to have a certain set of characteristics and to cite familiar previous performances.

Lived identity is more complex, especially for those of mixed heritages. Identity for indigenous peoples is related to an understanding of one's place within the community, as the community takes precedence over the individual in

many tribal worldviews; this part of identity relates specifically to one's familial relationships and one's current relationships within the community (Fitzsimons and Smith 38). Yet, there is often not one single identity, but many, to reflect one's place in multiple communities, and one must learn to code-switch through the various cultural practices when moving between communities (Vera 106).

I discuss this notion of a multivocal lived identity throughout the dissertation as it is a main concern of these playwrights. Lived identity is especially tied with notions of heritage, as discussed earlier in this Introduction, because both are negotiations of ancestry, worldviews, and performance. The performance of one's lived identity, particularly as one moves between communities, is telling of one's place within that community.

In some of the plays, the playwrights question whether invisibility is a strategy of the performed identity or if it is constituted by the dominant society. In the Clements chapter, I examine the question of constituted in/visibility by asserting a third term, obscured, that troubles this binary. I contend that the Native body is never fully invisibilized, though efforts are made through societal mechanisms to obscure the body (even as they are made all too visible in stereotyped ways). However, Native peoples resist this forced absencing of their lived identities within society and within narratives, thus illuminating a partially recognizable form, but one that is rarely fully comprehended by majoritarian societies.

In other plays, the problematic of identity is explored in other ways. The Colorado sisters directly challenge stereotyped constituted identities through the

use of humor. For instance, they create a superhero, recognizable from her cape and feather duster, who offers suggestions to exploited domestic workers, including a suggestion of blackmail as a way to readjust the status quo (*Ya Basta!*). They also perform a rap about discriminatory labels in which they reject some labels, while proposing other, more affirming labels. In one scenario, Hortencia tells a story about auditioning for a commercial role, where she was told that she sound like an “Indian;” she follows the story by playing the stereotype to a hilarious extreme while simultaneously pointing out the fictitious nature of the constituted identity (*Huipil*). Many strategies of negotiating identities and borders within the theatrical realm are in dialogue with the methods that other playwrights in their communities use, as discussed in the following section.

Theatrical Traditions

Current Native American theatre practices are built upon the varied and multivocal indigenous performance traditions that have been found throughout Turtle Island. While Native theatre has developed during the 20th and 21st centuries within recognizably Western conventions, it has moved beyond the categorization of Western theatre through privileging Native performance and cultural traditions. Christopher Balme asserts that many Native American playwrights utilize theatrical syncretism in that they combine “a fusion of performance styles [and an] incorporation of ritual and mythic elements to find a new way of presenting in theatrical terms a post-colonial society in the process of

change” and to find a strategic method of decolonizing the stage (13). This syncretic approach has the potential to foreground Native traditions and rituals through the use of Western dramatic structures and techniques while pushing the boundaries of performance creativity and respecting all included traditions. Playwrights Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements all exemplify many trends in Native theatre, including theatrical syncretism. Moreover, their unique positionality as female playwrights of mixed heritage has influenced their innovations that further the limits of theatre along the axes of both gender and ethnicity. In order to fully grasp the innovative aspects of their works, it is important to note the many cultural and theatrical traditions from which their plays draw.

Most tribal nations have performance traditions which date back to their origins. One of the most prevalent is storytelling, which is thought to be one of the earliest modes of communication (Moses 196). Not only is the story relayed via verbal communication, but often there are physical gestures that accompany the story. In short, the story is at least partially enacted by the teller. Storytelling remains a foundation of culture and performance, in the tribal nations, Native theatre, and elsewhere (see Archibald). Not all stories, however, are accessible to all people at all or at any given time; knowledge through story is only given to those who meet certain requirements based on communal agreement. Some stories are only meant for a section of a community, while others may be heard by insiders and outsiders (see Moses). As has been discussed elsewhere in this Introduction, storytelling is a method of culture and knowledge transmission

(*Brayboy Toward*; *Taylor Archive*). Therefore, the inclusion of indigenous stories¹⁸, whether communal or personal, within theatrical structures likewise transmits culture and knowledge. Individual stories include many layers and many voices just as the breadth of indigenous stories as a whole do. While the Colorado sisters, Glancy, and Clements all include a range of voices in their plays, often through specific tribal stories, Glancy articulates the overall centrality of multivocality to Native theatre, saying:

Native American theatre rarely makes use of a centralized point of view.

In fact, Native American theatre regularly celebrates the multi-vocal aspect of storytelling. Thus, audience members often do not derive the meanings of a Native American play from following a single story or protagonist, but from witnessing a multitude of stories. Multi-vocal authenticity not only shapes the dramatic structure of Native American plays, but it also connects to the notion of communal truth. (Stanlake 132)

The centrality of story within Native theatre is illustrated in Spiderwoman Theater's concept of "storyweaving," in which different types of stories are interwoven to create theatre (Stanlake 10). This method greatly influenced the Colorado sisters' approach to the creation of their plays. The weaving of stories into the Western theatrical framework illuminates the importance of diversity in voices inherent in indigenous and mixed communities. Also, the playwrights combine and collide many stories, increasing the effect of multivocality but also

¹⁸ It is assumed that the stories included within Native theatre are culturally acceptable for wider audiences and do not include private, sacred knowledge.

destabilizing the hegemonic modes of representation that are reinforced in the institution of the theatre.

Other traditions include a variety of ceremonies, rituals, and dances; these cultural practices can be considered performances in that they are presented by individuals in ceremonial dress, or costumes, to a group of spectators (Moses 198). In some instances, these customs moved into a space that today would be defined as theatrical because the ceremonial participants enact mythological characters (though it is important to note that Western views of this enactment can conflict with Native perspectives). The Maya dance drama, the *Rabinal Achí*, is one example; this performance dates back prior to the arrival of the Europeans and is still performed today as it holds a significant place within the Quiche Maya culture in Guatemala (Taylor “Rabinal”). There are many other examples throughout Turtle Island, including the Tlingit potlatch dances and the Hopi katsina dances (see Berlo; Moses). As with storying, these ceremonies and rituals are accessible to a range of people according to the cultural codes of the community; some ceremonies center on private, sacred knowledge, while other rituals may allow outside participants. Even (and perhaps especially) when its subject matter is contemporary and socially engage, Native theatre is inspired by and employs many of the ceremonies, rituals, and dances found throughout the Americas, which demonstrates the significance of indigenous worldviews to these theatre artists (Geiogamah). Certainly, they can be found in the works of these playwrights: the Colorado sisters often begin their plays with an invocation of

ancestors and spirits; pow wow dances are integral parts of some of Glancy's plays; and Clements incorporates tribal myths within plays such as *Age of Iron*.

In México, in addition to popular performances, such as acrobatics, clowning, and puppet shows, and religious-affiliated performances within the syncretized Catholic traditions, there has been an increasing number of Native theatre performances, playwrights, and companies in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Mexican government utilized theatre as an educational tool to promote the use of Spanish within the indigenous communities and to foster ties between these communities and the Mexican government. These puppet plays were a collaborative effort between Mexican playwrights and local Native artists, with each play presenting a social problem and solution (Underiner 30). More recently, there are a growing number of Native theatre groups, such as the Maya collectives, Lo'il Maxil and La Fomma, and the Tarahumaran puppet theatre group, Indigenous Theatre Company¹⁹. Outside of these and a few other examples, although most of Mexican theatre is written and performed by *mestizos*, the subject matter and characters rarely reflect indigenous perspectives.

In regard to Chicano theatre in the United States, some groups and playwrights examine Native themes and characters; however, there are many who

¹⁹ Some of the indigenous playwrights include Carlos Armando Dzul Ek, Feliciano Sánchez Chan, Ildefonso Maya, María Luisa Góngora Pacheco, Petrona de la Cruz, and Isabel J.F. Juárez Espinosa. Montemayor and Frischmann's trilingual anthology, *Words of the true peoples*, provides excellent examples of indigenous Mexican plays as well as further discussion of these plays within a larger Mexican context.

focus entirely on modern-day Chicano realities within the US without necessarily foregrounding the Native component of Chicano identity(ies). One of the most notable playwrights explore indigenous issues within Chicano identity(ies) is Luis Valdez, who deals with indigenous themes in several of his plays, including one key scene in his most famous play, *Zoot Suit* (Ramírez 60; Huerta *Chicano Theater*). The style of the plays by the Colorado sisters draws upon the *actos*²⁰ of early Chicano theatre, often injecting humor into otherwise serious subjects. Chicana theatre developed in the 1970s and 1980s, as Chicanas began to examine their roles within and between the various societies in which they found themselves. Estella Portillo-Trambley was a pioneer whose first play, *Day of the Swallows*, concentrates on a *mestiza* woman that is “in touch with both her indigenous and her Spanish cultural and spiritual roots” (Huerta *Chicano Drama* 22). Cherrie Moraga further resituates indigenous cultural aspects within Chicana theatre in plays such as *The Hungry Woman* and *Heart of the Earth*. The Colorado sisters intervene in this discourse through their personal examinations of indigenous heritage within Chicana identity(ies) throughout their plays. At the turn of the 21st century, Chicana/o theatre established audiences outside of their communities as mainstream theaters have begun to produce these plays.

Like Chicana/o theatre, Native theatre in the United States and Canada developed out of the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the American Indian Movement. Lynn Riggs (Cherokee) is considered the first

²⁰ *Actos* are short agitprop scenes that aim to educate audiences on social and political issues.

US Native/Mixed Blood playwright, with plays often featuring Native and Mixed Blood characters. He wrote throughout the 1920s and early 1930s and is best known for *Green Grow the Lilacs*, which was adapted into the musical, *Oklahoma!* However, Native theatre was not established in the US until the founding of the American Indian Theatre Ensemble (later the Native American Theatre Ensemble) in 1972 by Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa/Delaware). It was established in Canada when Red Earth Performing Arts Company was founded in 1974. Since that time, there have been many Native theatre companies that have come and gone, including Spiderwoman Theater (1975), Nakai Theatre (1979) Native Americans in the Arts at the American Indian Community House (1980), Red Eagle Soaring (1990), and Native Voices at the Autry (1999). These companies have been fundamental in supporting and developing works by many Native and mixed playwrights, including Glancy and Clements.

According to Birgit Dāwes, there are “well above two hundred aboriginal playwrights in the United States and Canada since the turn of the twentieth century; with over two hundred published and far more than four hundred unpublished plays” (2)²¹. While most of these playwrights tackle topics important to Native peoples, only a small handful specifically contemplate Mixed Blood issues. In many of his plays, US playwright William S. Yellowrobe (Assiniboine)

²¹ US Native playwrights include Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa/Delaware), Diane Glancy (Cherokee), LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), Bruce King (Oneida), Arigon Starr (Kickapoo/Creek), and William S. Yellowrobe (Assiniboine). In Canada, some of the most produced playwrights include Marie Clements (Métis), Tomson Highway (Cree), Margo Kane (Cree/Saulteaux), Monique Mojica (Kuna/Rappahannock), Daniel Davis Moses (Métis), Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibway).

expands the notion of Mixed Blood to include Native and other non-Native heritages other than European-American. Canadian playwright Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibway) engages with these concerns with his typical humor in several of his plays. Glancy is unique in that the majority of her plays either concentrate on Mixed Blood characters or issues of living between two worlds, a phenomenon recognized by peoples of mixed heritages. Clements also includes many Métis characters, yet her focus is always on the story, which can negotiate multiple worlds but always features the frequently silenced voices of indigenous peoples. There has been significant overlap in production locales and playwrights' origins as plays are produced on both sides of the border. Native theatre in Canada has been accepted in and produced by mainstream theaters to a much larger extent, whereas Native theatre in the US has been largely produced by Native theatre companies.

While theatrical innovations, such as those discussed throughout this dissertation, can foster positive and productive cross-cultural conversations, it is important to note that they can also have negative consequences for the playwright. For European-American audiences, innovation that is too tribally-specific can be off-putting in that it asks the audience to understand certain cultural codes. This type of innovation can also deter Native audiences in that there may be a concern of culturally-sensitive material being presented in a non-accepted manner. On the other hand, changes within the Western tradition can distance tribal audiences that feel that the Native voice is lost. Thus, what is acceptable to multiple audiences can be difficult for the playwright to ascertain and can limit either the playwright's creativity or the

play's produceability: there are many excellent Native plays that have never been produced or have only had a limited run, including a couple of those discussed within this dissertation. Additionally, the subject matter of the play can have a material effect on the playwright's work in that her larger circles of affiliations will have certain expectations of that work, which can have consequences if not met (e.g. not published or produced, heavily criticized). Those who resist societal constructions of mixed heritage or Native American identity often find their careers and their place(s) within their communities in some peril.

Across Turtle Island, a lack of visibility and recognition has been a significant inhibitor for Native theatre in mainstream theatre. Native audiences can understand and relate to the storylines, yet continued funding remains an issue. In order to connect with Native and non-Native audiences, Native theatre practitioners must find new ways to get their works produced, just as mainstream theatres need to acknowledge a diverse and inventive subset that can reach and challenge audiences in different manners. The playwrights discussed in this dissertation are prime examples of the innovations that are offered by Native theatre practitioners in that they continually introduce new methods of bringing to light stories of marginalized peoples.

Structuring Stories

A key feature that connects the works by the Colorado sisters, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements is a unique approach to theatrical structure. While these playwrights work within the overall frame of Western theatre, I argue in this

dissertation that they create innovative approaches to structure in order to articulate stories and voices that have been previously absented in dominant narratives. These alternate structures open up theatrical discourses to allow for multivocal stories and multi-level planes of existence. Additionally, the playwrights use structure to recenter Native understandings such as time, transformation, and spirituality.

For example, the symbolism of the circle is important to the structure of much Native drama, allowing playwrights to play with the multiple layers of existence that co-mingle within most tribal worldviews in circular and interconnected ways (Archibald 11; Duran and Duran 90-91). The playwrights play with Western notions of linear time and unrepeatable events in both their plot and structure. While each of the playwrights meddles with conceptions of time, Clements' works are perhaps the most multifaceted in this regard in that her plays will often intermingle various generations and supernatural beings surrounding a single event. The Colorado sisters frequently weave together stories from different times and communities in order to open up discourses with which they engage.

Within circular worldviews the significance of transformation is crucial, acknowledged in the seasonal transformations from birth to death to rebirth. The best known example of transformation within many tribal worldviews is the trickster, a supernatural being that is able to transform and change its appearance in order to teach a lesson; these lessons then encourage new ideas and often effect change (Henderson 73n). The trickster is used as characters in two of Glancy's

plays, promoting not just lessons learned but also how people deal with significant changes in their lives. Additionally, transformations that occur within the stories which reflect these worldviews demonstrate that cultures and societies are dynamic and change as needed (Semali and Kincheloe 298). Many of the plays at the center of this project have an element of transformation, although Clements foregrounds the notion of transformation as a method of negotiating worlds and adjusting to change.

Spirituality²² is a hotly contested subject within many communities as it is fraught with many historical and cultural intricacies. Across communities, there is a range of individual belief systems that incorporate tribal understandings and/or Christian dogma that was introduced during the colonization process (Wax 31-33). Jace Weaver argues in *Other Words* that Native spirituality is imperative to the survival of a community and the social integration of its members (43). Each of the playwrights acknowledges the importance of spirituality within their communities through cultural codes embedded in their plays. For instance, Elvira and Hortencia Colorado often begin their plays with a ritual that invokes various spirits, including their female ancestors. However, they also play with the centrality of Catholicism to many in Chicana/o communities. The range in individual belief systems is explored in more depth within Glancy's plays as she presents various combinations of the two, seemingly oppositional spiritualities. I

²² I take spirituality to indicate a set of worldviews and deeply held values that point to a realm apart from the material.

term this range of possible belief systems, a spectrum of spiritualities, in an effort to open up discourses surrounding this aspect of many communities.

These are a few of the examples of alternate structuring that I analyze across the chapters. However, they only begin to illuminate the variety of theatrical structure, particularly innovative structures, that are existent within Native and mixed heritage theatre.

Scope of Project

The arrival of Europeans on Turtle Island effected change across tribal nations, which continues to have consequences today. Native theatre engages with these consequences, both directly and indirectly, through explorations of identity (mixed and Native); life on the reservations versus the urban, largely non-Native cities; and visibility in dominant societies. In spite of European attempts at domination, oppression, and assimilation, indigenous cultures and traditions have persisted and continued to evolve (Henderson 255). As a result, Native theatre is able to carry on these traditions through performance modes, transmitting cultural memory and knowledge while challenging subjugating dominant systems. However, little research has been undertaken to explore theatre that focuses on peoples of mixed heritages and their daily realities; this dissertation begins to address this hole in the landscape of the academic discipline. I contend that as members of these communities, Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements are uniquely situated to interrogate and bridge cultural divides between Native and non-Native communities.

In this dissertation, I examine the theatrical work of a select group of mixed heritage playwrights, while focusing on how they open up dialogue(s) between cultures, with which discourses they engage, and their innovations in creating these dialogues. I did not come to this project or these plays with preconceived ideas of what themes or issues to apply across the spectrum of mixed heritage theatre. Instead, the themes became clear as all of the plays of each playwright were examined as a group; within this dissertation, likewise, there are points of thematic similarity and dissimilarity, many of which have been introduced above.

The Colorado sisters, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements each come from different areas of Turtle Island, or North America, and followed diverse paths toward identification with their mixed heritage. English is the primary language that all of these playwrights use; however, they each also include indigenous and other European languages within their theatrical frameworks. As each playwright brings differing experiences and worldviews to their plays, there is not one set of themes or questions that is applied to all of the chapters; this approach follows the Native understandings of plurality and diversity (Blady 155). Instead, I concentrate on cross-cultural discourses and innovations, unique to these playwrights, and approach them with analyses appropriate to their particularity. In doing so, I hope to establish the breadth of the multivocality with Native theatre, while also recognizing that this dissertation can only begin to articulate the intricacies of their works.

I employ an interdisciplinary approach, which includes theories from theatre and performance studies, comparative literary studies, rhetoric, and cultural studies. This dissertation is part of an indigenous strategy in the academy, set out

by Graham Hingangaroa Smith, to transform Western discourses and disciplines through the recentering of indigenous philosophies and worldviews, which he terms transformative actions (210).

Throughout the dissertation, I use indigenous knowledges as guiding principles, recognizing that these knowledges are diverse and tribally-specific. Jo-Ann Archibald names seven principles that she used in her research on storywork; they include: “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” (ix). While I do not specifically reference these principles throughout my analyses, they do inform my approach to the material and also have helped me structure the dissertation itself. Storytelling is a significant aspect of my methodology as it references the playwrights’ form of preference as well as indigenous methodologies and cultural traditions. I use storytelling in the dissertation as a way to connect these traditions to the play texts within my own writing. One aspect behind this choice is that it allows for multivocality, a significant facet of my analysis of the plays and the playwrights. I also focus on the lived experiences of the playwrights and the worldviews which inform their plays; however, I do not presuppose authorial intent unless it is specifically indicated within the text of the play or supplemental materials from the playwrights.

I also engage with specific Native and Western theories to reflect the combination within the playwrights’ works. This intermingling of theories and worldviews challenges many binaries within the academy, while also offering multiple ways of knowing. In “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in

Education”, Bryan Brayboy offers three types of knowledge – cultural knowledge, knowledge of survival, and academic knowledge; I attempt to integrate these three types of knowledge in this project in an effort to bridge multiple discourses and present new insights into this field of study (434-435). I draw on several of Gerald Vizenor’s theories, especially his notion of survivance, which examines the combination of survival and resistance in presencing the absent indigenous body. Jace Weaver’s theories of the importance of community to Native groups, the connections of the land to the community, and his neologism, communitism, provide underlying material upon which I build my analyses. Some of the Western theories I employ include Christopher Balme’s theatrical syncretism and Diana Taylor’s idea of transmitted cultural memory and knowledges. I also engage border theory and literary theory and rhetoric in addition to various indigenous worldviews in my analyses of borders and identity as well as theatrical structuring.

Chapter Two concentrates on the works of Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, as members of Chichimec Otomí, *mestiza*, and Chicana communities. In this chapter, I explore how they weave a web of indigenous Mexican-American female identity that is inclusive of all of their communities within their plays, employing Birgit Däwes’ concept of a web of identity. I also examine border discourses of which they are a product and with which they engage through scenarios as well their use of bilinguality as a strategy for their interrogations into these discourses.

Chapter Three investigates Diane Glancy's plays as discussions of the realities of mixed blood individuals and tribal nations in the US, particularly in the Oklahoma region, reflecting her personal experiences. I analyze Glancy's creation of an "alternative space" in which she can explore the continued theme of negotiations of multiple worlds and cultures, particularly the united concepts of despair and survivance. Also, I examine the centrality of spiritual beliefs within the text and the theatrical frameworks, demonstrating overlapping realms; I term this trend, a spectrum of spiritualities. Finally, I consider her experiments in dramatic and linguistic forms as innovative methods of expressing the stories she conveys within the alternative space of her plays.

Chapter Four focuses on Marie Clements' works as they attempt to resituate Native stories within dominant narratives. I examine her choice of characters and subject material. In doing so, I interrogate Peggy Phelan's concept of marked/unmarked in the third chapter by offering a third, alternate term that troubles her binary – *obscured* – to describe the individuals about whom Clements writes. Also, I concentrate on her multi-layered and experimental dramatic forms as theatrical innovations. I conclude by arguing that Clements combines the subjects and structural innovations of her plays in an attempt to create an alternate historiography.

I end with further thoughts in which I offer possibilities for future directions for this particular field of research.

CHAPTER 2

ELVIRA AND HORTENCIA COLORADO

Coatlicue (“She of the Serpent-Woven Skirt”), dwelling on Coatepec (“Serpent Mountain”), had a family consisting of a daughter, Coyolxauhqui (“She whose Face is Painted with Bells”), and of many sons, known collectively as the Centzonuitznaua (“the Four Hundred Southerns”). One day, while doing penance upon the mountain, a ball of feathers fell upon her, and having placed this in her bosom, it was observed, shortly afterward, that she was pregnant. Her sons, the Centzonuitznaua, urged by Coyolxauhqui, planned to slay their mother to wipe out the disgrace which they conceived to have befallen them; but though Coatlicue was frightened, the unborn child commanded her to have no fear. One of the Four Hundred, turning traitor, communicated with the still unborn Huitzilopochtli the approach of the hostile brothers, and at the moment of their arrival the god was born in full panoply, carrying a blue shield and dart, his limbs painted blue, his head adorned with plumes, and his left leg decked with humming-bird feathers. Commanding his servant to light a torch, in shape a serpent, with this Xiuhcoatl he slew Coyolxauhqui, and destroying her body, he placed her head upon the summit of Coatepec. Then taking up his arms, he pursued and slew the Centzonuitznaua. . . . The hostile sister is [now] the moon; the brothers are the stars. . .

From Louis Gray’s *The Mythology of Races*

In this Aztec/Mexica creation myth, Coatlicue is the mother of most of the other deities (Ramírez 137). As such, she is the earth goddess, giving birth to and sheltering all living creatures. However, she has a dual nature (Rebolledo 50-51). While she gives birth to all living beings, as the earth goddess, she also accepts the dead into her body and can transform from giver of life to receiver of death and back. For this reason, human sacrifices were necessary in order to satiate her appetite and to honor her. This association with death is why Coatlicue is represented as wearing a necklace of human hearts, skulls, and hands, which represent those of her slaughtered children. Her dual nature is visually indicated

through the two confrontational serpent heads that constitute her head. Also, she is always depicted as wearing a skirt of serpents; serpents were a frequent representation of Aztec gods and goddesses and often demonstrate the duality in nature. As one of the oldest Aztec/Mexica deities, aspects of Coatlicue have, over time, also been associated with other female deities in such a way that she encompasses these other deities while remaining more central to the mythology than the others. She is alternately known as “Teteoinan” (“the mother of gods”), “Toci” (“our grandmother”), and “Cihuacoatl” (patron of women who die in childbirth).

Elvira and Hortencia Colorado²³ (Chichimec Otomí/México/US) honor Coatlicue by having named their theatre company after her and addressing her multiple characteristics within their plays. In doing so, the Colorado sisters identify their theatrical works as strongly indigenous- and female-based as well as allied with a Chicana political sensibility and connected to their Mexican heritage. They grew up in the US as part of a larger Mexican-American community, which provided connections to that aspect of their heritage and various border discourses later explored in their plays. Also, their grandmother was the main link to their indigenous heritage, which is featured of many of their scenarios. For example, they often start their plays with a ritual that includes two merging circles of flower petals. In the ritual, they welcome or invoke the grandmothers, both ancestral

²³ Their last name, Colorado, is Spanish for “red;” they use this connection in many of their plays. For instance, red is a color that is used in many props, and the idea of red blood (both in a literal sense and as a Native symbol) is a throughline for much of their work.

spirits and female deities, who they ask to “help us to remember, to dream your stories, and let them live” (*Cloud Serpents*), associating their performance with Coatlicue and her aspective deities as well as with their own ancestral spiritual guides.

As the principal theatre makers within Coatlicue Theatre Company²⁴ for the past twenty years, they also strive to create an often humorous theatrical space in which to explore the dynamic tensions between the communities of which they are a part, as a result of the multiple borders with which they engage. Within this space, they practice the process of storyweaving, first theorized by Spiderwoman Theater Company, in which they weave together personal and community stories with myth and song in order to focus on various themes. “We write, perform and weave our creation stories which are a part of who we are along with social, political, and cultural issues affecting our communities through the ongoing invasion, colonization and genocide. Through our stories we educate and entertain, and our stories have the power to transform and heal our communities” (Colorado, *Interview*). Their plays incorporate direct connections with the female deities who are aspects of Coatlicue, exploring their multi-faceted identities, and addressing specific concerns of the multiple communities with which they engage.

²⁴ The Colorado sisters generally write plays for themselves to perform, although occasionally they will be joined by a collaborator. Their plays are often generated through their workshops within communities; they have worked with many communities, though their focus has generally been the indigenous Mexican populations in New York City and in Chiapas.

In their performance style, one can see traces of indigenous storytelling, Chicano *actos*, and Western performance traditions. The incorporation of personal stories and ancestral mythologies as well as the blending of serious and humorous subjects point to indigenous worldviews. In their short scenarios, the Colorado sisters reference the Chicano *actos* tradition in which scenes come out of improvisations and are focused on issues important to their communities. These styles of performance continue oral storytelling traditions from their communities, which honor and transmit knowledge and cultural memory to audiences. In most of their performances, they utilize the trappings of a Western blackbox stage. The integration of these various styles in weaving together their performances is a visible intervention into discourses surrounding the México/US border, which tends to define the sisters' experience of life in spite of being born and raised in the United States.

The Colorado sisters are an example of the effects of the anxiety and politicization around the México/US border as discussed in the introduction of this project. People who have crossed the México/US border (or whose families have) are forever inscribed with border identity and can only be viewed as a product of border discourses by the dominant society in the US. They were born in the US, have lived their entire lives in Chicago and New York, and have never lived near the México/US border. Yet, that border is how they are defined by the majoritarian society. Their bodies have been inscribed by that border and can only be viewed as a product of mainstream border consciousness. They are part of transnational communities that are determined by the US's long-standing

anxious relationship to the México/US border but are not necessarily restricted by geographical location in the physical borderlands. The México/US border, however, is not the only border to have an effect on the lives of the sisters; the borders between indigenous/Mexican/US American have likewise influenced their identity and background. While growing up, they were told by their mother that they should classify themselves as first Spanish, then Mexican, but never as “Indian” (Perkins 79). As such, their lives and backgrounds have been informed by the issues surrounding these borders; these issues, consequently, have become an integral part of their plays and as such, frame my analyses within this chapter.

In the first section, I assert that they have created a web of identity that is inclusive of multiple lived identities between the indigenous, Mexican, and US American cultures; this web of identity, as theorized by Birgit Dāwes, is a set of interconnected layers that include the socio-historical contexts experienced by those who live between these cultures (106). By creating a web of identity, I maintain that the sisters challenge hegemonically constituted identities in order to more accurately represent the women who live between these communities who are frequently silenced by dominant members of each community. They also interrogate the practices of heritage denial and historical cycles of violence which have had a negative impact on past methods of identity formation.

In the second section, I examine how they specifically engage with the multi-leveled socio-historical tensions in México/US border discourses, focusing on representations within border discourses, physical border crossings, and consequences of being marked by borders. I argue that in doing so, they intervene

in entrenched oppositional border discourses in order to foreground stories from their transnational communities.

In the third section, I delve into the integration of multiple languages within their plays as a strategy for their interrogations of borders and identity. Elvira and Hortencia utilize both English and Spanish, while including specific indigenous languages and symbols that are significant to the stories they include. I contend that their bi/multilingualism critically engages with multiple audiences in order to foster dialogues within and about the México/US border.

WEB OF IDENTITY

As indigenous Mexican-American²⁵ women, the Colorado sisters have struggled with the societal pressure towards denial and shame: denial of Native American heritage and shame for the need to deny part of one's identity. Since identity is a double existence, as lived and as constituted, the two have chosen to live in an identity that is complex as a minority within a subjugated minority. They have also committed to resisting the constituted identity through their plays. Their work foregrounds their societal, cultural, and historical relations to and identification with multiple communities. In doing so, they provide an inclusive alternative concept for

²⁵ While there are many terms to denote individuals who live in the United States but who have Mexican ancestry, I will primarily use the term, Mexican-American, in order to establish heritage as well as current U.S. residential location and national affiliation(s). On occasion, I will use the term, Chicana, when specifically linking the Colorado sisters to the Chicana/o movement, trends, and culture(s).

the multivocal lived and performed identities within the indigenous, Mexican-American, and female communities.

As Gloria Anzaldúa so famously elaborated in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, US Americans often do not recognize the indigenous heritage of many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, an invisibilizing that has particular consequences for women. For many, it was not socially acceptable to identify with one's indigenous heritage until the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Even then, self-identified Chicanos reduced their associated heritages and cultures into Mexican and Aztec, thus perpetuating the absence of the other indigenous tribes within the concept of the indigenous Mexican in the US imaginary²⁶. In addition to these complications, Mexican-American identity has been influenced by decades of oppression and negative stereotypes, as the contemporary public discourse on immigration from México and Central America suggests. By criminalizing immigration, certain proponents of strict immigration reform often maintain a cycle of prejudice and oppression, which can have a significant effect on a person's identity – even if s/he is a legal citizen or resident – through long chains of unfortunate associations. For many indigenous and Mexican-American women, these injustices are exacerbated by strict cultural codes that are difficult for the individual to challenge. In *Women Singing in the Snow*, Tey Diana Rebolledo argues that these women have been inhibited by cultures that offer the Christian Virgin as the primary role model for women; she also

²⁶ Even though Mexican identity is a national one, it is conflated as an ethnic identity in the US.

offers, however, that there are many alternative role models from other mythologies to which these women may choose to challenge these traditional roles (50-81).

As women who live between three different cultures and who are defined by others according to received notions about each of them, the Colorado sisters are intimately aware of the challenges faced by individuals who want to confront centuries of oppression through a redefinition of their own identity(ies) – both lived and constituted. As such, they are uniquely situated to bridge multiple communities and explode prejudicial definitions of identity, thus creating an inclusive web of indigenous Mexican-American female identity that underlies their works.

In the artist statement in Perkins and Uno's *Contemporary Plays By Women of Color*, the Colorado sisters explain,

We became writers out of necessity to speak in our own voices instead of being spoken for. We come from a lineage of strong Indian women who have been silenced for too long and it is through our work that we give voice to their stories, the unsung heroines.... These are the stories of our lives. Growing up with racism – the thing about color and the denial of being Indian. The denial in our family is so imbedded that we didn't know our father's side of the family – they were too Indian! We had to say we were Spanish and not Mexican. Least of all Indian. (79)

This denial of heritage and identity, and shame of the denial have informed many of the stories in their plays. The sisters have since rebelled against this denial (although they have family members who still deny), and they have embraced

their indigenous cultures and language as well as the border culture(s) and language(s) that informed their identity formation. They also have explored the cycle of violence that has led to the oppression (and genocide) of the indigenous Mexican peoples, which in turn led to a phase of heritage denial in order to survive.

Although themes of denial and shame filter throughout many of their plays, two plays focus on personal narratives, and one looks at these themes from a societal perspective. *Chicomoztoc-Mimixcoa – Cloud Serpents* (1996) features many personal stories about shame and denial. In one scenario, Hortencia asks her mother about her mixed heritage:

Elvira: Mama, what type of Indian are we?

Hortencia [as Mama]: We are not Indian! We are Mexicano. . .

Elv: What about Grandma Chicita; wasn't she Indian?

Hor: No! Grandma Chicita was Spanish. (*Cloud Serpents*)

Here, her mother denies their indigenous heritage, stressing that her daughters are only to identify as Mexican, though preferably Spanish. This play also focuses on the Colorado Sisters' search for their father's family as a way to connect with their Native heritage. One of the main stories interwoven throughout is about the events around a show they performed in San Antonio. Following the directions of a dream, they come to find their relatives that they knew had lived in San Antonio; they search for their grandmother's house according to a memory. As a result, they find a woman who shares boxes of pictures of their paternal family with them, but they do not find the physical bodies of their relatives there.

However, when they perform the show, many of their father's relatives come to the show and/or contact them and share stories as a result of the advertisement of the performance. The San Antonio trip was but one part of their journey towards exploration of their indigenous heritage, which led from this locale to México, where they found more relatives, and back to the United States, where they reside. Likewise, *Huipil* (1992) features personal stories about the impact of their family's denial of their Native heritage, situating their exploration within reinterpreted Chichimec culture, music, and stories, which demonstrates the importance of their indigenous heritage to their current identities.

The societal denial of indigenous roots is also explored in *Open Wounds on Tlalteuctli* (1993). Here, the Colorado sisters show that the denial was a systematic exploitation to gain control of land and peoples. In one of the scenarios, they demonstrate how ancestral land was taken from tribes through a scheme of denying the existence of indigenous peoples. In other scenarios, they explore how indigenous and Mexican cultures have been appropriated, sanitized, and exoticized for the consumption of (primarily US) tourists.

With the México scenario, the "ethnic culture" of México is presented as a "Mayan" rollercoaster ride, featuring all of the stereotypes of the indigenous with little regard to historical or current accuracy.

All aboard the Mayan Mindbending Scream Machine! This Mindbending Scream Machine will take you inside a huge Mayan pyramid with state-of-the-art light and sound effects. . . . a real life Mayan princess; she will be our guide on this tour into the pyramid of the sun and moon and stars. . . .

[she will take us] past another lost civilization, a Mayan civilization. . . .

[There are] fierce man-eating jaguars, and rain gods, with eyes that glow in the dark. Experience the thrills and chills of the Mayan Machine!

(Open Wounds)

The tourist border crossings are presented as chasing after an elusive mirage – societies and cultures that do not exist as advertised. The Mayan, and in another scenario – the Aztec, roller coasters present appropriated and essentialized stereotypes of each culture that are heightened through the use of the dark/blacklights and through the espoused distance between modern day people and these supposedly “lost” civilizations. The roller coasters are represented by shopping carts, which again point to the commodification of these indigenous cultures. By setting the roller coasters within the US borders, the two assure that the audience makes the connection between the exoticization of these stereotypes and misinformed “facts” and the consumption of the material by US tourists/audiences. Additionally, by relocating the Aztec and Mayan “cultural artifacts” from México to the US, a sanitized version of these cultures is presented in both a literal and figurative manner. In each of these scenarios, the denials of living indigenous peoples and cultures have been a source of disconnect within identity, particularly for the Colorado sisters in this instance.

Open Wounds is also an example of their investigation into the effects of the cycle of violence on indigenous peoples and their identities. They show the environmental and societal acts of violence that have been historically enacted upon indigenous bodies, cultures, and land for the profit of non-indigenous

corporations and governments. In one scenario, the two speak a prayer while building a representation of Coatlicue, an earth goddess, and an altar to her in order to pray for the healing of the wounds inflicted upon the land and the indigenous peoples.

Elvira: This is a prayer for our mother the Earth and all living things.

Hortencia: This is a prayer for all of the wounds that have been inflicted
on her.

Elv: Through nuclear testing,

Hor: Uranium mining.

Elv: This is a prayer for the desecration of our sacred burial sites.

Hor: This is a prayer for all the women who have died in childbirth. . . .

Elv: This is a prayer for all those victims of domestic violence, incest, and
rape and for their perpetrators – let the healing begin.

Hor: This is a prayer that we respect our bodies, for in them, we nurture
our future generations. This is a prayer for the power of the
sacredness of words.

Elv: This is a prayer for the power and the sacredness of words. . . .

Together: This is a prayer for the heart of the Earth. (*Open Wounds*)

Here, they initiate the healing process by recognizing and naming the societal and environmental injustices that have been perpetrated upon Coatlicue and those who live on the Earth. They invoke Coatlicue as she is an earth goddess who can transform life into death and back into life and thus is best situated to enact healing for the land and the peoples. With this listing of the cycle of violence, it

is clear the devastating effects can have on a person or a people, resulting in shame and denial.

Another play, *1992: Blood Speaks* (1992), discusses the role of Christianity during colonization in the forced removal of cultural markers that contributed to indigenous identity in order to gain control over people and to maneuver them into a different organization of religion, culture, and society. In one scene, Elvira relates a story of misunderstanding that led to the destruction of a significant object and way of life by the Christian Spaniards.

In the center of our village, there stood an enormous copal tree. A sacred tree. Our ancestors gathered under this tree to exchange their goods: corn, beans, and squash. And they shared these with each other because they knew that sharing would ensure the growth of their crops. The Spaniards thought this was evil, pagan. They couldn't understand why we gathered together, what the sacred tree meant to our people. . . . They built a Catholic church over the spot where the sacred tree stood. The church then replaced the serpents with flowers and thought they had stripped us of our power. (Colorado "1992" 84-85)

In this scenario, Elvira describes the Spanish attempts at controlling the indigenous culture, but she also reveals acts of survivance – as first coined by Gerald Vizenor – in which the community continues to resist these attempts (*Manifest* 4-5). These moments of survival and resistance have allowed for a degree of indigenous presence within generations of cultural and societal oppression. However, the methodical stripping of indigenous culture and land

from tribes has had a significant effect on individual identity over the course of centuries, whether through the denial of indigeneity or through the continuation of individual acts of violence against the culture, significant artifacts, or tribal members.

Through the presentation of these scenarios, Elvira and Hortencia defy and rewrite the historical denial of indigeneity and cycles of violence in order to present alternative views on how these events have contributed to the strength within their personal lived identities as well as other women's stories that are woven into their plays. In addition, they confront many of the labels, stereotypes, and personal dilemmas faced by indigenous Mexican-American women. In *Huipil*, they rap about the labels that dominant society uses to define them:

Together [chanting]: Chichimeca Otomi, Chichimeca Otomi.

Elvira: Anglo America, you call me a savage.

Hortencia: A greaser.

Elv: A half-breed.

Hor: And a Spic.

Elv: Anglo America, you didn't recognize my humanity.

Hor: Much less my Indian heritage.

Elv: You colonized me, stripped me, homogenized me, sanitized me,

Americanized me. You sterilized me!

Together: Chichimeca Otomi, Chichimeca Otomi, *india*²⁷, *Chicana*,
mestiza, *india*, *Chicana*, *mestiza*. Proud of who I am, proud of who
I am! (*Huipil*)

In this scenario, they reject these negative stereotypes in favor of positive aspects of their own identities. In doing so, they create a space in which alternate identities, including their own, can be explored.

This issue and how it relates to indigenous Mexican-American women's health is examined in *A Traditional Kind of Woman: Too Much, Not 'Nuff* (1995). In this play, they interrogate "what is a traditional woman?" in order to challenge cultural conventions surrounding health issues.

Together: What's traditional?

Elvira: I don't do beadwork.

Hortencia: You know, I've never been to a sweat.

Elv: I don't have a number.

Hor: I don't even have an Indian name.

Elv: I don't live on the rez.

Hor: Hey, I live right here in the city. . . .

Together: Is that traditional? Yeah! (*Traditional Kind*)

The "traditional" identity of a Native woman is challenged here to demonstrate that there is multivocality in indigenous Mexican-American female identity.

Through scenarios that demonstrate the complexities surrounding issues such as nutrition and diabetes, alcoholism, and domestic abuse, they contest how these

²⁷ The term, *indio/a*, is the Spanish-language counterpart to American Indian.

issues are viewed as well as the idea that indigenous women cannot speak for themselves and/or define themselves.

Throughout their plays, the Colorado Sisters fight for the right for indigenous Mexican-American women, including themselves, to be able to define their own lived and performed identities and to resist their essentializing constituted identities. In doing so, they allow for multivocality that has not always been present, which echoes the efforts of other Chicanas. “For Anzaldúa and other Chicana writers, a most important aspect of being able to seize subjectivity and to inscribe oneself into dialogue is acceptance of all that you are, acceptance of those names – Meskin, Chicana, girl, lesbian – and the understanding of the positive and negative aspects, which helps Chicanas break through the oppression and colonialism” (Rebolledo 106). However, the two go beyond the exertions of many Chicanas and do not just focus on their own ancestral heritage within their plays, but they also include stories and songs from many other indigenous Mexican tribes, including the Aztec, Maya, and Zapotec. In *Huipil*, though many of the stories and songs are distinguished as Chichimec, there is a scenario in which they specifically identify as “*India, Chicana, Mestiza... Azteca*”, which thus complicates the identity that they present on stage because Chicana and Azteca are a political choice for association. Similarly, in *Open Wounds*, the Colorado sisters express clear solidarity with the Zapatista women in México²⁸, which is

²⁸ While over the past five centuries there have been numerous so-called “indigenous uprisings” in México, one of the most effective and internationally visible resistance movements has been the recent movement of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a group of Mayans and non-Mayan

also reflected in their real life activism with the New York Zapatistas. In both examples, they are declaring that they not only identify with their mixed Mexican and Chichimec Otomí heritage but also with historically, philosophically, and culturally specific groups that do not necessarily correspond with their ancestral and/or personal background.

In many of their plays, they interweave stories of women from other tribes into stories of their own experiences; however, they do not clearly demarcate the stories from each other. By not having clear distinctions, the Colorado sisters interconnect all of the stories and enmesh the represented indigenous heritages. This is not to say that they essentialize all indigenous cultures by collapsing their stories this way. What they do is incorporate and recognize a variety of indigenous and other cultures into an *inclusive* indigenous Mexican-American female identity through which they acknowledge themselves. Their inclusive lived identity is offered as an alternative to the multitude of fractured aspects of incongruent identities that have been expressed throughout the Mexican, Chicana, indigenous, and Mexican-American communities. This process of integration creates a web of identity that simultaneously recognizes the societal, cultural, and historical aspects of an identity that resides between many communities. Referencing Native American identity-formation in particular, Birgit Däwes defines a web of identity as:

supporters who declared (non-violent) war on the Mexican government in 1994. Their primary demand was the right to self-determination, and their fight has been ongoing since that time (see Taylor *Indigeneity*; Underiner).

... often depend[ing] on a combination of different coordinates in the rhizome-like and flexible web of layers, ranging from the innermost circle of genetically constituting Self by the genetic body or ancestry all the way to an open, global community of human beings. Like the structure of the spider's web, this topology of interconnected layers and the various ways of accessing them allows for multidirectional, overlapping, and alternating locations and performances that are available to a person or group in specific historical contexts. (106)

Through the exploration of the complexities of indigenous, Mexican-American, and female realities and interrogations of past dominant inscriptions, I argue that the Colorado sisters reimagine what it means to be an indigenous, Mexican-American woman and allow for many interpretations under their inclusive web of identity.

Clearly, they are not "a traditional kind of woman". It is through their resistance to historical dominant definitions and narratives that they are able to redefine indigenous Mexican-American female lived identity, not just in personal realities, but also in how it is represented on the stage. In their plays, they contest non-compatible constituted identities, formed by outside groups, and publicly renounce many of the now-disavowed aspects of these identities including denial of Native heritage, historical cycles of violence, and negative labels. Through their interrogations of identity between the indigenous, Mexican, and US American cultures (and female community), they create an innovative web of identity that is culturally and historically inclusive and specific as well as multivocal. This web of indigenous

Mexican-American female identity extends beyond their personal identities explored within their theatrical realm to speak to and for a wide variety of women for whom this unique approach to identity more accurately represents their understandings of their personal identities.

BEARING THE BORDER

The México/US border is a principal theme, setting, and problematic in their plays, largely because they themselves are products of border discourses, which informs their web of identity. While they were born and raised in Blue Island, Illinois, a town south of Chicago, their parents, Maria Sabina and Regino Colorado, were both from México. Their mother left México during the Mexican Revolution to find domestic work following the death of her first husband, and their father migrated to Chicago to work on the railroads. They grew up in a large Mexican community, which provided a strong link to this aspect of their heritage. The (inter)national ideological, political, and lived tensions of the México/US border were a part of their everyday lives, though they personally lived far from the physical border, and became an important part of their plays, both as an underlying friction and a direct intervention into that discourse. I contend that the two intervene in majoritarian discourses surrounding the México/US border through interrogations of representations within border discourses, physical border crossings, and some of the consequences of border relations upon the indigenous peoples and the land.

I demonstrate how they do not reduce borders to just a physical separation of states, they also examine borders or separations between indigenous, Mexican, and US American societies, cultures, and peoples. They explore the daily complexities of living *with* border(s), not just *at* border(s), as the political, economic, cultural, lingual, and individual issues that are a product of border rhetorics are not relegated to a physical location. In addition, the two delve into the consequences of unequal power relations of border(s), particularly for the poor, indigenous, or female. Their theatrical adventures through border(s) are both serious and humorous, though always with a bite as they point to an often atrocious historical set of events and/or cultural manipulations. In doing so, they make visible the casualties of these borders through performance. While there are many border issues that are explored, three are common threads throughout: representation within border discourses, physical border crossings, and consequences of border relations.

The concept of a border has many facets, including geography, people(s), language(s), culture(s), and objects. Elvira and Hortencia discuss the representation of some of these facets within their plays. For instance, in *Chicomoztoc Mimixcoa - Cloud Serpents*, they explore different representations of the Virgin Mary and the associations with the border. In Roman Catholicism, the Virgin Mary is a central figure and the embodiment of purity and goodwill. In the Americas, while the traditional Virgin Mary is associated with European

traditions, partially as a result of her white skin, the Virgin of Guadalupe²⁹ (*La Virgen de Guadalupe*) is a *mestiza* version of Mary who merges Catholicism and indigenous cosmology and is important to the Mexican and Chicana/o imaginaries (Rebolledo 50-53). The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has many symbolic references to Coatlicue, such as the stars on the Virgin's cloak, her tunic has many sinuous lines that resemble the serpents of Coatlicue's skirt, and her black belt references similar belts worn Coatlicue (and Aztec women) during pregnancies. At the México/US border, the white Virgin is representative of the perceived European superiority, whereas the *mestiza Virgen* represents *mestizaje*, the inclusion of multiple cultures and religions, and equality between ethnicities and societies. The sisters specifically compare the Virgin of Guadalupe to the "porcelain Virgin Marys and Christs", noting the complexities of the former and the simplicity of the latter. At the same time, they do not directly address the symbolism of the Virgin as an internally oppressive ideology for Mexican women who are expected to take her as their only role model – an impossible and restricting role (74).

In *Ya Basta!* (2003), Elvira and Hortencia take on the injustices inherent in the domestic work industry, in which the border plays a large part. For non-white female workers, both US nationals and undocumented immigrants, the domestic industry is a primary option in which to earn a living because there is no

²⁹ "In México, the Virgin of Guadalupe, the first dark Mestiza Virgin, who miraculously appeared to Juan Diego in the early colonial period, is an important symbol of syncretism. The Virgin appeared in an area known to be the sacred worshiping place of an important pre-Columbia Nahuatl goddess, Tonantzin" (Rebolledo 50).

additional education required and schedules can be flexible. However, for many of these women, the pay is low; they are overworked; they are mistreated and abused; and if undocumented, they can be threatened with exposure to the Immigration and Naturalization Service and thus likely deportation (see Perea). As a result, domestic workers are an invisible face to border debates; they are marked by the México/US border but are rarely taken into account. Elvira and Hortencia play with these issues in one scenario:

Together: Welcome to Gringolandia! The land of opportunity.

Elv: If you have legal work papers, you won't have a hard time finding a *chamba* here!

Hor: You know, working in a farm, testing pesticides in the field.

Elv: Or working in a sweatshop, making sweat. . . .

Hor: But just don't apply for any jobs cleaning the sewers, sweeping the streets, or collecting garbage.

Elv: We're saving those jobs for [together:] our own citizens. [Elv:] And if you like children, you can always work as a nanny, taking care of [together:] Gringolandia kids.

Hor: Oh yeah, just don't bring any of your *muchachitos*. (*Ya Basta!*)

Here, the sisters point out the few options afforded to poor, non-white women, especially those who are marked by the border. Domestic work is presented as the best option, yet it does not come without potential pitfalls. Whereas many women find themselves threatened into subservience and silence as victims of the border realities, the two suggest that women turn the situation around by going on

the offensive. The sisters create a comedic character, SuperDomestica – complete with cape and feather duster, to combat these injustices and point to some of the hidden border issues in domestic work and other similar positions for those who cross the border into the US. By refusing to remain silent, they indicate that domestic workers will obtain better wages, hours, and working environments.

The Colorado sisters examine a different facet of borders, particularly the idea of the wall along the México/US border, in *Holding Up the Sky* (2006). The building of a wall along this border has been a contentious project since its inception; it consists of a group of wall sections that do not always connect. With the growing anxiety and politicization around the México/US border, the wall has become a symbol of border control and border crossings within discursive narratives. Yet, these narratives do not take into consideration the fact that this wall rarely hinders border crossings. It is there simply as a tool for politicized rhetoric. The sisters challenge the notion of the wall as a deterrent to “unwanted” peoples through a scenario in which they mime laboring to build a wall while verbally deconstructing said wall. They refer to it as “a wall of memories” – ostensibly memories of past border crossers and a wall of protection against the complexities of economic, political, and historical events that lead to border crossings. They list reasons for border crossings that are then seen as criminal: “the crime of being hungry. . . . of wanting a job. . . . of not speaking English. . . . of being Indian. . . . of wanting to live” (*Holding Up*). In doing so, they make visible what is usually invisible to border rhetoric in the US, both the reasons for

wanting to come to the US and the consequences for those who stay in their homelands.

In addition to examining the representations of the border, the two also use physical border crossings themselves as sites of consideration. They do not present the traditional view of these journeys – of undocumented immigrants crossing in the night from México to the US; instead, they investigate other examples, which illuminate the reciprocity of border crossings as well as alternative reasons behind them. For example, in *Open Wounds on Tlalteuctli*, they look at border crossings for tourism in both the US and México. With each scenario, the country was presented to the “tourists” (the audience) in the same sideshow-barker style. “Welcome, welcome. Welcome to the United States of America, the good ol’ USA. Welcome to the American Dream!” (*Open Wounds*). With the US scenario, they show how Mexicans are sold the notion of the US as “the land of opportunity” yet the likelihood of racism and discrimination is excluded from the official advertised rhetoric. These border crossings are freely condoned by dominant societies, yet they are fantasies that do not show the true, and potentially dangerous, undersides of crossing borders between countries, tribal nations, and associated cultures.

Another type of border crossing is shown in *Chicomoztoc Mimixcoa - Cloud Serpents*; here, Elvira and Hortencia cross from the US into México in order to search for unknown family. According to the various scenarios in the plays, they grew up without much knowledge of their patriarchal side of the family because their father was distanced from the family while they were

children. When they were small, there had been some interaction with family in Texas and central México, but as their father transitioned out of their family dynamic, these relationships were cut short. When as adults they became interested in their heritage, both indigenous and Mexican, they sought out their father's side. They first found paternal family in San Antonio, Texas, who then suggested an area of México where they might find more of their family; this interaction and the following are explored in scenarios in *Cloud Serpents*. The two went to México without knowing anyone, with just a couple of familial names with which to trace their lineage, "We are looking for the Colorados" (*Cloud Serpents*). Luckily, they found people who were able to connect with them through knowledge of family in San Antonio, who then welcomed them into their village. While their story worked out well, this border crossing had great potential for danger as they were Americans crossing into México, looking for people they did not know – except for a last name, and then crossing back into the US, even with US documentation as they are both physically marked by border discourses.

The two inspect another border crossing in *Holding Up the Sky* . This instance involves white US prospectors coming into México in order to buy and exploit indigenous lands. The Colorado sisters, playing the part of the prospectors, claim that Native Americans are just wasting the land, and if it is sold to them, they will give the land a function.

Elvira: Hello, my name is Captain Winslow, and I come to help your
community. Hell, I can give you paved roads, schools, clinics,

anything you want. You are letting all this land and water go to waste. Why don't you sell it? I can give you a good price for it, and you can have a beautiful new house. Yes, sirree! A new house! Just sign right here.

Hortencia: Just look at this lush property! Why, you can build hundreds of luxury hotels, hundreds of megamalls, hundreds of sports bars, and we will even create a green plastic jungle to protect the environment. And you can get work in all of these places. Lots of money. [together:] Mucho dinero. Mucho dinero!

Together [chanting]: Take away the land, import the corn. Agricultural waste, agricultural waste. Cut down the trees, ecological destruction! Make room for the cattle; get rid of the Indians. More hydroelectric plants. Suck out the oil; suck it out, suck it out! Tons of coffee to fatten your bag. Hyperinflation, hyperinflation. McDonalds, Taco Bell, rum and Coca-cola. Shuffle them all about and what have you got? Genocide, genocide, genocide, genocide... (*Holding Up*)

While this proposal looks positive initially, Elvira and Hortencia demonstrate that it is rife with problems from the Mexican and/or indigenous perspective. For example, this proposal does not treat the underlying causes of unemployment in the area, and if the tourism setting does not prosper, then the locals will be in a worsened state as they will not have the land or the promised paychecks. Also, the prospectors ignore the fact that the land currently has multiple purposes,

including sustenance for the local population, possibly access to water, as well as any cultural or religious import. Thus, the prospectors are using the border as a tool of exploitation, partially out of ignorance.

The prospectors' scenario also highlights consequences of border rhetoric, which is a third theme in the works of the Colorado sisters. Religion is an underlying detail in border debates as México (and most of Latin America) has historically and officially been Catholic, whereas the US is ostensibly secular but primarily Protestant; this is yet another border divide, cause for anxiety, and a way to differentiate between the two nation-states. Still, Catholicism is a cornerstone of the Mexican-American and Chicana/o communities and demonstrates the fluidity of many of the border facets. The sisters further challenge this binary of the border through their examination of Christianity as a whole within the Americas in their play, *1992: Blood Speaks*. Here, they focus on the role of Christianity through cooperation with European leaders and explorers in the oppression, exploitation, and genocide of indigenous peoples.

Pura Fe and Soni: . . . If you do not do this. (*Growling*)

Elvira: . . . and subject you. . .

Soni: . . . to the yoke and obedience. . .

Hortencia³⁰: . . .of the Church and of his Majesty. . .

Pura Fe: . . .and I shall take your wives. . .

Elvira: . . .and children. . .

Soni: . . .and make them slaves.

³⁰ I have corrected the spelling of Hortencia's name in this citation.

All: (*Staccato, pointing to audience*) If you do not do this.

Hortencia: . . .and I shall take your property. . .

Pura Fe: . . .and shall do you all the harm I can.

All (*Staccato, pointing to audience*) If you do not do this.

Hortencia: I protest that the deaths. . .

Soni: . . .and harm. . .

Elvira: . . .that shall thereby come. . .

Pura Fe: . . .will be your fault. . . (Colorado “1992” 83-84)

In this scenario, Elvira and Hortencia, with their two collaborators, deconstruct the proclamations of colonization, demonstrating the cooperation of Christianity and European leaders in the physical oppression of any resisting peoples. As many historians have noted, Christian and secular leaders believed that all non-Christians were inherently inferior and uncivilized; thus, the colonization of non-Christian lands was considered a duty because it was thought that the indigenous peoples could not have societies, cultures, or effectively be using their land (Hernández Chávez; Rabasa; Venables). In the above scenario, the actresses indicate how colonizers projected all fault onto the indigenous peoples in order to distance themselves from fault in their own minds. In doing so, they complicate historical narratives as well as the border divide as indigenous peoples on both sides of the México/US border (and throughout the Americas) have been and continue to be subjected to similar rhetorics.

Open Wounds also explores the cycle of violence, focusing particularly on the environmental and societal violence against (indigenous) women, both

historically and presently. In one scenario, the existence of indigenous peoples is literally denied in an effort to appropriate and exploit land by people from across the border in the US. The people are thus not only rendered invisible, but their land and livelihood is also stolen from them with no recompense. In another scenario, Elvira and Hortencia demonstrate the consequences of the deregulation of industry, particularly in environmental matters. They play poor workers who are hurt as a result of handling toxic waste, examining the effects of labor exploitation. “I wear gloves and a mask, oh madre, it helps a little bit. But I don’t have no spray suit. Eh, the boss says maybe next year. You know what? A couple of weeks ago, I forgot to wear my mask, and I sniffed some of that spray. The blood started coming out. Ooh! Don’t worry; I’m still here, but I got sick for three weeks!” (*Open Wounds*). This scenario demonstrates the many dangers of jobs typically allowed for border workers, who have few options. Here, the workers are injured and sickened due to a lack of proper equipment, which is a product of racist border rhetoric as they are viewed as replaceable and sub-human. Here, the sisters show the exploitation of border workers who are often considered a silent and invisible workforce.

Two examples of societal violence are demonstrated in *Huipil*; in this play, the sisters investigate consequences on a personal level as a result of this violence. In one scenario, they rap about the racist and misogynistic labels that are thrown at them daily. Within the rap, they reject the racist labels that are used daily to aggressively define them and instead, offer their own transformative suggestions. These labels are later highlighted in another scenario. In it,

Hortencia recalls her experience of trying to get a job acting in a commercial. She was initially excited by the possibility of portraying an indigenous individual. However, when she auditioned, she was told that she did not have enough of an “Indian” accent, which indicates that the casting director had a very different perception of the border between US American and “Indian”/indigenous. These discriminatory labels and experiences combined over a lifetime to create a cycle of mental violence, which can have serious consequences for the receiving individual.

Throughout their plays, they have challenged dominant rhetoric and worked to foreground the stories of their transnational community(ies). In doing so, they have opened up the rhetoric surrounding border tensions through the exploration of sites tangential to common and dogmatic border debates. This intervention is generated out of their examinations of representations, crossings, and consequences within border discourses, which they reveal to be more complicated and diverse than the often oppositional border rhetoric would indicate.

¿DO YOU HABLA ESPAÑOL O NAHUATL?

As indigenous Mexican-American women who are partially defined by border discourses, Elvira and Hortencia Colorado have found language to be an important tool in expressing their web of identity and exploring border tensions. Their plays are bilingual, largely in English and Spanish, with some Nahuatl and Zapotec. Their bi/multilingualism creates another layer of complexity and

resistance to the scenarios and subjects by rejecting the standard monolingual US performance-style. The bi/multilingualism is also representative of the México/US border, as a combination of English and Spanish are how these transnational communities communicate, while the indigenous languages are used within (and tie together) specific communities. I assert that the sisters' choice to use multiple languages with which to communicate their plays allows multiple communities to understand part of each play, but it is a small, targeted community that will fully comprehend the play through recognition of all languages used and through identification with the subject matter.

The question of language is of primary importance within border rhetoric in the US. Though there is as yet no official US language, English is the dominant language used, and 23 states have voted to enact English-only language, so that all government literature and interactions can only occur in English ("English-Only"). While the English-only rhetoric suggests that bi- or multilingualism at the governmental level disallows immigrants to quickly and easily assimilate into US society, I and many others argue that this rhetoric instead wishes to keep non-white and non-English-speaking immigrants from having an active voice in government and having access to governmental services. In doing so, this movement maintains (neo)colonial rhetoric in which those of European ancestry and their associated languages are considered superior to others; language is a significant method of oppression in that those who cannot speak the language are consequently viewed as silent and inferior and thus unworthy of equal rights. Generally, this rhetoric focuses on Spanish as the

Latino/a population is considered by many white US Americans to be a threat to national identity as that population continues to grow, while maintaining their ties to the Spanish language³¹.

Within the US, Spanish is a minority – though also a colonizing – language, and is perceived as inherently tied to the border where it is at times incorrectly assumed that no long-standing citizen would have Spanish as his/her first language. This assumption does not include the US citizens whose families became automatic citizens as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848); many of these families have continued to live in their ancestral homelands, which are now on the US side of the México/US border. Though US citizens, Spanish is still an important part of their expression of culture, though most do also speak English to communicate with those outside of their communities. Choice of language indicates to whom a person might communicate, what signs and codes might be needed for the communication, as well as the cultural background of the communication.

In addition, the English-only movement wrongly assumes that all immigrants who come to the US via the México/US border speak Spanish. Many of the immigrants from Central and South America who come across this border are indigenous and thus speak primarily their indigenous language(s); they often speak very little Spanish. Though once they have been absorbed into already established communities abroad, they often abandon their indigenous languages as they are not often used within the community. Also, people from around the

³¹ See discussions of the México/US border in the previous section.

world choose to enter the US through the Mexican border as it is easier to initially immigrate to México than the US. Not only does the English-only movement provide a reductive and prejudicial argument for a monolingual society/government, but it also oversimplifies border and nationalistic issues that are part of the narratives around language rhetoric. This movement also does not allow for the multilingualism that already exists in the US (and existed long before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, or even before the arrival of European explorers). Multilingualism is an expression of the many cultures and peoples who call the US home. To insist on monolingualism is to consciously silence many groups throughout the US, currently and historically (including the ancestors of many of the proponents of the English-only movement) (see Perea).

For those marked by the border, bi- and multilingualism is an expression of culture and identity (see Cortes-Conde; Fitzgerald; Hidalgo; Sollors; Young). In any border community, there is a range of languages used, including English, Spanish, and indigenous languages for those between the US and Mexican borders, and within this range is a spectrum of which language is preferred. Those who have recently arrived from their home area outside of the US generally speak their home community language, often an indigenous language, although again, the indigenous languages are not often passed on to the next generation, leaving only traces of the indigenous language, often key phrases and symbols, for subsequent generations. For those who have lived in the US for some time, whether they immigrated here or an ancestor did, the community elders often speak primarily Spanish, while the younger generation speaks primarily English.

However, this list greatly simplifies characteristics of this range. There are many people whose ancestors were US citizens who have since learned Spanish or their indigenous language in order to connect to their heritage(s) and identity(ies). Some border immigrants come to the US knowing an indigenous language, Spanish, and English. Which language is preferred is dependent upon the community.

Bilingualism has been a facet of border zones for so long that both languages are needed in order to communicate with all communities, as not everyone is equally comfortable in each language. Neither individual language is completely foreign, which leads to the expression of a dual cultural framework. Yet, neither language can fully encompass the rhythms, cadences, and signs of a border culture; it is only when the two languages are combined or used in concert that they can approach the linguistic expression of a border culture. The merging of the two languages allows for use of more terms, codes, etc. that may be in one language but not the other as well as code-switching between the two (see Cutter; Hatton; Jonsson). However, as there are a range of experiences and uses of languages on the border, there is not one single method of communication between border peoples or communities. These issues demonstrate tensions of borders and between countries/cultures/peoples as they privilege one language over another.

The Colorado Sisters utilize the bilingualism of their communities in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere as a method of expression, carrier of culture, and a form of resistance. For the two, bilingualism is a method in which to

communicate issues through performance with those marked by the border as well as monolingual audiences, thus reaching a wider variety of audiences. Yet, I argue that bilingualism is potentially problematic in that the use of English and Spanish still carry traces of colonialism, which are evident within the terms and codes of the individual languages. For audiences within their communities, the code-switching within a performance is necessary because of the gaps in languages and allows for a fuller expression of an issue or idea (Jonsson 1304). These gaps provide potential zones for interventions within language as the gaps are filled with alternate codes. Additionally, the use of language can be seen as an effect of the border, in that colonialism, migration, and religion were all factors in the necessity of bilingualism within the border communities (Mejia 176). Bilingualism is also a carrier of border cultures in that it is inherently part of the tensions of the border, provides expression for cultures that exist between societies/nations, but is intrinsically resistant to dominant narratives through its existence and usage.

While bilingualism has many functions within the Colorado sisters' plays, it is important to note that the plays are not a perfect combination of English and Spanish. For most of the plays, English is the bulk of the languages used; this is likely because it was the language learned in school, is the language of the dominant society, and thus the language most used by their audiences in New York City. However, this is not always the case; for instance, *Caracol, heart of the earth, flower of hope* (2005) was first performed solely in Spanish at the Fifth Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute in Brazil, before then being performed

mostly in English at the University of California at Davis and the American Indian Community House in New York (Underiner).

While English may be the primary language used in most of their plays, Spanish is frequently added in to the performances. Often, phrases and conversations in Spanish are used by characters who are family, Mexicans, or who are marked significantly by the border. For instance, in *Cloud Serpents* and *Huipil*, the conversations between one of the sisters and their mother generally occur with the sister speaking largely in English and the mother speaking entirely in Spanish. In other examples, Spanish is used to emphasize a point; in *1992*, they are describing a game played by children, whose underlying power dynamics indicated some of the issues along the border with immigrants: “Pom, pom, pom. They threw me back and forth. Pom, pom, pom. Como juego de pelota. Pom, pom, pom. No, you don’t belong here. Pom, pom, pom. You’re too dark. Pom, pom, pom. You speak Spanish” (*1992*). The use of Spanish here underscored the lingual differences that allowed for prejudice in a game among children. In yet other examples, Spanish words and short phrases elaborate on the subject of the border. Some of the examples from *Ya Basta!* include, “don’t bring any of your *muchachitos*”, “a bad *patrona*”, and “Don’t be an *esclava*”. Each of these Spanish words demonstrates the negative connotation for the presumed Spanish-speaker in the situation, which is appropriate in a scenario about exploitation and domestic work.

Even though English and Spanish are the primary languages used by the Colorado sisters, they do occasionally also use snippets of an indigenous language and indigenous symbols and proper names. According to Alicia Arrizón,

In their present situation as neocolonial subjects in the United States, performance artists such as Elvira and Hortensia [sic] Colorado and many Chicana /Latina artists look at the symbols of the indigenous as a form of resistance and cultural reaffirmation. Consequently, their situation must be marked from the situation of the dominant because they still feel caught in some way within systems of colonial subject-production. (37)

As the two were not raised speaking Nahuatl (or even recognizing their indigenous heritage), it is perhaps understandable that they do not know enough of Nahuatl, their language of their indigenous ancestors, to include it extensively in their performances. Also, there could be the concern that not many Nahuatl speakers would be in the audience. However, the language is apparently significant to the sisters, as they do include terms and names of deities in almost all of their plays. For instance, the opening ritual of many of the plays includes a calling on the grandmothers, some of whom are specified as Aztec deities including Coatlicue, Teteoinan, and Tlaltecuctli. The main example of their use of Nahuatl in phrases in *1992*, in which they also use Zapotec, as result of their collaboration with women of an Oaxaca, México community, specifically Juana Vasquez, a Zapotec native woman (Perkins and Uno 80). I contend that these instances of Nahuatl not only recognize and celebrate their heritage and its associated deities, but also honors their maternal grandmother, Rafaela, who told

them the tribal stories and Mexican folktales that they have also incorporated into their plays.

The two's use of bilingualism with multilingual symbols allows for wide audience that could include those who are often excluded from national discussions in the US. These nationally excluded individuals are the people who are often invisible and voiceless on a societal level, yet are often the same people that Elvira and Hortencia strive to include, represent, and privilege in their plays. For them, code-switching “. . . fulfills creative, artistic, literary and stylistic functions in the plays and can be used to add emphasis to a certain word or passage, to add another level of meaning, to deepen/intensify a meaning, to clarify and to evoke richer images, to instruct the audience about a particular concept, to attempt a more faithful representation of the voice of someone else, to mark closeness, familiarity, to emphasize bonds, and to include or, on the contrary, to mark distance, break bonds and exclude” (Jonsson 1309). At the same time, because their plays are largely in English and Spanish, they are inclusive of a large audience. Yet unless the audience is comprised entirely of the people that the Colorado sisters privilege through language and visual symbols, members of the audience are likely feel distanced from the production in certain scenes or moments; this isolation in itself could be an intangible emphasis of the subject and the play's preferred audience. These moments of isolation, these gaps, could potentially encourage multilingual dialogues between communities that are representative within their audiences.

Questions of language are innately tied to issues of the border as language is a form of communication and a carrier of culture. Who uses a language, why it is used, and how it is used are essential questions in understanding what is to be communicated. Elvira and Hortencia have chosen to take a border approach to language within their plays as they perform primarily in English and Spanish, while including indigenous languages and symbols. While potentially distancing for some of their audiences, this bi/multilingualism also strives to present a full understanding of the border issues they explore within their theatrical space. Their choice of language is also resistant to dominant US national rhetorics around language and border issues. Their use of languages reflects the transformative dual nature of Coatlicue in that the sisters play with two opposing cultural artifacts in order to transform their stories into an inclusive interrogation of the border discourses.

Elvira and Hortencia also use language and story to explore identity, the development of border rhetorics, and their own examinations of languages and cultures. Their language explorations are verbal indications of border discourses with which they engage and also reflect multivocal language realities between borders. The Colorado sisters engage with many communities, including those whose rhetoric they resist, through the intentional use of languages and story to create narratives that privilege the voiceless in society as well as stressing the multivocality and multilingual nature of the US.

Conclusion

Within their plays, Elvira and Hortencia weave together stories – stories of Aztec mythology, stories of indigenous communities, stories of their personal experiences, stories of the México/US border – these stories provide a unique intervention into the complications of life between borders, spatially and theoretically. Drawing from the duality of Coatlicue, the two engage with the binaries of national borders in an effort to bridge the divide and encompass the realities of those who live between borders. They directly address those realities within their innovative web of indigenous Mexican-American female identity which includes the multivocality of those who inhabit the borders. For their performances, the México/US border provides both a subject to delve and a backdrop for their other explorations. Their use of bi/multilingualism also is a method with which to investigate issues of the border. However, it is also a product of the border and colonialism, which gives fertile ground for study and potential problems. Yet, bi/multilingualism is an expression of communication and culture, allowing for lingual solutions to issues within border discussions. This bi/multilingualism also features in and is a way to verbalize the development of their web of indigenous Mexican-American female identity. “By combining dominant English, Nahuatl signifiers, and Spanish grammars, the Coatlicue group configures the intercultural location of the ‘new’ native woman” (Arrizón 36). The intercultural location of this newly-delineated identity demonstrates the interconnected nature of border issues, language(s), and identity(ies). With Coatlicue as an inspiration, the Colorado sisters hope to transform injustice and destruction into a new life for their communities through their performances while

continuing to resist narratives which seek to invisibilize indigenous Mexican-American women.

CHAPTER 3

DIANE GLANCY

When the first man was created and a mate was given to him, they lived together very happily for a time, but then began to quarrel, until at last the woman left her husband and started off toward Nûnâgûn'yî, the Sun land, in the east. The man followed alone and grieving, but the woman kept on steadily ahead and never looked behind, until Une`lânûn'hî, the great Apportioner (the Sun), took pity on him and asked him if he was still angry with his wife. He said he was not, and Une`lânûn'hî then asked him if he would like to have her back again, to which he eagerly answered yes.

So Une`lânûn'hî caused a patch of the finest ripe huckleberries to spring up along the path in front of the woman, but she passed by without paying any attention to them. Farther on he put a clump of blackberries, but these also she refused to notice. Other fruits, one, two, and three, and then some trees covered with beautiful red service berries, were placed beside the path to tempt her, but she still went on until suddenly she saw in front a patch of large ripe strawberries, the first ever known. She stooped to gather a few to eat, and as she picked them she chanced to turn her face to the west, and at once the memory of her husband came back to her and she found herself unable to go on. She sat down, but the longer she waited the stronger became her desire, for her husband, and at last she gathered a bunch of the finest berries and started back along the path to give them to him. He met her kindly and they went home together.

- from James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee*
(also paraphrased in Diane Glancy's *Jump Kiss*)

For the purposes of this dissertation, I read this Cherokee story of the origin of strawberries as a metaphor for the younger generations of Native and Mixed Blood peoples moving away from the "old ways" just as the woman in the story moves away from her husband. Yet, they are unable to completely distance themselves from their tribal cultures, which follow them like the grieving husband. The patch of strawberries is representative of the crossroads, the point at which one is forced to a stop in order to choose from more than one path. The woman in the story wishes to return, though this is not always the choice of the

younger generations. What is not indicated in this story is that even though the woman decides to return to her husband and her home, the very fact that she left has altered her/their life because she looked beyond their world together. She changed who she was through her decisions at her existential and spatial crossroads – the first choice to leave and the second to return. Likewise, many people get to a crossroads between worlds without realizing the significant impact previous choices and paths have had on their potential futures.

Diane Glancy (Cherokee) explores many of these issues within her plays as she focuses on the worlds and peoples between cultures, primarily those between the Native American and White³² worlds³³. She understands the obstacles faced by many of the younger generations because she is a member of the one of the first generations to explore the complexities of Mixed Blood identity and the realities of life between cultures. She explains, “I have been questioned as a white. I have been questioned as Indian. I am neither of both worlds. But one of my own making. Mainly by words” (*The West Pole* 7). The world between the two worlds that is within the space of the border is one that she inhabits and thus is able to begin to articulate within her works. Inspired by her

³² In this chapter, the White world will indicate the larger US society and Euro-American culture. I recognize that using the racialized term, white, in conjunction with the ethnic identification of Native American is problematic in this chapter; however, this dichotomy is chosen continuously by Glancy, to whom I choose to defer in this instance in order to maintain her voice within the chapter.

³³ For the purposes of this project, I use to the term, world, to indicate a related culture, society, and set of worldviews in which a person may exist. It is important to note there is a range of experiences and understandings within each world.

own struggles due to her mixed heritage, Glancy writes plays that present and make present the stories of Mixed Blood characters, which have been largely absent in past narratives of both Native and non-Native communities. The purpose of Glancy's dialogue is to foreground these struggles for Native, non-Native, and Mixed Blood audiences (Blaeser vi-ix). This ability to reach multiple audiences is perhaps why Glancy is one of the most produced and published Native/Mixed Blood playwrights in the US³⁴.

As a child, Glancy was encouraged to identify with her German heritage by her mother, although she resisted and also connected to father's Cherokee heritage. Glancy's integration of both heritages into her personal identity is what allows her the space to dialogue between and outside of both worlds. Self-identity is formed through the recognition of similarities and differences in relation to a culture and is an ongoing process. As such, identity formation can be a difficult process for Mixed Blood individuals who must reconcile two (or more) separate heritages. For instance, there are external pressures on the individual to perform specific hegemonic notions of racialized identity, both from the dominant society and the *othered* society itself. The clashing and overlapping societal notions allow room for Mixed individuals, such as Glancy, to interrogate these performances of identity and create an alternative identity that can, but does not have to, include aspects from each culture. However, resistance to societal notions can have consequences on the individual; for instance, Glancy's subject

³⁴ Glancy is also a well-known poet and novelist, which likely contributed to her initial reception as a playwright. Her plays have been produced by universities and professional companies throughout the US.

position within the Native American community has been challenged in the past by critics who perceive her as exploiting her heritage, due to the fact that she did not actively claim this status until later in life (Rathbun). Her experiences are one example of many potential dangers in resistance. The slippery space between identities allows for multiple variations of Mixed Blood identity; Glancy explores these differences in identity within the range of characters in her works. Through the assortment of Mixed Blood characters, Glancy is also able to open up the complicated realities of these individuals of mixed heritage without essentializing the variety of potential experiences.

In this chapter, I examine some of the stories that are common within Glancy's plays in order to explore the subtleties and tensions inherent in these stories. If borders traditionally produce strict binaries, Glancy explodes these binaries through works that document the struggles of those who rebel against this either/or dichotomy that is a product of societal infrastructures. In this chapter, I examine how she delves into the various experiences of Mixed individuals since they can play multiple social roles within more than one world. I contend that Glancy creates an "alternative space" in which she redefines the world(s) between the Native and White worlds through her characters' negotiations of identity(ies) and culture(s). Many of her characters find themselves at a figurative crossroads in their lives, unsure of which pathway to take. While they experience despair at the perceived lack of escape from situations, they nonetheless commit acts of survivance in which they consciously choose to survive and resist and in that choice become an active presence (Vizenor *Manifest*). The theme of the

crossroads throughout her plays probes the multiplicity of Mixed Blood realities and provides visibility to individuals who are often absented in society(ies).

With this alternative space, Glancy also explores spirituality³⁵ in a way that is rare within Native theatre. Both Native traditions and Christianity are featured within many of her works, which focus on the overlaps between the two. While past scholarship might have focused on the “diametrically opposed” spiritualities, or on the other hand a syncretic version of the two, recent scholarship recognizes that the realities of the belief systems of Mixed and Native individuals are far more complicated. I examine these complexities and theorize that there is a range of possible modes in which these two spiritualities can be combined. I offer the notion of a spectrum of spiritualities in order to approach the variety of beliefs and practices held by such a large and varied group of people. I then investigate Glancy’s representation of a spectrum of spiritualities within the belief systems of her characters.

Finally, these innovative concepts cannot be fully expressed within a typical Western dramatic structure as this style of theatre would not reflect Native understandings and worldviews. Glancy has constructed unconventional structures and forms in order to communicate the complete range of understandings and experiences held within these stories that focus on negotiations and spiritualities. Many of these structural innovations are volatile

³⁵ In this chapter, I use the term, spirituality, to bridge the perceived differences between the Christian religion(s) and tribal traditions since these two terms are not always analogous. I take spirituality to indicate a set of worldviews and deeply held values that point to a realm apart from the material and merely human.

and stretch the boundaries of theatre. However, they also progress the richness of Native theatre with its variety, and it is to the question of structure I first turn.

Of Earthquakes, Car Radios, and the Subconscious

In order to support her explorations of Mixed Blood stories, Glancy frequently experiments with dramatic form and structure. Western dramatic structures tend to produce specific “plotlines” that reify Western philosophies; for instance, a climactic plotline based on conflict often generates binaries (i.e. protagonist/antagonist, love/hate, ruler/subject, war/peace, etc.). Glancy constructs many of her plays using methods that implicitly interrogate Western epistemologies. This is not to say that all of her works are experimental; some of her plays follow a climactic, conflict-based plot structure. However, Glancy tends to explore innovative methods of storying and strives to provide the frameworks that challenge reductive binaries that do not fully realize the in-between states of many Mixed Blood individuals.

For Glancy, “A Native play is maybe less constructed. . . . Not moving to a clear finish with all kinds of imperatives” (*American Gypsy* 200). This statement becomes clear when examining her plays, which are character-driven rather than plot-driven. As such, there is often no resolution for her characters; the plot simply focuses on a set of characters’ stories, often at a time of questioning the intricacies of life. Additionally, there is rarely one central character within her works since multivocality is imperative to her experiments. By having multiple voices as the center of the play, Glancy engages with the

individualistic and humanistic impulse of most Western theatre in order to offer a communal understanding of the given situation, which reflects a Native worldview. This multivocality allows her the ability to delve into the ranges that she interrogates because the central characters express a variety of opinions, worldviews, and spiritual beliefs.

Moreover, Glancy incorporates multiple planes of existence, which indicates Native understandings of “reality.” These experimentations allow her to engage with discursive themes on multiple levels, so that, for instance, a dialogue about the healing properties of a connection with the spirits actually includes a theatrical representation of the spirits who interact with, but are separate from, the central characters. In most of her plays, there is “[t]he intercalation of (1) the physical world, (2) the dream world. . . (3) the spirit beings. . . (4) the ancestors (ancients), (5) the imaginative experience, which is a strip of all between” (*American Gypsy* 203). She does not include all of these concepts into one play, yet in small groups, Glancy weaves them into her works as the characters cohabit various realms. The use of multivocality and multiple planes are only two aspects of her experimentations; however, they are common features across the majority of her works. In regards to both negotiations of worlds and spirituality – further discussed in later sections – Glancy plays with many modes of structure and form in order to provide other methods of storying.

In her attempts to create an alternative space in which to explore the worlds between the Native and White worlds, Glancy provides several examples of experiments in structure and form. For example, *The Woman Who Was a Red*

Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance (1995) is structured as a series of monologues and dialogues between a presumably Mixed Blood granddaughter and her Cherokee grandmother as they each argue for incompatible life paths. There are no specific scene or locale designations, but there are distinct divisions between the monologues and dialogues. This structure demonstrates the separation between the two people and how they cannot come to an agreement. The monologues that intersperse the dialogues reveal the frustrations of the two women. The separation within the text reinforces the struggle between the two over the path of the granddaughter's life and her negotiations of the Native and White worlds. Glancy says that the play is, "[n]ot with the linear construct of conflict / resolution, but with story moving like rain on a windshield" (4). The structure of the play, with its clear lines of division, reinforces the concepts within the dialogue of the struggles by the granddaughter situated between two worlds.

The play, *One Horse* (n.p.), represents a different type of negotiation between realms because it features a pow wow announcer that, according to the author's notes, she "heard on the car radio while traveling across northern Wisconsin, July 19, 1992" (336). There are no stage directions, no setting, and no tribal identifications; the text is a running monologue by the pow wow announcer. This structure allows the audience to concentrate solely on the words, which are comments on and descriptions of events unseen. The pow wow itself is a liminal space in which members of many tribes come together for celebration and competition; it is between tribal nations and between the nations and the White world. That the text of the play exists through the radio is also a negotiation

between worlds. The announcer's voice through the radio is an interlocutor by both introducing and interrogating the unseen events to an unknown audience. As it is located in a car, the play is engaging with transitory spaces, between points A and B; it literally and figuratively inhabits the alternative space that she strives to create. Glancy also plays with the interconnected nature of current reality(ies) and memory through the use of her own memory within the form.

Glancy also engages with her own memory as an intercalated realm in the play, *The Toad (Another Name for the Moon) Should Have a Bite* (2001), in which she travels to China to examine connections to Native Americans through the Bering Strait (*American Gypsy* 217). Here, she again uses monologue as a method of memory exploration, which reflects the solo nature of memory as experienced by a single person. The monologue explores the importance of writing and language in a country where words have been censored, focusing the audience on *her* words and inferences. Glancy also investigates the pain of women in China and in the US, often through a disquieting lens of poetry that points to the silent hurt masked by the romanticized image of "woman." It is the structure of the play that allows the audience to accompany her on a journey through memory.

Another play in which Glancy explores memory and negotiations between worlds through structure and form is *Jump Kiss* (1999). With no specific circumstances, this play is a fragmented narrative that is supposed to be read/seen like a diary and blends the fictive and nonfictive worlds as it combines her own memories with imagined stories. There is no action or conflict to the play;

instead, it concentrates entirely on the voice(s) of the character, which is not described. According to Glancy, “*Jump Kiss* is an explanation ceremony. A recovery of events and experiences and relationships for the purpose of understanding what has passed” (87). The fragmented nature of the play lends itself to the exploration of various events, which tend to be remembered in pieces. The play can be read within a metaphor of tectonic plates. There are seven major tectonic plates on the Earth’s surface; Glancy splits this play into seven movements or “plates,” each consisting of multiple fragments. The plates can be rearranged³⁶ because the plates themselves are not the focus of the play. Instead, it is the moments of friction between the plates, like earthquakes, that reveal to the audience Glancy’s discoveries of self between worlds.

Just as Glancy took the metaphor of the tectonic plates as a method of creating structure, she likewise looks at the underside of a sweater to inspire the structure of *The Women Who Loved House Trailers* (1996). In her introduction to the play, she explains:

In looking for a different way to *tellstory*, I turned a piece of drama inside out so only a few strands of plot showed, like one of those sweaters, when you turn it over you can’t see the pattern. I knew the plot would be a thin line on which stories from different continents were stranded or hung. . . . I wanted to strand several elements of different stories. I wanted to see

³⁶ Each production of *Jump Kiss* has had the plates in a slightly different order (*American Gypsy* 207-216).

how thin I could pull the plot they hung on. I wanted to take several ways of saying the same thing. (20)

The play focuses on three characters who are undescribed except as Oscar the welder, Jelly the weaver, and Berta the story collector. Their stories overlap in the present, yet they differ in the past, which is their focus. There is little action, and the setting is alternately the studio, a cemetery, and Berta's uncle's place as described in the dialogue. The play instead focuses on their stories and how these women engage with and redefine their stories. In deconstructing the structure of a linear plotline, Glancy is able to instead allow the negotiations of the three characters between worlds to come to the forefront. Multivocality is key to the successful adhesion of the structure of the play as cross-threads through the stories of the three characters play on their variations.

In addition to her experimentations of form and structure in order to create an alternative space in which to explore the place(s) between worlds, Glancy also employs innovative forms and structures to fully manifest stories within a spectrum of spirituality, which I will describe in more detail below. In *Weebjob* (1987), the title character, a Mescalero Apache holy man, is similar to Biblical Job, a holy man overwhelmed by his problems, particularly that he feels that his family and friends slipping away from him. Set on Weebjob's property, the crisis of the play is when his daughter decides to marry his best friend, with everyone else's blessing. Weebjob's spiritual beliefs combine his tribal traditions with Biblical scripture. Glancy plays on these spiritual aspects with the insertion of a theatrical enactment of Weebjob's vision in an otherwise linear plotline. This

scene involves creation myths (Biblical and tribal) and the struggle over land that has featured heavily in the histories of the Americas, followed by an interpretation of the wedding scene that follows the vision scene. According to the stage directions, “The whole scene is a rush of movement. A preliminary to the wedding scene which follows. What happens in the spirit world will be acted out in the physical. This scene is the story of how we come from cayos [chaos] into maybe as much light as we can stand and how we struggle to stay there” (72). This vision is necessary for Weebjob to understand and accept the situation, and it is a direct intercession from the spirit world of his personal belief system. The vision scene brings light to the chaos in Weebjob’s life, and yet it also reveals the circular pattern of chaos and calm. This scene alters what would otherwise be a Westernized play in a linear plotline by interjecting a scene that visually interweaves Weebjob’s spiritual belief system.

The Truth Teller (n.p.) also uses structure and form to express spirituality. The play takes place over one year, with each scene representing a season; it is also Glancy’s only play to be set in the past – circa 1800. This structure ties into the circular nature of Native understandings of time, and it also connects to the circular nature of the story that is told as the Indian/Mixed Blood man returns to his wife with the first scene and leaves with the last. The characters follow the conventions of each season within each scene, reflecting the traditions of their tribal nation; for example, in the fall, they collect and prepare rice, which can be stored for use during the winter months. In addition to the structure of the scenes, Glancy also interweaves the physical and spirit worlds as dancers portray animal

spirits who interact with and guide the two main characters. The animal spirit dancers are manifestations of Indian man and woman's discussions of myths and dreams; they also act out their stories. The dancers demonstrate the connections of the physical world and the spirit world as understood from Native perspectives. The dancers as animal spirits also guide the two main characters. One example would be when the Indian man dreams of his son's name, a deer dancer enacts this name (269). Through the use of alternative dramatic structures, Glancy situates the play within Native worldviews in a manner that would not be possible in a linear plotline format.

The Best Fancy Dancer the Pushmataha Pow Wow's Ever Seen (1999)

also engages animal spirit dancers to represent the interactions between the physical and spirit worlds. In this play, however, they are both a part of the main characters' belief systems and a representation of their deceased loved ones (306). Set in southeastern Oklahoma, this play follows Henry and his next-door neighbor, Gertrude, as they attempt to guide the children who live with them, Jess and Genny respectively. The kids are both struggling with negotiating between Native and White worlds; the struggle is partially represented through their school project of retelling the Christopher Columbus story from their perspective. The spirits, which are a significant visual aspect of the play, reveal themselves during conversations about Native traditions as well as when the characters talk about certain family members who have died. Glancy's combination of realms reflects the characters' beliefs that animal spirits can guide and protect tribal members, but they are also connected to the ancestors. For instance, the blackbirds are

Henry's spirit animal discovered during his vision quest when he was a boy, so they guide and protect him through the storyline of the play (331). Once Henry becomes involved with the kids' project, the blackbirds also assist in the reinterpretation of the Columbus story as eventually told by all of the characters. The interjection of the animal spirit dancers allows Glancy to represent the merged physical and spirit worlds, reinforcing the significance of spirituality within the play.

On the other hand, *Mother of Mosquitos* (2000) engages with the spirit world completely through an imagined realm, or as Glancy defines the setting, "the Far North of the Imagination" (274). This play is circular with no clear action. However, it engages with the myths of the Inuit and Yupik peoples, specifically those that concern the mosquito, who is born of water and feeds on blood and provides a symbolic connection of the two with the peoples. This structure allows Glancy to create an imagined interaction between a woman, a mosquito, and an underwater forest, which was inspired by masks found in *The Far North, 2000 years of American Eskimo and Indian Art*. Within the conception of the play, she includes similar masks, which connect the play to the traditions of the tribal nations of the Far North. Within the play, the masks also allow transformation, specifically the transformation of the woman, which allows her to travel between the underwater and above-water realms. This exploration of myth and transformation could not exist in the same manner within a Western plotline; thus, Glancy created a structure that permits these multiple planes to coexist.

Glancy's play, *Halfact* (n.p.), is the most innovative when engaging with the spiritual aspects of a play within her works. This play also incorporates the spiritual and imagined realms into what she terms, "the realm of the subconscious" (190). In creating this realm, she writes between genres in order to unfamiliarize the elements of the story, one of incest and neglect, and yet also creates a story in which everything has multiple meanings. The play is structured to two alternating forms of theatre, the dialogue and the monologue. The dialogue is the interaction between Coyote Girl and Coyote Boy (and their parents, whom they impersonate); the twinned coyote personas provide both a spiritual and a subconscious characteristic in that "coyotes" are tricksters in Native traditions, who never seem to be as presented. The monologue is an omniscient narrator who not only gives additional detail to the dialogue but also provides insight into the characters' subtext. Glancy describes the play as, "Not motive or movement in chronological order with message and theme, but the sharing of experience without thought of the usual structure of the play" (190). In *Halfact*, Glancy creates a multilayered space of meaning within which she is able to explore spirituality within an incestuous domestic situation through the lens of the imagined subconscious.

In order to tell stories that explore negotiations of multiple worlds and a spectrum of spiritualities, as further discussed below, Glancy had to create innovative structures that allow for the exploration of these stories within Native frameworks. Otherwise, these stories would be hindered by reductive binaries maintained by epistemologies within Western dramatic structure. Instead, her

methods of structure and form recenter Native understandings such as multivocality and various planes of existence, and at the same time, they express the intricacies of Mixed Blood experiences.

Pathways and Crossroads

Until recently, Mixed Blood individuals have been absent from majoritarian narratives, in part because they were forced to identify with only one part of their heritage³⁷. Yet, many Mixed Bloods, and others of mixed heritage, have begun to challenge the monocultural societal infrastructures that have continued to reify the notion of “racial purity;” they have done so through scholarly and artistic explorations of the unique issues inherent in groups of peoples who exist between cultures, languages, and societies (Bhabha 169). Glancy is a key person in this movement because she not only identifies as Mixed Blood publically, but most of her dramatic and literary works focus on the daily struggles of people of mixed heritage. Indeed, her works are innovative in her choice of characters and subjects, concentrating on Mixed Bloods and negotiations of multiple worlds, as these choices are still rare even as the focus continues to gain scholarly and public attention.

Although one can argue that these choices are partially autobiographical and reflect the tensions in her life between worlds, I would also add that she strives to portray a range of experiences within the confines of Mixed Blood, as well as Native, identity(ies). This continuum of identity(ies) demonstrates the

³⁷ See the discussion of mixed heritage in North America in the introduction.

multiplicity of possibilities in experiences, backgrounds, and heritages; it also provides a fertile ground for her explorations of the necessary negotiations between worlds. Glancy uses the liminal space of theatre to create an “alternative space” in which the boundaries of the borders between cultures are ruptured in order to redefine the world(s) between worlds. Taking advantage of the gap between worlds, her alternative space provides a mutually-inclusive and contiguous locale that is self-contained yet also overlaps with the outlying worlds with which she engages, reflecting similar strategies discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. The crossroads are one of the dramatic liminal spaces that her characters often inhabit as they struggle to find their pathways towards their desires and dreams. In this section, I will delve into her examinations of cultural negotiations that take place at various figurative crossroads.

In many of her plays, Glancy places her characters between Native and White worlds, unable to completely relate to any one world, driving them to negotiate their paths between worlds. These characters reflect the realities that are faced by many Mixed Blood and Native individuals in real life, whose families have been successively pushed to assimilate into White culture while they attempted to hold onto their tribal cultures. The parents of many of the characters moved towards a White world, while the grandparents remain entrenched in a Native world; the characters that are of the younger generation are the ones who must find a way to reconcile their place(s) within and between worlds. While these characters must face prejudice and insecurity, they are also well-situated to bridge the gap between worlds.

The character of Jess in *The Best Fancy Dancer the Pushmataha Pow Wow's Ever Seen* is one example of the younger generation at a temporal and spatial crossroads. His parents abandoned him, and he lives with Henry, a grandfather-like figure who attempts to guide him through Native worldviews. Throughout the play, Jess is shown struggling with his place between two worlds while also working through an assignment to retell the story of Christopher Columbus' voyage to the Americas through his own perspective; this project becomes an expressive method to bridge the two worlds, both for Jess and the other characters. When Henry tries to push Jess towards identification with the Native world, Jess explains the perceived divide between the two worlds:

Sometimes I feel the old memories in my head. . . . I can put on my feathers and be an Indian again. I like to dance at the Pow Wow – but I can't beat others. I can listen to you, Henry, and know the Old World. . . . I can play baseball and take garage mechanics at school and work on your old truck and feel the New World – when I want stuff again, I can tell you. Healing is a process, you say. It doesn't happen at all once. (294)

For Jess, the two worlds seem far apart at the beginning of the play; the Native world, or Old World, represents tribal traditions represented by Henry, while the White world, or New World, is represented by materialism as he looks towards jobs that can give him the possessions he desires. It is through the Columbus assignment that the healing process takes place since it allows Jess to not only retell the Columbus story from his own perspective but also provides the tools for

Jess to redefine his own role between the two worlds and instigates similar events for Henry and the other characters in the play.

The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance likewise concentrates on a character of a girl who must find her path between these two worlds, while her Cherokee grandmother encourages her to return to the “old ways” of the Native world. While the girl wants to relate to her grandmother and her tribal traditions, there is a disconnect between them because the girl believes that her grandmother’s stories get crushed in the White world, the world of which she desires to be a part (9). It is only after her grandmother dies that the girl realizes her need for the tribal culture from which she has distanced herself.

Even though in the past she has tried to assimilate into the White world, the girl realizes in the play that she can never be completely accepted in either world and must find an alternative path. She explains to her grandmother (prior to her death), “I can’t do it your way, Grandma. I have to find my own trail. . . . there’ll be a way through – I just can’t see it yet. And if I can’t find it, it’s still there. I speak it through. Therefore, it is. If not now, then later. It’s coming. If not for me – then for others” (11). The girl’s hope to create a trail between the two worlds is carried through until the end of the play in which she begins to chart this path while interviewing for a new job.

At the rest of the interviews I started right in – Let me talk for you – that’s what I can do. My grandma covered her trail. Left me without knowing how to make a deer dress. Left me without covering. But I make a covering she could have left me if only she knew how. I think I hear her

sometimes – that crevice you see through into the next world. You look again, it's gone. . . . You know, I've learned she told me more without speaking than she did with her words. (18)

In this monologue, she is trying to convince potential employers to give her a chance at a job (in spite of racial prejudice against her) in the White world, but she is simultaneously obsessed with reclaiming her Native heritage and honoring her grandmother's legacy. In doing so, the girl finds her voice that had been previously absented through her acquiescence of prejudicial and monocultural infrastructures in both worlds.

In *The Lesser Wars* (1989), Glancy takes a mythological approach to this question of negotiation by engaging with the trickster archetype, which is found through many tribal cosmologies and is known to be able to move between realms. Set in Minnesota, this love story focuses on two characters, a man (Coytoe) and a woman (Tecoyo), who represent two sides of the trickster character. Both characters have been through a divorce and are redefining their personal identities throughout the play, especially as they are both removed from their previous roles as fertile beings (Coytoe, in a vasectomy prior to the play; Tecoyo, in a hysterectomy during the play). Through their introduction and interactions, they explore their roles as trickster through an examination of their pasts. They also look toward a new path that seems to bridge the Native and White worlds as well as the mythology and reality.

Tecoyo: Eternal Trickster.

Earlier stage of consciousness.

What we are out on the ocean in a tiny ship?

What we are when no one sees?

Coytoe: How we are intertwined in sameness.

Tecoyo: We put on the Trickster

what we need to shuck in order

to move on to a higher civilization.

Coytoe: Yet we can't forget who we were.

We're still fascinated by that part of ourselves. (164)

The two characters recognize that the trickster elements of their identity(ies) are necessary in order to find an alternative path; in other words, they must first be able to move between worlds in order to then bridge the two. They both desire to find and explore another world, not the "New World," but one of their creation (188). Their shared role as trickster not only makes the formation of an alternative world possible, but it also demonstrates some of the tools necessary in order to achieve Glancy's project of an alternative space between worlds.

In addition, Glancy often situates her characters within a figurative crossroads. Like the first woman who came to the field of strawberries and then had to decide which path to take, these characters similarly must deliberate, as each path is fraught with tensions and complications. Some of these paths engage negotiations between worlds, while others center on a community. In all, I contend that the theme of the crossroads move beyond a simple source of dramatic action to represent the figurative junction in which many of the younger generation of Mixed Blood and Native individuals find themselves. Products of

historical and contemporary interactions between the two worlds, this younger generation can be at a loss for modes of attaining their dreams and desires, which are often alternately situated within each world. Glancy explores the layers of complication within the decision brought about by these intersections, which are stimulated twofold – by a lingering sense of despair, combined with a need for survivance. For many of her characters, there is no likelihood of escape from an unfulfilling situation, yet there is always the hope for escape. The hope provides the instinct to survive the situation while resisting the urge to accept permanent desolation. In doing so, they move towards a refusal to consent to the absenting of themselves in their world(s) while always believing in the potential for achievement of dreams; this refusal manifests their voices and presences within their worlds.

Set on the title character's farm near Arapahoe, Nebraska, *Segwohi* (1987) is an exploration of the figurative crossroads in which the son in the story, Peyto, struggles to decide on his path in today's society(ies). His father pushes him to focus on the old ways, yet Peyto cannot see his place in that world. Recognizing similarities between her own life and Peyto's, his aunt, Sereh, supports him emotionally and financially, and tries to be the peacemaker between Peyto and Segwohi. To accede to his perceived path, Peyto tried to be a musician and have a family, but neither was successful. He feels that he is pulled in many directions that are not of his choosing:

We're here to make our own way on this open prairie – we're supposed to stand while being pulled one way and then another – the job, the white

world, the Indian's. I'm ordered around by everyone – do this. Do that. My wives nag and curse. . . . I don't know where I'm going – but I know it's not back here on the 'old place' – buried in my thought of 'what was' while the world goes on – sometimes I just hang on – nothing more. I don't hear the voices of the ancestors. I can't live what I don't see. I have to take part in the struggle I see before me. (219)

Throughout the play, Peyto struggles with these conflicting thoughts that are exacerbated by his father's disappointment that Peyto did not follow in his footsteps to become a medicine man. Ironically, it is through an existential crisis that he and his father simultaneously experience that they are both able to redefine their personal roles and identities (Sereh's role and identity within the family does not change as a result of this event). During this moment of crisis, Peyto, Segwohi, and Sereh all begin to draw visual interpretations of each other's actions on the kitchen wall as a winter count³⁸. In confronting each other's visual interpretations, Peyto and Segowhi recognize their faults and contributions to their current paths and end up growing closer as a result. Though his physical situation has not changed, Peyto finds a path that changes how he views himself, giving him hope to create his own story of survivance.

In *American Gypsy* (2001), Peri is a Mixed Blood woman who is concerned about the direction her life, and her marriage, are going because she

³⁸ Winter counts are pictographic representations of the major events for a person or tribal nation. They are generally created on buffalo hide and are mostly a cultural practice of the Plains tribal nations. These hides became a process of transmitting cultural memory in that they assist in the transmission through mnemonic devices (Berlo 120-121).

feels that she and her husband, TiToMo, have stagnated over the years. She dreams of opening a bed-and-breakfast, but the realities of her life keep her from doing so. At the end of the play, she is offered the opportunity to follow her dream when her husband is accidentally killed. Peri spends most of the play contemplating her life and her purpose within her community. She also questions her conception of “Indian,” because she believes the younger generation has “lost what it was to be Indian” (67). She envisions “Indians” as American gypsies who are always elusively searching. She asks, “Are we gypsies on a new migration trail – relocating to the cities, returning to the land – always on our restless travels over highways and roads – never settled?” (60). This question reflects the dual nature of her desires – to travel again with her husband and to connect to her land/home, yet she despairs of ever attaining either. Though she has a rather bleak view of her life and of the generalized “Indian” journey, Peri also recognizes she, as well as the other characters, will continue in spite of the many obstacles they face. After her husband dies, she takes advantage of the situation to follow the path towards her dream of opening a bed-and-breakfast and traveling with her sister, despite the discouragement by her friends. While she acknowledges the possibility of failure, nonetheless, she refuses to be dissuaded, reaffirming her voice and presence.

Three of Glancy’s plays specifically concern the despair that can result from centuries of cultural oppression and physical restriction – *Bullstar*, *Stickhorse*, and *The Women Who Loved House Trailers*. In *Bullstar*, Jack feels trapped by the responsibilities in his life and longs to return to the rodeo as a bull

rider. The rodeo represents Jack's dream to forge his own path, one that is free of the pressures of his family responsibilities. His wife, Cree, hopes that her father will give her some of the profits of the sale of a portion of his property, which would ease some of the financial burdens for her household; in the end, her father keeps the profits. Jack and Cree argue about Jack's participation in the rodeo, which is an escape for Jack, but it takes him away from Cree and their children. For Jack, the rodeo is also a chance to gain visibility and respect. I would argue that his dream, for many years, was just a way to cope with the despair of his life, his personal story of survivance. When given the opportunity at the climax of the play, Jack chooses the path towards the rodeo, recognizing that the other path, towards family responsibility, would always be available. Throughout the play, the characters reference a gyroplane that can take someone up in the air and bring that person back to earth again in a different place (147, 185). The rodeo is like the gyroplane for Jack with the hope to move a person to a better place on the earth. While the characters in *Bullstar* all hope to move to a better place, the despair continues to seep in, and there is an undercurrent that suggests that though they expect to continue to survive and resist, they realize that the better path may never come.

Alcoholism is presented as an ineffective method of coping with the despair of a general situation of futility in *Stickhorse*. Although only one character, Eli (Cherokee), has retreated into alcoholism, all of the characters speak of their frustrations with their places in life, which are the consequences of the dominant society's prejudicial infrastructures. Like many other of Glancy's

plays, *Stickhorse* is set in modern-day Oklahoma. For instance, Eli's girlfriend, Quannah, and his older sister, Virgene, are the responsible ones who have jobs, yet they are trapped by poor education and few choices, either in career or in life. Eli's friend, Jake, is a medicine man who tries to help Eli with his alcoholism through healing ceremonies. However, Jake also feels the despair of his generation in that they look to the past tribal community as a time of power and belonging, but they feel that present circumstances have moved beyond their control. Jake says, "We're not really visible. Our heritage has been erased and we live without a sense of who we were. We're the people who live without our lives – whose arms and legs move at times without our bodies – whose thoughts move without the heart and mind" (136). This disconnect is a direct effect of historical projects such as boarding schools and reservations, which were aimed at removing all Native peoples from their tribal cultures in an effort to assimilate them into the White world. These characters realize that though they live on the reservation and own property, they are trapped by a system that allows little room from productivity or success.

Yet, in spite of their despair, most of the characters retain a sense of hope that escape from their situations is possible. Their drive to survive and resist in spite of the despair allows for the recognition of an alternative space that they might inhabit and construct.

Virgene: We're in No Man's Land. We've lost our Indian heritage.

We're not part of the white world.

Quannah: You are if you drink – it's their stuff.

Jake: This is our land. It's our power. They're never getting rid of us.

Virgene: But we're caught between the two worlds.

Quannah: No – we have both worlds to walk in. (93-94)

For these characters, their alternative space must exist in the gap between the two worlds, just as they do. Even though Eli is the one at a existential and corporal crossroads with his alcoholism, all of the characters recognize the motivations behind his addiction, but they resist the urge to surrender, thus creating stories of survivance. They have chosen to resist their own erasure through the creation of an alternative space, and they encourage Eli to follow their path, instead of the path of self-destruction. Glancy leaves the play with an ambiguous ending as Eli's decision at his crossroads is left up to the reader's interpretation. I believe that this ending acknowledges the fine line between despair and survivance for many Mixed Blood and Native individuals.

The Women Who Loved House Trailers concentrates on three women who redefine their (hi)stories through various art forms. Oscar is a welder; Jelly is a weaver; and Berta is a collector of stories. The play has a vague forward motion as the characters move from an art studio to Berta's uncle's property; however, the bulk of the play is three overlapping lines of thought that converge and diverge throughout. In the past, these three characters each have been affected by the consequences of cultural oppression, both directly (boarding schools) and indirectly (family dynamics). For example, in the scene at her father's funeral, Oscar reveals that her father, who was a Christian minister, could not give her the love she desired; he also drove her mother away mentally through incessantly

quoting the Bible at her – her mother eventually took on the persona of a wren. During the course of the play, they address many of these effects that are the cause of despair in their lives while at a spatial crossroads as they are about to be evicted from their studio. Each woman works through the wounds of her past within her given art form and is able to alter the effects of the stories through interpretation. The stories of the three characters are like the house trailers, first created by Berta's grandfather:

Berta: My grandpa and his brother made the house trailer. It was a tent on a trailer they could put up and tie down when they moved. . . . He made the house trailer from a dream. I'm sending off my dream in a grant proposal. Leaving it for the mailman.

Oscar: A trailer can't go anywhere on its own. . .

Berta: Dreams are hard to work out. (22-23)

In spite of the despair that could have hindered their stories, these three characters instead chose the path towards a dream and changed their stories into something else, just as the house trailer was mutable. Yet, as Oscar comments, house trailers must have something driving it; for these characters, an instinct for survivance drives their reinterpretations. Jelly's voice was restricted by her stepmother as a child and by her husband as an adult. Her transformations of birch bark into canoes returns Jelly's voice to her, allowing her to redefine her stories. Their stories will continue to change and provide them alternate paths at various junctions since house trailers are often at a crossroads yet always able to change paths. As such, the women have the option to stay in one place, but they also

have the potential of mobility at any given time. I argue that this play offers a hopeful alternative space in which Glancy proposes a method of changing histories of victimry into stories of survivance (see Vizenor *Manifest*). In addition, the metaphor of the house trailer indicates that a person could have numerous opportunities to find new paths and crossroads to indicate a point of decision.

In her plays, Glancy strives to create a unique alternative space in which she offers the gap between worlds as a space in which her characters, often Mixed Blood, can (re)define a world that overlaps and yet is also part of both worlds. Although many of the characters struggle with despair over a seeming lack of escape from futility, they often consciously resist the despair and fight to survive, and in doing so, they make themselves present in their communities. The crossroads, which are a frequent theme of Glancy's work, are motivations for acts of survivance for many characters as they must choose a pathway to take. These paths represent the multiplicity of Mixed Blood experiences and reveal some examples of the negotiations between worlds.

A Spectrum of Spiritualities

Discussions of spirituality within Glancy's plays are a continuation of her explorations of an alternative space between worlds. The gap between worlds has been a fruitful source of investigation for Glancy; similarly, she ruptures the binary of Christianity and Native traditions through demonstrations of the spectrum of possible personal beliefs. Historically, part of the "civilizing

mission” of the European immigrants was to convert the indigenous to Christianity (Wax 31-33). This mission was in part effective as the majority of Native Americans are at least nominally Christian, though there is a range in which Christianity and tribal traditions are interwoven. While many scholars have critiqued the role of early Christian missionaries in this acculturation process, until recently, few have studied Native agency within that process³⁹. Past scholars have focused on the acculturation through the Christian missions, yet this approach does not allow for Native agency. According to Michael McNally,

The signs and practices of the Christian tradition [within the tribal communities]. . . are better understood as part of the process of culture change rather than as a product of that change. This is because those signs and practices – especially the practices – became a medium through which many native people exercised their own agency within the tight confines of history and through which some articulated resistance as well as accommodation. (845)

In other words, the integration of Christian signs and practices into tribal traditions can be seen as so many acts of survivance. Additionally, recent scholars have begun to note that although Christianity and tribal belief systems are basically incongruous as comparable concepts, there are many points of intersection between the two in which individuals might find similar beliefs (see Campbell; McNally 834-859). Since Christianity has permeated most tribal communities to some degree during the past couple of centuries, most indigenous

³⁹ For a key example focusing on the Yaqui, see Shorter.

personal, spiritual belief systems are within a spectrum, with Christianity and Native traditions as the outlying areas, and the majority of people's spiritualities residing between those two points.

Glancy examines this spectrum of spiritualities within the range of her works. Some of the plays represent the middle of the spectrum; others focus more on the Native traditions; while still others center on Christianity. She does not just explore spiritualities as subject matter within the text, but she also incorporates the spiritual/unseen world with the physical world in the realities of her characters as described in her stage directions. Her study of the spectrum is innovative in that the concept itself has been mostly limited to theoretical examinations. Though spirituality(ies) is not the focus of each play, it is a significant aspect of much of the dramatic action. Spirituality is a theme of Native theatre, yet it is rarely as prominent as in Glancy's work.

Some of her plays explore the interior of the spectrum of spiritualities by directly engaging both Native traditions and Christianity. In *The Truth Teller*, the character of the Indian, who is Mixed Blood, has several conversations about spirituality with his wife, who is Native, and makes comparisons between Christianity and Native traditions. Early in the play, they discuss the importance of stories to their worldviews as the Indian man has just returned from a long guiding trip with White frontiersman on the Upper Mississippi River.

Indian: The white man. . . doesn't seem to have many stories to tell.

Indian Woman: How can anyone survive without stories?

Indian: They have stories written in a book. But not stories like we tell.

Indian Woman: They can't be stories then.

Indian: They are. I've heard some of them. A man in a boat and another
man on a cross. . . .

Indian Woman: Our stories carry us like a canoe. That's what stories do.

(259)

This scene demonstrates the lack of a direct comparison between Christianity and Native traditions. However, Indian uses the storytelling aspect of both spiritualities to explain the White man's belief system to his wife. Later, this connection is made clearer when he directly associates stories from both spiritualities with the present story of increasing numbers of White settlers encroaching into tribal lands. He tells his wife, "I remember the story of the Great Spirit's flying lesson. He flew and crashed. Maybe it will be that way for us also. The Great Spirit of the white man fell to earth also. They put him on a cross. Maybe our thud is coming. If the Great Spirit thuds and survives, then we can too" (270). He recognizes that the messages of both stories are similar and can be applied to his tribal nation's situation. His insight into both spiritualities and his incorporation of both into his personal spirituality are presumably the result of his mixed heritage since he was of both worlds and also between both worlds.

In two of her plays, *Stickhorse* and *Segwohi*, Native rituals come into question as the characters struggle to negotiate multiple worlds. Much of the story within *Stickhorse* focuses on healing ceremonies that Jake performs on Eli, an alcoholic at a existential and corporal crossroads. These ceremonies are

largely traditional, yet Jake updates them with conceptual reflections of the worlds in which he lives. For instance, one call to the Great Spirit asks, “Cleanse us from alcohol, purge us with your Drain-O” (103). While a moment of humor for the audience, this call creates a visual image for Eli (and the audience) in modern American English, one that viscerally expresses the desired outcome of the ceremony. This adaptation is a way to continue the relevance of the ceremony through an evolving connection to multiple worlds. Jake explains these adjustments by saying, “The medicine men argued over which way to sit in the lodge. They argued over the old ways – they didn’t want to change. My father said our lives had changed – our magic would also change – and it would still be magic. He would keep our medicine – it didn’t matter by which ritual. It was faith in the magic that kept it going” (122-123). Jake maintains that faith in magic that it is mutable between spiritualities, though focused in this play towards Native traditions. This attitude towards his spirituality is significant because spiritualities transform as societies and cultures change. When spirituality stagnates, it loses its relevance to its population. Glancy maintains the inherent nature of change within all societies and cultural practices in all of her plays; the characters who struggle against this notion are always at odds with the other characters and with their communities. This sensibility reflects Vizenor’s notion of survivance as well in that the characters are actively involved in both the changes within spirituality in addition to the continuation of certain practices.

What Jake learned as a young boy, Segwohi disputes for much of the play, *Segwohi*. As a medicine man, he clings to his Cherokee and Cheyenne traditions

as he learned them, presumably from his father, who was a medicine man before him. Since he is such a traditionalist, Segwohi vilifies his sister, Sereh, and his son, Peyto, for their art forms that combine their tribal culture and Western conventions. Sereh creates coffin-shaped pots to be sold at the Sante Fe tourist markets, and Peyto played saxophone in a jazz-infused Native band at a local bar. Segwohi disparages Peyto's life choices throughout the play because he is concerned that if Peyto does not follow in his footsteps to become the next medicine man, then cultural memory⁴⁰ will be lost as there will be no one to pass down the combined Cherokee and Cheyenne histories, rituals, or ceremonies. Sereh tries to intercede for Peyto, "Wake up, Segwohi. Another world has come. It's not ours, but we must live in it. We were an Indian people. Little children of the Great Spirit. Now we're a shadow of our dreams. But in dreams we dance. We fly like airships" (250). She recognizes that their community has changed and that the people and the cultural practices must adapt as well. There is an impasse between the three characters until they all lose their tempers and begin to draw winter counts on the wall. The ritual of creating the visual stories of the winter counts, albeit through an unconventional method, opens up Segwohi to understanding Sereh's point and accepting Peyto as a valid cultural transmitter. Additionally, Peyto experiences his first encounter with the ancestors as a result of the forged connection with his father through the alternative winter count ritual.

⁴⁰ Cultural memory can be defined as transmitted beliefs and practices (Rodríguez 1).

Other plays engage with the Christian side of the spectrum. For Peri in *American Gypsy*, Christianity is a connection to her friends and family who have died and part of the mystery of her world. Her aunt Julia was a Christian who used to take Peri and her sister, Frennie, to church with her. Thus, Christianity is a cultural feature that is both a comfort and an ambiguous notion to her. It is comforting because she always felt safety and love from her aunt and at her house (which is now Peri's house). As a cultural product, the angels that papered her aunt's house had a double function – they were a direct connection to her aunt's love, and they provided an imagined focus for her interactions with the dead. Throughout the play, Peri seeks guidance from the dead, her close friends and family – not her tribal ancestors; though she speaks to representations of them (i.e. angel figures, tombstones), they do not respond, following Christian beliefs.

Although she turns to Christianity when grappling with the existential crossroads of her life with her husband (both when she questions continuing her life with him and when she must confront life without him after he dies suddenly), she also wrestles with full comprehension of the link between her life and the Christian essentials. For example, Peri questions many of the inhabitants of the cemetery across the street, wondering about the characteristics of God:

Is God there in his majesty or is he really Adelaide, the cat, watching every move I make Oh God! Are you real? Are you waiting up like Mother in one of her rages when I came in late from a date with TiTo? Or like his mother, always grumbling about everything. . . . Harriet – Does God look us over like school papers? Does he keep grades Does God

own a café? Is there someone to cook for. . . . I would hate to arrive in heaven and find no tables or kitchen. (58-59)

In this scene, Peri is searching for help from her spiritual beliefs, but she does not know how to relate to God because Christianity has always been a practice that she only exercised through occasional events caused by her aunt. Each question reveals her fears, that in addition to her self-doubt, God might find her lacking. She also fears that what she enjoys most in her life – cooking for others – might be of no use after death. I argue that Glancy situates Christianity in this play as the mode through which Peri is able to approach the inexplicable in that it has the relational aspects of comfort and safety as a result of its connections to her Aunt Julia.

Jump Kiss is a semi-autobiographical, fragmented narrative, which is challenging to analyze since it does not have a plot or necessarily connecting stories or voices. In it, Glancy explores an evolving spirituality, mostly focused on Christian beliefs, though tribal myths are also a part. Several of the fragments concentrate on childhood understandings of Christian stories and dogma. For instance, the narrator is told that Christ was “poked with nails” because of her misbehavior (97), and she is informed that “God had a candy store where we went when we died. We got to go there if we asked Jesus” (135). Stories such as these are a part of the basis for a person’s spirituality because they form not only how a person views a belief system but also how they view themselves within that belief system(s). In the play, these stories are glimpses of the character’s beliefs within her daily interactions.

Throughout the play, Glancy examines multiple stories and voices that engage with different levels of comprehension of spirituality. One of these stories and voices is that of a mature woman who has regrets and hurt in her life: “I need it so. Forgiveness./But you know Christ doesn’t care who you are or what you’ve done. He opens you like a pear. Takes His pearing [*sic*] knife right down to the core. It doesn’t hurt. Does a pear feel pain? Have you ever heard one cry out as you bit into it?” (114). This fragment is presented between other fragments that ponder suffering, death, cattle, and Christ. It seems to indicate a need for the character to feel a purpose behind the sufferings of the world. Christianity, and specifically Christ, fulfills a need for this woman since forgiveness and acceptance are central tenets of Christianity. Throughout the play, there are also indications of the integration and importance of Native spiritual practices. In another fragment, Glancy provides a version of the Strawberry story that opened this chapter. In doing so, she acknowledges the importance of retaining Native traditions and stories even for Native Christians.

While some of her plays may focus on one end of the spectrum more than the other, Glancy’s plays often have elements of both in them. The combined exploration of a spectrum of spiritualities provides a unique and innovative contribution to Native theatre in that Glancy is the rare playwright who not only presents a range of spiritual beliefs through her choice of characters and subject matters but is one of the few to foreground this aspect of daily life. This spectrum reflects the realities of Mixed Blood individuals’ personal systems of beliefs and

practices and provides Glancy a tool with which to explore the functions of spirituality for a variety of individuals.

Conclusion

While Diane Glancy's mixed heritage inspires her choice of subjects within her plays, her own experiences do not restrict the theatrical realms of her works. Instead, she broadens a general understanding of the wide variety of experiences and paths of Mixed Blood individuals in the US. Throughout her plays, she mines the area between the Native and White worlds for an alternative space that she, and other people of mixed heritage, inhabit, which in turn she explores in the stories that she relays. The rich variety of characters in her plays demonstrates that in spite of feelings of despair, they can choose a path at the crossroads that gives them agency through acts of survivance. Additionally, Glancy delves into the realm of spirituality by presenting the spectrum of possibilities from which Native and Mixed Blood individuals make up their belief systems and practices. In order to open up these stories, Glancy also creates innovative structural frameworks that rely on Native, instead of Western, understandings and worldviews. In doing so, Glancy offers Native theatre alternative methods of storying and ranges of story possibilities.

CHAPTER 4

MARIE CLEMENTS

The Katzie descended from the first people God created on Pitt Lake. The ruler was known as Clothed with Power. This first chief had a son and a daughter. The daughter spent her days swimming and transformed into a sturgeon. The first fish to inhabit the Pitt Lake. It was from this girl that all sturgeon descended. After she left her brother wept uncontrollably and Clothed with Power took the silklike hair of the goat and transformed him into an owl-like bird that could only be seen by the Katzie descendants. It is only by human hand that a sturgeon can die and those that wish to take a sturgeon must first seek spirit power from her brother the white bird. Sometimes the sturgeon will make itself available to the fisherman. Sometimes a song must be chanted to which a steam will emerge and the sturgeon will make themselves caught floating to the surface belly up.

- Old Pierre (qtd. in "The Girl" 51-52)

Since the Métis are a people of combined Native American and European ancestry (from many nations on both sides), there is no one set of myths and stories to which to refer. As such, I am introducing the chapter on Marie Clements (Métis) with a story that she has included in her play, *The Girl Who Swam Forever*. This mythological story is layered onto a modern story of a girl who exists between worlds, much like the daughter/sturgeon. The importance of this story to one of Clements' plays demonstrates her incorporation of Native stories, traditions, and themes in all of her plays. Additionally, there are many aspects of this story that can be found throughout her work. The first is the connections between the land, the animals, the spirits and deities, and the ancestors; for many tribal nation worldviews, these relationships are integral and inseparable (Archibald 11). The familial bonds are part of what holds a community together, but they are also significant for one's identity and how

others can approach an individual. Of additional import are the negotiations of individuals between multiple worlds, dimensions, and meanings. For instance, the daughter/sturgeon lives between multiple worlds and dimensions and can be understood in numerous modes. Transformation stands at the heart of these negotiations as the multi-layered understandings can be approached as a result of change and alteration.

These negotiations and transformations are not without consequences, however. This story also points through the death of the sturgeon to the destructive power of humans. The notion of sacrifice for the greater good of the community is also tackled; survivance strategies are examined as well: from a Native viewpoint, the sturgeon in this story exists on many levels – as both a fish and Native woman, simultaneously in and outside of both worlds. She must be respected to be caught, and there are rules and guidelines as to when and how it is appropriate to catch a sturgeon. As a liminal being, she is hard to define and has the ability to travel between worlds. This point of divergence is an apt metaphor for Clements' work as there are multiple ways to understand it, but it is difficult to “catch” and delineate the many levels of her plays.

The multidimensional understandings of the worldviews and subjects within her plays reflect Clements' Métis heritage. While none of her plays overtly concentrates on issues pertaining to Mixed Blood status in Canada, several of her characters are Métis, and most of the primary plotlines feature negotiations of multiple worlds. These negotiations reveal many of the issues with which Métis and Native peoples in Canada struggle, yet her focus over the past 15 years

has been subjects with societal impacts (i.e. radium mining, domestic violence, and media responses to serial murders of Native women). Her work is multi-layered in order to reveal complications and tensions, allowing for various levels of audience understanding, yet there is always more to be explored. The richness of her work is perhaps why it has been successful throughout Canada and the US with Native, mixed, and non-Native audiences. As her plays have been critically popular and have found a home in many of Canada's main theaters, Clements continues to push the boundaries of theatre, thematically and structurally.

In this chapter, I will focus on the features that make her plays innovative and why these advances are necessary, while using her plays as primary evidence. The first section centers on her choice of characters and related subject material; these characters are drawn from the obscured individuals (largely Native and Métis in her plays) that exist in Canadian society as a result of infrastructures that seek to invisibilize non-dominant members of society. For the purposes of this dissertation, I take *obscured* to mean a purposeful attempt at erasing an individual or group within societal narratives, an attempt that is not entirely successful, thus the individual or group is not clearly distinguished or understood by members of the larger society. Here, I engage with Peggy Phelan's terms, marked and unmarked, to analyze this process, and to show how Clements reveals the varied obscuration mechanisms that maintain these characters' positions in society, providing her characters a liminal space in which they can gain agency with Canadian society.

The second section concentrates on the structural innovations she has created within her work. Clements has restructured the basis of Western plays in order to situate her plays within Native paradigms while using Native understandings of story, time, and space. I examine the variety of her structural explorations while engaging with Native epistemologies.

In the third section, I argue that her innovations in story and structure are an attempt to provide an alternate historiography, or another possible methodology with which to examine history. Clements offers an alternate historiography that recenters Native and Métis stories and worldviews while privileging indigenous epistemologies.

Revealing the Obscured

Native American realities and bodies are generally absent from the dominant narratives within North American societal consciousness(es); as numerous scholars have pointed out, the exception remains a fixed, essentialized, and romanticized notion of the “Indian” in popular culture and the popular imaginary. In her book, *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, Peggy Phelan discusses the unequal power relationship between unmarked and marked⁴¹ representations, and she argues, “There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal. Visibility is a trap; it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism,

⁴¹ The marked is the invisibilized Other in society, or the subject without an initial value that must be determined by the White man, the norm in society (unmarked).

the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession” (6). In “Hiding in the Ivy”, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy engages with Phelan’s notions of visibility and invisibility by suggesting that indigenous individuals can strategically choose visibility or invisibility in accordance with their own desires and willingness to be viewed. He points out that often visibility requires an individual to reify the romanticized notion of the “Indian,” which then perpetuates inaccurate perceptions of Native realities.

However, I would like to offer a concept that destabilizes these binaries. I suggest that the indigenous body is *obscured* and that Clements’ work offers survivance strategies for the obscured individuals represented by the characters in her plays. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “obscure” as “not clearly seen or easily distinguished” and “not readily understood or clearly expressed”. While the indigenous body is not clearly visible, the indistinct form *is* discernible to the dominant societies that are unreflexively the source of the obscuring. While many societies across the hemisphere have historically attempted to completely invisibilize and assimilate indigenous peoples, Native Americans have resisted these attempts but have not yet been able to control the majoritarian narratives; they remain obscured. Consequently, the obscured body is faintly visible through the very marking by the norms in the larger societies. Another aspect of obscuring is that the focus is not readily understood by the obscurers, as is often the case of the relationship between obscured indigenous peoples and dominant societies and associated narratives.

In her plays, Marie Clements chooses Native and Métis characters that have been obscured, subject material that exposes the societal mechanisms behind obscuration, and survivance methods that the characters use to respond to the -- process of being invisibilized. In doing so, she engages with the concept of indigeneity, advocating the resistant agency of her Native and Métis characters while revealing the multidimensional understandings of the worlds these characters negotiate. Phelan contends that visibility can be deceptive and has many negative consequences; however, Clements demonstrates that the consequences of obscured existence can be just as dangerous and power-gaining (if not more so) than the fight for visibility. Her characters enact small and large acts of resistance, which enable them to redefine their past and future, thus gaining agency over these definitions within Canadian society. However, these characters also face many negative consequences for their increased visibility within their redefinitions of self-identity. Additionally, through the presentation of these stories/plays, Clements has the potential to effect change in revealing labeling and restrictive obscuration mechanisms at work for many Native and Métis individuals in Canada.

Violence against obscured individuals, as representative of larger groups of people, is one of the main subjects Clements explores; her plays look at how violence is often ignored by Canadian society because it perpetuates those mechanisms through the refusal to acknowledge the violence and it continues the façade of powerlessness for the object of the violence. This is not to say that Clements explores the stories of people who are always and only victims. In

Fugitive Poses, Gerald Vizenor argues that most Western narratives (including some Native-sympathizing narratives) spread a cycle of victimry, or the concept of the “Indian” who is a static and continual victim of his/her own heritage, helpless against European domination. He contends that victims “offer the world nothing but their victimization, and that makes people who invest in them feel better. It’s a great emotional experience, they can draw upon it metaphorically, and yet the victim never talks back. When the victim talks back, they stop being victims” (85). Clements seems to agree with Vizenor in that she refuses to simply present stories of victimry; instead, she shows characters who “talk back” and resist being silenced. Clements’ characters are active agents of events in their own lives, not passive recipients, and her plays offer a symbolically restored sense of agency to indigenous peoples.

Two of her plays, *Now Look What You Made Me Do* and *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, deal with female characters who are the objects of domestic violence. These plays reflect domestic and judicial realities across the hemisphere in that these women are further invisibilized through both the abuse and the overlapping justice systems that often overlook events within the private realm. *Now Look* focuses on Madonna, a Métis woman in her twenties, as she falls in love with Jay, who was abused as a child and becomes Madonna’s abuser. The other characters are largely other women who have been abused. The cycle of domestic violence is the societal obscuration mechanism in this play, and Clements reinforces this notion by only ever showing them within the confines of a women’s counseling group therapy room. The women spend much of the play

trying to enjoy the positive moments with their abusers while excusing the abuse
itself:

JENNIFER: . . . *It's not so bad.* . . . he only does it when he's under a lot of
pressure. . . I'm not so smart, I make him mad. . . I don't think some times.
. . .

MADONNA: . . . *I look at his hands.* . . . His hands hold me. Protect me.
Mold me. *His hands hit me.* How could his hands hit me?

HEATHER: *he said* I am a bad woman and God has sent him to
punish me . . . *punish me for my sins*

JENNIFER: *He says – he says –* my hair looks like a piece of shit . . . I
can't seem to do anything right. That's my problem, I can't seem to do
anything right. *I wonder why?* (25)

Since these characters are caught in the cycle, excusing the abuse, they are being
invisibilized by their male abusers. However, throughout the play, the female
characters also come to resist the confines of the demands of their abusers –
make-up, hair styles, denigrating sex acts, and plastic surgery – by flaunting what
the abusers do not like about the women when alone at home or in public. Yet,
for Heather, wearing lipstick that her husband does not like triggers an episode of
abuse, a consequence of being an obscured individual since this violent act has no
repercussions for her abuser. At the end of the play, most of the characters step
out of the role of the victim to “talk back” to their abusers and leave their
individual situations, though Heather seems to stay with her husband. Here,
Clements attempts to return power and agency to these abused women, yet with

the ending of the women leaving, it is impossible to know if the characters gained visibility through their resistant acts. Still, by revealing the realities of these obscured individuals, she brings these stories to the forefront, potentially gaining visibility for real Native women in abuse situations who are doubly invisibilized through societal mechanisms at work.

The Unnatural and Accidental Women is based on true events of a serial killer who targeted at least ten Native American women in Vancouver over a thirty year period; the women all were found dead from a very high blood-alcohol level. The deaths were not seen as related for many years because of the mode of death – Native women dying of alcohol poisoning fits within the negative stereotype that is often the only visible portion of the representation of the obscured Native woman. Clements disputes this stereotype of the alcoholic Native woman (and in this case alleged prostitutes) by not only (re)presenting a variety of women but also providing detailed exposition for how each woman came to be in a place like Skid Row in Vancouver. The serial killer is also shown to have coerced and force-fed the women much of the alcohol; they did not willingly imbibe all of the alcohol that led to their deaths. Perhaps more significantly, the play stands as a tribute to the real women whose lives were considered expendable. Since their lives were obscured, so were their deaths, which were not easily understood by law enforcement and thus ignored in spite of the fact that the killer was known to have been the last person with whom the women were seen.

However, in the play, Clements not only reveals the societal mechanisms of their obscuration to her audience, but she gives the dead women the final power over their killer as they slit his throat in his own barbershop, where several of the women had been found dead. This ending departs from the true events, since he was convicted of one of the murders, served only 6 years in jail, and lived to be 74 (Larue). Through this departure and the literary license taken throughout the telling of these women's stories, Clements challenges the prejudicial structures in place within the society that absented the women during their lives and their deaths, to the point of allowing a serial killer to work for thirty years before being caught and given a light sentence with little media attention; she contests these mechanisms in the media and law enforcement through slide projections which quote the newspaper obituaries and coroner's reports. Two examples are: "Rose Doreen Holmes, 52, died January 27, 1965 with a 0.51 blood-alcohol reading. 'Coroner's inquiry reported she was found nude on her bed and had recent bruises on her scalp, nose, lips and chin. There was no evidence of violence, or suspicion of foul play'" (19) and "Brenda A. Moore, 27. Died September 11, 1981 with a 0.43 blood-alcohol reading. Coroner's report concluded her death was 'unnatural and accidental'" (61). The title of the play of course comes from the phrase that continually was used to describe these women's deaths and again questions how law enforcement and the media continually ignored even clear evidence of trauma prior to death.

In other plays, namely *Age of Iron* and *Burning Vision*, Clements investigates violence that is done on a larger scale – war – and the consequences

for the obscured peoples involved. She also explores the indigenous connection to land and earth, which is often exploited or seized by Canadian governments due to a lack of understanding of the importance of this connection. *Age of Iron* is “[t]he blending of Trojan Warriors with the historical reality of the First Nations people of the Americas, the blending of Greek and Native myths” (*DramaMetis* 194). *Burning Vision* examines the stories of people involved in radium mining prior to and during World War II.

Age of Iron pairs the stories of two peoples, the Trojans and the Native American peoples, in order to examine the effects of the obscuration mechanisms inherent in war when one group is occupied and controlled by the other. Told from the point of view of the Trojans/Native peoples, this play is staged with the audience in the role of the oppressor. For example, Wiseguy, a Trojan Warrior/Elder, addresses the audience while explaining his viewpoint through a story:

You have only seen this Land of Troy from the outside. The walls and floors are thick and grim with the wars and plagues and now hardened. But inside it is a beautiful woman, alive with happiness and living. The ancient ones talk to us. You envy that. You have no such land because you have covered it with an ungiving surface [concrete]. You call us barbarians. But that is what we call you. You attacked our people and keep attacking, because we are truly rich and powerful. . . . We are civilized, and the wise among us know that we are doomed. (202)

Here, Wiseguy attempts to reveal the prejudicial structures of war through enlightening the oppressors of his people and their worldviews, which are under attack as a result of a lack of understanding. He also shines the light back upon the conquerors to point to the hypocrisy of colonizing narratives. Finally, this example divulges the importance of the indigenous connections to the land, and through the land to their ancestors; this connection is a point of contention between the two groups, since the oppressors do not have a similar worldview about land and earth. For Clements (and obscured indigenous perspectives), the land is a foundation of culture, the earth seen as the giver of life and that to which all things return eventually. This cycle is also reflected in the plot, as the characters recognize that the aftermath of war is a time of loss but also a time of transition, in which there is always potential and hope.

Burning Vision examines a different side of war – that of the Native, Métis, and Japanese people involved in radium and uranium mining prior to and during World War II. While she explores the stories of many effected individuals, she focuses much of the plot on the Native and Métis storylines because they owned the land that was exploited and provided much of the menial labor needed in the process. As developments like the Manhattan Project were secretive, most of the people involved in the daily procurement and use of these elements were unaware of its weaponry potential or the dangerous side-effects of handling the elements or materials made from them. Due to the clandestine

operations by the US and Canadian governments⁴², the mining and material handling conditions had painful and sometimes fatal consequences for the unaware workers. In fact, for many years, just the workers' involvement with radium or uranium was sufficient to obscure them in society; since the side-effects often took many years to exhibit symptoms, the workers had to fight to become visible in the legal and media arenas. In the play, the characters' ignorance of the potential effects is exposed throughout as those who were told the radium and uranium would cure cancer instead succumbed to cancer, or the "yellow radium deep inside the black rock that can help the world" is instead used to destroy cities through nuclear bombs (36-37). The fatal consequences for many workers are vividly displayed at the end of the play as the Miner begins to cough up yellow mist, Rose has problems with her pregnancy, and the Radium Painter has lost half of her face and all of her hair. The horrors revealed by the experiences of the characters demonstrate the dangerous obstacles faced by obscured individuals within the system of exploitation of land and human resources and also the relatively insignificant compensation that was eventually awarded to the real radium and uranium workers. In this play, just as in *Unnatural and Accidental Women*, Clements reveals, then challenges, the idea that these individuals be viewed as disposable bodies – they can be both exploited and then ignored without repercussions.

⁴² Many governments were involved in radium and uranium processing for weaponry at the time. However, *Burning Vision* focuses on the US and Canadian involvements

In addition to the consequences for the workers, Clements also investigates the effects of mining on the land and its connections to the tribal nations. First, the Labine brothers are shown sneaking in a tunnel on Native lands, where they make the discovery of radium. These characters represent the many people who exploited both the indigenous peoples and large sections of their land in order to retrieve one small aspect of the land. They show a lack of respect for the land, unbalancing the indigenous peoples' delicate relationship with it, and continue the cycle of obscuring the indigenous peoples. Then the mining, the transport, and the use of the radioactive materials require increasing numbers of obscured individuals (both indigenous and others). The aggressive removal of radium, deep in the earth, begins a cycle of destruction and death – first with the destruction of the land for the mines, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending with the deaths of many workers in the Americas. Clements, through the character of the widow, warns future generations: “The money rock will make anybody say anything so long as they can keep taking out of our ground, and if everybody is making money it doesn't matter about the people” (104). This intense self-interest is a characteristic of many Western societies, including the US and Canada, and often precludes an awareness of the effects of exploitative projects like mining on the workers. From a Native perspective, the community takes precedence over the individual, which could provide an alternative option to the egotistical model currently used in Canada (and the US) (Weaver 42). *Burning Vision* serves as a warning that although the obscured individuals are the first to reap the negative consequences of

unregulated progress, there are societal effects; in order to avoid future examples such as this, a community-based approach could temper unethical inquiries and could avoid the stratification of positive and negative effects.

Other plays by Clements consider the scars that are left on the individual by urban societies. In each play, the individual negotiates his/her place(s) in multiple worlds; these negotiations often lead to physical, emotional, and/or mental scars on the individual. These scars are the consequences of obscured existence. Yet in the artist statement for *Urban Tattoo*, Clements argues, “Scars that have defined us can only be redefined by us. In this way, in this tattooing, we wear the markings of a warrior of our own design, our own making” (206). Clements takes the “marking” of the individual and makes it transformative, so that an urban Métis woman does not only have value through the marking by the elite. Instead, through redefining, through transforming scars, the obscured individual can revalue their own experiences and identities and gain agency in controlling how the past is viewed and the path of the future. The characters resist essentializing definitions of “Indian” and in doing so, strategically acquire visibility in Canadian society that acknowledges their present identities.

Urban Tattoo focuses on one character’s negotiations between rural Native and urban White worlds. This binary is set up by the people in her life, but she fights for a space in both worlds. As an obscured individual, however, there is much resistance surrounding her struggle; Rosemarie’s scars come as a result of prejudice and other aspects of Canadian society. Her scars are the effect of emotional, mental, and occasional physical cuts during acts of survivance: the

ridicule by her sister when she dreams of becoming a movie star like Jane Russell; her connection with a black man through recognition that they are both “niggers,” due to their low status in society; her rape by her employer while working as a domestic worker; and others that continue through decades of experiences. For many, these scars would define them by placing them in the victim role, as passive recipients. However, Clements rejects the cycle of victimry in favor of transformation through reexamination of these scars, while also engaging with the concept of indigeneity.

The play is set up as a series of memories, through which Rosemarie is able to redefine moments that “scarred” her. While she does not attempt to become a movie star like Jane Russell, the dream and the image help to sustain her resolve to fight for a place between the two worlds. The “nigger” connection allows her to be understood and accepted by another person when she is not clearly distinguished by others. While working as a domestic, she suppressed her identity in order to fulfill the stereotype of the “Indian;” the end result of the rape was that she was fired but was also able to break away from others’ expectations of her. Instead of negatively defining and restricting her, the scars become points of action and survivance. When the scars threatened to overwhelm her, Rosemarie stops to dig through and then alter the meaning of her scars.

I just knelt down and began to dig. Sharp points, memories getting caught on my skin. Sharp points. I knelt down to myself. . . and began to dig deeper. Unearthing the burden, unearthing the dead weight. . . . You cannot walk anywhere and hope to summon yourself you have to find the

exact spot the exact time and say I remember you I remember when. . .
. . You bury everything. And slowly it grows from your earth. The
perfect being. So I just stand. . . . As if we had an understanding that in
going past I know my place and in going forward I have I become bigger
than you can imagine. (227-228)

For Rosemarie, the path to a non-obscured identity is to reexamine her scars through the past, not to bury the painful moments, but to redefine them as they shape her present and how she approaches the future. In the end, the scars are dangerous and painful consequences of visibility within Canadian society, but through the transformation of her scars' meanings, she gains power and agency in her self-definition, thus resisting prejudicial structures within society. Through this play, Clements explores the concept of indigeneity through the conscious rejection of labeling obscuration mechanisms; she offers a transformative and power-gaining alternative using Rosemarie's journey as an example.

In *Copper Thunderbird*, Clements examines the scars of a real life artist: Norval Morrisseau (Ojibway), who is known as the Father of Contemporary Native Art in Canada. Known for his use of thick black lines and bright colors, Morrisseau's art negotiates Native and European-Canadian traditions and tensions, reflecting the struggles of his personal life (Blundell). These attempts at negotiation leave scars that are explored in this play; an example occurs in the Pollock Gallery scene in which Morrisseau is first introduced to the white art world. In the scene, the three Morrisseaus (he is represented onstage as three figures – the boy, the young man, and the old man) are confronted with two

choruses, one white and one Native; with each short monologue from young Morrisseau, both choruses interpret his statements in conflicting ways. For instance, after young Morrisseau describes his source of inspiration, the two choruses largely ignore what he has to say, and instead focus on their contradictory preconceived notions.

The Gallery Room Chorus (white chorus): I wonder if he's going to sing for us. I love it when they sing. It's so, so deep. Excuse me, could you drum and sing for us?

The Flooding Room Chorus (Native chorus): How'd he learn to talk like that? Look at him smile. How'd he learn to smile like that? Probably residential school. He looks assimilated alright. Small.

(46)

The white chorus encourages young Morrisseau to enact their perception of an "Indian artist", which includes descriptors such as "primitive", "the Chief of a conquered people", and "a Shaman" (48-49); the "Indian artist" falls within the parameters of the obscured individual because the individual is still not readily understood by the dominant society. On the other hand, the Indian chorus continuously accuses him of being a sell-out, which is, to them, the only option in moving away from the restrictions of obscurity. He argues with both choruses, claiming "I want my work to be properly used as an art form in its proper place by generations of Ojibway people to see in the future. . . . I want. . . these paintings to be seen by generations . . . As well as to be appreciated by all our white brothers" (48). His struggle against these two contradictory representations of

himself and his artwork is overwhelmed by the end of the scene, and he physically withdraws to a corner of the stage. Morrisseau begins to realize the impact of his artwork on his own life in that what was a personal act of expression reversed to become a public definition in which he has no input. Accordingly, his art becomes yet another method by which his identity could be restricted and controlled. One of the results of this realization and the continuation of obscurity is a cycle of alcoholism, which in turn serves to obscure him in the majoritarian narratives even more as he fulfills aspects of negative “Indian” stereotypes. Like the story of the sturgeon, Morrisseau lives between worlds and works to acclimate to both, yet his negotiations are not always successful, which leads to times of surrender.

However, the play also investigates his resistance to the restrictions of obscurity; he does so mainly through his multi-layered integration of Native and White cultural traditions and practices. These acts of resistance occur through his art and, in the play, through physical transformations. In one scene, the three Morrisseaus transform into a combination of Christianity’s Holy Trinity and powerful beings within the Ojibway cosmology, representing the point at which Morrisseau asserts control over his identity and, through his painting, *The Man Changing into Thunderbird* (also represented in this transformation), how he could be viewed in society. This transformational scene takes his scars and visually redefines them, in his art and on the stage. Also, it demonstrates Morrisseau’s multidimensional understandings of the worlds in which he resides and negotiates; however, this multidimensionality, as a complex and unfamiliar

worldview, obscures how Morrisseau is viewed within Canadian society while at the same time strengthening his personal acts of survivance.

Like the story that opened this chapter, Clements' *The Girl Who Swam Forever* focuses on one character's negotiations of multiple worlds – the lake, the land, a white-controlled Catholic mission school, tribal lands, and the many spaces between these worlds – and how each leaves its own set of scars on Forever, who is both girl and sturgeon. Yet the play takes place in a liminal space, after she has run away from school, a space in which myth and “real” exist simultaneously, and people from her past can visit, and she can converse with people from her present. There are many scars from her past: family members who have died and left a darkness in her life, experiences at the mission school that she cannot discuss with her brother, the abandonment by the father of her child. As she is pregnant with a Mixed Blood child, this space is also when and how she reexamines her scars in order to redefine them for the future, since she recognizes that she is “changing” currently. In a connection to her past, her grandmother guides her to the realization that her scars of the past are part of her story, part of her circle, which is tied to her ancestors' circles, all of which reside in her, giving her strength to follow her dream. Rather than sacrificing herself, as sturgeons are able, she instead takes the train to the city, towards a dream, where she and her son (also a sturgeon) can confidently swim. In this play, Forever resists the obscuration mechanisms of restriction that have scarred her past and threaten her future, effectively negotiating the multiple worlds and dimensions.

In all of her plays, Clements concentrates on obscured characters that in some way challenge the dominant concept of indigeneity. Through the characters' resistance to the societal infrastructures that aim to restrict them, the characters gain agency within their lives through acts of survivance while demonstrating the multidimensional possibilities in Native and Métis identity(ies) and experiences. There are many possible consequences for resistance; while some are power-gaining, others are destructive and can leave scars. These scars are not just sites of trauma but are opportunities for transformation and redefinition. It is through reexamination and change that the characters are able to move forward, without repeating past cycles. Clements offers these stories to also reveal to Canadian communities the restrictive obscuration mechanisms at work in an effort to effect change in the larger society and not just within the theatrical world.

Collisions, (Re)Constructions, and Transformations

When reading or viewing one of Marie Clements' plays, it is immediately apparent that her work is decidedly experimental and employs Native-centered epistemologies. She often uses even-numbered separations (either two acts or 4 movements); while some of her plays have no scenic designations at all. Plays such as *The Girl Who Swam Forever*, *Now Look What You Made Me Do*, and *Urban Tattoo* are examples in which characters move seamlessly from one space to another, one dialogue to another; this style requires a circular notion of time, which is part of most tribal nations' worldviews. While each play may have a

sense of a beginning, middle, and end, time is more fluid with the beginning often being interchangeable for the end. In addition, the past and present (and occasionally the future) can overlap and exist in the same space, just as the “real” and the “myth”. Accordingly, the aspect of time and dramatic structure in her plays tends to be situated between the climactic and episodic binary, with the late point of attack and forward motion of the climactic and the multiple plots/characters/locations of the episodic.

This foundational understanding of her distinctive structural style is imperative for the detailed discussions of her dramatic structure that follows in this section. Clements uses multiple levels of dramatic organization of the structural features of her plays, while experimenting with plot structure, time, and space. These unique characteristics force a critical distance for the audience and provide a supportive and Native-centered foundation for the stories that she tells.

A feature of several of Clements’ plays is that there are multiple plotlines, though a few plays focus on a single character. These multiple plotlines are one form of experimentation in that they generally exist with few points of direct interaction, yet they all are connected thematically. The separate plotlines may share locations or space on the stage; some of the plotlines may merge but certainly not all. At the beginning of the play, the plotlines are kept completely separate, but as the play progresses, there is more overlap in the scenes and/or the dialogue until the separate stories of the plotlines begin to collide within the play itself. These collisions of stories happen on various levels, whether the characters actually meet, they have similar events occur, or the dialogue from different

plotlines begin to overlap without fusing the stories. The separation of the plotlines is vital to the eventual collisions, which underscore the chaotic and serious subjects that Clements explores in her plays. I describe Clements' use of the separate, multiple plotlines as a parataxic plot structure. Parataxis is from the Greek, meaning "the act of placing side by side"; it has been used by literary theorists to indicate a group of juxtaposed sentence fragments that together lure the reader to create his/her own connections (Hayles). I believe that Clements creates a similar effect through her multiple plotlines, which collide to emphasize the theme but still allow for a critical stance from the audience. Clements' structural innovation allows for multivocalities of resistance that heighten her attempts to reveal the obscured.

One example is from *Now Look What You Made Me Do*; focusing on the subject of domestic abuse, the play is told through the parataxic plotlines of Madonna, Motor Mama, Heather, and Jennifer. Each of the women is shown in the thralls of her abusive situation. The stories are kept separate except during two group therapy sessions and the ending when each of the women decides whether or not to stay in the abusive situation; however, during each of these scenes, the women all still seem distant from one another, even when their dialogue overlaps. In the therapy scenes, each of the women's monologues is intertwined as they speak about their abusers' excuses. These interwoven monologues reiterate to the audience how the abusers are projecting negative images onto their spouses and cause the audience to reflect on the similarity of the excuses when each is critiquing different characteristics. At the end of the play,

most of the women regain control over their appearances and lives through verbal rebuttals of the abusers' claims, and they physically leave the domestic space, which often in silence. Again, these scenes are shown separately, though sharing the same physical space on the stage. In this collision of similar events, the audience is confronted with what is necessary to leave an abusive situation but also the difficulty in doing so, as Heather does not leave, sacrificing her own happiness. The multivocality of the parataxic plot structure moves the theme away from being didactic towards a thought-provoking and inclusive play.

The Unnatural and Accidental Women also has a parataxic plot structure that follows the stories of several women, most of whom die of alcohol poisoning administered by a serial killer. In the first act, the women's plotlines rarely overlap. The main exception is Rose, who unlike the others who are Native, is White; her character interacts with the most of the women as she is their connection to people outside of their isolation (she is a telephone operator). For the first act, the only points of collision are when the characters experience a similar event – death at the hands of the serial killer. This parataxic series of events emphasize the loneliness of each of the women, which is what the serial killer preys upon. In the second act when most of the women are dead, their plotlines collide as they become a chorus of ancestral guiding spirits for Rebecca, a woman searching for her mother (who has been killed by the serial killer) and who realizes the serial killer killed her mother just as he is about to kill her. Although unseen by Rebecca until the end of the play, the chorus of women provide exposition throughout and take revenge on the serial killer just as he is

about to kill Rebecca. Rebecca and her mother are also given a space to communicate one last time for closure at the end. The collision of the plotlines brings the women together and provides them with a collective agency at the same time it allows them a voice, something that was taken away from the characters by the serial killer and taken from the women upon whom this play was based. Also, the collision provides a Native-based understanding of the women's stories and their participation in future events despite their deaths through the interaction of the physical and the ancestral realms.

Both the parataxic plot structure and the collision of stories are most evident in Clements' play, *Burning Vision*, which concentrates on the obscured individuals associated with radium mining. The plotlines cover the brothers who discovered the radium deposit in Canada, a radium miner, the men who transport the radium, a radium dial painter, the anthropomorphic uranium and test bomb dummy, and the various women whose stories intersect with the other characters. The various plotlines share the stage and often overlap in dialogue; they are visually separated through the use of light and props, switched quickly as though with a remote control. Most of the plotlines do not connect throughout the play, although in the last scene, the dialogue of the stories combines so that any one plotline does not get more than a few lines in a row. This collision coincides with the revelation of consequences for each story, none of which are pleasant.

There are a couple of plotlines whose stories do merge; three of these instances result in a romantic subplot: the Miner and the Radium Painter, Round Rose and Fat Man, and Koji and Rose. While these subplots offer a view of

temporary hope, none survive the end in the same sphere of hope. Round Rose and Fat Man reunite through a fear of dying alone. The Miner and the Radium Painter both are shown to be dying of radium-related illnesses, and Rose's pregnancy is threatened as a result of radiation exposure. These collisions, first as romance grows, then as tragedy strikes, provide somewhat of a story arc in an otherwise unconnected set of plotlines. Though all of the plotlines carry the theme of the consequences of radium mining, without the romantic subplots, I believe this play would be unintelligible to its audience. As it stands, the various collisions of the plotlines demonstrate the chaos of the events surrounding the Manhattan Project and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki while also showing the fatal effects on the people who were exploited. By having so many stories in this parataxic plot structure, it provides the audience with a large cross-section of people's experiences with radium mining, allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions.

In many of her plays, Clements experiments with time and how it is understood. Time is circular in most of her plays, presenting an aspect of Native worldviews to the stage in the US and Canada. Clements both plays with notions of time, allowing for more fluidity between past, present, and future as well as between realms, such as myth and real, ancestor and progeny, and forms of art. In some plays, Clements constructs time so that characters that might have existed in different times are placed on the same path in time. In others, moments in time are woven together for the character's examination. In doing so, Clements offers alternative structures for the stories she relates.

One example of Clements' construction of time is *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. First, she takes seven women who were killed in real life by the serial killer over the course of thirty years and condenses their stories into the same timeframe. During the first act, one after another of the women is shown in her last minutes before death, which is signified by slides that provide the information released by the media about each of the women. This construction of time forces the collision of the women's stories as aforementioned, pointing to the similarities and dissimilarities to the audience. Time is also constructed so that Rebecca and her mother, Aunt Shadie, are physically in the same geographic location, which enhanced the irony that Rebecca does not find her mother until after Aunt Shadie is already dead.

In the second act, time is constructed in order for the dead and the living to inhabit the same space. The dead women, as a chorus of ancestral spirits, guide Rebecca and in the end, are able to exact revenge on the serial killer. For most of the act, this construction of time provides the women a space for their voices as they are free to elaborate on their previous lives through their comments on Rebecca's, and in the end, they are able to give voice to their revenge – a action not originally afforded to them during their deaths. Only at the end of the play are the living (i.e. Rebecca and the serial killer) aware of the shared space with the dead, which supplies two moments of closure for the characters involved. In constructing a time in which both the living and the dead are able to act and interact, Clements demonstrates a commonly-held Native worldview – that the

ancestors exist on the same plane as the living and are able to function as guides, interacting with those they choose.

In *Burning Vision*, Clements likewise constructs time so that the storylines of people who might have existed over an 80 year time span are able to be represented, though in an atemporal fashion. For example, the Dene See-er is from the 1880s, while the Fat Man is from the 1940s/50s; the Radium Painter is from the 1930s, and the Widow became such in the 1960s. The atemporal time construction of the various plotlines not only allows for the collision of the stories but also provide an area for collisions that could never happen outside of the atemporal space. The play begins with the Labine brothers exploring a tunnel, looking for radium, but instead finding snippets of scenes from other plotlines with their flashlights. These short scenes and monologues immediately connect the object of their investigation, radium, with people and stories outside of the tunnel. Though these snippets foreshadow events to come, the brothers refuse to be intimidated, insisting on finding the “money rock”. These short scenes also provide the audience with a short introduction and some exposition for the various plotlines that will be revealed throughout the play. Another instance would be the collision of Koji and Rose’s stories since Koji is a fisherman who was killed during one of the atomic bombs and Rose is a Métis woman who works in Hudson’s Bay. In including these storylines and collisions, Clements is able to incorporate the Japanese individuals that are connected to the radium mining in Canada, providing a link for the audience to explore.

In other plays, Clements experiments with rearranging time; *Urban Tattoo* is one example. As discussed in the last section, this play is a series of memories that examine scars that result from obscuration mechanisms of community oppression. Clements repositions time in Rosemarie's life; fragments are restructured to aid in the redefinition of her scars. There are no scenes, just overlapping memories, some of which are repetitions of memories previously explored. The result is a sense of stream-of-consciousness, as though the audience is in Rosemarie's head, wading through memories and experiences with her. These memories are always presented from Rosemarie's perspective, with Rosemarie providing connecting commentary between memories. Some of the memories are presented through a juxtaposition of the past and the present, with Rosemarie both presenting the past and commenting on it in the present. Other memories are partially repeated, focusing on key scarring moments; this technique is also used in *Urban Tattoo* as a method to further analyze certain moments in order to redefine the resultant scars in order to gain power and presence in her own stories.

Clements also plays with time in *Copper Thunderbird*. Here, time for the subject of the piece, Norval Morrisseau, is altered in two ways: Morrisseau as a character and the scenes themselves. Clements changes Morrisseau's timeline by splitting his character into three temporal representations of himself (boy, young man, old man). This division allows each of the Morrisseau characters to provide commentary on various moments in each character's past, present, and future, providing a critical distance from the events, both for the characters and for the

audience. These remarks and interactions show different perspectives of key events even though they originate from the same source. While the three Morrisseaus may be initially difficult for an audience to grasp, a trilogy working together and separate simultaneously is a known concept in many religions and cosmologies. The three also challenge the audience to view Morrisseau as an evolving person in real life, not just the alcoholic from the media portrayals of Morrisseau.

The scenes within the scope of the play are also reconstructed as Clements rearranges the scenes so that the flow of the play is not chronologically accurate as it bounces back and forth between many time periods from 1937 to 1987. The first three scenes introduce the three Morrisseaus to each other and to the audience while also setting up some of the reoccurring subjects throughout the play. Although time is fragmented in the play, there are threads that connect the scenes together. In the first scene of Act 2, in 1965, the three are experiencing and discussing things that make them feel trapped: wives, children, alcohol, his career; this scene is followed by a scene in 1973 in which they are literally confined – in a jail cell. These connecting threads hold the play together while offering the audience optional outlooks on the scenes from Morrisseau’s life. They also support a reexamination of the events, one that flows from documented “reality” into his artwork and back while ending at the beginning - 1987.

A third mode of structure for many of Clements’ works is the transformation of space on the stage, during and between scenes. Many of these transformations occur during collisions of stories and (de)constructions of time.

Generally, they are visual representations of the characters' negotiations of multiple worlds, either geographic or imaginary lands. Multimedia is often the medium used to express the multidimensional nature of Clements' plays; in fact, the stage directions give specific suggestions as to what effects should be present. These visual transformations are crucial for the audience's understanding of Clements' innovations in structure and content as they illustrate Native worldviews that are inherent to her work.

An example of her transformation of space would be in *Age of Iron*. At the beginning of the play, the Wall of Troy is a living, anthropomorphic object that interacts with Wiseguy, one of the main characters; the Wall argues for the importance of knowledge and understanding in a cosmological sense, suggesting that these are the reasons that Troy was defeated. Having relayed this information, the Wall retreats to become an inanimate object again, just a set piece until the Trojan characters need to hide from their oppressors, at which time they are hidden by the Wall. The transformation of the Wall demonstrates its place as the physical representation of the remnant of Trojan society and reflects the connection of the people with their land. I would argue that it is also an example of survivance, assisting the survival of its people and knowledges, while helping to resist the conquering authorities.

As *Urban Tattoo* employs fragmented time, the transformation of space is vital for the audience. The initial stage directions most succinctly describe the multiple and large-scale transformations that occur throughout the play:

ROSEMARIE climbs to the highest level of the stage. Standing, she looks down on the space and is silhouetted [*sic*] by a back-screen that is a sky and then a raven. She breathes and prepares herself to jump down and through the building, down toward the pavement. . . . ROSEMARIE's body jumps slightly upward, and begins to spin slowly in a circle, as images on the front scrim fall with her, over her, and on her, memories and buildings twirling, and finally the sky descends and then ascends to the beyond. (209)

The setting is transformed from the top of a building, looking down on a cityscape, to the effect of flying through time, space, and memories. Several screens (and a fly system) are needed to produce these transformations so that a variety of images can be projected on the screens and on the actress. These visual images, both multimedia and live-action, provide a set of notations from which the audience can examine the memories with the main character as well as to be able to keep up with the shifts between memories. In addition, they indicate that Rosemarie is someone who does not exist in a single plane, but she is able to move between worlds, in an effort to examine and redefine her scars.

Similarly, *Copper Thunderbird* uses the transformation of space as a method of elaborating on Clements' experiments with time. Both multimedia and live-action transformations occur throughout the piece, layering time, location, and dimension as the three Morrisseaus move between them all. These levels result in a hyperrealistic exploration of Morrisseau's life, though the settings materialize in various manners. For instance, some locations begin as more

realistic but are then transformed into something else. In Act 1 Scene 5, the scene begins in a hospital but quickly transforms through multimedia into woodlands and a river, indicating a place between worlds, filled with animals from his paintings. As this is a scene in which young Morrisseau is ill, the changing locations are a metaphor for his journey through his fight with TB. While some scenes have locations that start realistically, there are other scenes that are entirely located in the abstract. Act 2 Scene 1 begins with the three Morrisseaus floating in water. The location goes through several transformations (such as climbing a ladder, being in the headlights of a train, stuck in an unspecified domestic environment), yet none of the locations transform into an identifiable setting. Transformations also occur between scenes in that beds become tents and the space under the bed becomes an entrance; arches of a library transform into Californian hills. These transformations of location provide insecurity within the play in that nothing is what it seems and anything can transform into something different. This uncertainty reflects the conflicts of Morrisseau's life as shown in the narrative and also indicates aspects of Ojibway cosmology in which beings can and do transform.

The Girl Who Swam Forever is perhaps the best example of the use of layered, multi-dimensional transformations of space, though these are generally multimedia manipulations. As the piece takes place at a crossroads in a girl's life as she finds herself pregnant and without a support system, there are many transformations that indicate her past, present, and potential negotiations of the worlds in which she has been placed. As Forever struggles with her situation in

one scene, each viewpoint that she considers is visually represented by an image that is projected onto her. These projections suggest not just how others see her but how she views herself as well. Finally, the forest in which she is confined is transformed by the appearance of a train onto which a sturgeon is also projected (as a layered image); this train is the manifestation of her dream to move forward with her life into a new beginning.

Additionally, as the character is also a representation of a mythological character, the transformations often denote her movement between the “real” and the “myth”. In one scene, Forever and her grandmother are shown under water with sturgeon images projected growing from each character. This transformation, one of the few that does not occur in a memory, is a symbol of Forever’s connection to the mythology as well as her relation to her ancestors; in the scene, Forever is asleep, in an in-between state, as her grandmother imparts some of her knowledge. In all, these transformations of space symbolize Forever’s negotiations of times and worlds, allowing the audience to gain numerous points of understanding in relation to Native worldviews.

Many of Clements’ dramatic structurings are distinctive within Canadian theatre, especially as they reflect her inclusion of Native worldviews. The collisions of stories within a parataxic plot structure, (re)constructions of time, and transformations of space all destabilize audience perceptions of the stories she imparts on the stage. Her experiments with plot, time, and space, as well as with the combination of live action and multimedia performance, provide a layered,

multidimensional theatrical realm, one that is able to both reach and critically distance a variety of audiences.

Alternate Historiographies

Clements' plays often deal with subject matter that is distressing, the more so because these subjects are rarely part of the national Canadian narratives. The people who live within these subjects are obscured to and by the majority in society, creating a cycle of obscurity through continued prejudicial mechanisms. One of the central mechanisms is the production of history, which as conceived as a Western notion, has been explored by Michel de Certeau in his book, *The Writing of History*. He argues, "all historical interpretation depends upon a system of reference" (58). This system of reference is determined by a hegemonic institution; it is hegemonic in that the institution creates and then lives by a set of rules that establishes its place in society, a place that is fortified by its reification of the dominant society. As such, the institution can only allow one mode of production, which restricts the forms that historical writing can take. As an established system, the production of history within an institution in a society constantly reaffirms all aspects of the infrastructure as the individuals who produce the history are situated within the hegemonic institution.

If history is necessarily tied to the institution that produces it, can history be separated from the institution when it must almost by definition reify majoritarian narratives? In other words, can an alternate historiography be offered and recognized within the larger society? I believe it is possible, though it

requires much negotiation of liminal and public spaces. An alternate historiography must work on multiple levels in order to be acknowledged. First, it must refute the mechanisms that produce a mainstream narrative or history of an event (or series of events), and it must provide a different perspective, while offering a new outlook on the previous evidence or introducing other forms of evidence or modes of analysis. An alternate historiography must look for and work within the liminal spaces that are inherent in an institution. After all, a historiographical institution, like a library, a newspaper, or a governor's press staff, necessarily censors evidence that does not support its narratives; therefore, there will always be hidden and obscured compartments for this data, which are precisely the liminal spaces that alternate historians can use. Finally, the alternate historiography must simultaneously and publically challenge the institution and the larger society in order to have the best chance at success, which is the wide-scale recognition of its new contribution. For example, historians with hegemonic institutions take archival evidence away from the primary site to a secondary site (location and cultural) for analysis and compilation; whereas, Native scholars attempt to resituate evidence within tribal understandings and in doing so create alternate historiographies.

Clements provides an alternate historiography from within the theatrical institution in order to subvert and transgress dominant narratives that obscure indigenous stories and peoples. Theatre can be considered both an institution according to de Certeau's criteria, in that productions have a certain level of systemic and societal acceptance, and a liminal space between reality and fiction

(as well as a public space). Clements finds the liminal spaces within the historiographical institution of theatre, using them to explore a Native-centered perspective of current and past events. This recentering of history requires an innovative theatrical structuring to resist Western conventions in order to present her otherwise marginalized stories. In his article that analyzes a production of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, Reid Gilbert offers, “If the goal of a playwright is actually to effect change, it is necessary that the writer derail reception - at the site of primary perception - at least enough to ‘denaturalize’ its hidden assumptions and reveal the ‘differences’ which call for action” (128). Clements’ theatrical structuring offers such a challenge to her audiences by “denaturalizing” common theatrical elements, reflecting both Brechtian and Native sensibilities. Also, in working within the theatrical institution, which is also a public sphere, Clements offers alternate historiographies through her plays, striving to reveal the obscuration mechanisms of prejudice and restriction that restrict indigenous peoples and their stories.

While all of her plays strive to completely redefine the majoritarian narrative of the events through a reexamination of evidence and a structure of Native-centered story, time, and space, I will focus on two, *Copper Thunderbird* and *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, for examples here. These are two of her plays that reconsider real life people and events, though all of her plays could be said to do the same to lesser extents as they draw from Native realities in the past and present.

Copper Thunderbird investigates the prejudice at work in the public (and private) life of Ojibway artist Norval Morrisseau, whose work was considered “primitive” in many of the Canadian narratives. While the mainstream media portrayed Morrisseau as the stereotypical “drunk Indian” – demonstrated in snippets of newscasts within the play, Clements presents an alternate historiographical approach to his life through her theatrical structuring of the play. She rearranges time in order to provide Morrisseau (in the play, the three Morrisseaus) the opportunity to scrutinize and evaluate his own life in a public, albeit completely imaginary, realm. This restructuring of time reveals the struggles behind his actions, only some of which were publically revealed during his lifetime, as well as the survivance techniques Morrisseau employed in his life and in his art. The transformation of space, between and during scenes, was a useful tool in maintaining the audience’s understandings of Morrisseau’s negotiations of multiple worlds as the transformations were able to represent many levels of locations, moods, and perceptions. Additionally, her combination of multimedia and live action transformations reflects a postmodern approach to performance, providing a means to create this example of alternate historiography.

Though the play ends where it began – in 1987 with Morrisseau as an alcoholic and the object of media scrutiny – Clements has Morrisseau move from the rigid views of the media narratives, expressed by the Californication girls, dump bears, and the newscaster, into a transformative space in which he is surrounded by his creations which understand him. I believe by the end of the

play, the audience is able to understand and accept Morrisseau's life as a whole as a result of the revelation of the struggles between worlds. Through a critical distance that is supported by her structural methods, the audience comes to recognize and comprehend a formerly obscured individual's story, thus rendering Clements' alternate historiography successful.

While Morrisseau's story was somewhat visible in the dominant narratives, the murdered women that are the subject of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* were almost completely absented from any narrative; only short paragraphs on their deaths ever found their way into the newspapers. In fact, when the murders were discovered as such after thirty years, the media focus was almost entirely on the killer, a white man, rather than on the Native and Métis women he killed. The obscuration mechanisms employed by the media not only further invisibilized the women, but the media also neglected to reflect on the fact that these women died because similar prejudicial structures caused them to be overlooked in society, or their own responsibility in perpetuating a cycle of obscurity. Due to their places in society, not only were the women disregarded in life and in death, but there is also no way to know for sure how many women this serial killer almost and/or did kill but who have remained unreported or under-documented.

In this play, Clements works to reveal not just the societal mechanisms that invisibilized these women but also to demonstrate the culpability of the law enforcement agencies, coroner's office, and the media who allowed this serial killer to continue through ignoring the many signs over thirty years. In order to

do so, she reconstructs time and creates a parataxic plot structure in order to allow all of the women to exist simultaneously, which gives their stories more of a presence and allows the women themselves a voice in their own stories. These structural methods reinforce Native understandings of time and worldviews. Her exposure of these stories through an innovative lens also offer an alternate historiography through which the audience (at the time, local, but now, international through the adaptation of the play into a film) comes to understand the lives of these women as well as the labeling obscuration mechanisms that restrict their lives (and deaths).

To establish an alternate historiography, Clements manipulates the liminal spaces within the theatrical institution to reach both elite and popular audiences. Within these spheres, she uses structurings of plot, time, and space to present Native-centered perspectives of historical events, which are explored through the viewpoint of Native and Métis individuals. Within the theatrical realm, both a public sphere and a societal institution, Clements can and does seek to effect change for these obscured individuals by persuading all audiences to critically reexamine events through the lens she provides.

Conclusion

The plays by Marie Clements are layered and multi-dimensional, reflecting the complications and tensions inherent in her personal background while also privileging complex Native worldviews within the theatrical sphere of Canadian society. She provides an alternate historiography as a new

methodological approach to past and current events, recentering the Native presence within the Canadian national narratives. In doing so, she pushes the boundaries of theatre through her innovative structuring of challenging stories, ones that reveal the societal mechanisms at work to restrict and continue the cycle of oppression in the lives of obscured individuals.

Her theatrical structuring includes new examinations of storying, particularly in regard to multiple plotlines, how time is viewed and constructed within the theatrical realm, and how spaces can transform to reflect multiple dimensions and meanings. These transformations can happen visually through the postmodern combination of live action and multimedia arrangements, or through the plot, in which scars from societal prejudice are redefined in order to remove them as representations of invisibility and reposition the scars as positive tools for moving forward and gaining agency and power. By focusing on the stories of obscured individuals, Clements broadens the concept of indigeneity while providing a public, and very visible, platform for her attempt to lessen the various obscuration mechanisms in society. Through her plays, both in plot and structure, Clements offers the possibility of effecting change while presenting her alternate historiography.

CHAPTER 5

FURTHER THOUGHTS

Theatre that focuses on mixed heritage themes – particularly that which is created by and for peoples of mixed heritages – is deep and wide ranging because of the variety of cross-cultural experiences by people of many, often complex, identities that result from inhabiting spaces between borders of cultures. In order to articulate some of the previously absented stories of peoples of mixed heritage, Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, Diane Glancy, and Marie Clements have all had to confront many conventions of Western theatre, and in doing so, they have recentered indigenous worldviews while pushing the boundaries of Native, mixed heritage, and Western theatre.

Additionally, the playwrights have intervened in many discourses through their integrated approaches. For instance, the notions of various borders in North America, how they are performed, and how they affect identities are issues that are developed within many of these plays; they move border discourses away from the hyper-politicized México/US border, though the Colorado sisters do also question that border, in order to examine the implications of tribal national borders within other national borders. To explore these discourses and stories, the playwrights have created innovative approaches in which they collide storied and historical understandings of events, pointing to the negotiations and interrogations of multiple worlds by many peoples of mixed heritage. They also challenge Western notions of time and corporeality by incorporating manipulations of circular time/space and transformations

of characters and places, while foregrounding tribal worldviews in which multiple planes of existence are intertwined.

These playwrights have called into question the necessity, from a Western standpoint, of binary systems, instead demonstrating the diversity of voices within Native and mixed heritage communities, which is especially apparent in their range of representations of identities and spiritualities. I point to the multivocality of this subset of Native theatre both directly and indirectly, through the multiple voices represented within the plays but also through the playwrights' voices that are a portion of larger communities. Multivocality is probably Native and mixed heritage theatre's greatest strength, but at the same time, because of its infinite variety, it is also difficult to categorize within current hegemonic academic discourses. In the dissertation, I do not just look for commonalities among playwrights and subjects, but I attempt to revel in the diversity of their assorted perspectives, interrogating three very different points of focus that represent some of the possible variations within the North American geographic area. I specifically chose the Colorado sisters, Glancy, and Clements as the center of analysis because they are partially representative of the range of peoples with mixed heritages on Turtle Island, and as such, they are well positioned to both delve into and bridge cultural divides between and within communities. Their positionalities reflect the complex identities forged by people between cultures as well as the multitude of discourses with which they engage as a result of their places within numerous communities. However, this is not to say that the works of these playwrights fully summarize the experiences and understandings of all peoples of mixed heritages in Turtle Island.

Themes that bear further examination in these and other plays by mixed heritage playwrights include, among others, the following: healing in response to acts of violence, humor, multilinguality, and audience reception. The role of Native theatre as a strategy in healing tribal communities is an emergent theme currently in the field of Native American performance/theatre studies. However, the potential of healing, particularly in response to acts of violence, within mixed heritage theatre should also garner attention as this theatre often focuses on subjects and peoples often overlooked by multiple communities. Likewise, the use of humor within Native theatre has been approached by Drew Hayden Taylor; how (and if) humor can be used as a bridge between communities has yet to be explored. Questions of bi- and multi-linguality within the theatrical realm have largely been focused on colonizing languages. The inclusion of indigenous languages would certainly open up questions of community engagement and intersectional audience reception. I would also like to examine the issues surrounding indigenous stories that are translated into colonizing language(s) that do not have the cultural codes or implications of the indigenous languages.

Throughout the dissertation, I point to areas in which there are potentials for cross-cultural dialogues offered by the playwrights. While it was not a focus of my dissertation, the facilitation of dialogues across cultures and communities through theatre could be argued as an important aspect of theatre that focuses on *mestizo*, *Mixed Blood*, and *Métis* subjects as these issues already bridge multiple communities and borders. Which audiences would be engaged by these plays and

the efficacy of these cross-cultural dialogues resulting from this style of theatre would certainly be an interesting venue for future research in this field.

Another area that I would like to delve would be structuring within the theatrical realm in an effort to move towards a theory of alternate structures. The main challenge would be how to open up the dialogues surrounding structure without being reductive. Multivocality will likely be the key to this quandary. In this dissertation, I address how the Colorado sisters, Glancy, and Clements create alternate methods of theatrical structuring. However, in order to create a more encompassing theory, I would need to be more inclusive of additional plays and writers. If the project is to truly be multivocal, it is imperative that I incorporate the playwrights' voices into the analysis – not just through the plays, but also through interviews and other materials – in order to allow this community of playwrights to voice their interpretations as well.

In her *Indigenous Storywork*, Jo-Ann Archibald writes, “If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibly to others in order for this knowledge, and its power, to continue” (Archibald 3). Through the process of this dissertation, I have learned that I could never learn all there is to know, nor should I be able to as somewhat of an outsider. However, I have tried to respect the knowledges about which I have learned, and I hope to be able to share my understanding with others in order to continue the process of culture and knowledge transmission.

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209

209

209