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Native American Theatre, Playwrights & Spirit of Place

A Thesis Presented

By

Sonia Elizabeth Kircher

To

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My thesis and research focuses on Native American Theatre, playwrights and performance in the Americas. I am interested in the history of Indigenous performance as it pertains to spirit of place, eco-criticism, cultural ecology, colonization, Native American philosophy and critical race theory. I explore how Native American playwrights and performers have used dramatic literature and performance as a vehicle for self-expression, determination and identity. Also, how Native American theatre has been used as a platform to rise above oppressive political and/or governmental policies. My exploration of Native American theater focuses primarily on an Indigenous worldview, as seen through the lens of the artists, performers, playwrights and directors who have contributed to this emerging and controversial art form.

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INTRODUCTION

I think of that mountain called Tsee Ligai Dah Sidile (White Mountains Lie Above in a Compact Cluster) as if it were my maternal grandmother. I recall stories of how it once was at that mountain. The stories told to me were like arrows. Elsewhere, hearing that mountain's name, I see it. Its name is like a picture. Stories go to work on you like arrows. Stories make you live right. Stories make you replace yourself. (Benson Lewis, Western Apache, age 64, 1979) (Basso 38)

Oral history and/or historical tales, which have a connection to specific land sites and places, have the potential to leave emotional and mental wounds. From the Western Apache perspective, listening to these stories is like being injured by an arrow, the wound being deep and penetrating. This experience is essential, because in this context, the process of *replacing oneself* occurs. The act of replacing oneself, is an act of self examination and reflection. Experiencing and purging oneself of emotions such as anguish, guilt and/or shame is necessary so that the process of healing can begin. In essence, replacing oneself is foundational to the healing process and this is widely understood from the Indigenous perspective as only being possible through *spirit of place* and *storytelling*. The very act of storytelling (i.e. oral history, historical tales) has the power to change individuals, to connect people with places and the historical landscapes from where their ancestral tribal identity emerged. *Spirit of Place*, according to the Western Apache and the predominant Indigenous philosophy and worldview, perceives the physical landscape, the mountains, red canyons, valleys and arroyos as integral members of their tribal community. These places have symbolic meanings and are very much a part of the tribe's origins and self-identity. The land has as much significance to a tribal community as one's own grandmother, mother, father, uncle, cousin and/or any other relation. According to the Indigenous worldview, stories that come from particular landscapes and locations pursue the individual (like an arrow) and have the power to change an individual and make one live right. This Native American concept of living right requires constant diligence. With time, old wounds heal, and scars from those arrows (i.e. historical stories) begin to fade. That is why it is necessary to keep retelling these stories in Native culture, so that they, as a people, can continue the healing process generation after generation. Nick Thompson, a member

of the Western Apache tribal community of Cibecue shared the following observation with ethnographer and author Keith H. Basso, “Grandmothers and uncles must perish, but the landscape endures,”... “The land,”... “looks after us. The land keeps badness away” (61).

A tribe’s identity, traditions and culture are specifically associated with geographic locations as told through historical tales. It is widely understood and believed amongst Native American communities, particularly the Western Apache, that when one fails to remember place names, one forgets how to be strong. Land, language and spirit of place have power, and that power is interwoven in the stories. It is in the ritual of storytelling, and through the act of listening that the tribal member remembers who they are and most importantly, how to live right according to their particular tribal affiliation.

It is not very difficult to understand why Native Americans who lost connections to land and place through colonization, western expansion and the Indian Removal Act, forgot who they were, and/or how to be strong. The removal of Native Americans from land bases that were integral and inherent to their traditional beliefs and way of life was devastating to entire tribal communities. In 1828, two years prior to passing the Indian Removal Act, a bill was passed denying Indians the right to testify against whites in court. This measure denied Native Americans their legal rights and allowed white settlers to seize Indian lands at will. Congress also passed laws and edicts intended to prevent Native Americans from speaking in their Native languages, practicing their cultural traditions (including dance ceremonies) and celebrating their religious beliefs. So much of what happened to Native American tribes during America’s westward expansion and the confiscation of Indian territories impacted and wounded the entire structure and foundation of what was integral to Native identity. Without the land and/or language to tell their stories, socially unacceptable behaviors became rampant and began to fracture the fabric of not only tribal identity, but also the very core of who they were as a people. Thus individuals within communities began to experience a sense of isolation. Due to the terms of a Peace Policy issued by President Ulysses Grant in 1869, Native American children were forced by the U.S. government to leave home and were sent to boarding schools. Many Native American children died during this time in U.S. history when federal educational policy and boarding schools were functioning under the Carlisle Industrial School philosophy whose

mission statement was, “Kill the Indian to Save the Man.” The Native American children who did survive the boarding school experience, upon reaching the age of eighteen, were sent back to their reservations. They could no longer speak their languages, and in many cases, did not want to, because of shame arising from their newly formed identity and assimilation. They were not recognizable to the elders, their parents and their communities, and they were not accepted outside of the reservations because they were seen as Indians and were non-whites. This is when the journey of the socially delinquent and/or wounded interior of many Native Americans began. They were displaced from their home and land base, isolated from their tribal communities, and returned to the reservation filled with self-loathing and shame due to an assimilation policy whose basic tenet was to abolish the perspective and worldview of the Indian. When students from boarding schools returned home to the *Stony Tribe* of Canada they were known as *aintsikh usombe*, “*the lost people*.”

Native Americans who were drafted to fight American wars returned back home only to discover that they were still not welcomed by neighboring communities near their reservation and because they were Indian, they were not going to be given any viable opportunities to work. Due to poverty, hopelessness and desperation, many Native people turned to alcohol and drugs. Currently in the United States, the highest number of suicide rates occurs amongst Native American children. Also, domestic violence on reservations is amongst the highest in the nation as well as deaths related or due to alcoholism. It is primarily from these experiences that Native American theatre arose, from the ashes, like a ghost awakened. It is in self-revelation, self-determination, the revival of tribal traditions, storytelling, Indigenous thought and perspective, that is the catalyst from where I believe Native American playwriting and theater emerges.

Chapter 1

NATIVE AMERICAN THEATRE, COMMUNITY & CREATION

For many Native American directors and practitioners, Native American theater should not be defined or constricted by traditional western forms, dramatic criticism and/or theories. According to Raven Chacon, a Native American composer and director from California, Native American theater is an emerging art form that's need to be developed and designed through an indigenous lens and perspective. As a genre, it should be approached outside of the relative constraints of a western perspective and as an Indigenous art form it should never comply, be theorized and/or be defined as such. It is a non-linear theatrical expression that is meant to be experienced, expressed, crafted, performed and created by Indigenous people who share this unifying history of colonization, oppression and identity with spirit of place (Chacon).

Native American writers and playwrights such as Hortensia Colorado and Daystar/Rosalie M. Jones express a similar worldview, and it is the foundation from which Native American Theatre identifies itself and emerges. Native American playwrights tell their stories through the lens of an Indigenous perspective which primarily speaks of having to walk in two oppositional worlds.

Native American authors such as Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), Simon Ortiz (Acoma), Joy Harjo, (Creek), and cultural anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz (San Juan Pueblo), have written about the moral dimensions of Native American conceptions of the land. N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) a Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, poet and playwright who lives in Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico addressed the subject in an essay entitled, "Native American Attitudes to the Environment."

"You cannot understand how the Indian thinks of himself in relation to the world around him unless you understand his conception of what is appropriate; particularly what is morally appropriate within the context of that relationship..."(1974:82)

"The Native American ethic with respect to the physical world is a matter of reciprocal appropriation: appropriations in which man invests himself in the landscape, and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience" (Basso 64).

Leslie Marmon Silko, a poet and novelist from Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, stated the following while discussing Pueblo identity, narratives and their relation to the land:

The stories cannot be separated from geographical locations, from actual physical places within the land...and the stories are so much a part of these places that it is almost impossible for future generations to lose the stories because there are so many imposing geological elements...you cannot live in that land without asking or looking at or noticing a boulder or rock. And there's always a story (64).

From this catalyst of ideas, experiences and Indigenous philosophy are the tenets and landmarks of the progression of Native American Theater in the Americas. The playwrights tell their stories through the lens of an Indigenous world perspective which primarily speaks of having to walk in two oppositional worlds.

A devised theatrical piece entitled; *The Creation*, is defined from a western perspective, as an oral myth as experienced through the art of storytelling. Although not written in play form, by the storyteller, the performance did occur and was documented in ethnographic records. In the early 20th century, ethnographers began to record and document indigenous oral stories and myths, this included cultural representations such as dance and what was perceived as performance, on text. The role of performance and the power of the word in storytelling is an Indigenous art form fully developed through oral traditions of the tribe. In the ethnographic document, Native languages were translated into English, and the performance was documented as a cultural archive on text. A single performance and/or oral story were reshaped by non-indigenous editors. Oral traditions of indigenous people were documented as cultural artifacts (Elder & Wong 3).

The Creation is an anonymous story that comes from the Mohawk tribe of Northeastern United States and Southeastern Canada. The oral story conveys an indigenous ideology, and what is dominant in Iroquois thought, that recognizes and includes nature and all living inhabitants (winged ones, plants, animals and other natural features of the environment) within human ethical circles. In nearly all Native creation stories, animals and plant persons existed before human persons, and because of this, these relatives (though non-human) are perceived as elders and guides. Within this context, they have as much influence on Native American thought and perspective as human elders do. Although many non-native persons, have a general understanding of indigenous philosophy, that is, the interconnected relationship between Native persons and nature, this relationship is much more evolved than most people can imagine.

The relationship between traditional Native Americans and their natural environment is inclusive; all living creatures (including plant life/non-humans/land) have purpose and is necessary to maintain proper balance. This inclusivity (all my relations) is a concept that is unfamiliar and is not recognized and/or valued in western thought. This is due primarily to the influence of Aristotelian thought and perspective on what determines and defines members of a community. Community, and/or state, as clearly defined by Aristotle's political and ethical theory, is made up entirely of human beings (Wildcat 94).

Traditional Native thought agrees with Aristotle's linkage between an individual's ethical development and one's community. However, unlike Aristotle's treatment of the "state" or community which consists exclusively of human beings, traditional native thinkers include as part of their political communities many other – than- human persons, including persons that swim, winged persons, four legged persons, and so on. In short, while Western thought, following Aristotle's lead defines politics and ethics as exclusively human issues and endeavors, Native thought and, more importantly, practices have defined politics and ethics as involving a much broader concept of persons. This point is obvious in the stories, oral traditions, and ceremonies and social life of Native peoples (93).

In the earliest encounters between the French Jesuit priests and the Iroquois people, the French Jesuits documented their perception of Iroquoian thought and belief system. In these documents (historical archives) Jesuit priests wrote that the Iroquoian conception and belief of what constituted a person was altered and distorted. To the Iroquois, it was not their conception of personhood that was distorted, it was the Jesuit priests and the western perception of what constituted a person that was disordered (93).

This Iroquois and predominant indigenous perception of community and "all my relations," is a very traditional concept and is the basis for an ethical, implicit environmental ethos. This fundamentally alters the way the traditional Native person relates, lives and places themselves within their environment and within the context of the earth. This ancient, yet traditional Native thought and idea, is the foundation and basis of an environmental ethos. This ethos requires one to speak of a moral sphere that goes beyond merely thinking that morality is the relationship you and I have as human beings. Morality and politics have to do with a reality that involves relationships we have with other-than- human persons of the biosphere and the ecology we

(human beings) are a part of (93). Onondaga elder Oren Lyons remarked during the twenty-fifth-anniversary Earth day Celebration in Washington D.C.: “We don’t call a tree a resource, we don’t call a fish a resource. We don’t call a bison a resource. We call them our relatives. But the general population uses the term resources, so you want to be careful of that term –resources for just you?” (94).

The *Creation Story*, is an Iroquoian concept of the interdependency of these relationships, how to acquire and seek out the greatest good, not just for yourself, but for the entire community (all our relations). Summarized by John Mohawk, in “Animal Natives Right to Survive,” moral and political ethics can only be accomplished when we consider and act from a moral compass that respects “all the members,” that make up the fabric of our community, the *summum bonum* (97).

Within the Mohawk *Creation Story* were artistic symbols and/or drawings identifying and relaying the conceptual idea of each passage. The symbols were an artistic representation of the story that was being conveyed, similar to petroglyphs discovered on boulders and large rock formations found in the state of New Mexico. For example, the symbol of a carved serpent found in the Jackpile uranium mine near Paguate, one of seven villages on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico, had significant meaning and prophetic ramifications for the Indigenous people who lived there. The significance of the large serpent; *Ma ah shra true ee* carved onto stone, is believed to be a messenger from the spirit world, announcing changes to come:

Ma ah shra true ee is the great serpent the sacred messenger spirit from the Fourth World below. He came to live at the beautiful Lake, Kawaik, that was once near Laguna village. But neighbors got jealous. They came one night and broke open the lake so all the water was lost. The giant snake went away after that. He has never been seen since. That was the great misfortune for us, the Kawaiikmeh, at Old Laguna (Silko 127).

The Indigenous people who created the petroglyphs, were also the originators and conveyers of the oral narratives. They perceived themselves to be as much a part of the landscape as the rocks, the clouds, the earth, canyon and sky. They were not separate from the landscape they perceived, rather they were very much a part of it and recognized that they too had an

interrelationship with all things, and were in fact a part of the landscape that they surveyed (27). “Human identity,” from the Pueblo perspective, “is linked with all elements of creation through the clan; you might belong to...” whether that is the Sun, Lizard, Corn or Clay Clan (28).

According to the ancient Pueblo worldview, the land “could not be improved upon.” The ancient people “did not presume to tamper with what already had been created” (28).

“Pictographs and petroglyphs of constellations or elk or antelope draw their magic in part from the process wherein the focus of all prayer and concentration is upon the thing itself,”... (28, 29). “Interrelationships in the Pueblo landscape are complex and fragile.” That is why the ancient Pueblo people gave them much attention. Their very survival depended upon this close relationship, this maintenance of balance and harmony with all things in their landscape (animate and inanimate) that surrounded them (29).

The ability to transmit and relay stories, was not only for the preservation of culture and tradition, but it was also a way of surviving in very harsh climates and conditions. Survival depended not only upon the sky watchers, the people who watched the sky and transmitted that information to the communities, but also the conveyance of those stories so that future generations can learn from the previous ones. The Pueblo culture of sky watchers is only surpassed by the Mayan and Incan cultures. This Pueblo oral tradition and narrative was passed on from generation to generation for thousands of years, and none of it was ever recorded in writing. The only written form or documentation is the symbols and carvings on stones and upon boulders (30).

“The ancient Pueblo vision of the world was inclusive. The impulse was to leave nothing out.”... Even today stories about “Creation and Emergence of human beings and animals into this world continue to be retold each year for four days and four nights during the winter solstice. The *hummah-hah* stories related events from the time long ago when human beings were still able to communicate with animals and other living things”.... Ancient Pueblo people were instinctively able to sort events and details into narrative structures. “Everything became a story.” (31)

Everyone in the community was expected to listen to and retell a story. Even if it was just a segment of the story, it was a traditional requirement of both the young and the elderly (31).

Interpreting written symbols through physical reenactment and performance was also the kernel, the impetus for *Coyote in the Outer World*. This devised Native American production, directed by Raven Chacon at the University of New Mexico, wrestled with the Indigenous concept of having to walk in two oppositional worlds. One world represents spirit, Indigenous culture and place, the other represents the constructed western world with whom they need to engage and participate with, in order to ensure their survival. The premise of story was told and examined through symbols and images. From these images and symbols, the Native performers (including myself) were given a period of collective time to construct and improvise a landscape, a sound board of sounds and musical expressions. The devised work was crafted in layers. It encompassed and included Native dance, film projections, panels and images, physical movement, music, including drums and Native American flute. Though it had the semblance of a choreographed structure, the symbols being the blue print from which the production emerged, was in its conception, non-linear and non-western. The entire performance was done primarily in the dark, with very little lighting on stage. According to the director, his concept and vision of *Coyote in the Outer World* was a representation of Native American performance in direct opposition to westernized theater.

Similarly, *The Creation Story*, of the Mohawk (though linear) used similar images and symbols to relay their story. When I looked upon those images, I was reminded immediately of my personal experience as an artist working in Indigenous theater and performance at the University of New Mexico.

Every tribal nation generally has or had a creation story. It is through the creation story that all life and the beginnings of tribal identity and how it relates *to spirit of place* begins. It is the beginning and place where myths unfold and stories emerge. Like in the book of Genesis, these creation stories may be perceived as myth to some and truth to others. The Mohawks creation story is just as pivotal and foundational to their belief system as the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden is to the Christian Scriptures and Judeo-Christian Religion.

Chapter 2

PLAYWRIGHTS, PERFORMANCE, LANGUAGE & PLACE

Mud Swallow is one of many oral stories and/ or narratives preserved and shared by Vi Hilbert, an elder from the *Upper Skagit Tribe* of Washington State. She was the last person, and consequently, the last elder from her tribe, who could still speak Lushootseed, the tribal language of her people. I met her at the *Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian* in Lower Manhattan, where she was talking about the collaborative work she was doing with the museum in order to preserve her tribe's stories in Lushootseed (with a translation in English). Her hope was that a future generation could once again learn the language and continue their tribal stories and traditions. Vi Hilbert was concerned that after she passed on, all that would be left to tell the stories of her people would be that soundtrack recorded on March 29, 1991, in Seattle, Washington.

I recently heard of her passing from a presenter at the 2012 Eco-Drama Conference, at Carnegie Mellon University. I'm not certain whether anyone in her tribe, picked up the torch that Vi Hilbert carried, to learn the Lushootseed language in order to keep the oral stories and traditions of her people alive for future generations. One can only hope that this did happen before she passed away and a new generation is now sharing these stories with their children.

While I was teaching on the Jemez Reservation, I decided to take one of these oral narratives, *Mud Swallow*, and adapt it into a performance piece for children. Once the story was adapted as a theatrical text, I was able to use the play within my classroom. The story unfolds through the voice of a narrator. There is also a cast of major and minor characters, including the Creator, a diverse variety of birds (including raptors), and the main character, the protagonist, Mud Swallow. The moral of the story is conveyed through the trials and errors, and poor choices made by Mud Swallow. The lesson and objective of the story, and what was of most value to the teacher, as well as the children who were dramatizing and reenacting the play, was the significance, and importance placed upon the art of listening. There were great consequences that Mud Swallow had to endure, because he failed to listen to the creator's instructions. These consequences would not only impact Mud Swallow during the course of his lifetime, but also the many generations that were to come after him.

N. Scott Momaday is an author who lives in the Jemez Pueblo community and has won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction with his first novel, *House Made of Dawn* in 1969. His book, *In the Bear's House* includes a play about a Bear named *Urset* who has a dialogue with the Creator referred to as *Yahweh*. The play, *The Bear – God Dialogues* explores the function of bear from a Native American ideology and perspective. *Prayer, Dreams, Evolution and Story* are titles used to define the dialogue, while spirit of place, the wilderness, resonates and reflects the thought. The following dialogue is Urset's description of the creek he walks besides and listens to:

“*Frijoles Creek*, runs southwards through splinters of sunlight and patterns of shade. It runs without urgency, as I walk ...like the steady procession of the pilgrims of *Chimayo*, in our natures and in one nature....I hear among the stony churns of the creek words that I heard from an old man when I was young...It is the first of all mornings and it is unspeakably old” (Momaday 27).

Frijoles Creek flows from Frijoles Canyon in New Mexico, passing 700 year old Pre-Columbian ruins, while *Chimayo* is a place of spiritual significance and the destination of numerous pilgrims who travel there on Good Friday to be healed by the sacred Native soil.

In N. Scott Momaday's introduction, he states, “I am less interested in defining the being of Bear than in trying to understand something about the spirit of wilderness, of which the bear is a particular expression”.... “If you look at him very closely and long enough, you will see the mountains on the other side. Bear is a template of the wilderness” (9).

N. Scott Momaday's “Indian name is Tsoai-talee, which in Kiowa means, “Rock – tree boy.” *Tsoai*, “Rock tree,” is Devils Tower in Wyoming.” He states that since he was given his name, a name conferred upon him as an infant, he has possessed the Bear's Spirit. According to the Kiowa people, “Bear is the animal representation of the wilderness” (9).

“Something in me hungers for wild mountains and rivers and plains. I love to be on Bear's ground, to listen to that old guttural music under his breath, to know only that he is near. And Bear is welcome in my dreams, for in that cave of sleep I am at home to Bear” (11).

I was a member on the *Native American Writers Circle* founded by author Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo). During that time, Native American artists and writers would gather monthly at

The American Indian Community House (AICH) located in Manhattan to share artistic work.

There was a public reading at AICH, where members of the Native American Writer's Circle were invited to share excerpts from their canon of creative writing and dramatic literature for an audience. The reading was filmed and well attended. The presenters included Elvira and Hortencia Colorado, founders of *Coatlicue Theatre Company* and members of *Spiderwoman Theater*. The Colorado Sisters are playwrights, Chicimec Otomi Storytellers, poets, theater artists and members of the *Danza Mexica Cetiliztli New York Zapatistas* (Hemispheric Institute). They are also community activists, and their theatrical plays and productions address social, political and cultural issues that impact Native American communities. Due to their extensive activism and educational intervention in urban Native American communities, (specifically as it pertains to the survival of Indigenous women) they are recipients of the *Ingrid Washinawatok Community Activism Award*. Ingrid Washinawatok; (*Opeqtaw-Matamoh/Flying Eagle Woman*) was an internationally known member of the Menominee Nation of upper Wisconsin, a delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and Chair for International Indigenous Treaties. She was kidnapped and murdered (along with two other delegates sent by the United Nations) by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia for trying to establish a traditional school that would support the preservation of culture and language of the Uwa people. She was also trying to defend their ancestral lands against oil exploitation by Occidental Petroleum.

The dramatization of Hortencia and Elvira's creative work was highly evocative, and explosive. The heightened emotional subtext of the material and the deep focused intensity and passion in which they portrayed their work was for the audience members and the panel, quite electrifying. This wasn't simply a poetry reading, it was a theatrical event. They included physical movement that put the words and story into action, while using the full range of their emotional life and speech/vocal capacity. The dramatization of their reading was staged as a performance piece, but was a full embodied personification of the spoken word.

The play, *Blood Speaks* (1992), is a creation story written by Elvira and Hortencia Colorado. Within the script, words had a pulsating rhythm and a sense of urgency. The subtext that drove the action forward was this connection to spirit of place (Mexico), and identity (Aztec, Spanish ancestry). The phrases and words, repeated over and over again throughout the script, described

physical manifestations of creation, yet were spiritual in its context. The words, that resonated throughout the play, like the pulsating rhythm of a drum, or a vivid and active stroke of an artist's brush, were, "Red dust, now red clay, red, red blood, red clay, red, red blood, red clay" (Colorado 82).

Throughout the play, and within the poetry and rhythm of these visceral images, certain metaphors, words and/or ideas of place and story (that are in essence communal) kept coming to the surface that are to Indigenous persons, universally understood and recognizable. This is a play about one's search for authentic identity, the loss of land, language and sacred indigenous sites due to colonization.

In the section, *America the Beautiful*, the character, SONI sings, "Oh Beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain, For Purple Mountain Majesty, Above the Fruited...*(Spoken)* Fruit...I picked the fruit that you eat. ...I cut the fruit. For what? The blood on my hands ("Oh Beautiful," is sung under dialogue). The blood on the fruit. For the blood on the earth. Who am I? Who am I? Your mother is Spanish from Spain. No I am Aztec. I am Mayan. I am proud. Mexican-American. Mexican-American..." (88).

Blood Speaks is about self discovery, about the reawakening and questioning of Indigenous people of Mexico, in particular the children, whose parents, because of the desire to find work relocate here in the United States. In the artists' personal statement, they speak about their personal experience with racism, and the family's denial about their Indian heritage. Being of Quechua descent, I am familiar with these experiences. In South America, especially in urban areas and highly populated cities, there is a pervasive level of denial and unspoken shame attributed to being of Indigenous descent. Unfortunately, these are the ramifications, the politics of color that still exists in the Americas today.

I believe this internal conflict and wounded consciousness comes from a collective memory, where indigenous tribes and/or persons, (particularly of the Americas) were so oppressed, that they were not even given the status of being recognized as a human being. Power, colonization and politics created the racial divide between those who have and those who would be denied the status of being a person. By denying that a Native person was actually a human, oppressors-

colonizers could do to them whatever they willed, including taking land, (which was in actuality the main reason why Native Americans were denied the status of being recognized as human). In the eyes of their colonizers, they were on the same level as animals, not in the context of how Native American thought and ideology perceived animals (as an integral and necessary part of their community) rather in the same way as the land is perceived, that is something to be subdued and subjugated. As a result, Native American persons could be treated and dealt with in whatever way the colonizers desired with no penalty and/or consequence. It is the suffering and the mass oppression of Native people that created this racial divide and complex internalization of denial and shame specifically as it pertains to Indigenous ancestry or heritage.

Blood Speaks is a theatrical response to that question about Indigenous identity, denial of who one is, and the ramification and continuum of shame, generation after generation. The theatrical piece resonates with oral traditions from Mexico. It is collaboration with three Native women who live in Oaxaca, a village the Colorado sisters travelled to in order to create and write this play. Juana Vasquez, a Zapotec Native woman from Yalalag, opened her home to them and shared her stories. The production of *Blood Speaks* uses film and images interspersed in the background showing community life, including morning sounds and vocables overlaid in the dramatic stories. There are three languages spoken and sung within the play including Zapotec, Spanish and English (80).

Open Wounds on Tlalteuctli, addresses the urgency and conflict between the polarized ideologies that shatter the balance of the earth and the eco-system that so many tribal communities still depend on for their cultural identity and survival. Written by the Colorado sisters and performed at the *American Indian Community House* in New York City and at the New World Theater in Amherst, Massachusetts, this play examines the relationship between the abuse of women and the desecration of the earth. It speaks about the physical, spiritual, cultural and ecological oppression of women, and how in the Indigenous worldview and thought, what is done to the land, whether that be drilling, fracturing, waste disposal, desecration, mining, dumping, exploding, chemical and/or aerial spraying, forest removal and/or destruction, eventually finds its way to us (80).

According to Leslie Marmon Silko, destruction of place, eventually leads to the destruction of ourselves. Whatever violence is done to sacred places and/or spirit of the earth (land, mountains, water, canyons, etc.) will resonate and beget violence, a repercussion, a domino effect, here within our own communities. In her narrative; *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, she discusses how a mine was drilled for uranium on the Laguna Pueblo Reservation. The drilling occurred near a sacred site, a cave, where an image of a serpent significant to the oral traditions of her people suddenly appeared (Silko 126). Shortly thereafter, a teenager from her tribe, without any history of mental illness, went into his friend's home and murdered two people by hacking them to pieces. When asked afterwards why he did it. He had no response, other than that he felt compelled to do it. Leslie Marmon Silko believed, (as did many other people from her tribal community) that this murder that had taken place was a direct result of the spirit of violence that was now occurring (in the way of drilling and mining) on their sacred places on their land (131).

“Perhaps comprehension need not come from obvious catastrophes, like the destruction of the ozone layer, but more through subtle indications, like a stone snake come to remind us that violence in the Americas-against ourselves and one another-can run as deep, but only as deep, as the deepest shafts with which humankind has pierced the earth” (132).

During the time I was a member of the Native American Writer's Circle, many renowned playwrights, activists, poets and screenwriters were actively involved in the American Indian Community House by giving lectures, poetry readings, producing plays and musical performances and sharing artistic work. On one occasion, Sherman Alexi, author and screenwriter of *Smoke Signals*, (a screenplay and film that was developed at the Screenwriters Lab Sun Dance Institute in 1997 and an adaptation of the *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*) presented a reading of his new work for our community.

Whether it be the poet and writer; Simon Ortiz, the playwrights and performers; the Colorado Sisters and Spider Woman Theatre, actor/ activist; John Trudell, screen and fiction writer; Sherman Alexi, Mohawk Chief, lecturer and Indigenous cultural educator; Tom Porter, they still shared a unifying theme that connected them to each other and to the community at the American Indian Community House; that universal theme was spirit of place. That was the thread that

united us to each other, though differing in language, tribal affiliations and regional culture. Though all gathered in New York City, their ancestral home was somewhere else and that was where their heart was, and it was the spirit of the land and the stories of their ancestors and people that continued to feed and inspire them.

Chapter 3

NATIVE AMERICAN DANCE, THEATER & CEREMONY

No Home But the Heart, “*An Assembly of Memories*” is written by playwright Daystar/Rosalie M. Jones. Born on the Black Foot Reservation in Montana with *Pembina Chippewa* ancestry on her mother’s side, she is a Native American artist who entered the theatrical world with an ideological framework that places land and home at the heart of her story. Home (spirit of place) is a main character and is represented as such in the design of the stage. As a theater artist she describes herself primarily as a dancer and choreographer. *No Home But the Heart*, is a dramatized story, a recollection of memories, that interweave choreographed Native American dance within the script. However, due to the nature and formulation of the play structure, dance, (specifically her choreography) could not be published within her script. The playwright expressed hope to change that with this play (Daystar 78).

Being that dance is so integral to Native American tradition, spirituality, community and ceremonial practices. From a Native perspective, dance completes the story and dance is integral to the life and experience of what it means to be an indigenous person of the Americas. So much history and stories, in essence, their oral tradition and most sacred beliefs unfold in the arena of the dance. From experience, while living in New Mexico, ceremony, prayer and feast days were initiated when the singer and dancers began to chant and dance their prayers generally at the rising of the sun. It was considered complete when the dancing was done, however, the communal act of gathering and eating was also integral to the ceremony and celebration of a significant feast day. Prayers done in the Kiva were private and separate and were not open to the public. The dance and music however, was the heart beat, the pulsating focus of the activity throughout the festivities of a traditional Feast Day.

No Home but the Heart, is a written choreographed performance that calls attention to the early reservation years and experience when Native peoples (particularly in the Plains) lost their homelands and were forbidden from practicing and engaging in religious ceremonies such as the Sun Dance and/or the Ghost Dance. The play, through dialogue and choreographed dance, weaves the story through the timeline of the early reservation years to the tribal renaissance of the 1960’s. The playwright expresses in her personal statement that she reached a certain point

in her life, shortly after her mother's death in 1987, where she felt compelled to tell her own story. That she would write, create and choreograph a performance piece that would address the generations of her ancestors that had to bear the burden of acculturation. "That story is the story of our immediate mothers and fathers, and grandmothers and grandfathers. I have used my own family to begin telling those stories" (Daystar 78).

The Setting is described as a "time period of the (dance-drama) that takes place within historical times from the 1800's to the present. However, there are references to spiritual events that take place outside, and beyond, historical time" (79). Panels of photographs are used on the stage of realistic drawings or appropriate photos of grandmothers – ancestors. There are four rocks placed on the ground (stage) which represent the presence of the earth. The dance-drama unfolds within the circle of the earth and relies heavily on choreographed movements of various women characters (80).

The play comes from the stories that Rosalie/Daystar was told by her mother while growing up on the Blackfoot Reservation. The stories are random; however they depict tribal life on the reservation and the resettlement of Native people in the late nineteenth century. These stories are told through the voices of her great grandmother, grandmother and mother as they were experienced and remembered. The work conveys the experience of the small pox epidemic and the devastating impact it had on the reservation. Also, because her family's ancestral lines come from Indigenous people who were forced to relocate from the north, the play addresses themes such as relocation, the loss of land and place and the universal search for identity, family and homeland (81).

The play had a two day run at the Santa Fe Hotel in Santa Fe, New Mexico and had an expanded production on September 21, 2000 in the Hartwell Dance Theater at the State University of New York at Brockport. It then moved on to the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada (82).

One of the problems with Native American theater today is something that Day Star addresses and openly criticizes, that dance, particularly Native American dance (which is so integral to Native American life, ceremony and community) and choreography, cannot be published within a script. Yet to the Native American, dance and story are so often intertwined (78).

“Spirit” A Journey in Dance and Drum, is a Native American Musical, a choreographed dramatization of the struggle and dilemma of having to walk and survive in two oppositional worlds, the world of industrialization, and technology, and the world of spirit. It is a full scale musical production that was created and composed by Peter Buffet, and collaborated on and developed by Robert Mirabal (Taos Pueblo), and Chief Hawk Pope. It was through this extraordinary collaboration that *Spirit the Seventh Fire* was born. It is a dance narrative infused with Native American music, a classical choral piece for children and contemporary rock music. It is a theatrical narrative that conveys through dance and music, the reflective quest and journey of a Native American (male) trapped in an urban- technologically driven society, who returns back to his true-inner self and indigenous roots. It is in essence, a search to discover and awaken his Native ancestry and his relations to the earth and others around him. The musical is inclusive and seeks to reach out to other cultures, while returning to the center and truth of what it means to be Native American. It is a theatrical quest for truth and identity and within the choreography, there is a thematic structure and narrative, that addresses the determination and the ability to overcome insurmountable sufferings due to the courage, strength and will of the Native American spirit. The dances are a response to colonization, western culture and assimilation, while recognizing the need for healing, autonomy and the continued struggle for self-identity (Buffet).

“Dance is an encounter with the past and present, a foretelling of the future of the community and a display of ritual- symbolic practices-toward the gods, aggressors, nature, and the communities own members. In these relations, the powerful symbols of the dance emerge as the elements around which the community negotiates, accuses, and provides solutions”... (Huanca Laura 57).

Dance has always been an integral part of Native American communities, socialization, ritual and spiritual life. Throughout the Americas, the reciprocity and relationship between the earth (spirit of place) and the Indigenous community, is negotiated primarily through ceremonial and social dances. During the celebration of the *Aymara Fiesta* that takes place in Lacaya, Baja, Bolivia, there are three forms of ritualistic offerings. The first is an offering, a sacrificial rendering of one’s physical being, for the good of the entire community. As with many Native

American ceremonial dances, such as the Ute Bear Dance and the Sun Dance, there is an element of physical suffering and pain that one must endure for the benefit of not only themselves but for their entire tribal community. The ritualistic dance is a communication that addresses the complex relation and understanding of the earth and the intricate links and ties within the community. It is a reciprocal balance and cooperation that is respected and honored by traditional Native communities. The dance is an offering; a communicative gesture of respect, thanksgiving and petition that is necessary for the survival and continuation of the tribe. That balance and communication will determine whether a harvest will be bountiful, and/or whether the people will appease the deities of the land in which they reside. It is in the ritualistic, ceremonial practices of the dance that strengthens their relation with the land, all its inhabitants and with one another. The second offering that is rendered through the dance is food to the deities. It is the ritualistic offering of food to the deities that ensures that the tribe will be preserved from natural disasters, disease, drought and the subsequent loss of crops. The final offering was historically the sacrifice of a human person. The sacrifice of one person would expiate the collective faults of an entire community. In summary, during the ritual of a ceremonial dance, two things occur and are accomplished simultaneously. First, the spirits of the land (the deities) feed themselves and are satisfied by the offering, the second, is the dancer who offers and makes the sacrifice is ensured rewards such as fruitful harvests and the wellbeing of their families and tribal communities (Huanca Laura 57). Because of this enduring ceremonial practice and relationship between so many tribal communities and the land, it is not very surprising that Native American dance is so much a part of the theatrical experience and expression.

In the mythological Aztec story, "*The Hungry Goddess*," retold and performed by Mexican storyteller, *Olga Loya*, the audience is introduced to Aztec ritual, celebration and ceremony. There is an invocation to the Gods, a reverence and act of thanksgiving made to the four compass points (directions). The Aztec Creation is experienced by the audience through improvisational exploration that includes drums, rattles and Native flutes. From the storyteller *Olga Loya*, it is a retelling of ancestral stories that she was told growing up as a Mexican girl in East Los Angeles. Her parents, both of whom are Mexican, shared with her the traditional stories of her culture and

her people. It is these stories that she now brings to the public's attention through storytelling, music, dance, instruments, improvisational acting and movement. An audience member said that experiencing the *Aztec Creation* was like being immersed in a wave, that enveloped his entire being and certain parts of this story and experience continued to work on his psyche and consciousness even well after the performance was over. This was the re-enactment retelling of the Aztec Myth, Hungry Goddess; La Diosa Hambrieta (Indy Theatre Habit).

The Goddess had eyes and mouths all over her body. The eyes were needed because she wanted to see way out into the far expansiveness of the universe and because she was always seeking deeper knowledge. The numerous mouths spread out all over her entire body, was a disadvantage to her and caused her much pain and suffering, because with so many mouths to feed, she was always hungry. This insatiable hunger made her a burden to the other Gods who shared the universe with her because her mouths would continually cry out day and night, "Tengo hambre, tengo hambre!" Translated into English, "I am hungry, I am hungry" (Loya 42).

This continual wailing was upsetting the other Gods so much that they began to conspire and talk with one another about her without her knowing. The Gods were so upset because with the constant wailing, they could not sleep, nor could they think, they had no peace. In desperation they decided to bring the matter to the two most powerful Gods; *Quetzalcoatl*, and *Tezcatlipoca*.

Quetzalcoatl, looked like a plumed serpent because he wore long multicolored feathers that flowed and carried a walking stick that was carved into the shape of a serpent. He wore a mask shaped like a bird's head called the Wind Mask. With the mask he could blow the wind for a long distance, he was known as the Wind God and the God of Light (42).

Tezcatlipoca was robed in black and wore the rattles of a rattlesnake around his legs. He was known as the God of Smoking Mirror, because he wore black volcanic glass (obsidian) on his foot through which he could see everything that was happening in the universe. He was also known as the God of Darkness (42).

The two Gods conferred and decided to take La Diosa Hambrieta to the water. They hoped that the waters would soothe and calm her and she would stop wailing. When they placed her into the water, she did stop crying for only a moment. Soon however, she began to wail out loud again, "Tengo hambre. Tengo hembre. The two Gods became very upset and transformed

themselves, each into a serpent. They grabbed her in two, each wrapping their serpent coils around one hand and foot. La Diosa Hambrienta, resisted fiercely and began to fight the two serpents/Gods. Finally, the two serpents split the Goddess into two. She was no longer crying out, but they knew she was not happy. So they took her two body parts to the other Gods and showed them what they had done. The other Gods felt sad for her and decided to take the lower half of her body and transform it into the sky. The Goddess still looked very unhappy, so the God's, feeling very sorry for what they have done, and what was done to her, decided to transform the upper half of her body into the land beneath the sky (44).

They transformed her hair into the forests. Her skin became the lakes, the rivers and the ocean. Her mouth became the caves; shoulders became the mountains. She became Mother Earth -- the Earth we live on to this day.

All the gods said, "Ah, now she will be happy!"

But no! She again started to wail, "Tengo hambre. Tengo Hambre."

To this day, La Diosa Hambrienta, Mother Earth, is still hungry and thirsty. When it rains, she swallows all the water; if a tree falls and dies, she eats it. When a flower wilts and dies, she eats it. She is always hungry.

Sometimes when the wind is blowing late at night, if you listen very carefully, you might hear her calling, "Tengo Haaambreee; tengo haaambre." (44)

Tewa ritual performances are communal public prayers that involve dancing, singing, percussive music, dramatic skits and elaborate costumes (Sweet 83).

As they dance between female earth and male sky. Connecting essential opposing elements of Pueblo philosophical thought and being, dancers evoke the human condition. Cycles of life – fertilization and the coming together of opposites in order to create life- are continual themes of Pueblo dance (93).

There are six Tewa villages all located in the Rio Grande region north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The indigenous people who reside in these Pueblo villages and/or reservations, all speak the same native language; Tewa. There are many other tribal people who reside in the southwest, who are distinguished by the native language they speak. These various native languages (Towa, Tiwa, Keres, Hopi, Zuni) are not dead languages, in fact, they are still thriving and in many

cases, are the primary language spoken on the Pueblos, and within many Native American southwestern homes. The Native American people of the southwest are decedents of tribal peoples who have survived all kinds of harsh environmental conditions, including severe drought. Also, for the most part, they have kept their tribal culture and traditions intact despite an onslaught of Spanish colonization and western expansion.

Tewa dance events can be discussed in terms of seasonal theme, degree of secrecy, and performance context. Although, the dance ritual is open to the public and is a performance, it is also a cultural tradition that is associated with seasonal, spiritual and/or agricultural activities, such as planting, harvesting, hunting, cyclical worshipping and prayer. Most dance rituals and performances take place at the Plaza, the center of the Pueblo village. The Catholic Mission Church, for many Pueblo villages, is also the focal point where the elaborate dancing ritual and Ceremony often takes place. The dance cycles that occur throughout the year, revolve not only around agricultural events, but also encompasses and integrates the feast and saint days specified on the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. As in South America, the influence of Spanish colonization can be experienced and widely observed in many of these dance, drama skits that are open to the public several times a year. It is the only time during the year that outside members, (non natives), are allowed to freely enter the Pueblo village and be a part of a festive Indigenous celebration. This also includes feasting at the tables of hospitable Pueblo host families, whose primary function during these ritual dances is to cook for and serve the masses of people who come to experience the dance performances. The visitors they graciously and tirelessly serve (throughout the entire feast day) include relatives and relations within their own tribal community, the dancers, drummers and singers, other tribal members from other Pueblos and/or nations, and non natives, people who they may not even know. The invitation is open and non - discriminatory. Pueblo hospitality abounds and many private homes are open to the public. All are welcomed to eat and feast with the tribal families that are hosting the meals. During the elaborate feasting, the dance ceremony continues and lasts the entire day generally starting at dawn and concluding at sunset.

“Beauty of course, is culturally defined and relative. For the Tewa, beauty is found in the illusion created by many dancers moving in perfect unison within a contained dance style. Beauty is also found in the choreography and song composition that is repetitive and relatively

simple, but punctuated with subtle variations. Most important, beauty is found in a respectful and sincere performance” (94).

Because ceremony, ritual and culture is intricately interwoven and passed on from generation to generation through dance, performance and song, it is not surprising that so much of what is perceived as Native American Theater and drama is conveyed entirely through dance, whether choreographed and/or improvised. Story and the representation of events such as a hunt, relations with animals and/or the environment, religious ceremony, mythology, Spanish influence and colonization reveals itself through the costume, movements, dance rituals and steps of the dancer/performer.

A Song for Dead Warriors (1979) was an earlier production that received notable acclaim and was significant for Native American performances and theatre during its time. Choreographer, Michael Smuin used dance as a vehicle to tell a contemporary Native American story. He used his personal experience, growing up in Montana, in Indian country, and his perception of the occupation of Alcatraz by the American Indian Movement (AIM) to choreograph and tell the story. The production used highly stylized elements of ballet and theatrical effects to intensify the dramaturgy. At the close of the performance, and what was given significant acclaim and attention, was a performance of a Plains-Style Men’s Fancy Dance (Jones 172).

As Native American theatre gained momentum, so too did the collaborative efforts of Native American artists, directors, dancers, actors and musicians. *Maid of the Mist* (1990) was a ballet choreographed by Raoul Trujillo for the Repertory Dance Theatre of Utah. In collaboration with Dr. Louis Ballard (Cherokee/Quapaw) an internationally recognized composer who wrote the musical score, and Bruce King, (Oneida) a renowned playwright and artist who wrote the script, an ambitious noteworthy theatrical production was conceived. The project was further developed by Elwood Green, the director of the Native American Center for the Living Arts, in Niagara Falls, New York. It was given further promotion and attention by Buffalo State College, who offered workshops, an exhibition, and a teacher training institute for its benefit. During the summer of 1991, it was produced by Buffalo State College in conjunction with the Repertory Dance Theatre of Utah (172).

The American Indian Dance Theatre was founded in 1987 by Barbara Schwei, a producer from New York, and Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa) a theatre director and playwright, based at the

University of California, in Los Angeles. The theater company has toured nationally and internationally. The repertoire of material ranges from traditional Native American dances, such as Fancy Shawl, Men's Traditional, Grass Dance and Zuni Pueblo Dances to contemporary choreography that includes theatrical performances and narration (172). The American Indian Dance Theatre recruits only the finest Native American performers in the country. The performers they select, represent varying Native American tribal communities from all over the country. The theatre incorporates the performer's cultural heritage, music, songs and stories in the repertoire and dramaturgy. The choreography and directing reflects and focuses on a particular tradition and style, in order to give honor and respect to the unique cultural heritage of varying tribes. Also, the dancers employed generally dance in the tradition of their own specific tribal group and heritage. The singers and narration reflects the stories and the heart of the varying tribal communities, and within the context of the dramaturgy, their culture and unique heritage is always respected. The costumes, songs, dance and music are authentic and represent the tribal community being represented. Many of the performers in the American Indian Dance Theater generally continue working as Native American artists, dancers and educators and do quite well in solo careers. With a combination of contemporary and traditional dances and productions, The American Indian Dance Theatre will probably continue producing shows for live audiences for many years to come. The company has a relatively strong following internationally and they are also well known and respected amongst tribal communities throughout the United States and Canada.

The Woman Who was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance is a play written by playwright Diane Glancy (Cherokee). It is a play about a grandmother and granddaughter who approach life from two different perspectives. The grandmother speaks of Ahw'uste and the Spirits, and the red dress she made that has connected her to the deer spirit. Ahw'uste, is a mythological spirit deer, who the grandmother says she has personally encountered. The granddaughter doesn't understand what her grandmother is saying half the time. She feels her grandmother's ideas are out of touch with reality and can't help her in her present situation. The daughter experiences hardship, in and out of soup kitchens, difficulty holding on to jobs, homelessness, poverty, numerous and dysfunctional relationships. She asks her grandmother for advice, and all her grandmother does is talk about Ahw'uste, the spirits and her red dress that she made for the Deer

Dance. Although the grandmother admits during the course of their broken dialogue, that the Ahw'uste and the spirits let her down (Glancy 3).

GRANDMOTHER. *Gu's'dii-da-da-dv-hni* My relatives-

I'm making medicine from your songs. Sometimes I feel it. But mostly I have to know it's there without seeing. I go there from the hurts he left me with, all those kids and no way to feed them but by the spirit. Sometimes I think the birds brought us food. Or somehow we weren't always hungry. That's not true. Mostly we were on our own. Damned spirits. Didn't always help out. Let us have it rough sometimes. All my kids are gone. Run off. One of my daughters calls from Little Falls sometimes. Drunk. Drugged. They all have accidents. One got shot. (17)

The granddaughter has a different complaint, she is not understood (so she laments throughout the dialogue). Her grandmother doesn't really speak to her; she talks in riddles, in ways she doesn't understand. Her ways, are not her granddaughter's ways, and this has been the chasm between them. Her grandmother's stories about the red dress and Ahw'uste, the deer and the spirits, can't help her in contemporary society. She wishes her grandmother could talk to her directly, rather than just speak about stories.

GIRL. Speak without your stories. Just once. What are you without your deer dress? What are you without your story of Ahw'uste?

GRANDMOTHER. We're carriers of our stories and histories. We're nothing without them.

GIRL. We carry ourselves. Who are you besides your stories?

GRANDMOTHER. I don't know-no one ever asked. (14)

In another short dialogue between them (more like a monologue spoken by the granddaughter), the girl, begs her grandmother to speak to her directly without the stories, without Ahw'uste. She tells her grandmother she could be more like her, (if she wanted to be) she could wear her grandmother's ceremonial red deer dress.

GIRL: Open your deer mouth and talk. You never say anything on your own. I could wear a deer dress. I could change into a deer like you. (7)

The grandmother laments about her granddaughter's inability to listen, or hear her. She worries about the direction she's going, she worries about what would happen if she gave her granddaughter her red deer dress.

GRANDMOTHER. Why can't my daughter wait on the spirit? Why is she impatient?....

My granddaughter wants to do what she wants. Anything that rubs against her, well, she bucks. Runs the other way. I'm not going to give her my deer dress to leave in a heap on some dude's floor. It comes from long years from my grandmother- (15)

As with all traditional Native American dance and ceremony, the dress is not simply a costume to be discarded after use. It is ceremonial, it has purpose. If an Eagle feather falls off a dancer and falls to the ground, the dancing stops, everything in the arena stops, until a ceremony is completed, and the Eagle feather is properly retrieved from the floor and returned to the dancer who dropped it. If this is the manner in which an Eagle feather is respected during a Pow-wow, then I'm certain, and from what I witnessed on the Pueblo's of New Mexico, that dance and ceremony, is more than performance, and entertainment, it is spiritual, it is traditional, it is a witness to culture, and the survival and endurance of the people's stories and beliefs spoken and sung through the prayer of the dance. Native American prayer and dance are interconnected, and that is why the grandmother in *The Woman Who was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance* says to her granddaughter:

GRANDMOTHER. When I saw Ahw'uste, yes. My deer dress is the way I felt, transformed by the power of ceremony. (14)

“Ahw’uste,” according to Diane Glancy, “was taken from “Doi on Ahu’usti” and “Asudi on Ahw’uste,” *Friends of Thunder, Tales of the Oklahoma Cherokees*, . . . pieces of the old Cherokee language (3).

As with much of Indigenous languages today, most of the young people, don’t know how to speak their tribal languages. The granddaughter asks her grandmother about the meaning of the word Ahw’uste:

GIRL. What does Ahw’uste mean in English?

GRANDMOTHER. I don’t know what the English was. But Ahw’uste was a spirit animal.

GIRL. What does that mean?

GRANDMOTHER. She was only there for some people to see.

That answer by the grandmother reminded me of something that happened to me while returning on a school bus, back to the reservation after a field trip with my students. I was sitting up at the front of the bus with a few other teachers’ aides, mostly Jemez (Towa) from Jemez Pueblo. I was only in New Mexico a short while and this was my first field trip with the school as their new music/drama teacher. I noticed through the front window of the bus a mountain north of the reservation. On the top of the mountain, there was an image of a large Eagle, with open wings as if soaring above the clouds. The image of this large Eagle was clearly visible to me due to the snow that had fallen the night before and seemed to outline it in clear detail. When I mentioned this to one of the ladies from Jemez Pueblo, she said to me, “That is our mountain. And what you’re seeing on top of the mountain we call, *Black Eagle*. Not many people can see him. Only a few are able to, those who are meant to.”

From that moment on, I was accepted by the people. Somehow, though she was the only one I spoke to and shared this with, I was invited not only into their lives as their teacher, but into their homes, during dance and drumming rehearsals, for weddings, funerals, cooking meals and enchiladas for my Native American music classes first Pow-wow. I was accepted and the welcome was hospitable and warm. I also felt the land accepted me. The place, welcomed me. I learned from a Native American Professor, Dr. Francis (Laguna Pueblo), at the University of New Mexico, who taught a course I enrolled in called *Spirit of Place* (a partial component of my

research and thesis title), that the land, either can accept you or reject you. You will know, you will be impacted physically, emotionally, spiritually, whether the land welcomes you or not. You can move wherever you want, but if the land does not welcome you, you will suffer; it could come in the form of allergies, or in another way. The land will let you know. The land chooses whether it will welcome you or not, it is not the other way around. Some people can laugh at this concept and say it is quite superstitious and not founded in reality or science. But then, I think about places I have lived, that I didn't entirely feel comfortable in, and didn't really understand why. I think of the images I recently saw in a documentary by Ken Burns called "*The Dust Bowl*." How after the Native Americans were displaced, removed from their lands, the buffalo was destroyed, the buffalo grass was replaced by cattle and endless wheat fields and agricultural techniques brought in by the European immigrants whose primary goals were based more on greed and capitalistic gain rather than on balanced and sound farming practices. How after years of applying agricultural practices that destroyed the soil and the land, how the land fought back. How the people suffered, not only the adults responsible for the largest environmental crisis ever to happen in the United States, but also how the children suffered, their livestock suffered, all suffered. The suffering and the onslaught of the storms were so incapacitating that many people were forced to abandon their homes and leave. Many lost their homes due to extreme drought. Many who wanted to stay could no longer do so, because the land was unable to yield, (chose not to yield). A huge exodus of immigrants packed up and moved to California. Soon the land recovered. In my opinion, that environmental disaster supports Dr. Francis's theory, the people may have wanted to make that place their permanent home, but the land, had other ideas. It was apparent from the footage, interviews, and documentary that their concept and ideas about the land was contrary to what the land needed and wanted. Their concepts and perception of *place*, and how to interact within that place was not welcomed. They were (according to those interviewed who lived through it) motivated by greed, tore up the wet buffalo grasslands, killed off natural predators, like the coyote, killed off the buffalos, offsetting the natural balance of things. The land in my mind fought back. The land like an angry landlord, who simply had enough, giving housing, shelter, etc., but receiving nothing in return, had enough. The tenants were soon evicted and kicked out, whether they wanted to leave or not was not an option any more. Though this analogy is based more on capitalistic ideals rather than on Native thought and ideology, it still accurately reflects the concept I am trying to convey. Many had no other

recourse, out of money, the ability to raise crops, support their families, some even losing loved ones (their children) to dust pneumonia, loss of stock, homes due to foreclosure, had to go. It was the land that forced their hand and didn't give them any alternative (Burns).

At the end of the play, *The Woman who was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, the granddaughter speaks about her grandmother, who apparently, at this point of the play has passed away. From her words you can see how there has been an evolution in her thinking, how the passing of her grandmother, has made her reflect on her journey, on her relations, on her connection between the past and the future. How she, (though different than her grandmother) still carries her grandmother's stories, traditions and legacy forward.

GIRL. My grandmother was a deer. I could see her change before my eyes. She caused stories to happen. That's how I knew she could be a deer....

I'm sewing my own red deer dress. It's different than my grandma's. Mine is a dress of words. I see Ahw'uste also....

My grandmother covered her trail. Left me without knowing how to make a red 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.

My heart has red trees. The afterworld must be filling up with leaves.

You know, I've learned she told me more without speaking than she did with her words. (18)

Chapter 4

INTERWEAVING STORIES - INDIGENOUS & IMMIGRANT

EAGLE PROJECT: INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR RYAN VICTOR PEARCE

Tales of an Urban Indian is a contemporary, one-man show that is semi-autobiographical. Written and performed by playwright and actor, Darrell Denis (Shuswapi), it had its debut at *The Public Theater* in New York City during the spring of 2009. The play was produced by *Native Voices at the Austry*. It tells the tale of a young man's transition from the reservation to the city. It is a comical, yet sad depiction of a contemporary Native American male, who has to contend with stereotypes and racism not only in urban society as an adult, but also while growing up in a predominant Caucasian community. It is a story, a journey of one Native American's struggle to overcome obstacles and challenges in order to survive in a culture that is in so many ways so different than his own. The play addresses death, isolation, rejection, racism, shame, betrayal, the loss of land and place, the search and discovery of one's true-self and the impact that drugs and alcohol have upon the Native American psyche and their communities.

One of the most influential and significant playwright's within this genre of Native American writers is Lynn Riggs (1899-1954). He was a member of the Cherokee Nation and grew up in Oklahoma. He was the only Native American dramatist writing for the Broadway Stage during the beginning of the 20th century (National Museum of the American Indian 2010).

He witnessed the social and legal changes that occurred in his community in 1907, when Indian Territory became Oklahoma. This experience inspired him to write *Green Grow the Lilacs*, a Pulitzer Prize nominated drama that was later adapted by Rodgers and Hammerstein into the musical *Oklahoma* (NATL Museum of the American Indian 2010).

An opera conductor Tim Long, who is Choctaw and Cree and grew up in Oklahoma, expressed to me that he finds it outrageous that a Native American playwright would have written this piece devoid of any Native experience or characters at all. He even suggested that the playwright was probably Cherokee. He wanted me to provide him with a further dramaturgical investigation on this playwright. Upon my research, I have discovered that *Green Grow the Lilacs*, although it has been produced and adapted for eighty years completely devoid of a Native American presence, in actuality, uses Native dramaturgical elements that are sophisticated,

provocative, philosophical and dramatically haunting. Within the play there are characters asserting Native American intellectual traditions, people surviving despite overwhelming political changes and ceremonial actions relating people to one another and the land around them (*spirit of place*). He introduced a Native theatrical language onto the Broadway stage when most portrayals of Native people were purely stereotype. He was the first playwright to give the American Theater an element of Native Dramaturgy.

On November 17th and 18th 2010, the *National Museum of the American Indian* hosted a production of *Green Grow the Lilacs* by the U.S. Naval Academy's Theater Troupe, *The Masqueraders*. The director, *Dr. Christy Stanlake*, scholar in Native American theater, stated in an interview with the Smithsonian Museum that she believed that this production was the first to use Native American theatrical staging productions, but had hopes that this sort of interpretation of Lynn's play would soon be the norm (Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian 2010).

Spirit of Place is a major character in the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* (Oklahoma) and without place, Native American theater, would lose the foundation and spine of the drama. In essence, without place, there would be no story to tell, because Native stories and theatre emerge from a specific location and land base that gives the tribal members and affiliates their identity.

There are many Native American theatre companies emerging across North America, South America and Canada. One such theater company, *Eagle Project*, is currently producing and introducing new Native American plays, playwrights and theatrical works to audiences in the northeast. Ryan Victor Pearce (*Nanticoke - Leni-Lenape*), is the founder and director of *Eagle Project* a professional (Equity affiliated) Native American Theatre company based in New York City. I recently interviewed Ryan Pearce (in an impromptu, unscripted context) and asked him what made him decide to start a Native American Theater company, basically what was the impetus, the turning point in his professional career as a theater artist that propelled him to embark on such a journey? He told me that he was interested in telling the American story through the lens of the Native American experience however, he feels strongly, that the American story could never be completely told without the influence and convergence of the immigrant journey and voice. The American story to Ryan Pearce is the telling of both stories, the interwoven design of the Native American experience and influence of the immigrant voice.

In his perception, both are interconnected, and are integral to what makes America who she is as a country today. So much of what we recognize as American, such as branches of government, democracy, are entirely influenced by Native American society and thought, in particular the Iroquois nation.

The Mission Statement of Eagle Project states the following: Exploring the American identity, through performing arts and our Native American heritage.

Native American theatre being a vehicle to tell the American story, with the understanding that *place* is integral and central to the telling of that story. In the scripted plays that Eagle Project has produced as staged readings in New York City, locale and/or *place* was the central theme, the driving force behind the action of the story. Spirit of place, (as with so many other Native American plays) is integral and the foundation that moves the story forward and propels the characters into action.

Broken Heart Land, by Vikki Lynn Mooney (Cherokee) had its debut, and was performed as a staged reading by Eagle Project in April, 2012 in New York City. The play addresses the challenges and obstacles that a family of Cherokee ancestry faced when dealing with land, territory and ownership during the early 1900's. Ownership being a word that was unfamiliar to the Native American experience. Land, prior to the influence of western thought, expansion and colonization, wasn't owned, sold or purchased, rather it was an integral part of who they were as a Native people, it was their place of origin, it was a living member of their family and community. So much land and territory was lost, because Native tribes and leaders didn't understand the meaning and/or concept of ownership.

Prior to starting Eagle Project, Ryan Victor Pearce was very active in a theater company called *Aboriginal*, an Australian Aboriginal Theater Initiative. The cast was predominantly Australian aboriginal and dealt with tribal issues and experiences of their place of origin. Afterwards, Ryan Pearce worked on an *Immigrant Theatre Project*, as well as being cast as an actor in theatrical productions produced at the *American Indian Community House* in New York City for eleven Years. A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, he worked as a professional actor at The Public Theater, New York Theater Workshop, New Dramatists, LaMaMa E.T.C. Playwrights Horizons and New York City Opera at Lincoln Center.

The catalyst for Eagle Project began when he was introduced to a play, *Wood Bones*, by playwright, William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. (enrolled member of the Assinibone Tribe on the Fort Peck Reservation, in northeastern Montana). In collaboration with the playwright, Eagle Project presented a staged reading of *Wood Bones* on Wednesday, March 7, 2012 at *Playwrights Horizons* in New York City. It was during that event, that Eagle Project was officially launched as a professional Native American Theater company in New York City. Eagle Project will present a fully-staged production of the play *Wood Bones*, opening on May 11th, 2013 at the Abington Theater on West 36th Street in Manhattan, New York City.

In a statement written by the playwright, William S. Yellow Robe, Jr., he conveys how it is imperative that his people, his relatives, his family, and the voice of his nation (the Assinibone tribe) is heard. When teaching playwriting to Native American students, he tells them, “We are not learning to be white playwrights, we are learning to be strong Native writers. We have to be able to validate our own experience for ourselves.”... “Native theatre artists have been made homeless in our own homeland. I founded the Wakiknabe Theatre Company as a new homeland for Native American artists” (D’Aponte 42).

Waaxe’s Law is a provocative and controversial play that is written by playwright *Mary Kathryn Nagle*, with a Ponca translation and pronunciation guide, provided by elder *Louis Headman* (one of the last five persons who can still speak the Ponca language and dialect). Ryan Pearce directed a staged reading of *Waaxe’s Law* on October 11, 2012 at New York University’s Law School in New York City. *Waaxe’s Law* (pronounced *Wah-hey law*) is primarily about the significance of place (Niobara - Nebraska), Native American identity and personhood (Habeas Corpus) and the journey and survival of Chief Standing Bear and the Ponca nation during forced removal and relocation set forth by the U.S. government.

Spirit of place (Niobara), defines and motivates the major character Chief Standing Bear, and is in essence, the central reason why the other Native characters, White Eagle and White Swan, from the very opening scene have direction and purpose. Place is the spine of the story and is integral to the Ponca tribe’s survival and identity. Chief Standing Bear is carrying the bones of his deceased son, *Bear Shield* in a box (having been displaced by the United States government due to the Indian Relocation Act). During the long, forced march and journey to Oklahoma,

(Indian Territory set aside by the United States government), Standing Bear decides to return home to place the remains of his deceased son's bones on ancestral soil in Niobara, today known as Nebraska. He tells White Eagle that his decision to return back to Niobara while leaving his tribe to travel to Indian Territory without him, may turn his people's heart against him. That he may be seen as a traitor, for having abandoned them. White Eagle assures him that when they learn that he was fulfilling a promise he made to his son, to bury his bones in their homeland in Niobara, they will understand (NYU Performance).

The play Waaxe's Law (*Whiteman's Law*) is a historical drama that reenacts a landmark court case (writ of Habeas Corpus in U.S. District Court in Omaha, Nebraska in 1879), where Native Americans, in a lawsuit initiated by Chief Standing Bear of the Ponca Nation, won their recognition as persons under the law and therefore were entitled to the same rights and protection. Prior to this case, Native persons under United States law and jurisdiction, were not even recognized as persons and were subjugated to the consequences of this travesty.

Similarly, although not related to this case, the Mexican Repatriation was enforced by the United States Government. This was a mass migration of persons that took place during 1929 - 1939. The main objective and purpose of the Mexican Repatriation Program, was to deport all Native (Mestizo/Mexicans) outside of the United States territory to Mexico. Although, many of those who were subjected to deportation were United States citizens, having lived in Mexican/ceded territories for generations and were Native to the lands from which they were removed, they were not recognized as United States citizens and they were not recognized as persons with legal rights. Being stripped of their United States Citizenship, their land was taken from them, and they were forced to leave their country and their ancestral home (Frame 2009).

At the end of the U.S. Mexican War, and between 1846 and 1848, Mexico ceded territories to the United States government during the signing of the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* that included: California, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado and the southern portion of Texas. During this time, 35,000 people who resided in these conquered territories were deported to Mexico, 500,000.00 of Mexican descent were forced to leave. The United States government had to pay 15 million dollars to Mexico for reducing its territory to 55 percent. During the signing of the Treaty, U.S. citizenship was promised to 80,000 Mexican citizens residing in the territories ceded to the United States. *However, Mexican citizens who claimed to be Native*

Americans were excluded from obtaining American Citizenship. During the forced migration, dark complected Mestizos (who are persons of European and American Indian descent) were targeted for deportation and although they were U.S. citizens according to the Guadalupe Hildago Treaty, they were now treated like foreigners in their own land. Many persons of Native American ancestry were targeted, and deported to foreign land in Mexico (Frame).

While fighting for his rights, to be recognized as a person under the law, and during course of the actual trial, Chief Standing Bear was asked to speak on his behalf, it was reported that he stated the following to those in attendance, “That hand, is not the color of yours, but if I prick it, the blood will flow and I shall feel pain. The blood is of the same color as yours. God made me and I am a man” (Starita, 8).

The play first came to my attention, while directing *NAFAW, Native American Arts Forum at Wompowog*, A Native American Arts Playwriting competition, on the national level at Stony Brook University. What I found incredibly beautiful and unique about this play, was the inclusion and interspersion of the Ponca language throughout the script and dialogue. Louis Headman, an elder, and one of the last five persons remaining in the world who can still speak the tribal Ponca language, translated the text and Ponca dialect and created a glossary of pronunciations. The use of the Ponca language and the defining character of *Place* is why I selected *Waaxe’s Law* as the winner of *NAFAW’s National Playwriting Competition*. Also, the interwoven spirituality, including a theological perspective introduced by the character Bear Shield, during the context of the drama, captures the essence, sacrifice and sufferings one must endure in order to survive in a hostile and unreceptive new world. Chief Standing Bear’s ability to survive in two worlds, that is the world of his own particular Indigenous culture and belief system and the world constructed by the European colonizers and settlers, is a core reality that still reverberates in the Native American psyche and in Native American tribal communities even today.

A very evocative and poignant moment during the play occurs while Bear Shield is having a conversation with White Eagle. During the dialog, Bear Shield introduces the concept of the White man’s God, as Father. He tells White Eagle that he has discovered that there are similarities between *Wakanda*, their creator, and the White man’s God (as Father). He tells

White Eagle that he believes that the two beings, *Wakanda the Creator* and *God the Father* are actually one in the same. He then teaches White Eagle *The Lord's Prayer* and they recite it aloud together as a canon. While they are reciting The Lord's Prayer, President Grant and General Sherman enter (two actions/dramatic intentions are taking place on stage simultaneously) they begin to discuss the removal of the Ponca tribe from Nebraska to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The decision to remove the Ponca tribe is agreed upon, primarily because the United States government doesn't want to contend with the Lakota nation, whom, they perceive and refer to as the *bloodiest savages* on the face of the earth. In contrast, the Ponca tribe has always been a peaceable nation towards the United States government. Based on their knowledge of the two tribes, though the removal was intended for the Lakota nation, the Ponca tribe was removed instead (Nagel).

Oftentimes Native playwrights use existing scripts by Caucasian playwrights to tell their own personal and/or ancestral stories. Ryan Pearce told me of one such Native American playwright whom he worked with in 2007, and who influenced his decision to start a Native American Theater company in New York City. *Myrton Running Wolf* (Black Feet/ Montana), wrote an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. Running Wolf's adaptation was called, "*Carlyle, A Different Three Sisters*." The play was set in the Carlisle Industrial Boarding School (1879-1918), a governmental run school/agency, whose Mission Statement, "*Kill the Indian, to Save the Man*," was the assimilation policy set forth by Captain Richard H. Pratt in regards to Native American Educational policies to be adopted by the United States government (Prucha, 260-271).

Ryan Victor Pearce's goal and vision for Eagle Project, is to take Native American plays to a new level. He wants to include differing perspectives and expertise to the work by incorporating the research of scholars, anthropologists, teachers, educational leaders and directors. He also wants to invite theatre practitioners such as dramaturgs, producers, actors, emerging playwrights and directors to his company. Mostly he wants to include the complex, multi-layered and diverse voices from the Native American and immigrant communities to tell, what he feels is the American journey and story (Interview, Nov. 2012).

The Horse Ranch, is an adaptation I wrote based on Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. It was interesting for me to hear about Myrton Running Wolf's adaptation of a Chekhov play, *The Three Sisters*, to tell the story of the Carlisle Indian school experience and atrocities. Anton Chekhov was a naturalist and his set designs and concept of place, in particular the post-revolutionary Russian landscape, was so rich, detailed and vivid, that I found it inspirational and I was comfortably able to use his technique (like an impressionistic artist –with rich colorful brush strokes and detail), and concept of place into my story.

The Horse Ranch is set in Santa Fe, New Mexico in the year 2008, just at the height of the recession. I use the setting and place, the landscape as a major character. In fact, without the place, there would be no story to tell in my adaptation. The land and the people are interconnected; it is a weaving, a quilt of assimilated heritage, the collective voice and psyche of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry. The colors, the dance, the culture, the vibrant songs, music and drama are an integral part of the landscape, in which you cannot have one without the other. The New Mexican landscape is a major character in my adaptation, because *place* is the essence and the life blood of the people who have lived there for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

The following dialogue is between MIGUEL GONZALEZ, a cowboy who works at the Horse Ranch and VICTOR MIRABAL, a Native American from the Pueblo who works with the horses. He is a horse whisperer, and Neva Mirando and her family trust Victor wholeheartedly with their prized herd. In fact, these two characters, in my adaptation, are more than just hired hands on a working ranch in New Mexico, they are more like family. This kind of working relationship between the two cultures (Native American and Spanish descent) and this interconnectedness and influence they have upon each other, can be felt and experienced throughout New Mexico, especially near Pueblos/Reservations. From the architecture; Pueblo adobe and Spanish colonial homes, the food; red chili, green chili, enchiladas, and the dominant religion; Catholicism intermingled with Native American traditional; Pueblo Ceremony and Catholic Feast days, to the art work; pottery, sculptures, paintings, wood and stone carvings, jewelry, silver, turquoise, to the agricultural lifestyle, the influence from the Native American and Spanish cultures can be widely observed and felt. The reciprocity and the balance between the two groups, makes the state of New Mexico like no other place in the world. In fact, many

Native American families from the Pueblos bear Spanish Surnames. Baptism records from the archives of the Catholic Church has revealed (historically) that this intermingling has gone on for generations, almost from the very beginning when the Spanish Colonizers first set foot on Pueblo soil and tribal land.

In the following scene, the Horse Ranch is about to be auctioned off due to unpaid debts. Despite this dark reality, the Mirando family is celebrating *Las Posadas* (a re-enactment of the Nativity drama) at their home. Few people know about the financial crisis and the dire circumstances that the Mirando's now face. But Victor knows, and the following conversation reveals his deeper insight and knowledge about the looming crisis they all must face once the horse ranch is auctioned off.

In the opening scene of Act II, I attempted to paint a visual picture of the landscape in New Mexico, during the Christmas season. Since place is so integral to this story. The landscape has to be treated like a major character in the play. The natural sounds that come from the environment, the colorful images, the use of light and shadow, the textures, and music all add to the fabric of this place. Like an improvisational painter, the words, like brush strokes fill in the details, that I hope someday a set designer can convey to an audience.

The Horse Ranch

Act II, Scene 1.

It's the eve of Las Posadas, a 16th century New Mexican tradition that reenacts the Nativity drama. The Las Posadas celebration is already beginning to gather at Neva's Ranch House. The bright red ristras are strung around the outside of the ranch, while the luminarias are burning brightly all along the adobe walls and walkways. A moon is rising above the red canyons from the east, while coyotes can be heard crying in the near distance. Flamenco music and dance are wafting through the night air. The sound of guitars, palmas, cantas and the pulse of flamenco rhythms are vibrating and pulsating the snow dusted desert landscape. Victor is wearing a large black cowboy hat, cowboy boots and a turquoise and silver bolo tie. He is walking alone towards the horse stables and is met by Miguel.

MIGUEL. Hey Victor, did you hear the news?

VICTOR. What news?

MIGUEL. About the horse ranch being auctioned off today?

VICTOR. Yea..., I caught wind of it? Why are you asking?

MIGUEL. Well, I heard that if the horse ranch goes into the wrong hands, your
horses might also go up for auction.

VICTOR. Well, then... if that's the case, you might as well, auction me off as
well!

Victor turns to go but Miguel stops him.

MIGUEL. Hey, I didn't mean anything by it. I mean,... it's not me, it's everything
around us! It's all falling apart Victor! It's all falling apart.

A star falls and quickly fades out above them.

MIGUEL. Did you see that?

VICTOR. Yea..I saw it.

MIGUEL. That was pretty impressive! Now even the sky is beginning to fall all
around us!

VICTOR. Yea, well...it's not a good sign.

MIGUEL. Why does everything with you have to be about a sign or something?
Why can't a falling star be just that...a falling star?

VICTOR. If that's what you want to hear!

Victor continues to walk towards the stables leaving Miguel standing alone.

MIGUEL. (*Shouting*) What I want to hear?! You want to know what I want to hear
Victor?!

Miguel quickly follows Victor towards the stables.

MIGUEL. I want to hear some truth for a change! I want some facts! I want to know why the hell this ranch is being taken from underneath us while everyone is carrying on like it's some big celebration?!

The music grows louder and more boisterous. The rapid tapping of flamenco shoes can be heard all around the ranch.

VICTOR. Why are you asking me something you already know?

MIGUEL. I don't know! Why do you think I know?! You're the one who reads the stars around here as if they were a newspaper! So...what's the forecast today... huh? Why don't you start with that Victor?!

VICTOR. You know as well as I what's coming! You're just like the rest of them! Trying to run from the truth with your loud music, gadgets and toys! Well, there's no place to run anymore! It's finally caught up with you...with all of you! Unfortunately, the quick sand that's got a hold of you, has got a hold on me and my horses too!

Victor proceeds towards the horse stables! Miguel gets in front of his face.

MIGUEL. So who's going down Victor! Like that falling star, who's going down?

Suddenly two owls are heard hooting in the distance. Their hooting intermingles with the Flamenco music.

VICTOR. You know,...I think it's best that I just tend to the horses and make sure they're secure for the evening. Why don't you go inside and enjoy the party!

The owls continue hooting louder now.

MIGUEL. Sure..., whatever you think is best. Tomorrow is another day!

VICTOR. Perhaps they'll be no tomorrow for us? You ever think about that?

MIGUEL. What are you talking about? Of course they'll be a tomorrow! Even if this place is sold and auctioned off, we'll continue! We'll find another way! We're part of this place, this land..., they can't take that from us!

VICTOR. They already have! The land is already sold, our days here are numbered! The owls are warning us for a reason.

MIGUEL. What reason could that be?

VICTOR. It won't just be one death.

MIGUEL. Death?!... I don't get it! Why are you always talking about death?
This is the night of Las Posadas! This is the night of new life!

VICTOR. You see... and you hear,... but you don't want to believe. You say you are a part of this land as much as I, and yet you can't read the signs that are right in front of you?

MIGUEL. The only thing I know is there was an auction today and soon we'll all know our fate!

VICTOR. And if that fate should happen to be death?

MIGUEL. Death?!... The only one who will be doing the dying around here is that ill fated New Yorker Harvey Miller! Especially if I get my hands on him!

Las Posadas, the Nativity drama, approaches the ranch house. A large group of carolers are singing Silent Night in Spanish. In front of the procession are a man and a woman dressed as Mary and Joseph. They knock on the door. Neva opens the front door and walks outside with Xemena and her brother Fernando.

In the final scene it was important for me to show Victor in the natural landscape, he is not removed from the natural environment, he is a part of it. The close of his life is accompanied by

the setting of the sun, the snow, which signifies the land's quiet time and need for rest, and the ominous hooting of the owls, which to many Native American tribes signifies death.

ACT 3. Scene 5.

A snowy Santa Fe canyon. The sun is setting to the east in a bright red color. Victor is standing in the middle of the canyon staring at the sunset. When the sun disappears beneath the red canyon Victor collapses on the ground. He is still and lifeless. A horse whip can be heard echoing in the distance. As the set grows dark, the moon rises and a soft snow begins to fall covering Victor's body. An owl can be heard hooting through the canyon.

Chapter 5

NATIVE AMERICAN ACTORS & PERFORMANCE ON FILM

The History Detectives is a program aired on the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS). During Season 9 and 10, the *Ince Ledger*, was introduced by researcher Eduardo Pagan. This particular episode was significant because it pertained to early Native American performances captured on film. Also, it discussed the turning point in movie history, specifically pertaining to westerns, and it was based on the discovery of an accounting ledger titled: *Indian Ledger & NYMP Corp.* dated November 6, 1915. The ledger was discovered by the great grandchildren of James Rauch, an electrician who worked for *The New York Motion Picture Company*.

The New York Motion Picture Company was the producer of epic silent westerns that were exported around the world. The ledger was created by Thomas Ince, a movie producer who was hired by the New York Motion Picture Company (1909 – 1917). Thomas Ince hired the *Miller Brothers Wild West Show*, because he wanted to incorporate a historical authenticity to his western films. Miller Brothers, used authentic Native American artifacts during its productions, and also hired and cast Native Americans in their shows. What made this unprecedented for its time was because although Native Americans were sometimes used in westerns, the majority of Native roles were played by White men in makeup.

One major production by the New York Motion Film Company was *Custer's Last Stand*, filmed in 1912, less than 40 years after the Battle of Little Big Horn. There is a belief and possibility that some of the Native American actors who were hired for this film, fought in the actual battle. The majority of the actors cast were Lakota, Sioux, from the Oglala Tribe at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota (Pagan).

Twenty five years after the Wounded Knee massacre, when the United States government was eradicating all aspects of Native American culture, the only thing of value left to trade was the breast plates, the bow and arrows, the robes, etc. George Barten, (listed in the Ince ledger) was a former teacher at the Pine Ridge Reservation, who spun a lucrative business, by opening a store in Gordon, Nebraska, where he traded and sold authentic Native American articles to buyers. He was a major supplier for the New York Motion Film Company, now absorbed into a company called *Triangle Films*. He outfitted entire Indian productions, (wild-west shows and

movie westerns) and was compensated accordingly. Barten would have considered himself to be an expert in his field during his time and he was a representative of his time and place (Pagan).

Milo Yellow Hair, tribal member of the Lakota nation and the grandson of *Lance Two Feathers*, was interviewed regarding the discovery of this historical document (the movie ledger) that was created by movie producer Thomas Ince. It was an accounting document; a ledger of payments made during the silent film era that depicted the American west according to the perspective of American (Caucasian) culture during this era. What made this film company (ledger) different than any other previously before was the use of *Native American actors* being cast in Native American roles. As a general practice, during that time period and even during western films in the early and mid 1900's, Native American roles (especially lead roles) were played by Caucasian actors. Although progressive for its day, western films (in general) still portrayed Native Americans in the same context, that being the untamed savage, the antagonist (Indian) flailing against the hero (cowboy), the vile intruder (Indian) who slays, steals, and does all sorts of lewd and indecent acts disregarding life, person, and/or property. Although this false caricature of Native Americans was being portrayed in most silent westerns, the audiences began to demand authenticity. *The New York Motion Film Company/Triangle Films*, responded to that demand. The Native American cast that was hired, were authentic Native American persons, from a specific location and place, and they were able to carry and utilize their own particular traditional clothing and instruments (weapons, headdresses, etc.) onto the film set with them. Many of the Native American artifacts used in the film, were created and were purchased for the sole reason to authenticate the western film. One particular Native American actor was consistently named and identified throughout the ledger; his name was *Lance Two Feathers*, (and wife).

His grandson, Milo Yellow Hair, while being interviewed about his grandfather's participation in the silent film era, stated that his grandfather had to walk in two worlds, survive in two worlds, the world of his cultural traditions and the belief system of his tribal people and the White man's world. He stated that even though his grandfather and the other Native Americans who worked for this film company were apparently exploited, it still was a vehicle and way for him to move forward, to preserve some of the cultural artifacts and customs of his people, for future generations. The artifacts, bows and arrows feathers and breastplates were authentic, and identified (linked) Lance Two Feathers and the other Lakota Native actors in the

film to a specific tribe, culture and people. The preservation on film was in essence a hope of his grandfather that despite the United States government's intention to eradicate Native American tradition, while assimilating them into American culture, that these films would and/or could be used by future Native American generations when trying to learn and discover who they were as a people during this very difficult time for Native persons in American history.

Milo Yellow Hair: "This is a warrior in two worlds...One world is where the White man lives and the other world is where the Indian lives or the Lakota lives...And he said you have an obligation to be the best that you can in both....My grandfather did this in order to keep his family fed because in order to get a little money they had to do something. ...The great big benefit is that it is a way for him to pass on his historical ideas to the future. And that's the best way he knows how, under the circumstances, is that it's the way to preserve our way of life.... Hopefully, by his participation in films somehow or another a little bit about who we are and what we are and the history that we come from transposes itself into the future generations. And that is what I believe the biggest contribution that Two Lance and his wife made to us. And it's valuable." (Pagan)

Spirit of Place is particularly important in historical dramas, especially when told through the lens and framework of an Indigenous perspective. The lead character often tends to be identified and associated with a specific land site and/or location, the origin from which their specific tribe, language and culture emerged. The destiny of the Native people and or characters, are generally tied to and connected with the land. The story, the narrative, the spine of the script is interwoven and connected with place so intricately, that if one would attempt to adapt a Native American story where the land was an integral character any place else other than the environment from which it emerged it would unravel. In fact, you wouldn't have the skeletal framework or foundation for a story at all. Without the spine, (that is spirit of place) the structure would collapse and be unidentifiable.

Despite all the false representation of Native American portrayal upon the American consciousness and psyche for generations, particularly through film/westerns, the arts, literature, and media, new opportunities are emerging where Native American actors, writers and theatre practitioners can tell their tribal stories and memoirs with a canon of legitimacy and authenticity. *The New World*, a film directed by Terrence Malak explores the historical, yet highly distorted personage of the female Native character Pocahontas. Though caricatured by the Hollywood film industry for generations, the character of Pocahontas in the film, *The New World*, (though highly romanticized) is still a more accurate portrayal and a three dimensional character of a historical Native American icon. The actors, the location, the set design, the Algonquin language, the Jamestown Fort, the wigwams, the corn and tobacco crops (actual seed of Native American corn – not hybrid were planted and cultivated for the film), and the costumes, right down to the bones, shells, beads, and turkey feathers were authentic. The feathers and Native accessories were provided by a member of the Powhatan tribe.

The entire cast and crew, worked alongside many professional, tribal persons, archeologists, historians, utilizing historical documents, in order to bring about a place, people and era that was only realized in ones imagination. This respect for Indigenous people and their culture is quite new and welcomed especially considering the past history of Hollywood and Native American persons who were often portrayed through the narrow and prejudicial lens of directors who perceived and caricatured Indigenous persons as savages, capable of nothing but thievery, mass and unjustified killings, extreme violence and treachery. Because of this tragic history, the Native American chiefs and tribal persons who were sought after by the director and creators of this film hesitated at first to enter into this collaboration due to suspicion, doubt and the justified anger they harbored towards the film industry. Their initial reaction was understandable, and even expected, however, once their suspicions were alleviated due to the integrity, respect they were given and the great interest the creative team had in regards to making this as authentic to the Native persons tribal history and culture as possible, then the creators and the Native American collaborators were able to move forward and resolve any initial conflicts with respect, harmony and cooperation.

I think what is important to understand here, is that the Native Americans of that region in Virginia, recognized that these directors, and the creative team that came out to film, dramatize and retell a historical story of a specific tribal community, came into the region not with their

own preconceived lens and version of Powhatan tribal life and culture during the 1600's, rather they came to the Powhatan community with an openness and willingness to learn and understand their story, their people, their authenticity. Why it worked so well when finally captured on film was because of the integrity and commitment to detail to make sure the authenticity, spirit and culture of the Powhatan people were represented and not some caricature of what Hollywood and or/American culture wishes them to be. This is significant to Native American theater and the arts because unless the story is told through the eyes and spirit of the tribal people, then the story is truly just another highly stylized dramatization which for most accounts, will caricaturize Native American life, history and its people.

Chapter 6

A HISTORICAL NATIVE AMERICAN DRAMA; ST. KATERI TEKAKWITHA GAH-DEH-LEE DEH-GAH-QUEE-TAH (MOHAWK)

As a playwright, who has an ancestral affiliation and connection with an indigenous tribal people and specific land base (*Quechua–Incan/Cusco, Peru*), I approach my craft with that particular worldview and ideological lens where the land, the spirit of place, is integral to the telling of the story. I am currently researching and drafting a full length historical drama/script about the life of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, (Mohawk pronunciation: *Gah-deh-lee Deh-gah-quee-tah*). As with most historical dramas, I have found myself spending days and even years, compiling research as a foundation for the story I want to tell. When I first decided to tell this story, about the historical and miraculous journey of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th century Algonquin/Mohawk woman who died at the age of twenty four, I opened with a poetic depiction of the landscape, the northeastern woodlands of the Iroquois people. As the Iroquois people were first being introduced to European settlers, so to was the land that was basically intact and unspoiled by the human footprint. In the opening scene, I try to convey through the natural elements within the environment (including the musical sound-scape of birds, native flute, etc.), the interconnection and harmony that the Iroquois had with the landscape, with the spirit of place from which they originated. However, as the European intrudes upon their land, desecrating the forests, and hacking down the trees, taking more then they give; the relations and balance with the Native people reflect that intrusion and that destruction. Soon the homeostasis (balance) between creation (the natural environment) and the Native person is dramatically altered and the landscape is no longer the same and has changed. The violence that is incurred upon the land is introduced to the lives of the people. Destruction begets destruction, and soon land, people and wildlife inhabitants are all thrown out of ecological balance; the journey between European settlers and Indigenous persons begins. When Kateri Tekakwitha enters the metaphor of this surreal setting, already fraught with sacrifice, murder, and the shedding of martyr's blood, the Iroquois has collided with a western worldview, and the natural environment that Kateri Tekakwitha's ancestors and people had been accustomed to, has been permanently altered.

Kateri enters this violated paradise and with her enters the piercing rays of the rising sun. The sun (w/ stage-lights) bathes all present in blinding hues of radiant light. In the center of the stage remains the stump of a tree that has been chopped and axed, just a remnant of what was person and place. She approaches the tree stump now bathed in this apparitional light and carves the sign of the cross on its bark. This act conveys the influence of the Catholic religion brought into her world by the French Jesuit Priests. The symbol of the cross for Kateri, was not only a source of strength and courage, but ultimately became for her and many Mohawk and Indigenous people during that time period all that made sense, all that seemed permanent and unchangeable.

Kateri Tekakwitha; Holy Woman

Gah-deh-lee Deh-gah-quee-tah; Wiyan Wakan

Scene 1

Northeastern woodlands. The year is 1602.

A wild, dense forest with a variety of trees, undergrowth, flowers and plants. The call of wildlife and songs of birds fill the air. Stage right there sits a solitary Iroquois man on the ground. He is tossing tobacco onto a flame (fire pit) and the smoke rises towards the clouds. He is chanting prayers in song as the smoke rises.

The sound of an axe chopping a tree can be heard in the distance. The NATIVE AMERICAN MAN continues to chant prayers as smoke rises. Soon there are sounds of numerous axes chopping and multiple trees falling. The destruction of the forest is now the predominant sound. The songs and calls of wildlife and birds are overpowered by the sounds of axes and machetes cutting through the underbrush, plants and the density of the forest.

Enter SEVERAL WHITE MEN with machetes and axes from the back of the forest (downstage). The entire forest setting is destroyed and cleared away very quickly (hacked away/chopped down) by this very boisterous group of men wearing tattered worker's clothes. The Native American man slips away unnoticed.

The forest is completely destroyed. All that remain are the tattered looking men holding machetes and axes. Limbs and branches of fallen trees and plants are scattered on the ground. Silence fills the air as the men begin to carry away the limbs of trees until nothing of the original landscape is left. Exit the men leaving a barren, silent landscape where nothing stirs (lifeless).

Scene 2.

The year is 1646 in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon (present day Auriesville, New York) by the Mohawk River.

Enter two JESUIT PRIESTS in procession wearing long black robes. The first priest to enter begins to chant Gregorian hymns in Latin. He holds a monstrance as the other priest carries an incense urn. Smoke rises from the urn and fills the entire setting. The black robed priests stand in the exact location that the Native American man was sitting in the previous scene. The priest holding the incense urn sways it back and forth repeatedly as in Catholic ritual, while the priest holding the monstrance stands very still. The smoke rises around the monstrance. As the smoke rises, the priest carrying the urn joins his voice to the Gregorian chant.

Enter the third CLERGYMAN in long white and black robes. He carries a large wooden cross with the bloodied sculptured image of Christ's crucified body. He stands in the center of the stage facing directly forward. His voice joins the Gregorian Chant.

A fourth CLERGYMAN enters the setting carrying a large bible with a cross on the front cover. The bible faces forward as ritual. He walks towards stage left and stands near the crucified depiction of Christ. His voice then joins the other three voices in a Gregorian Chant.

After the procession, an altar is erected in the center of the space. The Jesuit priests and Clergyman continue chanting prayers in Latin throughout as the incense from the urn continues to rise.

The sound of Native American instruments (an Iroquois rattle and drum) can be heard after the altar is erected. The Jesuit priests stop chanting to listen. A single Native American male voice is heard singing prayers in the background.

The Jesuit Priests return to their ritual/Mass as they continue to chant in Latin. The Native American prayers/songs begin to overlap and intermingle with the Gregorian chants into a cacophony of sound. Soon the one male Native American voice is joined by two voices and then numerous (war like) voices and cries fill the space.

The Jesuit priests stop chanting Latin prayers as a group of NATIVE AMERICAN MEN carrying hatchets, clubs and tomahawks enter the newly constructed church. The church items are quickly destroyed by the war party. The two black robed Jesuit priests and the two other clergyman are tethered.

As the Iroquois war party exits the area with their captives, they come across a lone bark of a tree. A Native American man strikes the tree with his hatchet 4 distinct times. The Black Robed priests and clergymen fall dead (one by one) after each strike upon the tree. Death is preempted by each hatchet strike upon the tree. As the last priest/clergyman falls and hits the ground, lights black out.

Scene 3.

Enter KATERI TEKAKWITHA at age 24. As she enters, the sun begins to rise until the entire setting is illuminated in light. She walks with a limp towards the solitary tree. She begins to carve a large cross into the bark of the tree. When she is finished, she kneels and begins to sing a prayer/canticle in Huron. All is illuminated in the light of the risen sun.

Black out.

The symbol and sacrifice of the cross, in particular, the suffering one must endure for the benefit of an entire nation, was not a concept that was unfamiliar to Native American thought.

To Native Americans, this concept of suffering for others, whether it be through ceremonial dance (such as the sun dance) and/or spiritual ritual and personal sacrifice resonates and has a thread of universality about it. St. Kateri Tekakwitha, who was canonized this year on October 21, 2012, is the first Native American saint from North America. She represents not only the Mohawk and Algonquin people whom she is tribally identified with; she represents all Native American people. The title of the play; *Kateri Tekakwitha, Holy Woman; Gah-deh-lee Deh-gah-quee-tah – Wiyon Wikan*, incorporates two indigenous languages, Mohawk and Lakota. Many Native Americans today look to St. Kateri Tekakwitha as a spiritual guide and as a foundation of hope. Even traditional Mohawks, who reject Christianity and Catholicism and perceive western religion as the culprit behind the demise of their own culture, look to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha with great respect, appreciation and honor.

The most difficult part about writing a historical drama, especially when trying to compile unbiased research about a Mohawk-Algonquin woman who lived during the 1600's, is trying to balance the two opposing ideological constructs that defined her. Since she never wrote a single word, or left behind any transcribed document; who she was, as a Mohawk woman/convert, must be defined by those who knew her. Kateri Tekakwitha's legacy is told entirely through the lens of the missionary priests who knew her, those who were able to write about her and were able to maintain and keep historical documents. During that time period (1600's) it was the French Jesuit priests who came to the Americas with the courage and conviction to save and convert as many Indigenous people to the Catholic religion as possible that kept historical written documents. Many Native Americans with differing tribal affiliations (Huron, Algonquin, Iroquois) were baptized and accepted the Catholic religion. Many others however, fought hard to keep it out of their communities and away from their people.

While writing this historical drama, one of my main resources was the writings of the Jesuit priests Fr. Pierre Cholenec, (Kateri's Spiritual guide) and Fr. Claude Chauchetiere, whom she appeared to after death. However, there is another story that one has to listen to and incorporate into the script if you want to be accurate, that is the story of the Mohawk people. I had to research their ideological viewpoint through their cultural, ceremonial, mythological, traditional and spiritual perspective. I had to uncover not only who they were as a tribal people during the 1600's, but also, their perception of the changing world around them.

The Martyrs, St. Isaac Jogues, St. Breubeuf and Lalande, needed to be incorporated into the story in order to give a chronological foundation to Kateri's Mohawk community and the first introduction of her people to the Catholic religion.

Did Catholicism and Christianity change the worldview and true identity of the Native American person? Many Native Americans, including several playwrights that I have incorporated into my research, say unequivocally, yes. Because many Native Americans perceive Christianity as a main culprit and vehicle used by their oppressors (colonizers) to incur loss of culture, traditions and spirituality they reject it. However, unlike so many others, particularly in her own tribe and family, Kateri incorporated and embraced Catholicism within her own ceremonial practices and cultural perspective. She was both a Mohawk and Algonquin woman and a Catholic. Identifying herself as a Christian did not mean she had to forsake her culture. The Jesuit priests, who knew her, took it upon themselves to learn the Mohawk and indigenous languages so they could better understand the Native people. They also soon learned that the Indigenous concept and understanding of the word, "*spirit*," was much more highly evolved than the European construct and definition of the word (Salvucci). This historical drama tells the story of two colliding worlds and the survival and courage of the Native spirit in a young Mohawk woman, whose choices and example inspired not only the Jesuit Priests who counseled her but also, the Native people who came to love, admire, honor and embrace her.

Kateri Tekakwitha; Holy Woman

Gah-deh-lee Deh-gah-quee-tah; Wiyān Wakan

Act 1., Scene 7.

The moon rises over the mountain to the east as the sun begins to set in the west. The sound of song, rattles and drums can be heard in the distance. Kahenta and Kateri are gathering wild berries in their baskets.

KATERI. Why is my brother weeping and why did we leave him in the Long House all alone?

KAHENTA. He is not alone! There are many with him now who will watch over him until we return.

KATERI. So my brother is not alone?

KAHENTA. He is not alone! He has a large family to watch over him. And the man of the cross watches over him always.

KATERI. But we walk alone Kahenta.

KAHENTA. We don't walk alone!

KATERI. Yes we do. No one in the village walks with the man of the cross but you...and me, and my brother.

Kahenta doesn't respond to Kateri's statement, and begins to quickly gather the baskets. She begins to walk towards the trail. Kateri chases after her.

KATERI. Do you ever feel alone Kahenta? Truly alone? Has the creator Ha-wen-ne'yu abandoned you because of the man of the cross? And what does he look like,... the man of the cross and how can I recognize him?

Kahenta turns and faces Kateri.

KAHENTA. He no longer has a body, as you and I do Kateri. He walks in spirit! So yes,...it appears that we walk alone, but he is always with us.

KATERI. How do you know if you can't see him, hear him or touch him? How do you know he walks with us?

Kahenta looks to the heavens and raises her open arms towards the stars and moon in praise. A wind stirs through the fields and forest and the leaves shudder.

KAHENTA. Can you feel the wind?

KATERI. Yes.

KAHENTA. Can you hear the wind?

KATERI. Sometimes.

KAHENTA. What does the wind sound like?

KATERI. The wind moves the trees so the leaves sing.

KAHENTA. How do you know?

KATERI. I can hear the trees sing.

KAHENTA. But can you see the wind?

KATERI. Not really.

KAHENTA. So how do you know the wind exists?

KATERI. Because I can feel it rushing through, around me, above me, beneath me, in front of me, behind me.

Kateri dances in the wind as the leaves on the trees stir and the tree's sing through the leaves that shutter.

KAHENTA. That is how I know he exists. I cannot see him, but he walks with me. Like the wind, like spirit he is all around me. All of creation, like the song of the trees acknowledges him and lets me know he is there, with me, besides me, above me, all around me...and you...and everyone who will stop for one moment to listen.

The wind picks up and the trees, Kateri and Kahenta are gently stirred by the breeze.

KATERI. So we're not alone?

KAHENTA. No. Spirit always walks with us. Just be thankful for everything he brings to you Kateri. Remember all is a gift from the creator and we must always be thankful.

KATERI. Can I always walk this road with you and the man of the cross? Do you think that would be alright?

KAHENTA. That would make me very happy! (Kahenta smiles and embraces Kateri.) But be careful not to share what happened here today with your father's family. No one must know!

KATERI. Why?... Why can't I tell them these stories!

KAHENTA. It would be difficult for them to understand. Your father and your uncle would become very angry with me. So let's walk this sacred road together, but also walk in honor and beauty thankful to Ha-wen-ne'yu, the Creator. You must balance two worlds Kateri if you want to walk in the ways of the Mohawk and with the man of the cross. Two worlds... but those two worlds can exist to become one. You don't have to lose the one to have the other.

KATERI. I don't? But Kenneronkwa and my uncle says I will lose the Mohawk ways if I listen to the Black Robes who teach about the man of the cross!

KAHENTA. I promise you Kateri as long as you walk in beauty, and respect all living things you will always be Mohawk. Pray in spirit Kateri!... Listen to his voice in the forest, in the river, in the wind, in all things both small and mighty, and you will discover that the creator breathes life in everything.... He breathes life and truth in you! You are Mohawk Kateri,... but you are also called to walk that lonely, red road of the cross. It is paved in blood.

KATERI. Blood?!... Why blood?!

KAHENTA. Because his blood is life!

KATERI. So... then why did he have to die?

KAHENTA. So that we could live!

KATERI. But wasn't he afraid of dying on that cross? I would have been!

KAHENTA. There is no fear in death, Kateri... because spirit always continues on. It has no end...like the wind it continues, no beginning... no end.

The wind grows strong and sings through the trees. The leaves shutter as the wind dances with them. Kateri dances in the wind as the breeze lifts her hair. Kahenta watches.

Black Out.

Chapter 7

SILA & SPIRIT OF PLACE

“*SILA*,” in Inuit mythology means the primary component of everything that exists.
“*Anirniq*,” means soul or spirit.

There are numerous Native Americans, particularly in the southwest of the United States, and in the Andean regions and rainforests of South America, that still speak their ancestral and/or tribal affiliated language. For example, in New Mexico, there are currently twelve Indigenous languages that are still spoken today as a first and/or primary language. There is also a resurgence and revival of Native languages throughout the Americas, for example, in the northeast under the tutelage of elders such as Tom Porter (Mohawk), through recorded oral history by Vi Hilbert (Lushootseed/Upper Skagit Tribe of Washington State) and Ian Custalow (Mattaponi Tribe) with the *Powhatan Language Revitalization Project*. However, there are even a higher percentage of Native Americans, who have lost the ability to communicate in their ancestral tribal language. This is primarily due to colonization, boarding school and radical governmental policies. For example, Powhatan or Virginia Algonquian language had been extinct for more than two centuries, because the language was forbidden to be spoken by law. It wasn't until the filming of, “*The New World*,” that the language had a resurgence. Linguists, academics and scholars researched the existing vocabulary, came up with a working dialogue that resembled the original language of the Powhatan people and taught this resurrected language to the Native American cast who had speaking roles. The language spoken by the Powhatan cast in the film is the Algonquian dialect that was recovered by linguists, academics and specialists in the area. Today, Mattaponi Tribal member; Ian Custalow, offers language classes to students of all ages and works extensively with the Powhatan Confederacy to revitalize and bring back an indigenous language that for the most part had been entirely lost and forgotten. The hope for Custalow is that the *Powhatan Revitalization Project* will allow for the language of a suppressed and underrepresented Native American Community to live once again (Rising Global Voices).

However, even with the loss and ability to communicate in an ancestral tribal language, certain words and phrases (though conveyed, and/or translated in English), seem to show up again, and again, in Native American literature, dramatic writing and oral stories. These words seem to connect the Indigenous person to a spirit of place and to each other. The stories, words and phrases (though unique to each tribal community) have a universality about them, like the language and rhythm of music, and that connection is entirely formulated by the Indigenous person's connection to the earth, the land and their ancestral place of origin.

SILA, a play written by playwright Chantal Bilodeau (Canadian) uses the perspective and community of a particular Inuit village in Canada to tell the global story about Climate Change, its impact upon the environment, and specifically the melting of the glaciers and ice in this particular geographic location. She uses several languages in the script, Inuit, French Canadian and English. She encompasses the landscape, the people, the animals, Inuit mythology and the meaning of *SILA* to weave a tale that is both deeply haunting, yet challenging. The play won the *2012 Eco- Drama Award* and had a staged reading at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on June 2, 2012. What impressed me most was how the playwright incorporated all these characters, with differing perspectives and viewpoints, numerous plots and storylines, like pieces of a mosaic, to tell the crisis of an entire community. Community in *SILA*, included not just the humans, but also, the Inuit thought and Mythology, Spirit of Place (the arctic) and the animals, specifically two polar bears, *Anaanaa/MAMA*, the mother Polar Bear, and *Paniapik* her cub, referred to in the script as *DAUGHTER*.

This Inuit community that had been in existence for 4,000 years is being gravely impacted due to climate change, and the melting of the ice packs and glaciers. *SILA* wasn't told through one voice and perspective; it gave a voice to *all* community members impacted. The most interesting characters to me were the Polar Bears, *Anaanaa* and *Paniapik*, having Inuit names, and struggling with the onset of environmental disasters (the warming of the ocean and the disappearance of the glaciers) where the survival of their species and the entire community is placed at risk. Many do have a tragic end. The Polar Bear cub, *Paniapik*, perishes due to the melting of the ice floes and drowns despite her mother's pleading, encouragement and desperate fight to save her.

To see the struggle of life, through the animated voices of excellent actors, was highly evocative and emotional for me. I can still hear the cries of despair of Anaanaa as she searched desperately for her drowned cub in the dark murky ocean. The playwright's decision, to use the Polar Bears to introduce Inuit mythology and to convey the meaning of SILA was poignant and provocative. Especially since it was Anaanaa, teaching her daughter Paniapik, Inuit stories through oral tradition as they were observing the stars in the arctic night sky.

The following dialogue between Anaanaa and Paniapik, seemed similar, (in my observation) to the conversation that transpires between Kateri Tekakwitha and her mother Kahenta as they gather wild berries for the Mohawk Strawberry Festival in *Kateri Tekakwitha; Holy Woman*. However, this is due primarily to the conversation about *Spirit* and *Sila*, the indigenous concept of the word is interchangeable.

MAMA. You're a very good hunter, Paniapik.

DAUGHTER. I'm a good hunter.

MAMA. I'm proud of you.

They look up at the stars as the daughter revels in that thought. A beat. One of the stars (in the Orion Constellation) starts to morph into a running bear.

DAUGHTER. Look! There's Nanurjuk, the nanug who climbed into the sky!

MAMA. U-huh. And do you see the hunters chasing after her?

DAUGHTER. Yes. One, two, three.

As the daughter counts, the three stars behind Nanurjuk become Inuit hunters.

MAMA. And?

DAUGHTER. And in the back is Kingulliq, the fourth hunter who dropped his mitt and went back to retrieve it. The fourth star became Kingulliq.

MAMA. That's right.

A beat as they watch the chase.

DAUGHTER. I'm sad for Nanurjuk. It must be lonely running across the sky like that every night.

MAMA. The only creatures who are lonely are the ones who forgot about SILA.

DAUGHTER. How do you mean Anaanaa?

MAMA. All life is breath. From the original breath from which creation is drawn to the World itself, SILA wraps itself all around us.

The daughter looks around.

DAUGHTER. The sky is SILA?

Mama nods.

DAUGHTER. The land, the ice, the ocean?

Mama nods.

MAMA. And Sila also moves in and out of our lungs.

Mama breathes.

See? That's SILA. And with each breath, SILA reminds us that we are never alone. Each and everyone of us is connected to every other living creature.

The daughter breathes.

MAMA. But SILA'S gift is not ours to keep. We may use our breath while we roam the land but we must surrender it once we pass from the land.

MAMA (CONTINUED). Creatures who are lonely are the ones who hold on to their breath as if it was theirs and theirs alone.

The concept of SILA, is as much a part of death, as it is during life. In the following dialogue, at the tragic end of Paniapik's life (due to drowning), reveals that desperate struggle for survival for the Polar Bear as a species. The plight of the Polar Bear, has been documented and filmed by wildlife journalists, biologists, scientists and documentary filmmakers who are attempting to awaken the consciousness of society to the very seriousness of the environmental crisis that now apparently seems (due to the destruction caused by Hurricane Sandy in the northeast) to be upon us.

DEATH

Heavy panting, the open sea. Mama tries to prop up her exhausted daughter on a small iceberg.

MAMA. There...That's good...rest for a little bit...

The daughter is too heavy. The iceberg rolls over, throwing her back into the water.

DAUGHTER. Anaanaa

MAMA. It's OK. I have you. Climb on my back.

As best as she can, the daughter climbs on Mama's back.

MAMA. Now hold on tight. We're not very far. I'll get you there.

Mama swims.

The daughter's panting gradually slows down as the earth's breathing rises.

Mama swims.

Soon the daughter and the earth breathe in unison, their breaths rising up and down with the swell of the ocean.

Mama swims.

There is a moment in the scene, where Paniapik's breath is in complete harmony with the earth, but then her drowning and struggle for life, becomes apparent. Weeds, or possibly a creature symbolizing death rises from the sea and wraps itself around Paniapik's body. There is a tug of war between Anaaiaa and death, who desperately tries to stop her daughter's body from being dragged beneath the sea. It is a fight for her cub's survival; it is a tragic struggle between life and death. The drowning and death of her daughter Paniapik is imminent and the cub's body sinks beneath the murky, dark waters. Anaaiaa searches for her daughter and realizing she will no longer see her cub again, wails and cries out her name loudly at first, and then softly with quiet desperation, "Paniapik!"

There are people in the world who would not wish to be in the world, were not Bear there as well. There are people who understand that there is no wilderness without him. Bear is the keeper and manifestation of wilderness. As it recedes, he recedes. As its edges are trampled and burned, so is the sacred matter of his heart diminished. (Momaday 10)

Animals are very significant to Native American thought and ideology, and are used in ceremonies, naming ceremonies, totems, and *the Khanty Bear Feast* as referred to in N. Scott Momaday's, *In the Bear's House*:

... I ventured among a people for whom Bear is sacred. In western Siberia I was shown articles of the Khanty bear feast-the facial skin of a bear, like a mask from another world, the bear's paws,...its house. In the presence of these things I felt their power. In their presence I understood something about Bear's transcendent spirit, how it is that Bear dances on the edge of life and death, crossing over and back again. (Momaday 11)

For traditional Native Americans, animals have various functions. Their function and purpose is not entirely based on self-preservation, sustenance, companionship and survival. Animals; and the manner in which they present themselves to the recipient, are perceived as messengers. This relationship between the messenger and recipient is complex and perceived and defined differently according to an individual's tribal affiliation and philosophy. The diverse variety of wild species that co-exist with humans in the Americas and Canada are categorized according to the belief system and traditional ceremonial practices of varying tribes. Their purpose and function, (depending on the tribal community and/or indigenous ideology) can assist them to understand their future, appease the spirits that exist in a geographic location and place, define their clan name and or/tribal identity, and make sense of their past. When a specific animal presents itself to the recipient as a messenger, it can be looked upon as bringing a warning, or a forbearer of impending danger. The messenger can also be perceived as a guide to assist someone to find purpose, to discern their vocation, discover their authentic identity, guide their journey and most importantly to acquire and fulfill their fullest potential as they discover who they truly are. This quest for self discovery (when done in a traditional context) has significant value to the recipient because the messenger can reveal to the individual in a personal and deeply defining manner who they can become by assisting them to develop their personal strengths while minimizing and acknowledging their humanity and weaknesses. Animals can even sacrifice their own lives so that you can live. I was told this by a Native American educator I worked with, who taught classes in *Towa* (the oral- traditional language of the tribal community of Jemez) on the Jemez Pueblo Reservation in the high desert region of New Mexico. This Native American educator, who taught in a traditional Indian school, shared this very unique perspective that I had never heard before after I shared with him a harrowing experience that I had just been through the previous night before. I was driving home from Santa Fe to Jemez Pueblo late at night. I was exhausted and during the long trip, I had to stop my car and park alongside the highway, several times just so that I wouldn't fall asleep behind the steering wheel. When entering San Ysidro, and the most difficult part of the journey, the small two lane highway, through the canyons and reservation of Jemez, a large bird flew above my car, I saw it hovering, like a shadow, and then the winged creature landed on it. I heard a loud thud on the top of my vehicle and then saw it land on highway 4. My colleague said, "That owl sacrificed itself so that you could live!" The reason, he felt strongly about this was because of what occurred

afterwards. I looked in my rear view mirror, not exactly sure what kind of nocturnal bird landed on my car. I saw an owl in distress, flapping its wings on the road. I couldn't just continue onwards knowing it was injured so I stopped my vehicle. I put on a pair of reinforced gloves that I always kept in my vehicle, and I approached the owl picking it up in my hands to examine it. Something about the way it looked at me, with deep intensity and a bloodied eye, and how its tiny neck dropped back soon afterwards, awoke me. The whole experience awoke me. I placed the owl's body in a deep thicket of tall grass, and proceeded on my journey home. I was no longer deathly tired, fighting to stay awake behind the wheel. I was deeply saddened and troubled about what happened to that little white owl that seemed to die in my hands. However, the adrenaline that came from that experience gave me the burst of energy I needed to return home safely. When I returned home I was so moved by the experience I couldn't fall asleep. Every part of my being was wide awake. As that little white owl died in my hands, I awoke. I was no longer fighting to stay awake (in retrospect, to stay alive), because of that owl and the way it peered into my eyes, my soul, I was wide awake.

Before I moved to New Mexico, while living in a large six story building that faced the beach on the iconic boardwalk of Rockaway Beach, Queens, a large snake coiled itself outside my front door and nestled itself on my welcome mat. It was there for hours and wouldn't budge. I called every wildlife agency (not very many) that was operating in New York City, in hopes that they could come to my apartment complex and remove this very large snake that was coiled up right in front of my entry way making it impossible for me to leave my apartment. No one could come immediately, nor could they confidently tell me what to do, since I couldn't identify what kind of snake this was. Finally a neighbor (hearing about my plight) asked me if he could take the snake. Apparently he always wanted a snake as a pet. I was happy to oblige him, and wasn't terribly disappointed in seeing the snake go. I shared this experience with author Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), the director of the Native American Writer's Circle at the American Indian Community House. He was interested, but didn't really know what to say about the visiting snake, who chose my front door as an ideal place to rest. When I met up later with Simon Ortiz, after I moved to New Mexico, he remembered the snake, and said to me, "Now I understand why that snake visited you in New York City. He was a messenger that came to tell you that you were coming here. That you were moving to New Mexico. He was a foreshadowing of your journey here."

New Mexico is a place, a landscape that is a natural habitat and home to a diverse variety of snakes. In fact, on the opening day of Jemez Pueblo School, where I was newly hired as a music-drama teacher, a message came through the intercom from the principal, that we had remain in our classrooms (similar to a lock down) because a rattlesnake was discovered in the gym.

Another incident that occurred that I shared with my teacher Natalie Goldberg and my creative writing class at the *Institute of American Arts* in Santa Fe, was how prior to class early in the morning, I heard a hawk screeching loudly outside my home. The hawk didn't let up, he was persistent, and so I went to look outside in my backyard to see what was wrong. The hawk was perched in the only large tree in my yard. He was strategically perched beneath a large owl. The owl's head was so huge that when it turned its head around, from various angles, you might think the creature in the tree was a large cat. But this wasn't a cat; it was a large brown owl. Because it was daylight, the owl wouldn't budge, despite the hawk taunting it, attacking it and screeching at it. Finally, the hawk gave up, and flew away leaving the owl still perched and resolute in the tree. The owl stayed in the tree, in my yard, the entire day. By the time I left (in the early evening) to get to class in Santa Fe, the owl was still there, facing my home. Little did I know then, what I know now. That a short time later (approximately two months) I would be leaving New Mexico to return to New York, and would experience one of the most difficult and trying times/journey of my entire life. My companion for years, my dog Simba who moved to New Mexico with me almost a decade ago, during the journey back to New York, had a tragic and heartbreaking end. He lasted only two days in New York and unfortunately due to his rapidly declining condition had to be put to sleep. In retrospect, perhaps the hawk was warning me of unfortunate events that were to come when I made the decision to return to New York and leave New Mexico. After the whirlwind of my journey settled, and I found a new home to dwell, a large red tailed hawk always appeared to me during my walks. The red tailed hawk, no matter where I live, and or venture here on Long Island, continues to hover over me, and sometimes even calls out when it is near.

When I travelled to Machu Picchu in Cuzco, Peru where my maternal ancestors are from, a large raptor placed itself in front of me on the highest recesses of these ancient ruins. We were so high up, that the clouds were beneath us. The Quechua guide that accompanied me saw the raptor facing in my direction, as if looking at me. She told me that this was a good sign; that this particular bird was significant and sacred to the indigenous people who still lived in the region.

The significance and value placed on animals in Native American thought, philosophy and ideology is why they are used and found so often in Native American stories, oral tradition, dramatic literature and poetry. It is why I chose horses, in my adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, rather than a cultivated vineyard or garden to tell the story of the community (indigenous and Spanish) who were losing their ranch in Santa Fe during the height of the recession in 2008.

The use of Indigenous languages is also prevalent in Native American theater and dramatic literature. Not simply words, or phrases, but an entire dialogue between two characters can be written in the Native language. In some of the plays I introduced; *Waaxe's Law* by Mary Kathryn Nagle (for example) the Ponca dialect and language is used. In *SILA* by Chantal Bilodeau, Inuit is incorporated into the script and spoken by the characters. There are glossaries included with each script to provide the English translation of the Native American words used.

When I lived and taught on the reservation of Jemez Pueblo, the formidable images of the landscape, the red clay canyons, the arroyos, Guadalupe Mesa, the Jemez Forest East Fork Trail, the Jemez Water Falls, Black Eagle Mountain and Valles Caldera beckoned and inspired me. When the hovering, rolling clouds came in like a ghost from the north, veiling the peak of Guadalupe Mesa and covering the red earth with heavy laden snow, a spirit of place, spoke to me. It whispered through the haze of wind and snow, the interconnectedness of all things here. How place speaks through the indigenous people of Jemez. Its voice, like a mirror, can be heard and reflected through their rhythms, stories, dance and music. That spirit, seemed to dwell in every corner, rock, coyote, owl, snake (animate and/or inanimate) crevice of that place. And you could hear, even in the silence, the song of that desert wilderness. Though a land distant from me now (in miles only), it still resounds in my memory, the vibrant essence of place and the Pueblo people and culture that awaken the landscape with their rhythmical ceremony, dance, drumming and ancestral art forms. The Pueblo people interpret and represent the rhythm and spirit of place, while the place inspires, feeds and drives the artistic culture of the people. It is a reciprocity and balance and connection that Native people have with the land and its inhabitants, that western culture still has yet to fully understand, comprehend and even recognize. By experiencing a place that is so unencumbered by development and technology, roads, lights, franchises, street lights,

etc. I understand how place can speak to one's spirit and dwell even after years of being left behind. This is where most Native American stories and theater originate and come from. It is from the place, in which one identifies with through ancestry, tribal affiliation, and/or birth, and it is from the spirit of that place which still inspires, heals, and/or wounds depending on the chasm of conflict and loss.

SILA ACT 1.

NUNAVUT

A climate change conference. Leanna stands at a podium.

LEANNA. I come from a place of barren landscapes and infinite skies. I come from a place of rugged mountains, imperial glaciers and tundra covered permafrost. I come from a place where North is where you stand and South, everywhere else. Where there are five seasons and no trees. Where the days last twenty-four hours and the night's too. I come from a place where the skyscrapers are made of ice and proudly ride winds and currents...I come from a place where you can walk onto the ocean and if you're lucky, beyond the horizon itself.

The place I come from we call Nunavut. It means "Our Land" in Inuktitut. It is where we, Inuit, have thrived for more than 4000 years. It is where we strive to realize our full potential. It's where we nurture our knowledge of who we are. Nunavut, our land, is only as rich as it is cold. And today, most of it is melting.

Chapter 8

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT CHANTAL BILODEAU

KIRCHER: You have chosen the indigenous word, SILA, as the title of your play, can you tell me what is the English translation, concept, and/or definition of the word, and also, where is its place of origin (tribal affiliation/language)?

BILODEAU: Sila comes from Inuit cosmology and is a word in the Inuktitut language. It is a formless concept (not an embodied God) that is not any one thing but encompasses everything. It is sometimes referred to as air, breath, weather, or even wisdom. It is a spiritual power that orders the cosmos and provides guidance. It is where all life originates and where it returns after death.

KIRCHER: How did you come to learn about the indigenous word/thought, SILA and why did you choose that word to be the title of your play?

BILODEAU: I don't remember exactly how I came across the concept of Sila. It must have shown up in my research at some point and I followed the thread blindly until it finally became clear that this was what I was writing about. A lot of my inspiration for the play comes from listening to and meeting Inuit activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier. Ms. Watt-Cloutier has been a pioneer in the fight to connect climate change with human rights issues. At the heart of her message is the idea that we are all interconnected; that what is happening in the Arctic cannot be separated from what is happening in the rest of the world. An understanding of this profound interconnectedness is what I wanted people to take away from the play and I felt that Sila was the best way to illustrate that concept.

KIRCHER: I understand that you spent some time researching, visiting and living near, and/or within a Native American community in Canada. How did that experience influence your writing and the telling of this story?

BILODEAU: *SILA* is so culturally specific and so deeply rooted in geography that there was no way of writing the play without experiencing the culture and the place first hand. I spent three weeks travelling on Baffin Island in the territory of Nunavut (in Northern Canada), and visited three communities: Iqaluit, Pangnirtung and Kimmirut. I arrived on Baffin thinking I was going to write about the opening of the Northwest Passage (a maritime route through the Canadian Arctic that has always been impracticable, but that may become navigable in the summer as the ice continues to melt) and all the repercussions this would have on local communities. But during my stay, I realized that this story would not do justice to the complexity of the problem. The story of the Canadian Arctic is not one story but a multitude of interconnected stories. So I shifted my idea to something closer to what the play is today. Many of the people I met, places I visited and stories I was told ended up, in one way or another, in the play.

KIRCHER: Your play, *SILA* won the 2012 Eco-Drama Award, and I saw a staged reading at Carnegie Mellon University. What impressed me most was the way you interwove the stories of numerous people (relations) within that community. Your concept of community was inclusive and *indigenous in thought* in that the audience was able to hear not only the differing voices and opinions of people who live there, but also were able to hear the voice of other inhabitants, such as the Polar Bear and her offspring. In your opinion, why do you think it was necessary to give voice to all these characters in the story (including the non-human voices) when speaking about the spirit of place (the land) and the concept of *SILA*?

BILODEAU: I think this goes back to the concept of interconnectedness. What is being lost with climate change is so massive, so unlike anything modern humans have experienced before, that it is almost beyond comprehension. It is not only the climate or some of the ways in which we live that are affected – entire species and ecosystems are being wiped off the face of the planet. And we have no idea what repercussions these extinctions will have other than they will almost certainly be negative. Because *SILA* is first and foremost the story of the land, I wanted all who share that land to have a voice in the play. I wanted every perspective represented, whether human or non-human, dead or alive. I wanted to bring to the surface the deep ties that connect us all because understanding and honoring those ties is the only way out of our current crisis. There

will be no meaningful shift in behavior unless there is also a shift in perception and value. In our modern societies, we have moved away from our physical and spiritual connection to nature.

Yet, this connection is the very foundation of life. The characters in SILA are living this connection for us.

KIRCHER: Did the Native community and people that inspired the story assist you in this project and if so, why do you think it was necessary for them to tell their story through you, a playwright, who was not a member of their tribal community? Also do you think this particular story could be told without the land and without the Native people who make it their home? Is there a reciprocity there that is between the land, the Native people and the non-human inhabitants? How is that relationship necessary for their survival?

BILODEAU: Several people from the Native community (as well as the scientific community and the government) have helped me develop this play. I interviewed Sheila Watt-Cloutier, an Inuit activist. Taqralik Partridge, an Inuit spoken poet, agreed to contribute two of her poems to the play. Saimata Manning, a young Inuit woman living in Montreal, helped me with the Inuktitut language. And several Inuit and First Nation actors participated in workshops of the play. So far, everyone has been incredibly generous and supportive.

I don't like to describe SILA as being an Inuit story because the Inuit are, in fact, only one part of the bigger story I am trying to tell. They are an important part but SILA is also about scientific research and resource development in the North, about climate change and environmental degradation in the Arctic, and about the larger political context in Canada. In that regard, I hope the Inuit don't feel that I am telling their story but rather, that I am including them in a much larger story of which they are a part.

And to answer your last question, I feel SILA would be meaningless if the Inuit were not represented in it. They have survived on that land longer than anyone else and know it more intimately than any of us, "Southerners," can fully comprehend. The story of the Arctic and the story of the Inuit people are one and the same – the two cannot be separated. Plus, the Inuit are still struggling with a legacy of oppression and discrimination from the federal government. For

years, they have been silenced and mistreated and ignored. Giving them a voice in SILA is, in a Very small way, an acknowledgement of their presence, and an invitation to welcome them into the world's community as equal participants.

Chapter 9

MOTHER

Mother is the title of a play that I wrote for a *Ten Minute Playwriting Competition* at Stony Brook University. The play ended up being more than ten minutes in length, due to the number of characters and music that I incorporated into the plot and play structure. The irony of its timing is that only several days after it had a public reading, on March 11, 2010, one of the largest earthquakes/tsunamis hit the Japanese coast causing mass destruction and countless deaths. The character; *MOTHER*, represents the predominant Indigenous concept of Mother Earth. The scene takes place in a kitchen where several of her children (representing different nations) are talking with her. The daughter *SHEILA* recognizes that mother is ill and wants to take immediate action to get her the medical attention she needs. She picks up a phone and dials 911 pleading for an ambulance. The son, *EDWARD*, thinks that this is just another one of *MOTHER'S* stunts, her dramatizations, so he takes the phone away from Sheila, tearing the cord from the wall. She is not really sick; (according to Edward) she's been ill before and recovered. When more children of *MOTHER* enter the room, they have empathy and sympathy for her, (unlike Edward) and talk to her from the framework of their cultural traditions and perspectives. There is her son *HORATIO*, a Curandero (a healer/medicine man) who comes from Peru.

Horatio starts hitting Mother's legs and arms with the blade of the sword. He continuously circles her chanting the following poem in English then in Spanish, then Quechua as if reciting a round.

HORATIO. A mother lowers a shrouded son,
into the desert crypt of skulls
where blanched sockets peer
lingering long after the wind scatters names.

Mother's children; *WUBETE*, and *IYASSU* from the African Congo come to be by their mother's side. They sing the following song from the Congo in Congolese:

Sheila reaches out her hand to Wubete. Wubete begins to sing in Congolese repeating the lyrics of the song twice. Iyassu joins in on the second round.

WUBETE. Sindji wakoilekela, lungenji, lua Kumau, menu, wakalonda lua mu maji, sindji wakapanga. Yo Yo Yo wakalonda lua mume ye sindj wakapanga

SHEILA. That was so beautiful! What does the song mean?

WUBETE. It is a song from my country. It comes from a story about a squirrel that was crossing the river with an acorn in his mouth.

IYASSU. While the squirrel was crossing the river, he noticed something in the water.

WUBETE. He saw an image of a large, shiny acorn, bigger and more beautiful than the one in his mouth.

IYASSU. So, he decided to reach into the water to grab it. He dropped the acorn from his mouth to capture the shiny, bigger and more beautiful acorn.

WUBETE. When he reached into the river he realized that the shiny and bigger acorn was only a reflection of what he already had. He desperately tried to catch his own acorn, but it was already too late...it was gone. Now the squirrel had no acorn. Not his acorn, nor the big shiny one he saw in his reflection in the water.

The song and its English translation, comes from Fr. Ignace Loleke, a friend of mine from the African Congo. He sang the song during his mother's memorial service. I was in attendance with many others, some of whom were from the Congo and different regions of Africa. He told me afterwards he learned the song from his mother while growing up in Africa.

The final scene of the play was inspired by many of the Native American writers whose work I have become familiar with over the years. In particular, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Essays on Native American Life Today* from *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*.

Fifth World: The Return of Ma ah shra true ee, the Giant Serpent:

“So the old people laugh when they hear talk about the destruction of the earth, because humankind, they know is nothing in comparison to the earth. Blast it, dig it up, or cook it with nuclear explosions: the earth remains. Humans desecrate only themselves. The earth is inviolate” (Silko 125).

During the final scene, an eagle feather falls from *MOTHER'S* hand. This symbolizes a warrior falling, as told to me by a traditional dancer during a Native American Pow-wow. The dialogue spoken by *YELLOW HAWK* and *EAGLE WOMAN*, and *ALL*; (the final words spoken by the entire cast), comes from a poem written by Phillip Yellowhawk Minthorn, from *Songs From This Earth on Turtle's Back*.

EDMOND. Would you stop please! Sheila this is getting way out of hand!

Everyone!...I hate to break up the family reunion here but, could you all please just go back home! Mother is not ill, she's only resting!

Look...we've been through this before!

The prayer vigil continues. Edmond remains outside of the circle and is ignored.

Damn it!...I'm out of here...later!

Edmund walks towards the door and begins to exit.

YELLOWHAWK. For a piece of the earth
he becomes thirsty
with empty eye sockets
and cannot remember

when or how old,
only the long ache.

Mother begins to shake uncontrollably. As she shakes, so does the rest of the people in the room as if there is a violent earthquake. The drums are now beating rapidly to mimic a heart attack. Guadalupe keeps praying, the Curandero keeps chanting and others join them. Mother stops shaking. At the same instant, the drums, prayers and chanting stops and everyone collapses to the ground in a heap, grabbing and clutching Mother's arms, legs and feet.

EAGLE WOMAN. Of throbbing roots
flowing upwards
around his decaying body
has now set him free.

ALL. He will let go.

Silence. All movement stops. Mother rises and the eagle feather falls. She stands alone above the carnage of lifeless bodies. Her children are clinging to her, they appear as human chains. She pulls off the hands that are clinging to her body so she can stand erect. She stares at the still and the lifeless beneath her then raises her arms up as if free. The moon rises. It is blood red. Like a wolf, Mother raises her head and cries out in a high pitched mournful wail. It is a war cry, a shrill lamentation for a fallen warrior.

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