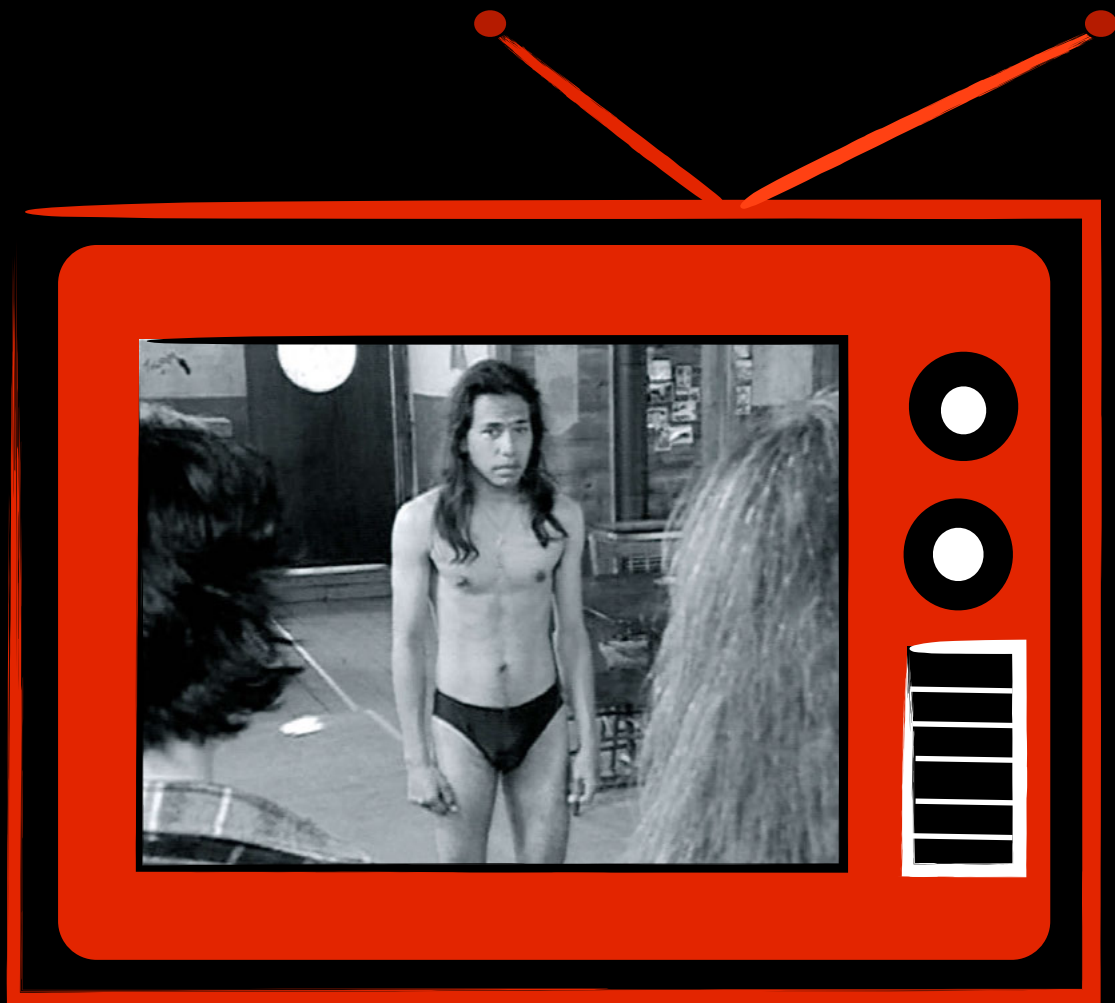


**Katrin Maslona**

# **The Only Good 'Indian' Is A Screened 'Indian'!**

**First Nations Culture And Its Representation In  
Contemporary Canadian TV Series**





**THE ONLY GOOD 'INDIAN' IS A SCREENED 'INDIAN'!**  
**FIRST NATIONS CULTURE AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN**  
**CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN TV SERIES**

**Dissertation**

**vorgelegt von**  
**Katrin Maslona**

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*For my mom who made me feel  
For my dad who made me think  
For my friends who made me watch  
For Christian who made me write\**

*\* positions may interchange according to the respective point in time and the author's particular state of mind*

## **FOR INDIANS LIVE IN INDIA! – THE CRUX OF THE RIGHT TERMS**

These are just generic terms used to describe us 'Indians.' Grab some aspirin and let me give you some examples. First of all, let's start with the basics. Status, non-Status, Métis... I guess next would come the already mentioned Indian, followed by Native, Aboriginal, Amerindian, Indigenous and First Nations.... There are the wannabe's (the White variety), the apples (the red variety), the half-breeds, mixed bloods and of course, the ever popular full-bloods.... Get, the picture? Right, there are two dozen separate names for our people. Where does it all stop? ... Even I get confused sometimes. That's why I usually use the term "Indian." I'm just too busy and too lazy to find out which way the political wind is blowing or to delve deeply into the cultural/governmental background of who I'm talking to or writing about. (*Funny*, 65-66)

As the 'Indian' author and playwright Drew Hayden Taylor describes, naming the former 'Indian' correctly without causing offense seems to be comparable to walking through a minefield. Yet, apart from the fact that in my opinion the use of the term Indian without hyphens should be left to the persons concerned, I decided to vary between a considerable amount of phrases like First Nations, First Inhabitants, Original Inhabitants, Aboriginals, Indigenous or Natives, whereby I constantly provided these terms with Capitals giving them the same stage as any nationality like the Canadians in general, the Scots or the Swiss.

Phrases with borderline connotations of prejudiced, politically incorrect or racist attitudes like 'dominant or 'master race' for instance are put in hyphens to stress their explosive nature or falsity. I did not want to relinquish them, though, because these terms often illuminate a particular subliminal public opinion and an overall atmosphere quite well.

Furthermore, this work does not dispense without occasional generalizations like 'the Canadian public/society' or 'the First Nations.' Canada's Aboriginals consist of a high number of different nations, every one having its own unique culture; yet, when I use a generalizing term describing all of them, I do so, because the statements and analyses I make concern Canada's First Inhabitants as a whole apart from their specific background. Additionally, the 'Canadian public/society' and 'Canada's Aboriginals' are frequently juxtaposed to one another, conveying that I do not count Natives to be a part of the latter. This should not be seen as an offence but as a major facet of the painful reality, which will now be discussed in this thesis.

If somebody still feels offended, I do apologize. This was not my intention.

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And thank you to my parents and friends for being who they are.



# FOREWORD – OR THE BOY WITH THE GOLDEN EYES

---

Kein Zweifel: Der Stamm sollte umzingelt und angegriffen werden! Ratlos starrte Ann nach dem Dorf. Was sollte sie tun? Wie sich verhalten? Gewiß, diese Männer da waren Weiße, Amerikaner wie sie – aber Anns Herz war bei den Indianern, bei dem Stamm zu den Chee gehörte<sup>1</sup>. (de Cesco 112)

Ann antwortete nicht. Von ihrem Platz aus konnte sie beobachten, wie Chee sein Pferd vom Pfahl losband und in den Sattel sprang. Noch einmal bäumte Kiuw sich wiehernd auf. Chee grüßte mit der Hand. Als er hinter dem Eckhaus verschwunden war, stöhnte Ann leise. 'Was für ein komischer Junge,' sagte das eine Mädchen.... 'Haben Sie gesehen: Er hatte goldene Augen!' 'Goldene Augen...,' wiederholte Ann, es klang wie ein Echo.<sup>2</sup> (de Cesco 142)

Thirteen years later, their homes destroyed, their buffalo gone, the last band of free Sioux submitted to white authority at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The great horse culture of the Plains was gone and the American frontier was soon to pass into history. (*Dances With Wolves*, final scene)

Taking a blatant look at the stories told behind the quotes above, I have to admit that those two tales were not only the first links of a chain but have to be considered as the two initial situations in my life that brought me exactly to the point, where I am right now: writing a dissertation on 'First Nations Culture and its Representation in Contemporary Canadian TV Series.' This may be considered pitiful, revealing me to have fallen victim to stereotyping concerning 'Indians.' Yet, I was about nine years old when I first read the juvenile book *Der rote Seidenschal* [The Red Silk Scarf] (1957) by the Swiss author Federica de Cesco, being the tale of a White girl named Ann Morrison, who is stranded all alone somewhere in the desert of Arizona at the end of the nineteenth century. She is found by a half-breed with golden eyes called Chee and persuades him to take her with him to his band. It should come as no surprise that they experience dangerous adventures and fall in love. This story became the trigger for my ongoing love for 'Indians,' which was then deepened by an enormous number of juvenile books on the long-lost past of the 'Indian,' as well as by movies, especially *Dances With Wolves*

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<sup>1</sup> No doubt: the band was about to be surrounded and attacked. Ann was watching the village in a puzzled way. What should she do? How to act? For sure, these men were white, Americans like her – but Ann's heart was with the Indians, with the band Chee belonged to.

<sup>2</sup> Ann did not answer. From her position she could observe how Chee was untying his horse from a stake and jumping into the saddle. Once again Kiuw was rearing up and neighing. Chee greeted her. When he had vanished behind the corner of a house, Ann moaned softly. 'What a strange boy!' one of the girls said.... 'Did you see: he had golden eyes!' 'Golden eyes...,' Ann repeated. It sounded like an echo.

(1992), an epic I even watched very many times and whose video tape is unambiguously signed with:

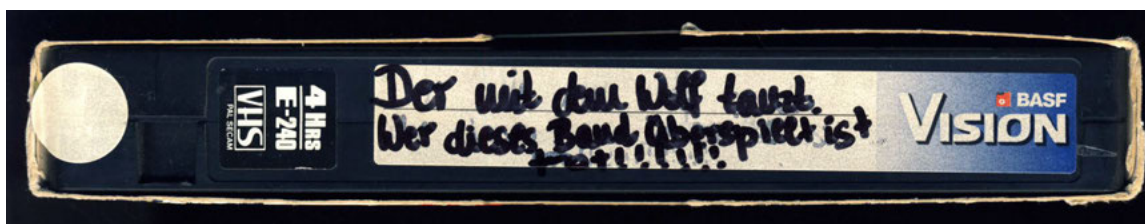


Fig. 1.1. "Dances With Wolves. Whoever deletes this tape is dead!!!!!!!"

When I was a child and a young teenager I always wanted to live the 'Indian way of life' and felt as if I had been given a raw deal for I was obviously born in the wrong century. Yet, over the years, my interests concerning the Native Americans ceased, only to come up again when my Ph.D. adviser Prof. Dr. Christian W. Thomsen and I were discussing the subject of my doctoral thesis. Rather incidentally I stated: "I have been interested in Native Americans when I was young." This brought us to the insufficiently analysed Canadian First Nations, and as I have always been interested in Cultural Studies and postmodern media, the topic on First Nations in television shows was born.

While conducting research for this thesis, I learned that I had to let go of images and false concepts I did not even know I had in the first place since I, and many other Europeans and the Canadian public, had kept in my mind a picture of 'the Indian' which not only was non-existent anymore but never had existed at all. Chee, the boy with the golden eyes metaphorically had been closing my eyes to reality, as just as the characters like John Dunbar and Wind in his Hair of *Dances With Wolves* had done. For they left me – having been born in 1980 – clinging to a past which was shaped by the media representation of a culture being as false but at the same time as durable as barely any other in the world.

Yet, First Nations ideology tells us that everything is cyclic and that no 'good' can exist for a person without his or her having seen the 'bad' for personal experience may be the ultimate goal and the ultimate remedy: an unrealistic juvenile book about a White girl loving a golden-eyed half-breed in the heat of the desert of Arizona managed to interest me in America's Natives as well as a contemporary Western about a White soldier with moustache falling in love not only with a wild wolf but also with a whole Sioux tribe. Like the life-altering little grandmother's stories mentioned ahead these tales have somehow influenced my life up to the point where they suddenly became the unforeseen

triggers for writing this thesis about wrong representations of Canadian Natives, and in how far television series on the contemporary life of First Nations can change their self- and their public image. Dealing with this topic made me realize that TV shows may thereby, indeed, have become the new (more authentic) means of telling life-changing tales, as they keep affecting my thought patterns and much more importantly: they offer the opportunity to alter the socio-cultural concepts Natives have of themselves and the wide public has of Natives in a sustainable way.

everything influences everything





# **PART ONE: PRESSING THE RED BUTTON – INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 THE ART OF SELF-DEFENSE**

I don't believe this dominance of the airwaves has to continue this way. Like anything, television can have both a negative and a positive influence. As the wise old Japanese Elder from *The Karate Kid* says ... 'no such thing as a bad student, only a bad teacher.' Television is what you make it. (Taylor, *Furious* 71)

Culture is about telling stories. Asking people about tales a common nostalgic picture comes into mind: an old, wise Grandmother with a mischievous look talking to a child with big saucer eyes leaning comfortably on her leg. The marvelling child immerses itself into the unknown opportunities and dangers of a seemingly inexhaustible, boundless world outside. It searches for entertainment and tension, the feeling of goose pimples on its arms and the reassuring certainty that Granny has a happy ending to tell. Yet, it does not know that these stories might mold it as much as its first year away from home and its first partner will do. They may determine whether the opportunity of going away 500 miles from its birthplace is a likeable challenge or metaphorically comparable to a suicide. They may influence the choice of lovers, friends and working places and they may shape goals in life and ideologies. Stories form people. People form nations and nations form cultures. But what happens to a culture if the way of storytelling is changing in almost every single respect because exactly that culture should vanish from the face of the earth? What happens if a leisurely grandmother is replaced by a TV spitting out 50 different shots per second? What happens if this TV box tells the child with the innocent saucer eyes that the world it lives in, is not as boundless as it should be? What if the child involuntarily has to follow an endless discussion about the question of who has the right to tell the stories anyway?

An extraordinary example of how a (Native) child's socialisation has changed over the last centuries can be found in Canadian history. Having had a similar cultural clash of Aboriginal people and colonisers as the United States of America, the country, nevertheless, constantly tried to distance itself from its overpowering neighbors and consequently developed a media landscape, which can be considered as quite unique.

Yet, the basic situation stayed the same: being deeply rooted in oral traditions Canada's First Nations (as well as other Aboriginal people in the world) did not only have to cope with their dramatically changing situation in life, be it the attack on gender and sexuality issues, be it the enforced disconnection from their land or be it the annihilation and falsification of their history, but also with an externally controlled and adjusted media representation. While oral lore is based on creative variations and is therefore fluent and alterable by nature, cinematic communication can be seen as the 'grand-mother-of-all fixity.' Stories are not just retained in cold print as before but they are "frozen" by vivid pictures – on the one hand technically on DVDs and videotapes and on the other hand metaphorically in the viewer's mind. Consequently, potential excrescence of stereotyping, being TV's most criticised deficit anyway, cannot only hardly be deleted but sublimely becomes a reality in socio-critical appreciation.

Thus, prejudices concerning the Native Peoples of Canada have been nourished over the last decades, again climaxing at the end of the last century, when 'Indians' became the 'flavour of the month' in the Western world. Different authors exposed the European construction of 'Indianness,' which created stereotypes like the 'Drunken/Stoic/Childishly Bumbling Loser,' the romanticised 'Exotic Noble Savage' and the historical 'Playful Pocahontas,' often mistakenly emanating from the Plains in the middle of the nineteenth century. These were opposed to the scary 'Ripping Wildman' and the 'Voluptuous Squaw,' or the 'Greening Indian' being the 'original environmentalist' in times when ecological devastation became a major topic. Blessed with attributes like courageous, agile, honest and proud the 'Indian' suddenly found himself being captured in a fake realm of clichés while at the same time striding away from his roots in real life. Permanently serving White concerns and interests in terms of anthropological matters the Canadian First Nations community generally has been falling by the wayside.

Times are changing, though. The Canadian Aboriginals were able to perform a quantum leap and therefore share the responsibility of Canada's uniqueness in TV broadcasting. Caught in the trap of grandmother's traditional storytelling being on the way to its 'happy hunting ground' and non-Native dominated film and TV being obviously an enemy to their self-conception, they nevertheless began to see postmodern media as a strong weapon and as a means of their self-controlled representation in the world. Television series on Natives have been released before, *North of 60* being the most

recognisable example, yet in most of them dominant culture ideologies were promoted still while the view on a 'realistic' Aboriginal community was blurred through a 'white lens.'

Notwithstanding, the contemporary series we will discuss, like the dramas *Moccasin Flats* (2003-2006), and *renegadepress.com* (2004-2008), as well as the sitcoms *The Rez* (1996-1998), *Hank Williams First Nation* (2006), and *Moose TV* (2007) reflect the challenging balancing act between oppression and equality, image and authenticity, being visible and being forgotten, between grandmother and television set. For in these shows prejudices and typical White images of Natives are exposed by the characters, who represent a generation of Aboriginal youngsters being proud children of a postmodernism supplemented with traditional ideologies.

These and other television formats on Canadian Aboriginals being regularly aired on public and private Canadian networks, Native media self-depiction reached its temporary climax when one of First Nations' biggest media achievements, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), went on air in 1999, run exclusively by Natives. It promised the Aboriginals a regular spot in the Canadian social landscape, namely a stationary channel in Canadian broadcasting. After all, APTN technically guarantees a visual presence of First Nations by concentrating exclusively on Aboriginal topics (70% Canadian, 30% other countries) in order to counteract former invisibility and inaudibility.

APTN's slogan 'Sharing our stories with all Canadians' proves that in the end it is all about tales again. In the past several decades storytelling shifted to a different level. It became visual and accessible by a simple switch on the remote control.

Such a development has such a sizeable impact on a nation's self-portrait that it can barely be compared to the nostalgic picture of a grandmother's tale anymore. In fact, mass media have outstripped personally experienced storytelling, which seems to have been lost along the way in today's fast moving world. Yet, the aftermath stays the same. The shared stories socialise the viewer, who is watching the programs independently from his or her social, cultural or ethnic background, and consequently the 'real' world is influenced by filmic images.



Fig. 1.2. APTN being a postmodern media grandmother for everybody

## 1. INTRODUCTION – THE ART OF SELF DEENSE

Therefore, the way and by whom the story is narrated becomes a major topic, the 'Holy Grail of Media' so to say. Being unique with its great number of commercial series on Natives, Canadian society appears to be a postmodern city upon two hills with a kloof in between. It mirrors the tightrope walk of a nation's community, in which cultural and social positions need to be switched without having yet been redefined. There is a dehiscing canyon between image and authenticity, between fantasy and reality, which has been and is still deepened by TV and film. Notwithstanding, these series on Native contemporary life in Canada have been setting themselves the task of redefinition. Hence, they serve as bridges as well as weapons of self-defence.

In the light of this variety of today's TV shows, this study examines whether the crossing of this canyon at the beginning of this century – regardless from which side – is performed rather in a hesitant walk on tiptoes, a leaping run or in a stamping manner by force of arms.

## **1.2 LATEST STATE OF RESEARCH**

What I found out in my investigation especially during my five month field analysis at the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) in Winnipeg, Canada and also considering the secondary literature concerning the topic of 'First Nations Culture and its Representation in Contemporary Canadian TV Series' at the University of Manitoba, were several things:

1. First Nations in Canada tend to be constantly discriminated against, falsely represented and – if possible – ignored by the public
2. yet, there is very much secondary information about First Nations in Canada
3. yet, very little about First Nations in TV series, coming as a surprise
4. since Canada is not only equipped with TV shows on contemporary Natives aired on public and private Canadian channels, but also – in having APTN – possesses a reliable medium to constantly broadcast series with Aboriginal content
5. thereby Canada strongly differentiates itself from the United States of America, having a plethora number of 'Indian' movies and an enormous amount of secondary literature on the image of the 'Hollywood Indian' but obviously no intention to produce a television show on contemporary Natives worth mentioning

1. As First Nations were and still are bound to a not only unrealistic but also unhealthy and destructive representation of themselves, we will – as an overall basis – have to find out how this depiction came into being in order to juxtapose Native traditional lifestyle as well as the consequences of its destruction, with the general appearance, film technical means, character building and plot lines of the shows. Thereby, we have to cover the whole Native ideological spectrum and the destruction of it according to Western goals of colonization, starting with gender and sexuality issues and moving from the reciprocal relationship to land to forms of teaching and storytelling. Those will be dealt with in the historico-cultural part. Furthermore, an overview of Western television ideologies and techniques of production in general and the Canadian mediascape in specific has to be undertaken. In combing these two major topics then,

## 1. INTRODUCTION – LATEST STATE OF RESEARCH

- using them as a basis, and in enriching them with elements of pop culture like theories on today's music, a relevant and profound analysis of the five television series should be possible.
2. In order to do so properly, historical secondary literature needs to be employed, whereby I would especially like to address the work of Daniel Francis *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. He presents an insightful analysis of how the 'Imaginary Indian' – with help of the media through the ages – could be created and stay in the heads of the Canadian public, thereby destroying the First Nations identity while having consequences on Canada's political decision making concerning its First Inhabitants. Furthermore, J.R. Miller with his work *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, as well as C. Roderick Wilson and R. Bruce Morrison with *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, and Olive Patricia Dickason with *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* helped to understand the traditional Native psyche as well as the contemporary one by explaining historical and cultural nexuses having taken place in the last centuries. Apart from mere scientific secondary literature, I also found it quite useful to listen to an authentic, contemporary voice commenting on the current First Inhabitants' state of health and state of mind in order to catch a straight and progressive spark of today's Aboriginal daily life in the postmodern Canadian cultural space. Here especially the Ojibwa/Caucasian author and playwright Drew Hayden Taylor should be mentioned. His columns collected in the *Funny/Futile/Furious* book series as well as his works *Me Funny* and *Me Sexy* on Native humor and sexuality made me aware of First Nations spiritual nature and of the overall fact that, first and foremost, an intelligent and subtle humor has been lying and still lies at the very core of Native culture.
3. When I first started my dissertation, practically no scientific discussions concerning First Nations in commercial TV series could be found, only some articles like McCullough's essay on "Representation of Urban Conflict in *Moccasin Flats*" or Mary Jane Miller's on "The CBC and its Presentation of the Native Peoples of Canada in Television Drama." Yet, there has always been a great scientific interest in non-commercial independent Native media productions (especially the ones of the North) being dealt with in for instance *Screening Culture: Constructing Image and Identity* (Heather Norris Nicholson) or *Something New In The Air: The Story of First Nations*

*Peoples Television Broadcasting in Canada* (Lorna Roth). This is a topic of great importance, indeed. Yet, often these rather small scale productions are not able to captivate and change the mind of the great Canadian public. Then in 2008 Mary Jane Miller published her book *Outside Looking In: Viewing First Nations Peoples in Canadian Dramatic TV Series* as the first discussion sustainably and extensively approaching this subject. Miller depicts the 50s to 80s series like *Radisson*, *The Beachcombers* and *Spirit Bay*, shortly hitting *The Rez* while concentrating on an intense analysis of *North of 60*. Thereby, Miller focuses on the characteristics of the Canadian television landscape (which is also successfully done by Augie Fleras who generally emphasizes on Canadian *Media and Minorities* in his works), classifying the series she examined within that landscape. As Miller ends with the 90s and *North of 60*, I understand my thesis as continuing hers, as I mainly devoted myself to current television shows of this millennium, deciding from the beginning to highlight a cultural scientific approach by elaborating First Nations historical foundations to use them as a template in order to estimate the current cultural essence of the respective show. In order to do so, secondary literature on television had to be employed, as 'Native performance' in these shows had to be compared to classical westo<sup>3</sup>- and Mediacentric<sup>4</sup> television production and ideology standards.

4. Far beyond public and private channels, APTN thereby appears to be the main media representative of First Nations concerns in today's Canadian mediascape. Being aware of this burden as well as of the chances it provides, it has dedicated itself to acting as a cultural catalyst in a responsible way, a fact I could convince myself of when I was conducting my field studies at its headquarters in Winnipeg.
5. Historically, the United States of America and Canada have dealt differently with their 'Original Inhabitants,' a fact, which could partly explain why regular television shows on Natives and especially the station APTN can exist in Canada. It is said that while the United States acted according to the saying: 'The only good Indian is a dead Indian,' Canada more or less secretly believed that: 'The only good Indian is an assimilated Indian.' Lives, nations and ideologies have been destroyed almost the same in the end, but in making television an instrument of their own, Canadian's First Nations have 'assimilated' on their conditions. Thereby, they have created a media

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<sup>3</sup> Westocentrism is the belief that Western values, attitudes, morals, etc. are superior to the ones of other cultures.

<sup>4</sup> "Mediacentrism asserts the superiority of Westocentric values and practices in a manner that is pervasive yet unmarked to escape detection. Under Mediacentrism, reality is routinely and automatically interpreted from a media point of view as natural and normal while other perspectives are dismissed accordingly." (Fleras, *Media* 48).

## 1. INTRODUCTION – LATEST STATE OF RESEARCH

atmosphere of penetration giving the wide public the chance to identify with Natives to a greater and more sustainable extent than movies are generally capable of. Furthermore, the United States tend to stick to the 'Historical Noble Savage' more than Canada, as this stereotype is grounded in a defining US American paradigm of conquering the final frontier, which is underlined by one of the United States' favorite genres: the Western. From this, a great number of stereotypes of Native Americans have emerged, for example analysed by Native American Ward Churchill in *Fantasies of the Master Race* or in Kilpatrick's *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*, secondary literature very important for my work especially concerning the topic of television iconing. In an ironical twist, Canada tries to differentiate itself from its overpowering neighbor at the same time, yet in the end it can as little escape from the universal force swashing over from the South as most other Western country in the world. Hence, it involuntarily but automatically takes over parts of US American socio-cultural thought patterns.

Therefore, through analysis of this hardly touched subject of 'First Nations Culture and its Representation In Contemporary Canadian TV Series' with all its overwhelming influences from the outside (and inside world) and by fostering the state of research concerning this contemporary topic, the current state of Canada's First Inhabitants in the broader Canadian mediascape should be revealed in the end.



# **PART TWO: OVER-SEXUALIZING THE 'INDIAN' – EROTICISM AND GENDER**

## **2.1 PENETRATING INTO THE 'INDIAN REALM OF LUST' – INTRODUCTION**

In one group's collective worldview, the act of creation is inseparable from an act of rage: revenge on humankind of engaging in physical pleasure, the eating of fruit from a certain tree. In the other, the act of creation is an act of joy, a kick in the pants, a good fuck. In the language of the God – the language of the head – such a human act is gross and unnatural, the apogee of evil. In the language of the goddess – the language of the groin, the womb – it is the most natural act imaginable. (Highway, *Me Funny* 168)

Indeed, Caucasians' tactics of tackling Native gender and erotic notions have appeared quite paradoxical for a very long time, an awkwardness not too surprising since "sexuality was the crucible of Aboriginal European relations and the source of their most profound contradictions" (Barman 239). Western societies' reception of Native sensuality used to range from inflicted prudence and firm ignorance, over ostensibly innocent juvenile tales (even acknowledged by Disney and its representation of a 'Barbie-Shaped-Eco-Chick-Pocahontas,' supported by beady-eyed, singing animals), to simultaneously disgusted and stimulated accusations of Aboriginal 'perverse' nature. One could say the truth lies somewhere in between but it does not. We can rather attribute this wide spectrum of cognition of Native sexuality to the clash of an anthropocentric and anthropomorphic society, which almost coercively had to lead to a distortion of facts, the rise of corrosive stereotyping, and the execration of seemingly offensive ethics, mostly ascribable to two seemingly opposed characteristics of the 'dominant culture:' arrogance and fear. Among many other prejudices fed over years and years, these two traits have conjured up an imaginative 'Indian realm of lust.' This is inhabited by gracefully 'Frolicking Pocahontases' next to proud, impassioned, yet gentle 'Exotic Lovers,' by breast-swinging 'Naked Squaws,' next to wild-eyed 'Red Rapists,' next to Indigenous people with a nice red tan and the ability to tell thrilling stories but without any sexual organs to be found on their bodies at all. And then there is the White man, sacred and pure on the outside and maybe a little bit profane and turned on from the inside, and he

## 2. OVER-SEXUALIZATION: PENETRATING INTO THE INDIAN REALM OF LUST

enters this realm he populated all by himself with a mighty church at the entrance and takes whatever burlesque he needs to serve his personal interests.

As Furniss says: "'history is written by the victorious'" (199). Thus the defeated ones' stories, concepts of history and way of living grew pale, falsified or seemingly generally lost. In the end 'the losers of the bygone days' found themselves caught in this fake realm acting in it according to its bizarre rules because they were been deprived of their past, hence their identity, and have therefore been bereft of alternatives to this day (while ironically the Western world concurrently has started to acknowledge the advantages of the twentieth century Sexual Revolution). Still a group of Native Canadian authors aims at nuking this fake realm of lust by illuminating the true principle of First Nations sexuality in order to proclaim sensuality as part of the healing. To Daniel Heath Justice he as a

native man ... [has] responsibilities to truth – both cerebral and bodily – and to understand how those truths can serve [First Nations] dignity and survival in respectful, affirming and constructive ways. To ignore sex and embodied pleasure in the cause of indigenous liberation is to ignore one of [their] greatest resources. It is to deny [them] one of [their] most precious gifts.

Every orgasm can be an act of decolonization. (106)

Nevertheless, these "greatest resources" have to be exhumed again in order to use them in a responsible way. Additionally, these "precious gifts" have to be accepted as what they are and have been all along in many egalitarian societies: presents of freedom and self-evident acceptance of humanity, and not in the way they were sold to Canada's Aboriginal peoples by European Judeo-Christians namely as evildoings, which had to be exorcised or performed furtively and in sin. Re-activating past Indigenous ethics and morals concerning 'human physicality' and gender issues thereby seems to be the most promising path to break off.

## **2.2 OF BIRDS, BEES AND NANABUSH – GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN NATIVE SOCIETIES**

### **THE ADVANTAGES OF POLYGAMIES – GENDER ROLES**

Generally, Native Canadian bands lived in a so-called 'realm of lust,' in fact, being held together by strongly stated rules in order to serve communities' comforts: according to the demands of a hunter-gatherer society women stayed at home being mother and wife in the first place and respectful to the males in her family.

When the girl is single she is completely under her father's control, even when married she still must obey her father.... A husband takes the role of the provider and must do so with the co-operation of his wife. Both have equal responsibility towards the children; the father trains the boys but has complete control over the girls, the mother trains the girls but has complete control over the boys. The girl is trained not to abuse her husband sexually – particularly not to be unfaithful. She is taught to respect herself, but if chooses to use infidelity she does so of her own choice. If a woman commits adultery and is able to look her husband in the eyes without guilt, then she has chosen to become an unfaithful wife, but if she is unable to look at her husband, then she has the choice to confess of her unfaithfulness or leave. Marriage is sacred for as long as the wife and husband keep it sacred. (Swampy 10-11)

Furthermore Swampy adds that most societies lived in strong social fabrics held together by detailed and complicated rules of obedience within kins-man like hierarchies to guarantee the community's balance and survival. With big families as understood highest priority in a polygamist world and the proper up-bringing of children to assure the next generation's mental health, social discrepancies like single parenthood or orphans were absorbed easily. Women were destined to have children since it was a great honor to be chosen by the 'Great Spirit' to serve as parental guardian. Abortions were off-limits, children deeply respected from the moment they were felt in the womb (cf. 11).

### **THE DISADVANTAGES OF DECENCY – NATIVE EROTICA**

Due to the necessity of a large number of children to assure the band's survival and the absence of prudish Christian doctrines, Native promiscuity was as natural in the New World as it was forbidden in the Old:

## 2. OVER-SEXUALIZATION: OF BIRDS AND BEES AND NANABUSH

No gender had an inherited dominance in matters of sexuality – both could take the initiative, and both could enjoy themselves. Sex was not only considered a physical necessity equal to water and food, but it was also regarded as a tool to help one's emotional well-being. Sex was not just connected to our genitals or just an act of procreation; it was a necessity to our sanity. (Kleist 17)

In consequence, as Stevens mentions, adopting this kind of posture towards sexuality led to a liberating experience of lust with practising individuals, who sensed their body and its needs as wholesome, who let their children watch them having sex, who guaranteed a candid birds-and-bee-talk at the right point in time and who possessed languages in which it was almost impossible to swear because sexual connotations were unknown. As a result, Indigenous mythology often appears to be horribly obscene to the demure White ear since it is not seldom concerned with women showing off their breasts, men with great penises having sex with several naive females, and talking rear ends, which are permanently kicked or even eaten. Additionally, Nanabush, the trickster, is one of the main characters in many of these stories, inasmuch as he/she is naturally blessed with either monstrous masculine or feminine sexual organs (cf. 20 ff.).

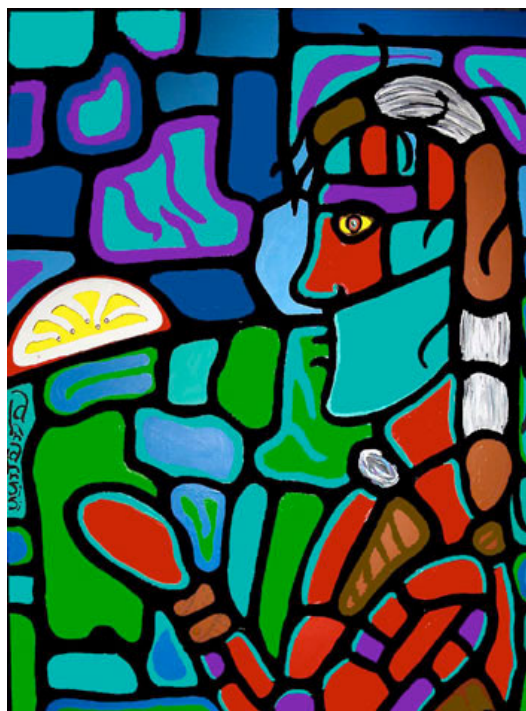


Fig. 2.1. Gordon Ahnahnsisi: Native man showing his penis

Mythology mirroring reality, a concrete direct link between gender and sexual action was not to be found. In fact, "one's gender classification was not determined on the basis of sexual activity but rather by the person's spirit, character and desire because the body is recognized as a temporary state and houses the soul spirit" (Bobbalee 33). According to Native understanding, men (berdaches) and women (warrior women), who lived the life of the opposed gender within their community, were not considered to be 'living in the wrong body' but rather be embodying a third, independent gender, whose "identity was viewed as a result of the divine interventions of other-than-human beings" (Roscoe 14). This being the case, sexual

intercourse with these people was classified in a distinct way:

If you are a man and you have a sexual relationship with a 'berdache,' you are not having sex with another man. You are having sex with a berdache. So the partners of

the berdaches are technically not homosexual because they are not having sex with the same gender. (Lang 205)

Furthermore, since sexuality in Canadian Native societies was considered as necessary as food and water, non-reproductive sex was valued as a tool for pleasure and emotional rewards "sexual acts were therefore not relegated only for the procreative functions" (Roscoe 14).

Being used to conservative thinking, the European Judeo-Christian was confronted with a "worldview that recognizes and appreciates ambiguity, transformation and the instability of one's outer form" (Mc Geough 83) on the one hand and the belief in erotica as being pure and essential to human beings on the other (cf. Akiwenzie-Damm 117). As the Native author Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm points out:

I have found that Indigenous erotic ... is often an attempt to reach out, to touch and, for the moment, to hold beauty aloft. Much of it is firmly based in the natural world – it reflects and affirms our connections with other aspects of the natural world, such as animals, birds, plants the land, the sky, the water, weather, the elements. In doing so, it reminds us who we are and that we are intimately connected to all that surrounds us. (Akiwenzie-Damm 119)

As a result, the natural world played a major role in Native erotica: "This is undoubtedly because it reflects our understanding of who we are and places us within a web of connections. For many of us, erotica is not something outside of who we are, or something 'other.' Rather it reflects fundamental beliefs about our relationship to all beings and ourselves" (Akiwenzie-Damm 122). Thereby it opposes former Western ethics and morals having been used for centuries to disconnect mind and body.

## **2.3 OF DISGUST, REPRODUCTION AND FORBIDDEN HUNGERS – GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN FORMER OCCIDENTAL SOCIETIES**

Experiencing sexuality, desire and lust as god(s)-given and as a natural connection to the spiritual world was barely comprehensible to the European societies of the past centuries, which believed that the 'impurity' an impassioned body provokes only drives the faithful adherent away from God. Indigenous traits were misunderstood. Aboriginals were regarded as too sexually explicit. Consequently, Native women were in many cases identified as 'whores:'

Some girls spend their youth this way, having had more than twenty husbands and these twenty husbands are not the only ones who enjoy these creatures, however much married they be; for after nightfall the young women run about from one lodge to another, as do the young men for their part, who possess them wherever it seems good to them. (Voyages and Discoveries ... 137-140)

Yet, familial societies like the Native Canadian ones could never have functioned harmoniously this way. Since this kind of ambiguous relations and the possible jealousy naturally occurring from it have to be considered as poisonous to a community with a main goal of overall balance.

When the Europeans first came to Canada then and made contact with the Indigenous peoples, they had experienced an utterly different lifestyle concerning many cultural customs. However, especially and foremost their attitude towards sexuality had developed a doctrine explicitly defining all kinds of perversities to be circumnavigated at all costs in order to paint the picture of a decent citizen. Notwithstanding, a remorseless hunger for 'the forbidden' was frequently lurking somewhere by many, often slumbering dangerously under the surface and waiting to emerge. So when the White explorers and later settlers arrived on the New Continent they had to cope with the dichotomy of disgust on the one hand and restrained desire on the other. "French males," for instance, "found the liberated sexual attitude of young Indian women before matrimony as attractive as the missionaries found them repugnant" (Miller J.R., *Skyscrapers* 54). This created a rather subjective view of the world they were presented as well as indicated a cultural clash destined to produce a bitter outcome in the end.

Over the last 400 centuries the Old World had painted a picture of eroticism decisively colored by the Roman Catholic churches' interpretation of the Bible and the frame was tightened by disgrace and shame. Thus sex was stripped of the airiness

assuring an intellectual time-out by giving up to mere instinct. Consequently, the European history of sexuality acquired a scientific almost calculating touch as far as

prior to the rise of the middle-class bourgeoisie the ruling class justified its control and power by forming alliances; one's power was determined by one's bloodline (see Foucault 38). Controlling sex was a way for the middle-class to mark and maintain its distinctiveness from other classes and ensure its health and longevity.... Sex became something to approach calmly and study rationally and to analyse and classify. Sexuality became regulated, as Foucault states, in four areas: in children, in women, in married couples and in the sexually 'pervasive' (see Foucault 38). Foucault writes: 'The society that emerged in the nineteenth century [...] put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourse concerning it [and] also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex (Foucault 58). This development resulted in a prescriptive delineation of the kinds of sensations and pleasures that were permissible and not permissible as well as specific definitions of gender and sexuality, classification systems also reflected in the judicial system's differentiation between the pornographic and erotic. (Mc Geough 60-61)

Hence, a 'demure' society came into being shaped by a static image of gender roles. These were rated on the basis of an accurately elaborated scale with 'pornographic' on the one end, 'erotic' in the middle and 'decent' on the other. The Old World's treatment of sexuality especially underscores its almost anankastic bias towards definition and pigeonholing on the cost of fluidity, freedom and pleasure. Notwithstanding, since sex was commonly associated with carnal desire, animal magnetism, bodily appetite, and desire of the flesh, intellectual classifications of the latter verged on the border of absurdity. Nevertheless, emerging from the fear of the indefinable and therefore uncontrollable, the panicked Caucasian man created his principles of male domination:

[e]quating women and nature became symbolic of what man must control and overcome if he is to transcend and evolve ... women were associated with the body, emotion, the primitive and animality and were thus diametrically opposite to man and reason. Beginning with the scientific revolution, Western society no longer saw itself belonging to the natural world and began divorcing itself from any dependence on the biosphere. In doing so, 'Western society denied women's activity and, indeed, the whole sphere of reproduction' (Plumwood 21). Women and nature became what eco-philosopher Val Plumwood describes as the background to which all men's activity took place (21). This perspective is particularly evident in the depiction of the female nude. Although women were often depicted as passive, the patriarchal society feared that women's civility was only a pretence. Within the Western artistic tradition [for example] the female nude was depicted as submissive and passive – a projection of the phallogocentric desire to control and contain women's sexuality – or she is depicted in such a way that she embodies patriarchy's fear of the female power. (Mc Geough 64)

## 2. OVER-SEXUALIZATION: OF DISGUST, REPRODUCTION AND FORBIDDEN HUNGERS

Some feminists tend to argue that egalitarian societies bear resemblance to Western patriarchies as well since women were generally 'reduced' to their roles of housewives and mothers and said to be

made for labor, one of them can carry, or haul, as much as two men can do. They also pitch our tents, make and mend or clothing, keep us warm at night; and, in fact, there is no such thing as travelling any considerable distance, or for any length of time, in this country, without their assistance. (Hearne 55)

In fact, First Nation's men were deeply puzzled when the first Europeans arrived – travelling cumberously without any women to support and facilitate their journeys. For Native people, this equalled 'gambling with death' on the one hand and the needless absence of distraction and amusement on the other. On the basis of this knowledge, Aboriginal women took power and equality for granted. Matthiasson for instance describes that "women are valued for themselves and the contribution they make to society. In these societies women are neither inferior nor superior to men, merely different" (*Many Sisters* ... xviii).

After all, the attitudes towards sexuality, status and gender roles concerning the articulation of women in a society naturally had and still have a great impact on the man's self-portrayal and particularly on the perception of his masculinity. Except that homosexuality had (and has) been categorized as 'perverted' for hundreds of years, inasmuch as a "third gender" (Roscoe 14) had/has never been an approved concept in European thinking and since it cannot be legitimized with Catholicism's only justification for sexual intercourse, namely reproduction, the slightest sense of homo-erotic fantasies had to be avoided. Nevertheless, a relatively low-risk depiction of the male nude was created: "a heroic, virile and purposeful manhood understood as active and dominating, and a typically younger model – adolescent or ephebic whose sensual and erotic appeal derives at least in part from its relative passivity" (Solomon-Godeau 26).



Fig. 2.2. Daphne Odjig, *Devotion*



## **JUST BLAME EVE FOR SHE HAS ALWAYS SPOKEN WITH A FORKED TONGUE – THE FALL'S OUTGROWTH**

The often cautious, almost terrified Western stance on one's individual libido might be ascribed to the Judeo-Christian interpretation of 'The Fall' to a great extent. The expression 'Original Sin,' namely the mother of all the sins due to Eve's failure, often cleared the way for a pathological and culpable comprehension of bodily appetites. Some Aboriginal Canadian authors, though, illuminate the story of 'The Fall' from a distinct Native angle. By presenting an Indigenous reception of the Garden's perfidies and considerable opportunities at the same time, they point out the basic contradictions of an anthropomorphic and an anthropocentric society. Thereby the writers unveil the chaos the latter one causes, when it – propagating obsessive rejections of sexual pleasure but bound to the imperial idea of colonizing mind AND body – meets a society in which the desire of the flesh is not just accepted but celebrated. As Tomson Highway states, when Columbus dropped the anchor at the shores of the North American coast,

probably the most significant item of baggage he had on his ship was the extraordinary story of a woman who talked to a snake in a garden and, in doing so, precipitated the eviction of humankind from that garden. This seminal narrative has created severe trauma in the lives of many, many people and ultimately, one might argue, the life of our entire planet. I don't think it is a coincidence that the mythology/theology this story comes from, Christianity, has at its centre the existence of a solo god who is male and male entirely. Such a narrative [...] does not exist in Native North American mythology/theology. [...] The Sinai Peninsula, at least as it appeared in Columbus's monotheistic world view, may have been a parched, treeless desert cursed by a very angry male god, but North America [...] certainly was not. [...] And North America is a landscape blessed most generously, most copiously by a benevolent female god, one known to us, as our Mother, the Earth. (*Me Funny* 163-164)

Highway furthermore exemplifies these two different ideologies of Adam's and Mother Earth's offspring by the characterization of European and Native Canadian languages. To him English is the "intellectual, cerebral language" (*Me Funny* 59) while French is "an emotional language, a language of the senses" (*Me Funny* 159), coming from the heart and the stomach. Cree, on the contrary,

is neither a language of the mind nor a language of the senses. It is a language of the flesh. A physical language. It lives in the human body not above the neck, as English does, not between the neck and the waist, as French does, but one step lower:

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between the waist and the thighs. Cree lives in the groin, in the sex organs. It lives, that is to say, in the most fun-loving, the most pleasurable – not to mention the funniest looking – part of the human corpus: a region of the body that has ... become so alienated from the head that speaking of it in English is a shameful, dirty, embarrassing, disgusting, dare one say evil thing to do. (*Me Funny* 160)

Additionally, the author detects that since the existence of a story about a human banishment from a garden is unknown to Canadian Indigenous mythology, the Natives consequently must still be inside (cf. *Me Sexy* 38) and to their personal entrancement this is "a garden of beauty, a garden of pleasure, a garden of joy" (*Me Sexy* 38) being some of few features even the Bible agrees on. Highway also states that we should understand his garden as a metaphor for the human body itself. At one point in time the English language was banned from that corpus causing the separation of human language and nature. "At that moment, the human body was severed forever from its own biology, its physical functions. These functions, and the organs they came from, were never mentioned and if they were there was hell to pay for the infraction" (*Me Funny* 38). That being so, nature became the enemy while human physicality came to be recognized as ugly, unholy and uncontrollably animalistic:

Putting it another way, the English language may live most magnificently inside the head, in the intellect, but it stops at the neck. And it stops there because that is the gate to the garden of pleasure and at that gate stands an angel with a flaming sword who will scorch your arse the moment you dare to re-enter the garden. (Highway, *Me Sexy* 38)

Meanwhile, the carnal languages of Canadian Native societies had never been cut from the body allowing a close correlation between one's individual corpus and nature, being not only free from guilt but a deeply loving one. While Roman Catholic doctrines irrevocably recorded in books made many European followers shiver with disgust when it came to libidinous longings, and encouraged self-hatred and self-denial to keep them from even trying "to enter the garden" again, Natives told each other bawdy stories and figuratively danced around the tree of knowledge, for "the reason for existence on planet earth is not suffering or guilt [...] but pleasure [...] to celebrate" (*Me Sexy* 40). Therefore,

[i]n one language, sex may be the dirtiest, filthiest, most evil activity the human body is capable of. In the other it is ... the funniest. In the Cree language, the 'tree of knowledge' that stands at stiff attention smack in the middle of the garden, which is the human body in all its pleasurable capacities, together with the attendant 'fruit' that hangs from that tree, are not only the most ridiculous-looking objects you have ever

seen with your two eyes, but they are also the most entertaining, the most beautiful, and are capable, moreover, of giving our 'biological realities' the most heavenly feeling known to women, man or beast: the orgasm. This tree, this red-hot centre of the human corpus [...] is capable of sending our bodies straight into heaven to commune face to face with God, whatever form that being may take in one's spirit and imagination. In other words, one system of thought, and the language that goes with it, denies biology, the other embraces it. (*Me Sexy* 39)

Hence, Canada's First Nations had to experience how a civilization often loaded with a burden of hypocrisy and detraction concerning one's own human nature dashed into a world where physical balance was practised like a duck takes to water and where 'unwholesome coenaesthesia' could be considered a foreign phrase:



Fig. 2.3. *Seven Seas to Calais* (1963): 'Indian' maid is having an orgy with her band (actress is Italian, though)

So although in one language, humankind is forbidden to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, in the other it is not only permitted, it is encouraged. That is precisely what that goddamn tree is there for, for humankind to suck from its fruits and suck and suck and suck and suck, thirty times a day if necessary. That way your body is that much more relaxed if not euphoric if not even exhausted, with pleasure. That way, you are that much less likely to rape a woman, beat your wife to death, start a war. Or ass-fuck pretty little eight-year-old Cree boys. (*Highway, Me Sexy* 40)

## **2.4 WHEN IDEOLOGIES BECOME BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS – THE DISASTROUS OUTCOME**

With the quote "[t]hat way, you are that much less likely to rape a woman, beat your wife to death, start a war. Or ass-fuck pretty little eight-year-old Cree boys" (*Me Sexy* 40), Highway bitterly points at the aftermath of the 'anti-sexual revolution' the White man forced upon the somatic oriented First Nations. Experiencing intense nausea concerning their own physicality Aboriginal people were first of all denounced as 'Lascivious Squaws' and 'Lecherous Rapists' by many Judeo-Christians in order to justify the painful but necessary conversion to the purest forms of decent Christianity that naturally had to follow. This deprivation of sensuality, though, being closely linked to First Nations perception of the world had to lead to a total loss of identity: on the one hand their social fabrics were destroyed, on the other a feeling of one's individual irrevocable impurity was inculcated, permanently removing them from the garden they had been 'living in happily ever after' while many of their virtuous suppressors were longing for it clandestinely. The long lasting effects of the 'takeover' were plenty and dreadful as for instance the combination of political decisions and repressed sexual longings resulted in one of Canada's biggest social and cultural crimes: the residential schools.

### **"I FELT THAT I MIGHT DIE JUST TALKING ABOUT IT" – RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

As Schumacher states, in the year 1879 the first residential school was opened, the last one closed down only in 1996 (cf. 101, 109). To replace Native beliefs by Christianity on a sustained basis, it seemed to be necessary to 'address the problem by the root.' Consequently, many Native children were taken away from their bands at the very early age of five or six years and sent to these facilities mostly run by missionaries. To 'extirpate their Old Ways' the students were often not allowed to visit home for the next ten years. "There were schools in every province in Canada. ... In total, well over 100.000 Aboriginal children, or approximately 20 to 30 per cent of the Native population in Canada, attended residential schools" (Llewellyn 258). These statistics prove that residential schools still effect today's entire Canadian Native generation in a significant way since

[a]s total institutions ... [they] imposed conditions of disconnection, degradation, and powerlessness on students. The nature of these institutions permitted and even encouraged the abuse that commonly marked children's experiences. Sexual abuse by caregivers and administrators was rampant in the schools. So, too were other forms of physical abuse, sometimes rising to life threatening levels. Agnes Grant identifies four general categories of abuse perpetrated in the schools: physical, sexual, spiritual and psychological. (Llewellyn 257)

Indeed, Canadian residential schools exemplify the ramifications of the anthropocentric destruction of an anthropomorphic society in the most explicit way: as sensuality was demonized, it had to be eradicated by missionaries. Many missionaries, though, being devoured by forbidden sexual appetites, molested Native children and adolescents the Canadian government figuratively handed on a silver platter, for those boys and girls were considered as second-class citizens without any rights anyway. Additional, practical reasons came into play as the students were barely allowed any contact to adults they trusted and could talk to concerning the abuse they had to endure. In his essay *The Dark Side Of Sex* Native freelance interpreter and translator Marius T. Tungilik shares his experiences of sexual assault in a residential school with the reader:

As we got older, the issue became too shameful and too complicated to even begin to talk about. However, because it was an unresolved child trauma, many of us coped with it in many dysfunctional ways, from family violence, misdirected anger, addiction to drugs or alcohol and compulsive behavior such as gambling to, sadly for some, a perpetuation of the cycle of abuse.... I remember my first attempt of speaking about what I had to go through in school. I could not talk about it without sobbing uncontrollably. The feelings and emotions were much too strong. I felt that I might die just talking about it. I think many survivors felt exactly the same way. We had kept all of it a dirty secret for more than twenty to thirty years. And many therapists and counsellors did more harm than good because they refused to believe that members of the church would actually be involved in abusing small children sexually and had no idea how to deal with the issue. It became clear that abuse in residential schools was one of the best kept secrets among aboriginal peoples. (51)

Except that sexual maltreatment led to the traumata Tungilik describes, the mere absence of familial bonds in a society destroyed the safety nets of First Nations bands for good. How can children not experiencing primal trust build a healthy family on their own when they are grown up? Being deprived of a of 'parental survival kit' and being bereft of elderly guidance, wisdom and practical knowledge but full of loneliness, fear, self-hatred and pain, how can they raise their own children in an affectionate, responsible way? Canada's actions to assimilate its Aboriginal peoples by sending them to residential schools became a tool comparable to a biological weapon. The first victims on the spot

got infected most but from that point on the poison disseminates relentlessly since it is being transmitted from generation to generation.

## **TODAY'S SADDEST NATION**

Canada's First Nations – having been some of the healthiest societies in the world before the Whites arrived – must now be considered as some of the sickest and saddest, for gang life, hooking and pimping have become bitter alternatives to abusive homes, sending young Native adolescents out of the frying pan into the fire. HIV is spreading: "the news releases from World AIDS day stressed the growing epidemic among First Nations and expressed that the fear of the mobility of the urban Aboriginal population between cities and reserves would only serve to spread the disease even into Canada's most isolated communities" (Kelm 390) while the internet page "Health Canada" (*hc-sc.gc.ca*) quotes that "although they represent only 3.3% of the Canadian population, Aboriginal persons comprised 5-8% of prevalent infections (persons currently living with HIV infection in Canada) and 6-13% of new HIV infections in Canada in 2002."

Yet, counteractive measures have been taken in the past decade. First of all, at least 15,000 of the 80,000 residential school students still living today have been charging the Canadian government, demanding compensations of 10,000 CND and 3000 CND for every year they had to spend in those institutions. If successful in court, this will cost the Canadian government 2.3 billion CND. Nevertheless, the most important and most cumbersome measurement has to be psychological healing. As Justice points out, "our sex isn't just a part of our Nativeness – it's fuel for the healing of our nations" (106), an experience Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm also had:

I loved sex and embraced my sexuality.... Before this I had lived primarily in my head. Being in love taught me that I was physical, emotional and spiritual as well as intellectual and that all aspects of my being needed to be healthy and in balance.... I came to realize that to bring love and sexuality back to their rightful place in indigenous societies required a revolution, a re-revolution that would take us back to our beginnings to reclaim our stories and who we are in a powerful and empowering way. I have a dream that there is going to be generation of our people ... who grows up with these images, these positive portrayals, these positive people who are comfortable in their own bodies, in their own sexuality and in loving other Indigenous people so that the erotic is simply an accepted, normal part of who they are. (117, 123)

Having in mind the devastating consequences today's Canadian Natives still have to face as a result of the privation of their sensual ethics, this remedy could be dismissed as a long lost pipe dream. Yet, in the very end it could also be seen as a chance to open the gates to the Garden again and as a chance to get rid of the stereotypical population the 'Indian realm of lust' keeps harbouring to this day.

## **2.5 COLONIZING THE 'INDIAN' REALM OF LUST' – SEXUAL STEREOTYPING**

In past centuries, colonization appears to have been one of the main 'enterprises' undertaken by the Western world, indeed, be it invading, occupying and imposing ideologies and prejudices on 'primitive and inferior' societies on the green or sandy or rocky foreign grounds of 'New Worlds,,,' or be it within the black and white landscapes of their own heads in a figurative sense. First and foremost, the 'far too sexual explicit and naked' alien force which the colonists encountered had to be stanchd locally but also – and even more important – intellectually as 'it' had to be identified, then evaluated and determined to be pigeonholed with a sigh of relief in the end in order to file it away without any risks worth mentioning. 'And out came' overpowering stereotypes especially concerning the frightening 'realm of lust.' Wherever the uptight Western mind had been fearing to tread all along for centuries (since Eve had once put her slender foot on the wrong path of the Garden with great consequences), 'Indian' clichés arose firmly as well as callously. They ranked from terrifying (yet sometimes turning on) depictions of 'Horny Rapists' and 'Lascivious Squaws' to soothing (yet sometimes turning on) ones of 'Playful Pocahontases' and 'Noble Savages,' never being three-dimensional but always responding to prevailing White needs (or desires) at the particular time.

### **PLEASE, MERCY-SLAY ME – THE 'HORNY INDIAN'**

Since times are changing the Caucasian image of the 'Lecherous Indian' has undergone a metamorphosis, too. This development took place due to the modified attitudes towards sexuality evolving in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After all these years it finally appeared to play into the hands of the maltreated red man's libido. Before he had been characterized as a "bloodthirsty savage, often crazed, seeking vengeance or just malicious fun" (Berkhofer 98), inasmuch as "[i]n the past centuries, the vision of violent sexuality was pretty standard treatment of Native men in popular genres such as the Indian captivity narratives" (van Lent 211). As Ward Churchill sarcastically points out in his popular manifest *Fantasies of the Master Race*, from the moment 'the Indian' entered the media platforms he was resembled "an inherent rapist" (190) in an almost ridiculously systematic way (cf. 190-192). For instance the movies of the first half of the last century



regularly offered the tension-increasing storyline of 'mercy slayings' for White women. For being caught by "the savage," was considered a "fate worse than death" (Churchill 191). In fact, one cavalry officer tells another in the movie *The Gatling Gun* (1971): "all those women have to look forward to is rape and murder!" Furthermore, it was heard of women who had been "raped into insanity" (*Ulzana's Raid*, 1972). In his essay "Indian Love Call," Drew Hayden Taylor verifies the Native men's disastrous reputation concerning their sensual competencies. If they even ARE described as sexual beings,

their sexuality is not healthy. What we did and how we did it is dark ... foreboding and forbidden. Kidnapping, rape, and other assorted defilements are the order of the day on this particular pop culture menu. Tender love stories involving Native people are scarcer than priests at a residential school reunion. We never even had a Romeo and Juliet story... Over the years, there have been many rumors and legends about the true relationship between Tonto and the lone Ranger, but that's about all we've got.  
(23)

This lascivious portrayal of the 'Red Savage' had been colored by Christianity's doctrines in the first place and was emphasized by different components, the interplay of which led to a deeply conservative reception of the Natives' promiscuity. The Victorian White males were often disgusted on the outside, but sometimes on the inside two feelings arose, one more dangerous to themselves and especially to the Aboriginals surrounding them than the other. The first one was suppressed, envious desire especially becoming obvious when native nudity came into play:

The captive narratives of the eighteenth century frequently mention nudity among the 'savages.' This theme was carried through into the nineteenth century at which point it was often accompanied by heavy moral condemnation of such immodesty. The Native Americans' disregard for clothing was supposedly clear proof that they were inferior and primitive. No doubt many Victorians clucked their tongues and voiced disapproval as they studied the pictures of Native nudity. It may not be too cynical to assume that many of them were meanwhile feasting their eyes on images of Native women's breasts or the voluptuous musculature of an Indian brave. (van Lent 217)

The second one was the devouring fear of losing the virile Caucasian image of irrepressible potency. Nevertheless, a world of domination and suppression had already been created with clearly defined and legitimized roles of status which – in addition to an intellectual level – had to be confessed on a sexual one as well.

To Eldridge Cleaver colonization forms a structure of sexual relations, in which "white men are accorded a self-assigned status as 'Omnipotent Administrators,' primarily cerebral beings who, by presuming to monopolize the realm of thought itself, have

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assigned black men the subordinate status of mindless 'Ultramasculine Menials'" (155). We can apply this to the Aboriginals of Canada or Australia, too: "To complete the figurative disempowerment of the latter, and thus to signify their own station of unimpeachable supremacy, the Administrators proceed first to constrain and then to preempt the Menials in that most crucial of all physical arenas, the sexuality" (Churchill 190). In the White man's rather subjective ethnological understanding, this warrants the irrevocable abstinence Aboriginal men are meant to respect White women with while White men naturally possess sexual access to Aboriginal females whenever they feel like it (cf. Churchill 191). Consequently, Native

men are thereby reduced to a degraded status as 'social eunuchs' while [Aboriginal] women, transformed into sexual commodities, are dehumanized altogether, and white women, consigned to serve as desexualized objects adorning the omnipotence of their men, fare little better. The great fear for the Administrators, according to Cleaver, is that the Menials might somehow discover a means of breaking the psychic bounds of their oppression, that is, of liberating themselves from their state of emasculated debasement by allegorically turning the tables and violating the 'purity' of white womanhood (see Cleaver 155). So deep-seated was this dread that it assumed the form of an outright cultural psychosis leading among other things, to the ubiquitousness of a myth that ... [Aboriginals] are imbued, innately and insatiably, with a 'need' to rape white women. (Churchill 191)

As a result, White women were out of sight for any black-eyed savage who dared to eyeball white skin, while red-skinned women were considered fair game by the Caucasian "Administrators" regardless of whether they were experienced as innocent kittens or as dangerous wildcats.

## **THE ART OF PICKING BERRIES – 'PLAYFUL POCAHONTASES' AND 'VOLUPTUOUS SQUAWS'**

Generally Native women with their dark exotic beauty and their natural promiscuity appeared to be quite appealing to many of the light-skinned, ravenous conquerors. Meanwhile, plenty of "Natives considered many White men ugly, and Indians impression of Europeans physiological features was not all aided by the fact that many Indians considered facial hair as sign of stupidity" (Trigger 225), an impression making sexual

intercourse between White men and Native women appear a pie in the sky. Nevertheless – or maybe just because of these basic prerequisites – two conflicting stereotypes concerning the black-haired daughters of the country came into being.

One of them can be ascribed to the proverbial hot-bloodedness of a 'Lascivious Savage' giving rise to the 'abilities' of the 'Constantly Voluptuous Squaw,' who never leaves for the forest just to pick berries. This kind of women is predestined as the Administrator's fair game to be shot effortlessly – without the feeling of a bad conscience, for this 'wild, unsophisticated provocation' appears to be no danger to the distinguished life shared with a decent, civilized lady waiting decently on another continent.



Fig. 2.4. Günter Einer, *Geronimo*: clichéd painting of a Native woman (note: the vertical feather heavenward)

Notwithstanding, the second stereotype, in fact, can be considered as the more bewildering one because it is not classified by 'wild behavior' at all – at least not in a sexual – but rather in a childishly naïve, carefree way. 'Princess Pocahontas' has been the most popular American Native fairy tale over the last few centuries – with some little blemishes and one great flaw, though. The true story of Captain John Smith and the chief's daughter Pocahontas, who is willing to sacrifice her life for her British lover, has been transformed into a Caucasian myth over the years. Hence, it is interpreted in the style of well-trying, European fairy tales of poor adventurers, princesses and happy endings. Yet, as Drew Hayden Taylor points out, first "Native Americans never had a hierarchy of royalty, so the term princess is inaccurate" ("Indian" 25), and second, peerages as well as happy endings should rather be left to the Brothers Grimm and Disney since Pocahontas died unhappily of small pox in the year 1617 at the age of twenty-one after involuntarily having been brought to Europe (and she was not with John Smith anymore at that point in time). However, next to the taming of the 'Shrewish Squaw,' White man's omnipotence seemed to call for a beautiful, young female savage, who is willing to immolate herself for his well-being since "Indian women have been consistently limned as suffering a hopeless, usually fatal attraction to the omnipotence of white men" (Churchill 194). Albeit viewing this famous incident from a different perspective one could conclude that Smith and Pocahontas were part of a popular Native ritual in which the young girl acted

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her proper part as young Powhatan woman in a ritual situation that was part of an adoption of Smith and the English colony. The threat of death by clubbing may seem excessive for a ritual of adaptation, but it is precisely what one might expect, structurally: a symbolic ending of one existence, and the beginning of a new existence. (Gleach 178)

With this famous creation of a tame(d) Native woman, the dominant culture then reveals its inclination to falsify historical backgrounds in order to meet androcentric thought patterns. First of all, Taylor's statement of "[n]ever let facts get in the way of a good story" (*Funny* 77) is confirming that the wild, indomitable female savage will be inescapably addicted to the "Omnipotent white Administrator" in the end (thus not attracted to her own people, namely the "Ultramasculine Menial" anymore). Secondly, the Squaw appears to be an elemental force and consequently she is as attractive as she is terrifying. Such being the case, a young Aboriginal girl had to become an icon who



Fig. 2.5. Pocahontas Girl

is kittenish (Pocahontas, meaning 'the playful one') as well as pliable, and this very formability plays an essential role in the image of Pocahontas still being of great importance and constantly fed in today's media world.

At the beginning of last century Native poet Pauline Johnson became very popular then, basically because she "represented a shining example of Indian womanhood to her non-Native audience, who saw in her the personification of Pocahontas" (Francis 118-119). On the one hand she was exotically beautiful (cf. Francis 117), on the other

critics and public alike admired in Johnson many traits they believed to be distinctively Indian.... The image of Indian leaders giving eloquent speeches around the council fires was deeply ingrained in the White imagination. Likewise her simplicity was described as typically Indian, reflecting the innocence of a people uncorrupted by modern civilization. And the quiet dignity of her bearing betrayed the proud stoicism for which her race was famous. (Francis 118)

Many White colonists loved this entertaining 'Pocahontian exotic touch' but only in so far as this foreignness also contained the 'right amount of unworldliness' and therefore made the (forced) transition to a modern society not only justifiable but desirable:

A paragon of virtue, Pocahontas later converted to Christianity.... The romantic story of Pocahontas inspired countless works of art, both high and low, idealizing the image of the Indian woman. She was painted often in European dress, much as Pauline Johnson appeared on stage wearing a formal gown: the Indian turned gentlewoman. The original Miss America, Pocahontas came to represent the beautiful, exotic New World itself. Her story proved a model for the ideal merger of Native and newcomer. (Francis 121)

That being so one thing becomes obvious: a Native woman is just as good as her adapted Caucasian character traits and behavior allow her to be, and this equation may be considered as a proportionally upward tending variable.

### **DIET COKE VERSION OF AN INDIAN – THE 'NOBLE SAVAGE'**

As the Rapist, the Squaw and Pocahontas have been discussed before, we will now concentrate on the masculine Pocahontian equivalent, the 'Sensual Noble Savage.' Is he even allowed in the realm of the "Omnipotent Administrator"? And how does his variable run in the chart of Whiteness? Considering representations of Aboriginal peoples, one always has to have the 'master race's' interests and propaganda in mind. Thereby the determination of gender roles and notions of potency seem to be an indispensable requirement to strengthen the oppressor's superiority and create a justification concerning himself, his ambitions and his colonial goals. Having always been a threat to calcareous, hairy potbellies, the Caucasian American appears to live happily with his Native depiction of the 'Devilish Red Rapist' or the 'Asexual Indian' 'vegetating on' his reserve.

But at the end of the last century a worldwide revolution was hatched. This was visible amongst other trends concerning Natives in the media, when the popular dance group Chippendales<sup>5</sup> suddenly had a muscle-bound stripper in their cast, who had "glistening coppery skin and long raven-black hair ... [and wore] little more than a breechclout" (van Lent 214-215 [he is describing a postcard painting. The features won't differ much, though]). Maybe his skin was painted and his hair was dyed (Grey Owl.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding, the First Nations man had found his way into the hearts, or better into

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<sup>5</sup> The Chippendales is a dance group of stripping men representing different sex objects (the construction worker, the fire fighter, the cop, the Black man, the Indian, etc.), which is touring the Western world and satisfying the voyeuristic needs of hysterically screaming Western women to this very day.

<sup>6</sup> cf. chapter 'Aboriginal Deception Packages.'

## 2. OVER-SEXUALIZATION: COLONIZING THE 'INDIAN' REALM OF LUST

the libidos of White women and suddenly became the 'next hot thing' arising to the status of becoming one of the main sex symbols of the nineties. This can also partly be ascribed to the Academy Award winning epic *Dances with Wolves* (1990) presenting a White, late nineteenth-century protagonist equipped with feminist-friendly attitudes and a masculine Native called "Wind in his Hair." There are endless variations of this man to be found in the genre called romance fiction, being an

incredibly lucrative genre, estimated to make up more than 50 percent of paperback fiction sales.... This is the literature of the middle-class Caucasian housewife and, to be fair, your average working-class woman, who dreams of romance and escape. In the arms of an Indian. And not just any average Indian. An über-Indian. (Taylor, "Indian" 27-28)

This "über-Indian" ("Indian" 27-28), as Drew Hayden Taylor puts it, generally possesses one main feature qualifying him for becoming the saviour of bored wives' daily tristesse. In contrast to the predictable husband on the right side of the sofa, he appears to be mysteriously exotic. This propagated foreignness, though, has to be decoded as the light version of the latter, just as the 'diet' in coke frees the most sugary drink on earth from its fattening quality. Nevertheless, some kind of exotic looks seem to be quite typical:

More often than not, he's got a solid square chin, an aquiline nose, chiselled brow and long, flowing raven-black hair (see 'Wind in his Hair') that can tell you the direction of the prairie breeze better than any windsock. So what if these traits are noticeably lacking from most Native men of that era? The broad noses.... And the aboriginal bodies seen in these fantasies could only come from hours in a personal gym.... Here lies the interesting contradiction. Objectively, the men ... all look like white men with good tans in dim lighting. (Taylor, "Indian" 28)

Also van Lent notices that "high cheekbones and oriental eyes give his face an exotic cast, but the elongated nose and face are curiously Caucasian, and this leads us to an important fact: in current popular culture exoticism of the Native male is always carefully controlled" (216). Furthermore, body hair plays an essential role, in so far as it is not there. According to van Lent, this could be attributed to the "fixation on clearly outlining each bulging muscle" (217) or to the "androgynous appeal" (217) on vogue since the last decade but as van Lent rather would like to believe: "Just as Caucasian features serve as a check on exoticism, perhaps unhairiness keeps the strong-featured, hard-bodied Native male appearing from too primitive, too overwhelmingly wild" (218). Apparently then, on the outside a transformation has taken place concerning the Native male. He is not depicted as red devil anymore, inasmuch as his savagery is not that dangerous to

the White psyche anymore; it rather makes him attractive to such an extent that he can frequently be called 'the next hot thing.' However, this exotic tigerishness is a faked one, owing to the fact that it is trimmed at some spots while exaggerated at different ones or brightened by a white pen. Yet, being deprived of most of his dangerous powers, one Native trait is generally supported and exploited:

On the 'noble' side he is a good deal of the residue of Romanticism; according to the typical formula, Native Americans derive their nobility from being close to the primal forces of life, that is close to nature and the natural state of things. American Indians are vestiges of an original human form – the way we all were before being corrupted by civilization. Traditional Native values are said to resound with a moral purity lost to most of us. American Indians seek to live in harmony with nature.... They are depicted as gentle and trusting with each other and others. When threatened, however they courageously defend themselves and that which is theirs. If we add qualities of loyalty, strong spirituality, and taciturn self-possession, the stereotype is pretty much complete. (van Lent 212)

That being so, in today's media world the 'Noble Indian' has entered the realm of the good guys, a place where he can hang out with the 'Disowned Prince' and the 'Honourable Pirate' at night and drink some beer. While according to old Westerns White women rather accepted mercy slaying than being the red man's prey before, nowadays a "cavalry officer is no longer seen as the rescuing hero – he is now less honourable than his traditional enemy. If the cavalry comes riding over the hill to rescue you from the Indians, hide and seek refuge with the Indians" (Taylor, "Indian" 24). Furthermore, as van Lent explains, since the Aboriginal man is a traditional one, one of his main character traits constitutes his faithfulness concerning his community and family. As mentioned before, keeping balance and harmony within a band was experienced as the highest goal within a community. As a result, this led to the demonization of selfhood. While nowadays the predictable husband may suddenly become unpredictable in so far as he suddenly realizes his personal freedom and self-development with a twenty-year-old, childless waitress, the reliable 'Savage' always relates affectionately and responsibly to children and family (cf. 220). "In popular culture, at any rate, American Indian lovers and fathers are portrayed as men who COMMIT" (van Lent 221). According to his contemporary portrayal then, the First Nations man seems to become a contender for the 'Best Husband in The World'-apron then:

Am I insulted [concerning this depiction of Natives]? No. Does ... [this stereotype] do our culture justice? Of course not! ... I prefer to think about that genre's positive influences. For the most part ... [we are portrayed as] ... caring, sensitive and

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interesting partners, far superior to all those abusive or non-existent husbands. Not to mention fabulous lovers. It seems our secret is out. (Taylor, "Indian" 31)

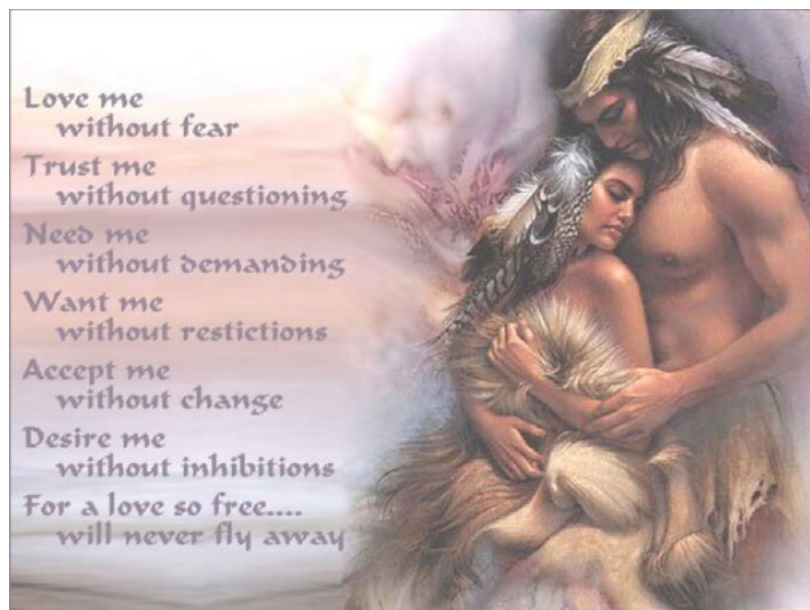


Fig. 2.6. Native love

However, this depiction of the bright 'Noble Savage' is one of the past and consequently not existing anymore (it never has in this way) and therefore as unrealistic as it is innocuous and harmless for today's potent White man. If a housewife longs for a muscular, lusty warrior on a horse, one just has to turn on the News and reality will infiltrate:

Part of the attraction might also be our innate desire to root for the underdog. The time period ... was arguably the last flowering Native culture in its pure form. All of the world knows what came next: the Dispossessed Indian, the Tragic Indian, the Forgotten Indian. This is a way of remembering them when they were strong, proud and free. I have yet to come across a historical romance that takes place on a reserve during the Depression. (Taylor, "Indian" 29)

Today the love stories of Native people are rarely shaped by romanticism, devotion and commitment. In fact, they are often characterized by hatred, addiction and abandonment within Native societies. But also the clichéd homage to interracial relationships having been performed thousands of times in today's media romantic fiction often lacks reference to reality.

It is an opportunity to experience forbidden love, a culturally unallowable tryst. Only recently – and again, this is arguable – have Native/non-Native relationships been considered non-scandalous and acceptable. But a wild Indian, savage and proud with long flowing locks and a huge powerful horse between his legs – now that's something to get bothered about, especially if you live in the suburbs, have two kids (one with the flu), drive a Honda minivan and are married to an accountant who never puts the toilet seat down. (Taylor, "Indian" 29)



It seems as if especially this forbidden love is essential to all these stories, whereby apart from the fact that familial obstacles like "marriage to a brutal White husband" have to be overcome, the last 'shot of tension' has to be provoked by difficulties based on the lovers' different ethnological backgrounds. This reveals the conflicting attitudes the European invaders have towards the American Natives to this very day. First of all, the ostracism of this romantic relationship unmistakably stresses the two-tier society, which should have stopped existing decades ago. Secondly, today's White women pine after this proscription while

truth to be told, I know very few if any, Native women who [enjoy these kind of plots]. The relationships in the stories are not forbidden or exotic for them. They know the reality and the pain that came from the real nineteenth century interrelations. It was not a particularly romantic time for First Nations. It was a time of massive upheaval, the perpetuation of a centuries-long cultural genocide. So I think it's safe to say – and I could be wrong, but I would hazard a guess – that the vast majority of [recipients] ... are white. (Taylor, "Indian" 29)

Additionally, a "diet" version of interracial relationships can be spotted again, inasmuch as the lusty Native man tends to have a snub nose in the first place. As mentioned before, the 'Wild Indian' often cannot make love to a White woman without possessing Caucasian features. Dealing with those irritating interracial frictions even more properly is the introduction of an appreciative character: the half-breed, for he can be equipped with White looks without the insipid taste of ethnic and ethical covering-up. That being so Taylor wonders: "What could be more romantic than the outsider, someone torn between two cultures? ... [where] as the story progresses, there are some bridges to be built between the two cultures" ("Indian" 29-30). This modus operandi becomes desirable for the 'master race,' for interracial relationships (in fiction) are acknowledged at first sight but beneath 'the smokescreen of acceptance,' a different pipe is smoked, which is not a peace pipe, since these romantic ties are kept as light and white as possible after all.

## **2.6 OPENING THE GROANING GATES OF SEXUAL LIBERTY**

"Once again we see that narrowly crafted path that the Native American sexual male must tread in popular culture. He must be tender and loving, yet a bold warrior, exotically handsome, but not too alien, a good man, but prey to the evil of others" (van Lent 225). After all, it seems as if the "Omnipotent Administrator" has barricaded all the fictional loop-holes a Native Canadian man formally known as "Menial" appears to have. He manages to employ strategies of hidden racism without being caught in the trap of today's political and ethic expectations an average White Canadian has to live up to. The average Native Canadian is permanently historicized (mostly incorrectly) and therefore out of fashion in real life. On the top of that, he is a victim of history, which means he is pitiable at the utmost. If those two features do not appear strong or rather weak enough, he can still have too many White characteristics concerning his physicality to pass as 'real, full-fledged Noble Savage.' If even his appearance does not meet the requirements of concealed xenophobia, he is just about to give up to the White culture, a trend already noticeable with the Pocahontas-myth leaving the female Native Canadian as playful, little exotic kittens. The Native is barely a serious counterpart, though, having his feet firmly on the ground of today's world.

Generally, for a First Nations person in Canada today, there seems to be no escape from misjudgement and no possibility to become a Canadian citizen of high value by having mainly Native features available. The stereotypical world of fiction mirrors and influences the real world at the same time. Canada is a multicultural country and popular for accepting every foreign nation for its own sake. Nonetheless, in terms of its Aboriginal peoples, assimilation still appears to be the underlying demand. Hence, the 'Canadian diagram of acknowledgement' shows that wide acceptance of the Indigenous in society even now increases proportionally to the decrease of one's Nativeness. Sexuality especially is a delicate topic as it has been influencing this 'diagram of acknowledgement' for a very long time. As many Western societies profoundly shaped by Judeo-Christian doctrines for centuries (including a major failure quite at the beginning of its creation triggered off by temptation and desire) developed a rather unhealthy relationship to physicality and sensuality, they arrived quite 'sensually damaged' in the New World only to impose their restricted body sensations on Native cultures, whose very body sensation connected them not only to each other but to the cosmos surrounding them as well. The condition being such, destruction was inevitable,

reinforced by the secret acting out of forbidden desires on the part of seemingly holy missionaries, who not seldom lived out their pedophile appetites. Hereby the conquerers have traumatized a whole Nation, which has suffered from the 'colonizing, anti-sexual revolution' to this day.

Western societies finally performed a sexual metamorphosis at the end of last century (albeit mainly without the church at the back) giving the impression that for instance women's sexual equality, the acceptance of promiscuity, or the acknowledgement of the need for a healthy relationship to one's personal bodily desires happen to be extraordinary innovations of society and world-changing achievements in general. Women finally talk about their sexual lust in talk shows and the advantages and disadvantages of monogamy, affairs and open relationships are discussed – triggered off by yet another celebrity, confessing his sexual addiction. In the last decades, the Western world has finally opened up the gates to the 'realm of lust' so tremendously wide to the public that the hinges are creaking – not to say groaning – apprehensively and are not seldom on the verge of cracking. Hence, the boundaries between an again artificially-built rather unhealthy 'realm of lust' and the liberating 'garden' Highway propagates are constantly blurring. Once more a frequently distracted Western culture is left behind, as well as the idle resources of the remedies of an ancient Aboriginal one, which had been living a wholesome and well-balanced sexuality in former times – yet, mostly unacknowledged, and which still has to deal with the devastation of this natural experience of sensuality the wreckers now ironically celebrate.

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After having dealt with the devastating gender developments in the Native population leading to an 'over-sexualization' of the Canadian Aboriginals, we will now take a closer look at the second anthropological branch. The First Nations reciprocal relationship to Turtle Island, the Western occupation of this 'unfortunately not empty' Canadian 'Garden of Eden,' and the resulting consequences for its First Inhabitants will be discussed in 'Un-Mapping The 'Indian.'

# **PART THREE: UN-MAPPING THE 'INDIAN' – LAND**

## **3.1 EMERGENCY AID AFTER THE GREAT FLOOD – FIRST NATIONS CREATIONAL LEGENDS VS. CHRISTIAN GENESIS**

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When the first light came, O-ma-ma-ma, the earth mother of Crees, gave birth to the spirits of the world....

Her first-born was Binay-sih, the thunderbird who would protect the other animals of the world from the mysterious and destructive sea serpent, Genay-big. We humans are worms compared to the thunderbirds.

The second creature from the womb of O-ma-ma-ma was Oma-ka-ki, the lowly frog, who was given sorcerer's powers and would help to control the insects of the world.

Third-born was the supernatural Indian, Wee-sa-kay-jac. O-ma-ma-ma gave Wee-sa-kay-jac many powers. He can change himself into any shape or form to protect himself from danger. Eventually he created the Indian people. But he is also an adventurer, who likes to create mischief and play tricks on us. Sometimes he gets our people very angry; however Wee-sa-kay-jac is to be respected by our people because he has great powers. If you ever meet him offer him some of your tobacco and he may help you.

O-ma-ma-ma's fourth child was Ma-heegun, the wolf....

After Ma-heegun came Amik, the beaver. Amik should also be respected by our people.... Whenever you kill a beaver, you must throw his bones back into the pond as an offering to the spirit of the beaver.

Then, fish, rock, grass and trees on the earth, and most of the other animals eventually came from the womb of O-ma-ma-ma. It was for a long time that only animals and spirits inhabited the world because Wee-sa-kay-jac had not made any Indians. Then came a period when the waters of the lakes and rivers began to rise and cover the forests. Many of the animals drowned....

At last only a small island remained with some birds and animals on it. But Wee-sa-kay-jac was on the island and helped the animals build a great canoe. Beavers cut down the trees and muskrats tied the poles together with roots while the frogs packed mud between the poles to make the great vessel float. The birds built a huge nest in the canoe so everyone would be warm and comfortable and Wee-sa-kay-jac built a roof over it. It rained and the waters kept rising until the great brown canoe floated off on the ocean. The animals and Wee-sa-kay-jac had to ride the big canoe for many years over stormy seas and strong winds.

Finally one day, the rain stopped and the great canoe rocked gently once more as the winds began stop blowing. Wee-sa-kay-jac realized in horror that he had forgotten to bring along a piece of the earth with which to re-create the new world. The only way to obtain was to dive to the bottom of the ocean, therefore he tied a vine to kitchi-amik, a giant beaver, and told him to dive into the depths for some clay. After some time had passed Wee-sa-kay-jac pulled up the limp body of Kitchi-amik into the great boat. To his disappointment, there was no clay. Next, he told Nin-gig, the otter, to dive for clay, but the same thing happened. The otter couldn't reach to bottom and drowned in the attempt.

In a last attempt, Wee-sa-kay-jac sent Wa-jusk, the muskrat, into the ocean. The vine went down and down. When he finally pulled the muskrat up, he discovered that Wa-jusk had drowned, but in his tiny paws was a piece of clay. Wee-sa-kay-jac was so happy that he immediately brought the three swimmers back to life. He then put the clay in a pot and boiled it. The clay expanded over the sides of the pot falling into the great sea until land was reformed. ...

One night as Wee-sa-kay-jac slept, a dream came to him. He saw many creatures shaped like himself, singing, dancing and pounding on drums. In the morning when he awoke, he remembered his dream and decided to make some of these people.

He took some clay out of the pot and placed it on the back of Misqu-day-sih, the turtle. The first man he moulded turned out to be black and Wee-sa-kay-jac decided this was not an Indian. This man was hurled into the air, landing across the great blue waters in an unknown land. More clay was moulded on the scaled back of Misqu-day-sih.

The man that resulted was pale and unhealthy looking. Wee-sa-kay-jac decided this was not an Indian, and flung the white man out across the flood. He took the remaining clay and worked with great skill and care. The man that came out to be was olive-brown in color. "This man is an Indian!" Wee-sa-kay-jac declared. It was this way that the Indian people was created.

Before the flood all the animals were flesh-eaters, so Wee-sa-kay-jac decided to change their eating habits to give our people a chance to multiply on earth. He ordered all the animals that had been in the great canoe to form a long line. The newly created Indians were first. They were told that they could eat plants and animals in the new world....

After the waters receded from the great flood, human beings multiplied on earth. They became many. (Stevens 20-25)



Fig. 3.1. Doris Maslona: *Creating the World* (original: Daphne Odjig)

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Comparing one of the First Nations legends of creation, namely the Sandy Lake Cree one, to the Judeo-Christian belief in its Genesis and the deeds of Noah, one can identify as many surprising similarities as predictable contradictions. Even a sketchy juxtaposition of these two myths already draws a clear picture of two different ideologies, whose understanding of place, status and property mismatch to a great extent and therefore making the later devastating cultural clash between those two civilizations become as foreseeable as inevitable. Since creational mythology serves as the basis for a religion, it shapes the minds and thus the interaction of religious people with their surroundings and influences the human construction of the natural world likewise. That being so, a mere comparison of the emergency measures reveals the predestined catastrophe, which had to follow when the Native and the Western worlds finally encountered each others – some 1000 years later.

### **OF CANOES AND ARKS AND FUZZY MUSKRATS AND GRACIOUS DOVES...**

The animals created in both myths, the Genesis and the Cree creation story, are of very different origin and fulfil exceedingly divergent functions. In the Genesis God forms the beasts on the fifth day and says "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind" (Genesis 1:24) while he puts special emphasis on the human being on the last day of his creation, namely the sixth, who should serve as the coronation of his cosmos as his image:

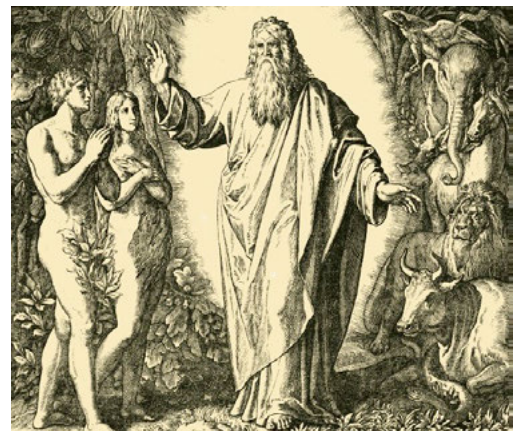


Fig. 3.2. *The Sixth Day of Creation ... animals are next to the lower arm*

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' ... God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue

it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' (Genesis 1:26-28)

O-ma-ma-ma, however, gives birth to a variety of beings, none of them human, but one human-like, and three of them animals living next to all the other beasts and plants in the world. While the human being in Judeo-Christian belief possesses the role of a supervisor from the first (or better sixth day) of earth's existence, it seems as if the animal family not really needs humans at all 'to make their world run,' and when mankind finally does populate the earth, it is crucially dependent on the beast. Consequently, man does not have as much of a hegemony as the Judeo-Christian Genesis guarantees its humans right from the beginning, inasmuch as the animals not only serve as vital nourishment and man's assistance (as in the Bible) but – since they are equipped with mighty powers – are worshipped as spiritual guardians.

Furthermore, although, the 'Great Flood' portrays a central motive in both cultures, different world views are hidden besides the contrasting use of locomotion vehicles of canoe and ark. Not only are animals already populating and cultivating the earth, but also they go on a cumbersome journey together with Wee-sa-kay-jac and finally play an important role in creating the world. After all, they all build the canoe in co-operation, every single one of them contributing its personal faculty, therewith proving its necessity in the cosmos. Noah on the contrary, constructs the ark all by himself and then canals all the will-less beasts into the vehicle, in pairs, though, thoroughly estimated.

Nonetheless, Wee-sa-kay-jac as well as Noah send out beasts as helpers. Notwithstanding, while Noah first unhands the black raven – being rather unpopular in Western philosophies – to find out if land has surfaced yet (it fails) and then the noble white dove finally bringing back the leaf, the trickster commissions his animals anti-proportionally, namely the mightiest one, the beaver, first, followed by the otter and the tiny muskrat managing to dig up the deeply desired clay in the end. Even these two policies of earliest mythology mirror the two conflicting ideologies inherited by anthropocentric and anthropomorphic societies. Noah as human being is the indisputable master. He leads the human race to promising shores into a New Age where the animals are counted means to an end. In Cree mythology, though, the beasts not only turn out to be essential helpers to create the cosmos they are living in. They also serve as role models for the humans listening to this legend in later times since all the different,



### 3. UN-MAPPING: EMERGENCY AID AFTER THE GREAT FLOOD – CREATIONAL LEGENDS VS.GENESIS

individual creatures formed a collaboration and became a unity in order to achieve a superior goal. Moreover, from The Old Testament's pages, the gracious white dove arises as successful animal aide while Cree oral traditions honor the smallest and weakest animal with the skinniest tail: the fuzzy muskrat dives deeper than the beaver and the otter.



Fig. 3.3. Carl Ray's fuzzy muskrat – swimming intently



Fig. 3.4. Noah's pure dove – flying graciously

These two plots point at the contrastive thought patterns and therefore divergent hierarchies within anthropocentric and anthropomorphic ideologies concerning human societies in which only humans count as well as interaction with non-human surroundings. Judeo-Christian doctrines proclaim the individual human being as the 'man of action' and due to that the centre of the world with only God being a superior force. These hierarchies – if with other persons or with beasts – are shaped by the 'survival of the fittest,' already smoothing the way for the capitalistic, competitive Western societies of later times. Unlike this credo, Cree belief systems will allow the supposed weakest link in the chain, the muskrat, to save the most important enterprise ever, namely the creation of the world. Mirroring a Native system of thought, this implies the constitution of flat,

collaborative hierarchies mainly aiming at communal balance within the spheres of human life, but also – since animals are not inferior to humans but rather mythological role models – a strong reciprocal relationship between beast and man.



## **3.2 AND THE GODS SAID: "BE HUNTING AND MULTIPLY!"**

If we were to peer through the mists of time to the Age of the Ancestors, the First Americans, what would we see? Probably we would see a small group of people, about 15 to 20. At times they might be joined by people from other bands.... Mostly they lived near the sea. They might follow streams to places where it was easy to spear a salmon or go inland to hunt deer or bear, or to gather berries on hillsides, but they were seldom far from water. They had spears and baskets, warm clothing.... But they moved frequently and did not have much else by way of physical possessions.

What they mostly had was not things, but knowledge. The knowledge to find what was needed to provide the band. Anthropologists for the most part would say that they had environmental knowledge (what do the land and sea provide and how can they be used?) and social knowledge (how do members of the group relate to each other in order to get things done?). (Wilson 11)

Apart from the fact that before the White man came to Canada there already existed over 600 bands with over 50 different languages spoken and various lifestyles led – meaning not only the romantically nomadic ones the nostalgic Caucasian history propagates – the importance of the transmission of environmental and social knowledge to strengthen the band seemed to be universal features:

Egalitarian societies did not separate authority from the group as a whole and in some cases they went considerable lengths to ensure that such separation did not occur. In those societies, available resources were open to all, and personal abilities translated into influence rather than coercive authority. Free sharing ensured that the superior skills of, say, a hunter benefited the group rather than the individual. (Dickason 26)

Belonging to this unabridged concept of balancing the social life of a Native society was not only the human being him- or herself but also the entire world surrounding the tribe including plants animals and the elements.

Wilson says that as the first peoples arrived on the New Continent probably over the Bering land bridge about 12,000 years ago (the Judeo-Christian record only goes back 4,000 years) (cf. 12 ff.), the relationship to the land they were living on grew very strong, in contrast to the Europeans' sense of environment. As Olive Patricia Dickason points out in *Canada's First Nations: Canada's Aboriginal people lived according to animistic principles in a world continuum where humans had no special place in creation and no distinction between human and physical world could be found* (cf. 13-14). Consequently,

### 3. UN-MAPPING: EMERGENCY AID AFTER THE GREAT FLOOD – CREATIONAL LEGENDS VS.GENESIS

[r]elationships dynamically unfold in time and space through the interactions between interconnected constituents, whether these are human or non-human. Hunters engage in intimate and reciprocal relationships with the animals they hunt insofar as they share the same land, trees, waters, breathe the same air, and walk over the same ground. Furthermore, the non-human constituents of the world are considered sentient entities that act consciously upon their world. Animals, for example, are endowed with intentionality. They have purposes, identities, and points of view so that they experience the world from their own perspective and act accordingly. (Poirier 144)

Therefore, hunting needed to be experienced as the animal's gift to the hunter since it "has its own will of living and thinking" (Feit 102-103), as far as it had individualistic characteristics and knowledge and was capable of independent choices. That being so, beast and man were understood as equal, which means "that the hunter must adapt his hunt to what he learns from and knows about the animals he hunts" (Feit 103). Thus this reciprocal relationship reveals the essential features of an anthropomorphic society. First of all, Native Canadians' "system of knowledge is holistic in the sense that it is not specialized and compartmentalized. Trees, bears and people are not put into separate 'boxes'" (Poirier 144), which means that a constant dialog between all of these 'creatures' was not only desirable but necessary to keep the balance within the corporate lebensraum.

When walking in the forest or visiting a hunting territory, a knowledgeable person should be able to read, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the state of the land as a whole. The availability of so-called resources as well as the state of their interrelations and interactions, and thus of their becoming, should be apparent. Such a qualitative and quantitative process of assessment implies listening to, reading, and interpreting the different languages within the forest and responding to them appropriately. (Poirier 144-145)

This policy of constant dialog was performed naturally as it fed a spiritual demand serving as personal stability as well as the mere physical one of surviving.

Since all sources of action dominating the cosmos were inhabited by life, "the explanations of the causes of events and happenings are not in terms of impersonal forces, but in terms of the actions of persons. Explanations refer to a 'who' that is active rather than to a 'what'" (Hallowell n. pag. quoted in Feit 103). Attributed to that, Feit explains that Native people did not experience the world as one of random chance or mechanic determination but rather sensed an intelligent order being so complex and dynamic that it could in many cases not be understandable to the human species (cf. 103). This extensive amount of complexity and dynamism can be ascribed to a constant

interaction between a mighty God, spirits, personified elements and animals, which were also capable of self-directed actions. With this spiritual system of thought in mind, it becomes obvious that the term 'power' according First Nations religious principles entailed a different code than in Western societies where it is mostly linked to owning material wealth and social status (physical). Since the world was a multiplex one, anyway, with the human in between, a sign of power could be spotted for instance when the hunter dreamed of an animal first (spiritual), found its track on the next day (physical), and was blessed by a headwind hiding his smell or sounds (spiritual and physical) when he finally shot the amenable beast: "Power is a social process, a relationship in thoughts and actions among many beings, whereby potentiality becomes actuality" (Feit 104).

Consequently, the 'man of power,' the person being admired in a community was not the one possessing the most goods but the one who excelled in the best hunting skills, ergo, the hunter being able to communicate with the nature surrounding him in the most sensitive way. This also required an instinct telling him when to stop since "in hunting, the life and death of animals form a delicate reciprocal process" (Feit 106), meaning that if the chaser killed too many beasts in a special territory, the beast would not offer itself anymore. If it was not properly hunted, though, it "is also bad luck because they have fewer young and more easily succumb to diseases or predation. Thus proper hunting can lead to increases in the numbers and health of the animals" (Feit 106).

Hence, the careful interaction between humans and nature can be seen as a cycle, which kept running by the recognition of responsibilities on a physical basis. Furthermore, the human being lived according to spiritual demands and loose dependencies guaranteeing the frictionless course of this wheel. Man was not only reliant on nature in general and the beast in particular on a merely profane basis, namely as nutrition, but on a sacred one as well. Being aware of this indispensable reciprocal process First Nations lifestyle as well as their ideologies, goals in life and personal reputations always went back to the actions serving the well being of a microcosm, namely the band, only feasible if the macrocosm of the world surrounding it was healthy.

In the Atikamekw language, this holistic process of assessment and reconnaissance over the extent of one's territory is referred to as Tipahiskan. Tipahiskan implies a whole range of knowledge and practices, from visiting a territory and evaluating its resources to passing on knowledge and telling stories. This can be translated as 'land and resources management' ... considering the principles of relatedness and reciprocity, management and ethics mean adapting one's behaviour or future purposes and actions on the basis of the information received from the forest,

### 3. UN-MAPPING: EMERGENCY AID AFTER THE GREAT FLOOD – CREATIONAL LEGENDS VS.GENESIS

including the needs and well being of non-human others. If the needs and purposes of the latter are not taken into account, the well being of humans will be affected. (Poirier 145)

Moreover, this thought pattern also did not know of landownership being a concept as less understandable as logical to Native belief: "The central resources of land and wildlife are not owned. The land and the animals are God's creations, and, to the extent the humans use or control them, they do so as part of a broad social community united by reciprocal obligations" (Feist 107). Considering these Native principles of holistic interdependency to keep the cycle going, the anticipatory system of thought supported by sophisticated and approved environmental knowledge on the basis of spiritual dogmas becomes obvious. As a result, knowledge and wisdom would be experienced as most precious resource in this kind of society while possession and wealth became not only futile but also detrimental as far as ecological attainments benefited the band while the latter hindered it.

Additionally, according to their cyclic and holistic way of living and thinking Canadian Native cultures were very future-oriented as "the aim of life is the perpetuation of a healthy, meaningful and bountiful world. This claim includes those now alive and those yet to be born. The social universe thus extends beyond the human world, beyond the temporal frame of individual human life" (Feit 106). It is said that the Elders encouraged their younger band members to act according to the well being of the seventh generation from that point in time yet to come, meaning that – considering the ramifications of the cosmos – the wrong killing of a small amount of animals today could make their grand-grand-grandchildren suffer from starvation. The Western world on the contrary, seems to have lost this foresightedness ages ago by adopting and succumbing to an ideology worshipping constant changes and an accelerated culture – at the expense of long-term developments.

### **3.3 OF HOW TO JUSTIFY THE CONQUERING OF THE 'ERSATZ-GARDEN OF EDEN'**

When the Europeans first arrived in America in the fifteenth century, they experienced a radically different world view concerning land and ownership than the one they were used to from their Western cultures. In those – although speaking of different countries – the creation of hierarchal political systems shared by the church, aristocracy and governments were the common denominator. While the Occidental explorers were heavily reliant on the Aborigines in the first decades, they nevertheless declared America as an empty "New Garden of Eden." Hence, it was available to those of the broad European population who wanted to leave the heimat for various reasons (which could mostly be ascribed to greedy or bigoted members of church, aristocracy or governments). The myth of the indefatigable 'American/Canadian Adam' levelling a land being described as looking as beautiful as God's Garden itself, therefore, paved the way for the greatest immigration in human history and, that being so, changed the American eco-system. Yet, the 'garden' was not unoccupied in the first place, and without the Natives the 'energetic Adam' would have been lost: "without the Indian, the canoe, the maize, and other products of the Indigenous society, none of the great exploratory trips would have got much further than Lachine" (Miller 52).

Notwithstanding, Manore mentions that while the Aborigines with their holistic thought patterns and reciprocal lifestyles considered themselves as part of the environment, Caucasian ethics led over the decades to rather arrogant attitudes towards the Indigenous population and their spiritual sense of natural territory. This haughtiness gave rise to a feeling of superiority. However, being in a position ABOVE the rest keeps you from being 'in there' automatically. Floating above means you look down on everyone else but at the same time you are 'out there' (cf. 3). By being 'out there,' you won't feel salvaged, and you can easily grow scared of the raw nature that surrounds you, which permanently seems to be intruding into your 'tidy lebensraum.' According to their God-given "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26) and in order to counteract these feelings of fear, Caucasian societies began to employ technologies to tame the alien, unpredictable environment around them and to exploit it due to ecological profits. This has caused an environmental imbalance over the past four centuries, which we now feel affects our life today to a daunting extent. Such being the case, the seeking for

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personal and ecological balance is becoming a major topic with partially obscure spin-offs.

Historian Lynn White suggests that in "the orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature" may be found the ideological source of our contemporary environmental woes. The Christian doctrine of the creation sets the human being apart from nature, advocates human control of nature, and implies that the natural world was created solely for our use. The biblical text that best exemplifies this view is Gen. 1:28: 'And God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' In the Christian Middle Ages, according to White we already encounter evidence of attempts at technological mastery of nature, and those incipient exploitative tendencies that come to full flower in scientific and technological revolutions of later eras. All this is attributed to the influence of Judeo-Christian conceptions of creation. Christianity, White concludes, 'bears a huge burden of guilt for environmental deterioration.' (Harrison 86)

The Fall seemed to have a great impact on this Christian thought pattern of dominating the world, insofar as the conquering of a second Garden of Eden promised the regaining of a power Adam had before he bit the apple as well as a relief from the hard living conditions the human kind had to face on earth as repercussion of the original sin since

the infertility of the ground, the ferocity of savage beasts, the existence of weeds, thorns and thistles, of ugly toads and venomous serpents, all of these were painful reminders of the irretrievable loss of the paradisaal earth. Even the surface of the globe itself, once a smooth and perfect sphere, had been transformed into hideous vistas of bogs, valleys, ravines, hills and mountains. In its original, pristine state, the whole earth had been an ordered garden, now it was an untamed and unkempt wilderness, inhabited by a menagerie of mostly unmanageable beasts. (Harrison 103)

The viewpoint of Western civilization and Native peoples could not be more controversial concerning the perceptual experience of the American continent's land. While in Western environmental conception the pristine American flora and fauna is attributed with guilt and atonement, ascribed to penalization and experienced as one big, life-threatening stumbling block, Natives' notion of the surroundings is pictured as the conflating conglomerate of embracing companions, which can only exist within the interplay of human, beast, elements, plants and spirit. Moreover, even here the Western philosophy of calculation and order becomes apparent, for the image of a perfect garden is a trimmed one bereft of all wild animals. Consequently, such an ideology abhors unpredictability and loss of control.

To Jean L. Manore in Western concepts wilderness has been considered as something separate from the human world for many ages (cf. 3) being proved and fortified by common binary oppositions like Civilization/Wilderness, City/Nature or in Canadian terms South/North (standing for Civilization/Wilderness) revealing hostile Western perceptions of pristine nature. "The first view of wilderness is that it is a place to be feared, a place where evil lurks. Wilderness is presented more as feeling than as an understanding because, in this view, wilderness is largely unknown. It is something that is 'out there,' alien to our normal existence and experience and, hence, vaguely menacing" (3). Due to this depiction and Judeo-Christian doctrines of an ordered, calculable environment the uncultivated world has to be dreaded,

because sometimes creatures from it venture into the settled areas, invade civilization's space and cause harm. Wilderness is more powerful than humankind and virtually all-encompassing. This is expressed in the tales of bears or wolves sneaking into villages at night or of 'Wildmen' of the woods, who would on occasion descend upon a village, snatch children from their beds and take them back to the woods for an evening snack. Werewolves too were a part of the wilderness as is the modern-day boogeyman. (Manore 4)

Supposedly, in many stories, told at cribs in small log cabins somewhere in the American bush, those "Wildmen" were said to be 'Indians' waiting in the dark with their teeth bared in order to carry off unwary White children. To overcome this fear Caucasians began to create powerful technologies equipping them to penetrate and exploit nature, with the facility of forming it according to their personal needs as a welcome side-effect: "These technologies allowed at least a semblance of control and empowerment over the wilderness and gave rise to the second view of wilderness as frontier" (Manore 5). The inventions of technologies to domesticate the land can be seen as a logical consequence considering the intermingling of Western characteristics like arrogance, fear, the long-time due indemnification concerning the Original Sin and the strong, capitalistic belief in the right of landownership:

Land became private property when it was improved by clearing, planting cultivation.... The justification for this influential understanding of the basis of property ownership came from the biblical story of creation: for inasmuch as 'God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth,' i.e. improve it for the benefit of life.... Logically, it followed that those who occupied lands, yet had done nothing to bring them under control, could legitimately be dispossessed of them. Such notions were to play an important role in the justification of overseas plantations and colonies.... Clergyman and naturalist John Ray pointed out that the author of nature "is well pleased with the Industry of Man in adorning the Earth with beautiful Cities and Castles, with pleasant Villages and Country Houses, with regular Gardens and

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Orchards and Plantations." In this respect, he pointed out, Europe differed markedly from "a rude and unpolished America, peopled with slothful and naked Indians," hinting darkly that their conquest of America was in keeping with the biblical injunction to subdue the earth. (Harrison 101)

Having a religious justification for the occupation of the 'ersatz-Garden of Eden,' which can again be assigned to Genesis and Noah's admired solo run, a sociological vindication was not a long time coming. "The [Western] view of history is rooted in a colonial ideology framed on the nineteenth-century theory of cultural evolution, which holds that all societies can be ranked on a scale of progressive evolution from 'primitive' to 'civilized'" (Furniss 217). According to this concept of 'Social Darwinism,' Aboriginal peoples must be ranked at the lowest end of the scale and European societies occupy the other end (cf. Furniss 217).

'Primitive' societies, according to this theory, are not only weak, poorly organized, and precarious but are inherently less worthy than 'civilized' societies. The implicit suggestion is that because 'civilization' is both inevitable and advantageous, the colonization of North America, the bringing of 'civilization' to the continent, and the domination of Native societies has been in Native peoples' best interests. (Furniss 217-218)

Although this concrete theory of 'Social Darwinism' only developed in the nineteenth century on the basis of social philosophy, its precursors could already be seen right at the beginning of Native and European interaction:

The indigenous inhabitants consisted of a multitude of bands and nations of hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists who had adjusted to their environment and lived in harmony with it... Their technology and value system made little pressure on the resources of their world. Lacking iron and firearms, they were unable to inflict much damage on fellow humans and animals; and their animistic religion restrained them even from developing the desire to do so. Their economic organization meant that they lived in smaller population concentrations than the Europeans, often faced more threats to their physical well being, and were forced to co-exist with one another and with nature. Although they shared a rudimentary form of commerce, similar motives for engaging in warfare, and essentially the same cosmology and ethics, they had no need or occasion to combine for economic or political purposes. (Miller 21-22)

This fundamental way of living had evolved over the past four centuries, and since spiritual principles as well as the apparently huge amount of land did not force the Native peoples to change their habits, they stayed the same.



Conditions were different in Europe, though. Due to the fact that land was entrusted to the Europeans restrictedly and was considered as economically valuable while the amount of available territory was strictly limited and population concentrations were large, measurements were taken to obtain it in form of legal as well as martial ventures. "Political systems had developed that were authoritarian and coercive rather than communitarian and consensual; and the various economies were increasingly driven by the capitalistic motive of acquisition and investment" (Miller 22) while

European countries were not just structured societies and authoritarian polities; they were also acquisitive economies. By the sixteenth century, the beginnings of a market mentality could be detected in some of them.... The significance of capitalism lay in its psychological character: capitalists acted on and promoted a desire to acquire material goods not simply for consumption and other social purposes, but for their reinvestment for the purpose of acquiring still more property. This economic motive also encouraged the development of an individualistic spirit that was beginning in economically advanced countries to erode communal ties of village loyalty and clan solidarity. In time this impulse, strengthened by the individualistic intellectual traditions that were a product of the European Renaissance, would remake the social ethics of Europe. The same forces, abetted by economic motivation, were bringing about a new reliance on machine technology and novel forms of energy. This revolution, like the impact of Renaissance and the expanding grip of capitalistic ethics, were remaking Western Europe into an increasingly individualistic acquisitive human community. At its best this process would lead to a considerable prosperity and a high degree of personal liberty; at its worst, to unbridled selfishness and yawning chasms between affluent and the poor. (Miller 16-17)

### **3.4 RETURN OF THE PALE AND UNHEALTHY CLOT OF CLAY**

As the Europeans came to the New Continent for personal freedom and economic wealth, which had become one of the main aspirations in the Old World according to historical developments and thought patterns resulting from that, and broke into societies with deeply contrasting, seemingly inferior, ethical backgrounds, a devastating change in Native lifestyle became inevitable. For "if two worlds collide there is always a possibility that only one world will survive" (Mc Geough 83). With concentration on the aspect of 'land' and with the knowledge that Aboriginal beliefs and ways of living were underprivileged and not to be respected, Canadian territory became economically worthwhile concerning two main aspects: the first one affected its natural resources and the second one its inhabitability in general giving access to immigration from Europe. The ecological balance being mapped and elaborated over thousands of years was to be destroyed as the formally pale and unhealthy 'clay accident,' which Wee-sa-kay-jac decided was no proper 'Indian' and "flung out across the flood" (Stevens 20-25), was about to come back for good.

### **'THANKSGIVING' THROUGH THE AGES**

"The Europeans had settled on the four motives that would drive their contacts until the eighteenth century: fish, furs, exploration and evangelization. The Indigenous people had tolerated the first, eagerly embraced the second, co-operated in the third ... and still remained blissfully ignorant of the last motive" (Miller 31). As J. R. Miller points out in his book *Skyscrapers Hide The Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, when the Europeans first arrived in America, they were figuratively flat on their backs, meaning 'Thanksgiving' emerged as one of the most popular holidays in America for a concrete reason. The reader suddenly notices that Western explorers had to rely on the First Inhabitants to a great extent revealing that for many years the Whites had to adapt much of the Native lifestyle and not the other way around. This reliance might seem obvious and logical, though, 'White history' obtrusively tells a different story reduced to one single day in autumn.

Regardless of the colonists' early dependence on the Indigenous, however, Western cultural traits were creeping in right from the beginning and destroyed Native living in a subliminal kind of way. While three out of the four motives Westerners had for staying in America were rather ignored by the Indigenous population in the first centuries after contact, the fur trade began to change their way of living right from the beginning. "The Indians initiated both, the contact and the commerce.... The Indians showed a marvellously great pleasure in possessing and obtaining these iron wares and other commodities" (Miller 28). Even more influential was the introduction of European firearms. Not only did muskets lead to a much more devastating warfare since "an opponent could be killed more easily than would have been the case had it been necessary to stalk him and strike him with arrow, club, or bone-tipped spear" (Miller 61), but also they changed the holistic way of hunting:

Similarly, the muskrat made depredations on the animals more effective just as extensive commerce created new incentives to kill more animals in search of furs to trade. What is obvious about this change is that Indians with muskets had greater capability to kill much larger numbers of birds and animals more easily. What seems almost as obvious is that they employed the new technologies to harvest more furs, a response to the incentive of the new commerce. (61)

Consequently, a shift in the Native perception of a holistic cosmos took place. Since motivations altered and beasts were now killed for commercial reasons and not to keep the balance within the reciprocal system they were living in, Aboriginals' spiritual understanding of the world surrounding them began to change as much as the status in the bands transfigured: delicate environmental knowledge grew superfluous as large-scale hunting promised even more commerce and therefore a musket began to offer more status than environmental sensitivity.

## CHAINING THE CANOE FOR GOOD – IMPERIALISTIC HARDWARE AND STATELESSNESS

Apart from the fact that natural resources were exploited by the Europeans cranking up their economies back in Europe, where for example American beaver fur became en vogue from the seventeenth century, Europe was overloaded with too many people longing for a better, more autonomic, independent lifestyle. America, "the land that had not been extensively used and modified by 'civilized' peoples was in fact empty, and so it could be claimed by Christian, civilized Europeans" (Wilson 30). The progressive use of technologies, so characterizing for civilization, justified the take-over of foreign territory as well as it provided the corresponding hardware:



Fig. 3.5. Peter Biram, *He who Explores*

Historian James Headrick suggests that the adoption of new technologies for military purposes provided the means – or hardware – for imperialism. The development of steam gunboats along with breech-loading and repeat-firing guns, the identification of quinine as a protection against malaria; and the development of steamships, railways and communication cables all contributed to the colonization.... (Neu 42)

First Nations, however, did not believe in owning 'land' in the first place. While in Europe 'land' had been one of the most if not the most important commodity for centuries, inasmuch as the more land one possesses, the more hunting territory he owns, the more farmland he cultivates, the more common people he employs, who till his land, the more food he reaps, the more products he can buy in exchange, etc., a hunter/gatherer society with its main goal of being in perfect balance with its surroundings does naturally operate in a holistic cycle. Attributed to that, it does not know, let alone believe, in an economic cycle of personal profit. To Native people selling a piece of land was as reasonable as selling a cloud or the wind, namely not at all, since it was just not possible to own anything like that. Thus it is said that when the first Europeans who came to America wanted to purchase some territory from a resident band, after the first moment of irritation, the

Natives exchanged it for goods they were keen on. But they did not sell it one time only. Instead, from that point on, they permanently tickled their funny bone and vended it up to twenty to fifty times, whenever they were asked by different new Europeans invaders crossing their path. Land just was not available for purchase.

Notwithstanding, times were changing. Due to Judeo-Christian beliefs, the 'theory of Social Darwinism,' European 'land and freedom of expression'-privation and the necessary technological hardware, immigration and the theft of land – which Canada's First Inhabitants did not even consider as a property in the first place – could take place and was generally sanctioned by the European authorities.

The intensification of industrialization in Europe displaced many of its own people and created a world demand for agricultural land and agricultural products. Between 1814 and World War I around fifty million people migrated from Europe to the 'new Europe's' of the Americas and Australia. Two-thirds of them came to the United States and 4 million to Canada, where the largest tide of immigration was to the West after the 1890s.

The policies of both the US and Canada were westward expansion and the alienation of ever more Indian land to provide a place for Europeans to farm. Populations of Amerindians continued to decline in the face of repeated epidemics, but the birth of the new immigrants was one of the highest ever recorded, especially among the Caucasians. (Wilson 34)

Neu states that according to their often nomadic, yet always 'primitive' ways of living, Canadian First Nations then were categorized as stateless (cf. 12), which to Western philosophy is a scary state of living on the one hand since statelessness means not being tangible, but on the other hand statelessness can be considered as 'uncivilized' and is therefore – in accordance with the invitation to 'civilize' – hinting at the need to fix the stateless persons – to chain their canoes for good, so to speak, and lock the nomads up in order to domicile them.

The historical impermanence of national boundaries and the need to control populations within them, as well as maintaining vigilance against 'the outsider,' increases the vulnerability of any group labelled 'stateless.' Statelessness, as defined by those outside the identified group ... was the problem. Statelessness and heterophobia are so closely linked with bureaucratic modernity that it may be impossible to tell which came first.... Fear of the other is normally managed by the military – its duty is to defend the border, that imaginary line which most fundamentally defines the outsider. But when the outsider is found within the borders and is perceived neither as a patriot nor as a citizen of another country, fear of the other can easily be encouraged by the politically ambitious frightful pitch.

'Statelessness' is a bureaucratic definition; the problem of what to do with a stateless people is a problem of modern governance, and consequently, the 'solution'

### 3. UN-MAPPING: RETURN OF THE PALE AND UNHEALTHY CLOT OF CLAY

is primarily a bureaucratic one, whether it lies in the direct extermination of individuals or in the slow procedural elimination of their life-support systems or with their total cultural assimilation (Hilberg 1985).... The conquest of the New World – the Americas in general and Canada in particular – could not be perceived by the conquerors successfully without the cultural genocide of the conquered peoples. Aboriginal cultures represented to the European everything "progress" and 'civilization' were trying to leave behind. The hubris of European hegemony and the notion of Christian superiority over "pagan" ... societies rendered the subjugation of those people not only a perceived natural right but in some cases a moral obligation – albeit sometimes indistinguishable from capitalistic obligation. (Neu 12)

So, bringing back the myth of the new trimmed Garden of Eden, it becomes obvious that the Europeans, who had not yet grown into 'real Canadians,' had settled in this Garden, which slowly became a place according to their conceptions. The 'Indians' had to be kept out there but also fixed somewhere else where they could neither harm the new citizens nor their capitalistic goals.

### **MOVING THE QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLAND TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC AT NIGHT – RESERVES IN CANADA**

"An imperial policy of 'civilization' of Indians began in 1830. It marked the beginning of the reserve period in Canada" (Wilson 35). Different First Nations bands, which had may have been fierce enemies for centuries, were now forced to live together on a small amount of land being 'reserved' for them to adopt Canada's economic goals of farming. The two main characteristics of these territories could be described as a) being 'out of sight, out of mind' for the Caucasian part of the newly forming Canadian society, and b) as being economically 'unreservedly' worthless (if suddenly potential, unexpected financial profits concerning this land were discovered like mineral resources, etc., its inhabitants had to move or were consoled with payments bordering on fraud).

Nevertheless, according to their well-meant policies the Canadian government's regulations were "directed by a concern for the 'protection, civilization, and assimilation of indigenous people" (Wilson 35-36). In order to fulfill these endeavors,

in the last few years of 1870s the policy changed from assimilation by community to one of outright assimilation as individuals: the policy of establishing isolated reserves changed, and it was thought that reserves should be close enough to non-Native communities for individuals to have an incentive to become 'enfranchised,' that is, to have the same legal status (and way of life) as individuals as non-Native Canadians.... (Wilson 35)

Although, the effort of becoming a 'real Canadian' was sold to the First Nations as being utterly desirable, the Canadian Confederation nullified all the advantages of being a citizen in the same breath by imposing "systems of band governance that allowed the federal government exclusive control over Indian national leadership, land, membership and money" (Wilson 35). Or as the Native author Drew Hayden Taylor describes, "we all went to bed and woke up the next morning living on reserves, speaking a foreign language and practising a new religion" (*Funny* 43).



Fig. 3.6. Picture from the Colonies: Native Family

Nonetheless, Canada never wanted to annihilate its Aboriginal peoples; their prime goal was assimilation. In contrast to the United States of America, 'a good Indian was not to be considered a dead but an assimilated one.' Wrestling land from them to destroy the unpleasant, uncivilized culture was maybe not as planned as one could presume today since financial gain has always to be considered as one of the major factors. Nevertheless, it was exceptionally effective:

Separating an Indigenous population from its traditional territory is a primary need for land acquisition and resource extraction. This is because the fundamental relationship between Indigenous people and their land base is irrevocable: Tradition is Place, and sovereignty over Place is the basis for a sustainable future. The tight interweaving of existence, self-definition and territory is the essence of Indigenous identity – a reality that is a complete anathema to the principles that allow non-Indigenous cultures to objectify land into real estate, divorce it from tradition and exploit its natural bounty without regard for the long-term future. (Neu 9)

The new Canadian population being equipped with all these strictly economical attitudes concerning the Canadian wilderness, therefore, needed to get rid of the First Inhabitants and their reciprocal ethics by employing the powerful psychological weapon of assimilation: "the fusion of Indigenous cultures with their land is so complete that the only way to take that land is to destroy the Indigenous culture" (Neu 9) – and vice versa: the most effective way to destroy the Indigenous culture is to take the land.

This assimilation was practised half-heartedly and failed. Aboriginals were left alone in their penurious reserves. In the end the Canadian society had hollowed out its 'Native man,' taking the means of forming his identity and leaving a hole, which was filled with alcohol and drugs many times, making Canada's First Nations one of the world's

### 3. UN-MAPPING: RETURN OF THE PALE AND UNHEALTHY CLOT OF CLAY

most depressive peoples. As Wilson points out "when Canada took over control of Indian affairs at the time of Confederation Indigenous nations became internal colonies" (35), 'lost' internal colonies which, although politics have changed concerning First Nations self-government, are still existing today:

Strangely, while in the 1990s Canadian politicians regularly boasted that 'Canada is the best country in the world' according to a United Nations index of quality of life that was applied around the world each year, they ignored the Third World conditions in which Aboriginal peoples existed within Canada. In the autumn of 1998, an Indian Affairs study found that when the UN criteria and standards were applied to status Indians within Canada, the results presented by *Globe and Mail* (12. Oct. 1998) showed that on-reserve Indians' quality of life was comparable not to the Canadian average, but to Brazil's. (Miller 364)

However, in the year 1996 Drew Hayden Taylor 'revealed' that "the entire Native population of Canada has been living under a veil of untruth" (*Funny* 40) since MP Herb Grubel "compared the Native people of this country [Canada] to children living on a South Seas Island, financially supported by an over anxious rich uncle – like the Federal government" (40). Hence, Taylor ironically 'admits:'

our secret is out. The last five hundred years of oppression, genocide, brainwashing, disease and other assorted afflictions were all a vast and incredibly well managed smoke screen. The truth is, it was all an ingenious master plan to achieve this wonderfully luxurious and envied position we now relish. The fact that we enjoy a suicide rate five times the national average, the knowledge that most Native communities sit at the bottom of the economic ladder and in some cases suffer from grinding poverty, are just as well established facts that have been exposed for the false rumours and illusions they are.

I, like him [Mr. Grubel] couldn't help but notice the similarities [to the South Sea Island inhabitants]. For instance an amazing loss of Indigenous tongues ... bitterly increased rates of alcoholism, annoying paternal attitudes by colonial governments....

And I guess, when it comes to the South Pacific/North America connection, the biggest shock to people is the news that every night, when it's daytime in the South Pacific, the Queen Charlotte Islands detach and are moved to the South Pacific where Haida people become Polynesians. (40-41)

Drew Hayden Taylor's joke contains pain, indeed. Despite the fact that we have entered the next millennium and Canada's First Nations became Canadian citizens with a special status card in 1960 and later were granted a concession concerning self-government within the reserves, Canada's Aboriginal people appear to be second-class citizens ignored by the public, leaving space for illusions of ill-founded euphemism, degradation and stereotyping at best. Meanwhile, Canada is still exploring and determining its own, unique Canadian identity.



By hook or by crook, in spite of all efforts, the First Nations peoples have fallen by the wayside. As already implied, "there is a direct correlation between the loss of territories, the loss of self-determination, and their confinement in 'reserves' and a significant increase in a variety of social problems. These include ... a high rate of suicide among people" (Poirier 138) as well as other side effects of identity loss like drug abuse, brutalization and depression. But – like in many broken societies – a smouldering odor of resistance can be smelled, too.

### **3.5 THE MUSKRAT'S LEGACY**

#### **MUSKRAT'S BITING BACK – OF FISHING RIGHTS, LAND CLAIMS AND THE OKA CRISIS**

Even though First Nations had to fight for their survival due to disastrous living conditions, they mounted opposition to governmental regulations specifically in form of the attempt to gain back land. Reinventing selfhood in general became more important and more insistent during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reaching its height in the Oka crisis of 1990. First of all, the hunting and fishing rights were reinstated when a new act promised that "the said Indian shall have the right, which the province hereby assures them, of hunting and trapping, and fishing game and fish for food at all seasons of the year on all the occupied crown lands and on any other lands to which the said Indian may have a right to access" (Morse 356-97). Being able to readopt ancestral, cultural lifeways was one part. Yet, the Native privilege to hunt led to envy between the Indigenous and Caucasian Canadian population still relevant today since many non-Aboriginal hunters feel discriminated against. Furthermore, new problems have arisen in the last few years evoked by a different lobby, namely that of animal-rights-activists, which constantly denounces Native hunting traditions.

However, far more familiar disputes concerning the use of Canadian territory can be assigned to the everlasting conflict of 'land claims,' a phrase Taylor – together with his band name 'Ojibway' – believed to be one word in his youth, "Ojibway-Land-Claim" (*Funny* 61), for it was so commonly used (cf. *Funny* 61). The mere essence of land claims, Natives argue, is that

before European arrival each nation had its own system of landownership and government, through which resource use and social conduct were regulated. Natives assert that their rights to self-government have not been relinquished, but only suppressed, and that these rights persist today. They draw attention to the continuity of cultural traditions to demonstrate their continuing status as distinct societies within Canada. (Furniss 216)

Court decisions supporting these statements were first common in the 1970s. They "made First Nations claims about land and rights credible to the federal government.... The federal government instituted processes whereby claims for compensation and land could be heard" (Wilson 38). This was the starting shot since "the claims process

continues, but the system set up to deal with the claims has been overwhelmed by the several hundred claims brought to it, and should it continue to work at its present place, claims will not be resolved for centuries" (Wilson 38).

Maybe the most popular case was the Oka Crisis, which became a major topic in the news all over the world in the summer of 1990. After the Mohawk Nation had been fighting for the land serving as their ancestral cemetery for many decades and lost a great part of it to a golf course, the situation finally escalated when this course was about to be expanded to eighteen holes. Over the next seventy-eight days the Mohawks, who were later joined by Native people from all over Canada and the USA, erected barricades blocking the access to the ground in question and some major bridges leading to massive traffic jams. After many violations and the supposed loss of control over the situation by the local authorities, Canadian Forces finally interfered. In the end the Native revolutionaries threw their guns in the fire, burned some tobacco and left. The aftermath of the Oka Crisis can be summarized with the death of one soldier, who had accidentally been shot, two indirectly attributed deaths of one Native and one non-Native, the cancelling of the golf-course expansion and the establishment of a new Native stereotype, namely the 'Guerilla Fighter' – in contrast to the 'Useless Indian' wasting away on his reserve.

By performing the fight for their land and therefore the fight for the recognition of their culture effectively in the media, Canada's First Nations have shown that they – although despised as antiquated and out-of-fashion – are able to make use of one of today's most powerful weapon: media propaganda. Hence, their public image changed insofar as on the one hand they suddenly became a threat to today's Canadian society again, which suddenly found itself trembling with its properties. "In this post-Oka society ... Native people were no longer victimized, they could be dangerous and volatile" (Taylor, *Furious* 92). On the other hand, attention beyond America by people not directly involved brought Canadian Natives numerous sympathizers worldwide. Meanwhile, the non-Native Canadian public was given new input concerning their everlasting striving for a unique Canadian identity.

## **THE BURDEN OF THE LATECOMER – OR WHEN DOVES CRASH**

### **UNLEASH THE CANOE AND DUMP THE ARK – CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

In his book *The Imaginary Indian* Daniel Francis reveals the ambivalent relationship non-Indigenous Canadians still have towards Canada's Aboriginal peoples. This controversial attitude is often grounded in non-Native people's perception of having entered their new homeland as latecomers: "our thinking about Indians relates to our thinking about ourselves as North Americans. Despite the stories we tell ourselves about 'discovering' an empty continent, stories told mainly to console ourselves for getting here second, we have to admit that we were latecomers. Native people claim the land by virtue of it being their home" (222). Furthermore, Francis explains, even though the First Inhabitants of Canada were degraded as 'uncivilized savages,'

we have always been uncomfortable with our treatment of the Native peoples. But more than that, we have also suspected that we could never be home in America because we were not Indians, not indigenous to the place. Newcomers did not often admit this anxiety, but Native people recognized it. 'The white man does not understand the Indian for the reason he does not understand America,' said the Sioux Chief Standing Bear. 'The roots of the tree of his life have not yet grasped rock and soil. The white man is still troubled with primitive fears, he still has in his consciousness the perils of this frontier continent' [Drinnon]. (224)

In spite of the fact that a great amount of Canada's immigrated population would consider this theory as made up out of thin air, non-Native Canadian society exhibits a great number of characteristics supporting Francis' thesis.

First of all, as Manore explains, it has to be stated that Canadians have a very contradictory concept concerning the wilderness of 'their' country. On the one hand it is considered as Canada's main characteristic attracting millions of tourists with its promise of wideness and the feeling of freedom. On the other hand, the remnants of wilderness are partly acknowledged as a national symbol because it has largely been overcome and defeated (cf. 4). This victory could have taken place because of the development of the steam engine, "which among other things serves as a metaphor for the time when humans developed large industrial based technological systems that enabled them to penetrate and exploit the wilderness" (Manore 5).

Although these inventions created financial gain, technologies also fulfilled a different function in an extremely large country with a very tiny strip of civilization in the

South directly at the Canadian border and a very big amount of wilderness towards the northern part. To Manore, "technological systems are at the root of non-Native perceptions of wilderness: they determine its boundaries. Wilderness starts when technological systems end" (5). But in the world of today many non-Natives seem to search for this wilderness, meaning it "has become a religion, and the forests, waters and mountains are holy shrines. The irony is that those who would enter these quiet places can only do so by relying on large technological systems" (5) since in order to reach their starting spot of intended freedom and purity they have to fly in or make use of the road network. Nevertheless, borders have to be created, even if only to prove that they are crossed at one point, and therewith experiencing pure wilderness becomes officially legitimized.

Taylor for instance detects a curious activity non-Aboriginals practice to feel attachment to the Canadian landscape. "Recreational Cultural Appropriation" (*Futile* 19) can be found when non-Indigenous business men are bored with their desks, suits and stocks and feel the urge to spend a great deal of money to experience adventurous sports which originated in Indigenous traditional cultures but are marketed by Whites nowadays. Taylor observes the alienated method of water transportation, namely the canoe/kayak trips, which can be watched at Canadian rivers at any given day in summer. Then "the Canadian rivers are jam-packed with plastic/fiberglass kayaks and canoes, practically none of them filled with authentic Inuit or Native people, all looking to taunt death using an Aboriginal calling card" (*Futile* 19). Formerly, these boats served as means of transportation and survival but in the last decades they have become toys of amusement to entertain White urbanites while many Native people watch this development with astonishment:

Perhaps my argument can best be articulated with an example of the different ways of these two cultural groups react to a single visual stimulus. First, in a river, you put some Native people in a canoe, right beside some White people in a canoe. Directly in front of them should be a long stretch of roaring rapids. With large point rocks and lots and lots of turbulent white water. Now watch the different reactions ... the vast majority of Native people, based on thousands of years of travelling rivers of this great country of ours, would probably go home and order pizza.... Usually the only white water Native people prefer is in their own showers. Hurtling towards potential death or certain injury tends to go against many traditional Native beliefs. (*Futile* 19-20)

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Taking a look at the White fun sports athletes, though, differences in the understanding of 'nature sports' between Native and Occidental people become obvious: "Now you put some sunburned Caucasian canoeists in the same position, their natural inclination is to aim directly for the rapids paddling as *fast* as they can *towards* the white water.... These people should pay a royalty of sorts every time they try to kill themselves using one of our cultural legacies" (21). Drew Hayden Taylor experienced one of those trips himself together with the "typical normal crosscut of the average Canadian" as he says: "a former Olympic rower, a Québécois lawyer ... one of Canada's leading Diabetes specialists and an ... ex-Mormon, who could perform exorcisms." They all had a lot of fun, except for the Native Canadian on board.

Despite, telling this little episode with a funny and ironic undertone, Taylor points out serious facts: many average sportive, non-Native Canadians of today appear to be walking the natural grounds of their country in a very lumbering way for they cannot deal with the wilderness and do not seem to have a natural feeling for the land. Experiencing nature to recreate and discover oneself seems to be the goal, but in the end the way they face the purity of their surroundings often is a commercial one on the one hand – only accessible by technical achievements of modern Western societies – and a loud, entertaining one on the other, often only satisfying hedonistic appetites. Therefore, their wholesome experiences with nature are reminiscent of a drug trip.

### **ABORIGINAL DECEPTION PACKAGES – GREY OWL AND THE GREENING INDIAN**

Another way of encountering Canada's wilderness apart from secretly dreading, narcissistically exploiting, technologically demarcating and athletically conquering it, is decorating it with original, holistic Native character traits. Next to the commercialization of Aboriginal environmental matter of course, 'The Greening Indian' has been a popular image for many decades and in today's world of ecological awareness he turns out to be even more desirable as a solid symbol for Canada's most important sight: its great outdoors. A magazine advertisement of 1992 for instance depicts two Native persons in historical clothing with ancestral utensils to promote Canada as a place for tourists to see. The text beneath the picture says inter alia "Animal People are our link to another realm" (*The Sophisticated Traveller* in Francis 188). Hence, Aboriginal people are an effective commercial means to symbolize purity of land: "The Indians in the

advertisement are familiar enough. They are spiritual, mysterious Indians. They are part of the land, like the animals, in touch with the unseen forces of nature. They appeal to the widespread conviction on the part of non-Natives that Native people experience the natural world in a way that is qualitatively different from the rest of us" (Francis 188).

Thus becoming or 'playing Indian' also seems to be an opportunity to experience the continent non-Natives inhabited as latecomers 'qualitatively differently' and therefore more pristine. As Daniel Francis points out, sometimes "we [the non-Aboriginals] had to become Indians in order to be at home here. This myth of transformation lies at the heart of Canadian culture: Canadians need to transform themselves into Indians" (Francis 223). They can do that by disowning their European past to become Native to be able to connect through the wilderness with the New World.

One of Canada's most popular "Imaginary Indians" is Grey Owl, who appears to be the incarnation of the 'Greening Man' to this day. Claiming to be an "adopted Ojibway trapper from northern Ontario, who had given up trapping under the influence of his Iroquois wife to become a fervent conservationist" (Francis 131), he published some successful books in the 1930s and gave many noted lectures spreading his concern for preserving the Canadian wilderness. Lovat Dickson describes his appeal as follows:

This voice from the forests momentarily released us from some spell. In contrast with Hitler's screaming, ranting voice, and the remorseful clang of modern technology, Grey Owl's words evoked an unforgettable charm lightening in our minds the vision of a cool, quiet place, where men and animals lived in love and trust together. (Dickson 5)

Grey Owl talked about "animals slaughtered to the edge of extinction," the loss of the reverence for the natural world, the disappearance of "the touch with the natural self," "Man should enter the woods not with any conquistador obsession ... but rather with awe, and not a little of the veneration, of one who steps within the portals of some vast and ancient edifice of wondrous architecture" (Grey Owl 326). People were enthralled by his lively description of their 'own' country:

"He made pure Canada, the Canada outside the concrete urban enclosures, come alive." (Dickson 239). And the thing that made these stories so authentic was the fact that Grey Owl ... was Indian. His writings and his talks were not to be taken as the sentimental maundering of some weekend canoeist. Grey Owl spoke with the accumulated wisdom of the people who had inhabited the eastern Woodlands for thousands of years. (Francis 139)

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The problem only was that Grey Owl was no 'Indian' at all. In reality he happened to be the son of a drunken English wastrel, who, solitarily raised by his grandmother in England, had always been reading books on 'North American Indians.' He finally began to realize his dream of switching identities and becoming one when he immigrated to Canada and started a new life as a 'wilderness man.' There he created a character, who "looked so much like what Whites thought an Indian should look like. With his long braids (which he dyed to keep black), dark skin (which he colored with henna), and glowering stare (which he practised in front of a mirror), he seemed to have stepped right out of the pages of Fenimore Cooper" (Francis 137). Within a week after his death in 1938 his real identity became unveiled not really irritating the non-Native public at all since what he stood for was more important than who he was. In the end, Grey Owl had evoked the image of the 'Greening Indian' by persistently promoting a special goal for the Vanishing Canadian Indian:

They should be set to work as forest rangers and game wardens; their technical knowledge, accumulated during thousands of years of study and observation, could be of immense value in helping to save from distracting Canada's wilderness country and inhabitants.... Grey Owl sought to end the marginalization of the aboriginal people by giving them a key role to play in the development of the country. Through [his persistent quest] and his public appearances he established the Indian in the public mind as natural preservationist. He [the white man] walked through the woods and only saw the profits to be made by cutting down trees. On the other hand, Native people living close to nature ... were conversationalists by instinct. The greening of the Indians begins with Grey Owl. To him belongs the credit for affirming if not creating, the image of the Indian as the original environmentalist, an image which has gained strength in the years since he expressed it. (Francis 139-149)

Even Disney's *Pocahontas* movie of 1995 is described as an "Indian-princess, eco-feminist fantasy" (Jojola 264), and the voice-over of the trailer reveals: "The Powhatan Indians were deeply spiritual. Their culture was based on a strong appreciation and respect for nature and their environment [picture: a muscular young Native running free with some antelopes]. It is a clash between the value systems of these two civilizations, the Powhatan and the English [a great amount of crude soldiers aggressively cutting down trees]..."

According to this media representation in today's world, Native people continues to be the prototype of an environmentalist, because of the simple fact that they 'have it naturally in them.' Although this can be considered as a stereotype and reality paints a



different picture, being rather grey or black instead of a well-fed green, the ancestral knowledge and the natural connection to the Canadian land can/could still be found (again). Therefore, in a time when 'Live Aid' became the biggest festival of 2007, featuring the most popular music acts of the recent years, singing to make the world pay attention to the disastrous effects of Global Warming and promoting countermeasures every human being can practice, Aboriginal holistic principles could finally be appreciated, valued and imitated.

### **ONLY WHEN THE LAST TREE HAS DIED ...**

Given the wide gulf separating the cultures, Europeans have tended to imagine the Indian rather than to know Native people, thereby to project onto Native people all the fears and hopes they have for the New World. If America was a Garden of Eden, then Indians must be seen as blessed innocents. If America was an alien place, then Indians must be seen to be frightful and bloodthirsty, Europeans also projected onto Native peoples all the misgivings they had about the shortcomings of their civilization: the Imaginary Indian became a stick with which they beat their own society. The Indian became the standard of virtue and manliness against which Europeans measured themselves, and often found themselves wanting. In other words, non-Natives in North America have long defined themselves in relation to the Other in the form of the Indian. (Francis 8)

Imagining a depiction of the 'Canadian Indian' and therewith the contrasting 'modern non-Native' society of a new, alien continent called Canada, many immigrated Caucasians lost track of the 'real' Aboriginal and the satisfactory (since mundane and balanced) lifestyle he could offer. Looking at the different principles of interaction with the environment surrounding the peoples walking and acting on Canadian ground, one can detect many of the serious misunderstandings and errors which took place from the moment the two cultures clashed. According to Judeo-Christian arrogance, the application of goals of a capitalistic society and the struggle with a persistent discomfort Europeans felt concerning their new heimat, Indigenous reciprocal doctrines were not only disobeyed, but systematically destroyed.

Until this day 'the Canadian land' is one of the most important measurements regarding the present role of Native Peoples in Canadian society proving that they have been and still are implacably linked to it in a unique way. After having defined themselves by it for thousands of years, it was usurped by the European newcomers; they were suppressed on Canadian wasteland and forgotten. But the forlorn fight for land brought

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them back to the eye of the public in the 1990s and made it pay attention to the way non-Native Canadians had appallingly affected First Nations culture by taking the land. And finally, in today's Western world, where ecocide and the battle against it are becoming a major topic, Native ancestral, environmental knowledge could let Canada's Aboriginal peoples play an essential role in the future of the country.

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After having illuminated Native gender aesthetics, the destruction of such resulting in a Canadian society of 'over-sexualized' people kept in a 'realm of lust' where they were/still are forced to act according to grotesque stereotypes, and after having concentrated on the Western egoistic 'un-mapping' of Aboriginals, the devastation of traditional homeland and the heteronomous construction of an identity-splitting, fake 'Native realm of oblivion,' we will now take a look at the dominant race's back-handed blow on First Nations community building and its strike on oral tradition habits in the third and last anthropological branch 'Dis-Teaching the World.'

# **PART FOUR: DIS-TEACHING THE WORLD – EDUCATION AND HISTORY**

## **4.1 OF GROWING WINGS AND CLIPPING WINGS – EDUCATION**

### **'LOOK, HE IS RETRACTING HIS ELBOWS...' – NATIVE CHILD REARING**

In Cree terms, education is understood as a life-long process that emphasizes the whole person. It strives for spiritual, mental, and physical balance, and the emotional well-being within the context of family and community.... Cree education is relational. Solomon Ratt explains that in Cree terms, education does not come in compartmentalized institutional stages. Cree education, kiskinohamatowin, refers to a reciprocal and interactive teaching relationship between student and teacher, a 'community activity.' (Wheeler, W. 198)

In Native societies the typical characteristics of educational measures reveal major parallels with Canadian Aboriginal peoples' reciprocal interaction with the environment in general. This comes as no surprise since the equilibrium and therefore well-being of the band has always to be considered as a crucial goal in a hunter-gatherer community. Hence, cyclic concepts and systems of thought could be constantly detected in everyday activities and traditions. Such being the case, in order to fulfil the band's common interests special values were permanently spread and especially applied to child-rearing:

1. older people should be respected, obeyed and listened to ...
2. pleasant and agreeable relations should be maintained at all times with neighbors and other group members (i.e. do not quarrel, live peacefully)
3. qualities of self-control, calmness and composure, patience and ability to dream and to dance, the maintenance of honor and dignity and striving to live daily by the principles one believes in should be sought after; and
4. a sense of humor is desirable (McShane 123)

Furthermore, "[c]hildren are neither systematically excluded nor necessarily included in adult activities. Their firsthand experience may include exposure to almost everything in the adult world. There is little hostility or gap between age groups per se, and children are frequently found assisting in simple family chores such as baby sitting, carrying water, gathering firewood, etc." (McShane 124). By involving children in the adult world as soon as possible and letting them run free Native communities followed principles of

upbringing which could now be considered as 'laissez-faire' (a mode of education very popular in the 70s but often criticized nowadays). Notwithstanding, according to Native standards of living in an anthropomorphic world, this way of raising the offspring was as useful as it was necessary since

among hunters and gatherers generally, learning proceeds through observation and imitation with what appears to outsiders to be a minimum of intervention and instruction. From the Dene point of view [for example], to explain is to take away someone's opportunity to learn for herself or himself ... knowledge derived from others is suspect. True knowledge comes from direct experience. (Goulet, "The Dene" 166)

Hence, mature role models were as mandatory as children with high attention spans and respect and trust in their models while the young people themselves could expect these traits vice versa. These concepts led to a band's well-balanced, social organization, as everyone took care of him/herself, being aware that he or she could be watched and taken as a role model by others. Consequently, small societies like these were able to work socially efficiently without a stated, supervisory jurisdiction. With the well-being of the band in mind as a natural highest goal, everybody within the community knew his or her duties and acted according to those self-evidently.

Simultaneously, a high degree of self-determination was guaranteed. "The ... emphasis on experiential learning through observation and imitation is closely associated with their value of autonomy. People's ability to realize their goals on their own, including acquisition of personal knowledge, is highly respected. This respect for autonomy is experienced throughout life" (Goulet, "The Dene" 167). The conditions being such, a scenario in the daily life of a former Native society can be considered as a quite realistic one: a six-year-old child has been climbing on a tree with thin branches to explore the nest of a bird. Adults are watching the child's attempt to take a look into the nest while the branch threatens to break but they won't scream out and encourage the kid to come down since "to interfere with the child's exploration of his environment would violate his right and ability to pursue and achieve his goals" (Goulet, "The Dene" 168). Even if the child fell out of the tree and hurt itself, his relatives would not undermine the child's ability to make up its own mind concerning its healing. If it refused to visit the medicine man or woman of the village it would not have to go. First Nations would rather "consistently maximize the number of occasions in which one can learn by oneself and for oneself what it is to live an autonomous life competently" (Goulet, "The Dene" 168).

The social patterns within a Canadian Native band may appear to be chaotic, indifferent and disrespectful at first (Caucasian) glance. But taking a second look, it becomes obvious that social interaction was deeply interwoven and permanently guaranteeing personal freedom and community cohesion. The positive side effects evolving from this reciprocal social framework can be observed by taking a look at Native dealing with crime and the absence of punishment:

Aboriginal peoples view wrongdoing either as a misbehaviour, which requires guidance to be corrected, or as an illness, which requires healing. Aboriginals see the world as a web of multidimensional interacting relationships that inevitably affect each other, rippling across both space and time. No one acts in isolation: everyone is in that web where all things said and done have repercussions. Healing circles instead of focusing on the misdeed itself are concerned with the disharmony at its roots and seek to re-establish harmony by encouraging offenders to genuinely acknowledge the harm they have done. (Dickason, "The Many" 131)

These ethical strategies mirror the overall interdependencies Canadian Aboriginals responded to in every aspect of their lives. Having discussed the holistic morals concerning their environment, it comes as no surprise that these principles were not only applied to the natural macrocosm surrounding them but to the same extent to the familial microcosm within the band, which then affected the macrocosm again. Working at the root seemed to be the main point, as thinking of the well-being of future generations demanded sensitive labor directly at the core of the problem to guarantee a long-lasting positive improvement.

Besides, Goulet says that every member of the community (not excluding anybody) comprised the 'core.' Age became irrelevant in so far as no constraints were tied to it. Children were encouraged to watch and learn from their elder relatives' lifestyles without being disciplined. Observation was regarded much higher than instruction, assistance higher than interference, in order to foster self-respect and inner strength to be capable of leading an autonomous, yet exemplary life serving the well being of the clan (cf. "The Dene" 166-168). Consequently, everybody was seen as an essential component in the social circle and therefore, earned respect and offered it in turn to the others, bringing us back to the fuzzy muskrat, which – as part of the animal community – is not put behind the other beasts, although it is the weakest one and finally manages to save the New World.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> cf. chapter 3.1.

## JUST EXTEND YOUR ELBOWS – WHITE CHILD REARING

"The fact that Indians indulged their offspring much more than Europeans did simply made the pestering of the children all the more difficult to control. For their part, the Indians were aghast at the firm discipline Europeans exercised on their children, to the point that they called French mothers 'porcupines' because of their apparent lack of tenderness" (Jeanen 33). Apart from the historical situation that Canada's Aboriginals experienced an exploring Caucasian race which incomprehensibly left its women and children behind in the old world, the bringing-up of children in general appeared to be an incongruous one to them.

Before the 'laissez-faire' style of education became popular in 'the Age of Aquarius' in the 1970s, European societies had been striving for different goals for centuries being shaped by rather strict behavioral rules supporting and manifesting well-established hierarchies. As well as land, education was considered to be a commodity and could be categorized by different standards.

While in Native communities child-rearing was accessible to everybody to the same degree – its success only dependent on the student-teachers' personal relationship of trust and respect – Caucasian societies often had established a system of

t e a c h i n g  
guaranteeing only  
the well-heeled a  
proper, reputable  
schooling with  
bright prospects of  
financial wealth  
and a high status in  
society. As a result,  
a hierarchical cycle  
was established



Fig. 4.1. Norval Morrisseau: Native childrearing

with very little possibilities to jump in as an outsider, assuring that a countries' elite could keep to itself while keeping away unworthy social outcasts at the same time.

Furthermore, the already mentioned individualistic spirit had been forming European cultures and thus also the priorities in children-rearing.

This revolution [industrial], like the impact of the Renaissance and the expanding grip of capitalistic ethics, was remaking Western Europe into an increasingly individualistic and acquisitive human community. At its best this process would lead to considerable prosperity and a high degree of personal liberty; at its worst, to unbridled selfishness and yawning chasms between the affluent and the poor. (Miller 17)

This general attitude towards 'uniqueness' (a term autonomous Native people would probably rather define as egoism) later became to lie directly at the core of Canadian identity, as America was explored by the individualistic American/Canadian Adam whose celebrated key values were defined by "individualism, self-reliance, advancement through hard work, struggle and self-sacrifice" (Furniss 199). The new Adam stood in line with the old one as well



Fig. 4.2. German home education in the 18th century

as Noah, all of them mavericks, only trusting in themselves and their personal abilities, as Miller explains, yet being adored for these characteristics of distinctiveness. While Western culture, history and storytelling has admired personal *ehrgeiz* and its population has been punching in its elbow societies for centuries (cf. 17), Native Peoples experienced individualistic ambition as an illness, which had to be healed or destroyed since it represented a great threat to the balance of the band.

## **FOR PAUL MCCARTNEY WAS RIGHT – EDUCATIONAL METHODS IN COLLIDED WORLDS**

### **THE AGE OF THE WICKED STEPFATHERS – WESTERN PATERNALISM**

When the Europeans began to take over the two modes of education clashed leading to many misconceptions at the expense of the Indigenous peoples. Being equipped with arrogance and disrespect as mentioned before, the Caucasians began to treat the 'uncivilized savages' as unpleasant stepchildren. Not only did they transfer their rigorous European paternalistic methods of pedagogy, they also applied them to the

'whole people' no matter if they were facing a five-year-old child or an eighty-year-old Elder, who had been teaching his offspring affectionately for decades. Over the years subordination replaced autonomy, interference was practised instead of assistance and instruction was considered as much more efficient than the philosophy of observation.

The basic attitude of Caucasians towards the Natives was grounded on submission evolving out of the feeling that the 'uncivilized savage' had to be handled as an under-aged person for he was as virginal to a 'sophisticated (Western) culture' as a new born baby. Consequently, subordinating behavior, wrapped into familial oriented vocabulary, shaped the dealings with First Nations people. Nonetheless, different cultural backgrounds evoked different interpretations of special phrases, especially concerning treaties:

An example was the dominant metaphor, familial comparisons that negotiators on both sides used. Both, the government commissioner and the Plains leader talked of 'the Queen mother' and her 'Indian children.' However, commonality of terms masked difference of meaning, for in Plains and Victorian British societies the relations of child and parents were utterly dissimilar. To the society from which government commissioners came, childhood connoted submissiveness, obedience, and dependence, but in Cree society, for example, childhood was a time of great personal autonomy during which the young could look at adults for protection and assistance of right. Careful examination of the treaty talks ... reveals that when government negotiators used the metaphors of childhood, it was often in a context in which assertions of government authority and Aboriginal submission predominated. However, when Saulteaux and Cree leaders used similar metaphors, they never followed them up with references to submission on their part and dominance by the Queen's government. (Miller 220)

So when the new Canadians started to tutor their Native children, who were 'entrusted by God' to them, and to 'lead them to the path of virtue,' after a while the Aboriginal people became aware of two facts: first, education in Europe had very little to do with a personal freedom to grow and second, it got even worse since self-realization was no option at all as 'complete self-abandonment' emerged as the ultimate goal.

In fact, many Europeans considered the aim of Natives 'acquiring civilization' as accomplishable since the 'White guidance to a cultural evolution' would let the Indian 'grow up' promising a level of equality with the Caucasian inhabitants.

Education and exposure to White society would have their effect. 'When the crisis is past, and the influences of the Christian religion have fully exerted their power,'"promised the missionary and Indian authority John Maclean, 'and these have been accepted and experienced by the red men, the descendants of the ancient lords



of Canada will become recognized as agents fitted for aiding in the development of the country, and giving unity to our race' (Mclean 135). But not as long as they remained Indian. It was the sine qua non of government policy that Indians had to abandon their identity as Indians before they could become full Canadians. In other words, Indians had to be destroyed so they could be saved. (Francis 216)

Applying today's understanding, two insights would probably be revealed: the first would be that it is impossible to destroy formerly learned cultural conducts and thought patterns totally, and secondly, by vehemently attempting to, the person to be proselytized will be destroyed in the end. First, Aboriginal people were linguistically cheated on in order to justify assimilation efforts. Then they were deprived of their cultures and reluctantly and half-heartedly indoctrinated to copy a White lifestyle. Not fulfilling unobtainable expectations, they were cast off like unwelcome adopted children whose new dominant parents had not been able to 'drive out the devils' of former times.

To counter these contrastive educational prerequisites and supported by a basic feeling of superiority towards Indigenous people, the colonizing AmerEuropeans undertook many paternalistic measures on political as well as cultural and personal levels. Residential schools for example were, apart from being misused as labor camps for children, not accommodated to Native didactic practices. As a result, Aboriginal children were mostly perceived as dumb, ungrateful and unteachable while in reality they were merely used to different teaching methods, namely observation and personal freedom and not subordination and pure instruction as it had been and still is exerted in European schools. The problems arising from these contrastive pedagogical methods (even in the 1970s) were documented at a Dene Tha residential school:

Assessments revealed, first and foremost that the students at DTCS [Dene Tha' Community School] are capable and show personal strengths in many areas. *The DTS students are not 'stupid,' 'dumb' or lacking in ability.* Virtually all students showed strengths in their ability to work with their hands and to learn by doing and seeing. However, *they displayed weaknesses in their ability to learn through language. This pattern of strong visual and poor verbal learning skills was pervasive. This pattern of abilities will have a significantly negative effect on students' abilities to function effectively within the classroom,* particularly when students with these types of abilities are taught via conventional teaching methods (i.e. verbally based teaching methods) (DTCSTI, 1996; my emphasis). (Goulet, "The Dene" 166-167)

Apart from the shortcoming that most Caucasian teachers, especially missionaries, were not responsive to the needs of their students and therefore spreading

an 'eroding germ of identity loss' right from childhood on, political sanctions did the rest. In 1876 the Indian Act was passed, a policy being officially directed by a concern for the "'protection, civilization, and assimilation' of indigenous people" (Wilson, C. 36). Yet, taking a closer look at the legislation, it becomes quite obvious that protection was seldom a characteristic shaping the undertone of these laws. Rather it was a legislation justifying control and containment while guaranteeing the government unlimited authority. Some attributes must be estimated as:

1. Duplicity in the alienation of even more land, including land previously reserved for Indians;
2. Heavy-handedness and arbitrary judgement in the definition of who was an Indian, both through the Indian Act itself and more particularly in the way recognition as being Indian was effected in individual cases;
3. Control over internal governance of bands, the election and recognition of leadership, and the definition of band responsibilities;
4. Corruption in the provision of goods and services of bands;
5. Legal sanctions against the practice of indigenous religion and spirituality;
6. The establishment of industrial schools, then residential schools operated by churches, in which Indian custom was denigrated and in which an attempt was made to wipe out the use of indigenous languages;
7. The institutionalization of and structuring of schooling, generally, that made academic success and achievement extremely difficult;
8. Control over persons and individual movements and mobility, with the institution of 'passes' for leaving the reserves;
9. Control over finances of individuals and bands;
10. The institution of policies that made early Indian success at farming impossible to maintain; and
11. Legal sanctions against meeting and organizing (Wilson, C. 36)

Generally, the amendments of the Indian Act did interfere in almost every aspect of First Nations way of life within the new Canadian society and especially in the social recognition of the latter. But, as C. Wilson stresses, it also impeded Aboriginal daily existence on a personal level since this Act controlled any form of free travelling, trading or hunting, earning and spending money as well as prohibited alcohol consumption and voting (cf. 448), and the conditions being such deprived the First Nations peoples of common fundamental Canadian rights. That being so, this Act was a fraud representation as it stamped Canada's First Inhabitants as underprivileged children, who were to be taken by the hand to be led onto the small path of acceptance to become 'real Canadian citizens.' Yet, these amendments, first and foremost, empowered the White population to exert universal control over the bodies and lives of their unbeloved adopted children, resulting much too often in personal enhancement and personal claims to

power of the authorities, namely reservation agents, who were not seldom acting like ancient European monarchs in their entrusted kingdoms.

## **"CAUSE NATURE HATES A VACUUM" – THE AFTERMATH**

In this 'Age of Wicked Stepfathers,' the First Nations people often were faced with a system of political repression, hitting them in virtually every aspect of their lives. Assimilation was often practised rather half-heartedly by disconcerting agents, who did not take the trouble to introduce Aboriginals to Western cultural traits appropriately. But then again, why should they? Governmental law was supporting a violent assimilation.

At the heart of government Indian policy lay a ... paradox. The stated aim of the policy was to assimilate Indians to the mainstream of Canadian society; but the means chosen to implement this policy was segregation. Native people were kept distinct and separate on their reserves, their behavior closely controlled by a host of special laws and regulations. They received privileges, which aroused White resentment while they were refused the most fundamental rights available to other Canadians.... Whites were encouraged to view Natives as different and inferior. (Francis 216)

Hence, it is hardly surprising that Canada's paternalistic strategies of educating the 'blank Aboriginal child' by drawing a white pen and succinctly writing Western rules and cultural traits on its skin, believing that a perfect White grown-up would arise, did not work out. As a result, whenever there was Native failure,

the Indians received the blame for it: they did not seem to be holding up their end of the 'bargain.' Non-Natives tended, at least implicitly, to view their relationship with Native people as a contract. In return for special status, the Indians were supposed to have agreed to abandon their Indianness. When the Indians did not appear to be following through in this agreement, non-Natives began to think that Natives were getting something for nothing, an opinion which persists to the present day. Officials concluded that Indians were by nature too ignorant, too indolent, too tradition-bound to make the leap into the modern world. (Francis 216-217)

Even though the times have changed – First Nations were recognized as full Canadian citizens in 1960 and from then on several juridical steps towards self-government were taken – the Canadian public still tends to recognize its Native co-citizens as 'too-everything' (cf. Mander 78) to become a homologous Canadian resident.

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This can partly be ascribed to First Nations living conditions, which can be described as disastrous to this day. What the broad Canadian public regularly tends to ignore, whenever another 'drunk Indian' is begging for money on the street or another reserve is portrayed as self-destructive ghetto without any rules, morals and norms, is that present



Fig. 4.3. Canadian residential school

Native conditions being equivalent to those of a Third World country originate in an interaction of ignoring Aboriginal thought patterns while applying Western ones. As a result, Native social networks have broken down while Aboriginals are facing a world where Indigenous ethics and morals are not acknowledged since they do not support the capitalistic

goals of Western societies and are therefore experienced as ineffective and weakening. Having practised subordination over autonomy for hundreds of years, though, the Occidental strategies of 'live and let die'<sup>8</sup> are employed on the New Continent both naturally and destructively as Taylor points out:

Most Canadians, hopefully, are aware of some of the tragic history of Native people. How we were forced into residential schools, forced onto reserves ... and a hundred other 'forced to's' all because the White race, in most cases ... has a firm belief that its way of doing things is the best and only way; everybody should be forced to do or believe things that way, or they are not salvageable or welcome members of society. And in most cases, it is the White peoples duty to its 'cause,' be it political or religious or whatever to enforce White beliefs, regardless of the consequences to other people. (*Funny* 48)

On the contrary, the Native lifestyle can be described as 'live and let live' communicating: "You're more than welcome to join us in what we do but you don't have to if you don't want to. You have your way, we have ours" (Taylor, *Funny* 53).

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<sup>8</sup> When you were young and your heart was an open book/You used to say: live and let live/But if this ever changing world in which we live/Makes you give in and cry/Say live and let die! /(Paul McCartney, "Live and let die").

The clashing of these two different ideologies does not leave the question unanswered as to which one has the better aptitude to survive. As one is defined by a strong request for harmony and the strategy of rather stepping one step back in order to secure the autonomy of the other while the other one is shaped by the belief in 'the survival of the fittest,' ergo 'stamping ONTO' the other becomes the major social pattern. This trampling led to nine major problems in Canadian Native communities on psychological as well as physical levels as a study reveals: "(1) alcohol abuse, (2) poor housing, (3) high welfare, (4) health-related problems, (5) poor educational opportunities, (6) increasing crime rated, (7) social stress and tension as related particularly to the rise of racism, (8) Native land claim settlement, and (9) poor recreational facilities" (Asch 188-189). First Nations were banished to Canada's peripheries geographically as well as socially and "centuries of alienation, dispossession and insensitivity have ... had their effect. When you take away from Native people their culture, their language and their land, it creates a vacuum. And as White scientists love to quote, nature hates a vacuum" (Taylor, *Funny* 32). Consequently, being weakened and vegetating as a lost people, the Aboriginals have to fill the vacuum as soon as possible and with as little financial and physical effort as possible. Being at the borderline, Goulet reminds us that typical Native thought systems like 'autonomy over subordination' (cf. "The Dene" 167) then become the triggers of the vicious circle many Canadian Aboriginals still exist in today while the paternalistic measures of the 'master race' highlight an additional malediction.

Offshoots of this circle can already be detected concerning rather small incidents in mundane existence. In former times for example non-interference corresponded to the instructive and self-regulating reality in the bush, which restricted human actions in a natural way:

Earlier generations ... dealt with their children in the context of a dwelling they had built in the bush, in which their children would fall asleep in the night as the fire went out, and everything was dark, indoors and out. Nowadays children may keep their parents awake night after night in a single family dwelling serviced with electricity, permitting light and television after dark. Children play and watch television in the presence of parents who will not turn off the lights or pick up the children and put them to bed, because that simply is not done. To do so would infringe their autonomy. (Goulet, "The Dene" 175)

The same mechanisms can be experienced in almost every aspect of daily routine, even or especially in situations in which outsiders would probably estimate the behavior as apathetic. The members of a community, for instance, could easily tolerate drug and

alcohol abuse of others since the clipping of personal freedom is generally avoided. Even if violent excesses harm the self-determination of another band member, the latter would rather withdraw from the scene than provoke a confrontation. "Conflict thus is avoided and people's autonomy is respected to the fullest extent" (Goulet, "The Dene" 170). Despite this form of social behavior guaranteeing the community's balance and therefore its survival in former times, such behaviour nowadays rather tends to deteriorate the already devastating living conditions of Canada's First Nations while the Canadian government's welfare system finally finishes them off.

Since hunting had been forbidden for many years, since trading in general could not support a family let alone a whole band anymore, since farming was doomed to fail, and since useful education in school was practically non-existent and therefore no starting point to a professional career,

the contemporary Native economy has not solved the problem of dependency on external agencies. Indeed, the problem has deepened: direct government payments have replaced productive labor as the main resource for obtaining trade goods, yet these payments are seen by most people, Native and non-Native, as handouts to the poverty-stricken. In short, post-contact economic history is dominated by a single theme: the acceptance by Native peoples of immediate well-being in exchange for long-term economic dependence. (Asch 187)

Additionally, the "introduction of direct family allowance payments, old age pensions, and other cash benefits to the heads of nuclear families and to individuals completely undermined the economic rationale of the local group, ... the nuclear extended family ... became the primary self-sufficient economic unit" (Asch 186). As a logical result community ties were destroyed by individualized government payments:

The problem of welfare is not limited to the amount or pervasiveness of the payments themselves. Rather, it is importantly connected to whom they are given: to individual families, ... the traditional distribution system ensured that there was little wealth differentiation. This is still true of the distribution system related to the bush subsistence sector of economy. On the other hand, the introduction of welfare payments in their present form has created the individualization of poverty and has helped to relieve the community of the traditional responsibility to help one another. The current form of payments has undermined the values of the collective responsibility that is part of a reciprocal economy, and it has subtly led to the forced acceptance of the value, characteristic of our economy, of individual responsibility. In this sense, welfare represents a social intrusion that goes far beyond a mere question of dollars: like education, it creates a perfidious influence on the Native people to change their values. (Asch 190)

Hence, by imposing a strongly dominant attitude towards Native Peoples, which is socially justified ('uncivilized savage' who needs to be taken by the hand to lead a proper Western lifestyle) while politically practised (after assimilation failed, the motto became sedating), the Caucasian Canadians rather unwittingly found a very effective means to strike down a reciprocal economy to which 'paternalism' was as foreign a concept as it became a devastating force.

What is nowadays left of these reciprocal communities, indicates the many mistakes the Canadian government has to answer for. The imposing of a nuclear family lifestyle as the 'right familial concept,' while at the same time demolishing the core of Native communal based thought patterns, gave rise to very sick communities, in which especially the youth has to pay. Apart from the fact that "Canada's Native population is younger than the non-Native population and is growing at a fast rate" (Wilson, C. 452, [source INAC 2002]), among general population, 19 per cent are under 15 years old; the corresponding figure for Aboriginals is 33 per cent, (cf. Wilson, C. 452, [source INAC 2002]), this sector of society is also precarious:

[t]he death rate for children under one year of age declined dramatically in recent decades but it is still twice the national average. Violent deaths generally are three times the national average and among the young may be 10 times the national rate. Suicides among young Indian adults are very high; for those aged 15-24 the rate is six times the national average.... The most clearly disproportionate statistics involve incarceration in provincial prisons.... In Manitoba, where 8 per cent of the population is Native, 61 per cent of the prison population was Native... (Wilson, C. 453)

Furthermore,

there are five times as many Indian children as non-Indian in the 'care' of the government. While the Indian population has doubled over the last 25 years, the percentage of Indian children being taken into care has also doubled. In the same period, the number of adoptions of Indian children has grown by a factor of five, while the proportion being adopted by Non-Indians has grown from 50 per cent to about 80 per cent; put in another way, eight times as many Indian children are now lost to the Indian community as formerly. (Wilson, C. 454)

Taking a look at these statistics, it becomes obvious that the vacuum Drew Hayden Taylor talks about (cf. *Funny* 32), is hard to fill in a satisfying way. Rather, the vacancy has been overlaid with varying kinds of different unsatisfactory substitutes, being a factoid strategy causing mostly anger, frustration, angst and depression but not any kind of regained autonomy, since feelings like the latter tend to 'lock up' the mind of a human being. As in many Third World countries children are many, but at the same time most of

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them cannot be given the care, protection and attention they need in the first place while they are looking into a future with very little hope. Parents and relatives are many times too dispirited to provide any foundation. Consequently, the typical ghetto reality unfolds consisting of broken families and a great number of disappointed children becoming frustrated adolescents desperately trying to find footing and approval somewhere else. This often ends in the hard-edged performance of a gang lifestyle whereby the 'posse' is serving as ersatz family while daily routine is shaped by violence, drug abuse, pimping, hooking and other delinquencies. As a result, the vicious circle being formally kicked off by the White Canadian population centuries ago keeps spinning, getting out of everybody's hand as it is now involuntarily turned by the Natives themselves.



Fig. 4.4. Daphne Odjig, *Piggyback*

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Notwithstanding, apart from these two rather practical methods of education, having finally led to the social as well as mental breakdown of the one Nation and the takeover by the other, there is also a more theoretical – or spiritual – level to the common modes of teaching. It is grounded in the understanding of history, tightly linked to the experience of time and the surrounding world in general.



## **4.2 OF GROWING ROOTS AND CLIPPING ROOTS – HISTORY**

### **INSPIRING THE SYNTAX – NATIVE EXPERIENCE OF HISTORY**

"Our Elders are our books" (Boddy 115) becomes a defining statement concerning the Native mechanisms for transferring legends, history and therefore Canadian Aboriginal identity without the written word. This simple sentence reveals a variety of attitudes and thought systems naturally having a great impact on daily life. First of all, it indicates an oral culture, which in Western philosophy has for many centuries been considered inferior. Orality – from a social point of view – seems to cover the lack of intelligence to be able to create a writing system on the one hand while on an intellectual level denies an oral culture its personal history on the other hand. Verbal deliverance is not considered as constant and thus not calculable.

As in so many other cases Native principles approach from a different angle. Drew Hayden Taylor remembers a situation in which he attended an Elder's conference and several young people were sitting in the audience

taking out pen and paper ... to diligently learn. This method of learning was not to be. The Elder quietly asked them to put their note pads away. 'Writing something down is asking permission to forget it,' he said. It made sense. A few years ago, I came across a quote in a newspaper. I think the quote was from Plato ... who said, 'Writing is the instrument of forgetfulness.' Sound familiar? – Two wise individuals from primarily oral cultures. It seems great minds do think alike. (*Futile* 85)

Hence, transmitting knowledge via voce is experienced as a method requiring a high amount of attention and powers of recollection from the student being much more arduous and mentally challenging than 'just' writing it down, which comprises the possibility of forgetting it in the first place and then not being able to apply it in daily life when it is needed but the necessary folder is lying at home on the desk. Secondly, this way of education demands a special teacher:

I believe it was William Blake who coined the term, 'The Palace of wisdom lies on the road of excess.' Wisdom comes from experience. Experience comes through trial and error. Sometimes error means waking up in a place you don't know, smelling like something you don't want to and realizing you might not have many more mornings left to wake up to. You have to travel before you know the countryside. (Taylor, *Futile* 85)

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Consequently, the person, who is experienced, who has lived life and possesses a kind of 'hoary wisdom' (which even the Western world tends to fall in love with) has to have reached a special age, seen the world and therefore can expect an immense amount of respect. This deep feeling of admiration and honor contributes to a truly healthy and balanced society, in which on a reciprocal level the Elder's intellect was stimulated constantly since his knowledge and experiences were required persistently while the expansion of his/her personal knowledge expansion was naturally fostered until his/her last day. At the same time, he or she became practically the most important member in the community and was not put in the backwater, a development which could be considered as one of the main problems of today's Western societies. Concurrently, the 'experienced' Native storyteller became the connecting link among microcosm, macrocosm and other spheres, among past, present and future and among children, adults and Elders.

Since oral tradition and the communication of lore can be considered as major characteristics of Canadian Native societies, the overall reciprocal element finds its core in this method of cultural transmission. As already mentioned, reciprocal interaction could be felt in every fibre of Indigenous reality. This contained community building on a microcosmic level as well as the interplay with natural and supernatural surroundings determining their macrocosm. Storytelling as the means to educate and preserve culture naturally mirrored these holistic ethics and morals.

All the indigenous peoples of North America held metaphysical, theological, and ethical ideas that are categorized as animistic.... Creation myths could vary from one nation to another, but the underlying understanding of what constituted being was the same for all Indians. All people, animals, fish, trees, rocks, and other aspects of nature were animate; all had souls or spirits ... and souls required respectful treatments at all times. At particular times they might require expiation and placating. There were rituals or prayers to show respect to animals and dangerous passages in the river, invocation to ensure that the animal about to be captured would not avenge itself on its takers by warning away its brothers and sisters in future. Similarly, there were numerous taboos that had to be observed to placate spirits. (Miller 13-14)

In his work *Sacred Legends of the Sandy Lake Cree* for instance, James Stevens describes some of the Cree rituals. It was for example dangerous to watch a flying bird for too long, because by doing so a part of your soul could disappear and you would live shorter (cf. 132). Furthermore, "it is a taboo for woman to step over a man or his clothing even in the most crowded conditions. If a woman transgresses this unwritten law it is

said that her actions will bring sickness, headaches, or nosebleed to the man upon whom this act has been committed" (Stevens 133). What would be considered as superstition today, served First Nations peoples for different functions. Those rituals were based on long time experiences giving people safety, explanations and common codes of conduct.

Other rituals aimed to ward off or cure disease, and in some nations curing societies had an important social and religious role. There was no distinction whatever between medicine and religion for the simple reason that disease was believed to be caused by evil spirits, some of them implanted by witchcraft. All religious behaviour was closely associated with the giving of feasts and presents, an important re-distributive and bonding process that was vitally important to Indian society. Selfishness was considered not just antisocial but also evidence of witchcraft – one of the few charges in Indian society that justified putting someone to death. (Miller 14-15)

### **THE LUST FOR HUMAN FLESH – WINDIGO**

We can detect a typical example concerning this intermingling of religious belief and the attempt to understand ill human behavior by taking a look at the story of the cannibalistic 'Windigo,' a myth common in many North American Native legends:

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"The dreaded windigo is the most horrible creature in the lands of Cree and Ojibwa Indians. Nothing strikes more terror in the hearts of the Anishinabek than the thought of the windigo. The cannibalistic windigos strike from the North during the five moons of winter and restlessly haunt our lands searching for food as far to the south as the snow belt extends....The windigo was once a normal human being but has been possessed by a savage cannibalistic spirit. When a human is possessed by windigo, ice forms inside the human body, hair grows profusely from the face, arms and legs and an insatiable craving for human flesh develops. When the ugly creature attacks it shows no mercy. This monster will kill and devour its own family to try and satisfy its lust for human flesh. The windigo is inhuman because of the powerful spirit of cannibalism and destruction residing in its body. When a windigo has destroyed its own people it will travel in a straight line across the forest until it finds the next group of victims. Usually high winds and blizzards accompany the windigo in its travels." (Stevens 122)

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As the Windigo mostly appears in times of harsh winters, ergo in times of hunger its main features of cold mercilessness (ice forms inside the human body) and insaneness can be ascribed to the stressful situation of wintry undernourishment since the Windigo is a "conspirator with starvation" (Norman 3). Therefore, 'going windigo' becomes the effect of acute hunger, a situation in which the desperate human being seems to be overcome by another power being that gutsy that he or she can transform into a cannibal. This inhuman behavior may be urged by confused, yet path-breaking visions and dreams and desolation or, described in today's terms "melancholia, anorexia, insomnia, and hallucinations, are all symptoms of depressive disorders and the desire to eat human flesh is common in psychotic depression" (Hay 2). Norman reveals that cannibalistic manners of outsiders – in a society where being a non-member becomes the worst imaginable penalty – is another case in which 'going windigo' becomes a commonly used term. In a social network which is shaped by storytelling via voce, pictorial mechanisms and patterns explain the opaque behavior of people. Thus the self-evident, metaphorical 'hunger for people' evolving from the communal exclusion is performed literally by 'eating human flesh' (cf. 4). Fenichel confirmed this idea on a scientific basis in 1945 when he stated that



Fig. 4.5. Norval Morrisseau: *Windigo*

cannibalism is a means to preserving a relationship.... "The ideas of eating an object or being eaten by an object remain the ways in which any reunion with objects is thought of unconsciously.... it cannot be too strongly emphasized how literally this oral incorporation is conceived of as devouring ([Fenichel] 1945: 389-390). Searles also sees cannibalistic urges as "... expressive basically ... of primitive but healthy identificatory needs. (1964:724). (Hay 4)

Hence, Windigo stories like most other Native storytelling become vivid, metaphorical explanations for human behavior as well as guides for indispensable social codes within Indigenous communities being much older and much more cryptic than the Western psychological discourses of the last several centuries, yet not less effective in the vocal based society they were spreading in.

## **FEATHER-FOOTED FREEFLOATING – DREAMS AND VISION QUESTS**

"Mythology is the articulation of the dream world of a people. Without it being a healthy, vital, living thing, that culture is in trouble" (Preston n. p.). Since no real distinctions were made between for instance religion and sickness because of the strong belief in interconnectedness, no differentiation between the natural and supernatural world was drawn either. In a society where everything influenced everything, citizens had to possess the ability to float between the different worlds naturally in order to obey laws or realize callings. Borders were fluent. Due to that, young boys went on a vision quest for example, fasting for a specific number of days to 'receive' an animal helper through a vision, which would then be guarding and supporting the human for the rest of his life.

Generally, First Nations people, "do not draw this distinction in the way Euro-Canadians conceive binary opposites such as the natural and supernatural of the field of science and the field of mysticism, magic and religion. The other land ... 'heaven' is experienced first-hand in dreams when the soul journeys away from the body" (Goulet, "The Dene" 162). Encountering dreaming and visions as natural trip to the other land being considered just as real and as part of mundane existence as the moments of day when the eyes were open, those visits of different spheres played an essential part in Indigenous microcosms. Songs, prayers and prophecies were brought back from this place supporting, warning, leading, healing and strengthening the band. Thus "religion and spiritual beliefs ... permeated all aspects of life ... included predicting future events, directing hunters in the quest for game, and curing the sick" (Miller 256-257).

## **LET CHAOS RING – NANABUSH**

The refusal to accept binary oppositions and therefore most forms of physical boundaries in general is embodied in First Nations' most popular character, having many names like Wee-sa-kay-jac (the one who formed the New World out of clay), Nanabush, Napi or Coyote. Mattes explains that he/she exhibits a range of contradictory characteristics and qualities: good and evil, male and female, human and animal, creative and destructive, sacred and profane. He/she is the creator and the destroyer, the humorous rogue, the clown, as well as the cynical, malicious swindler and impostor

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who, with no concept of moral and social values, follows his/her passions and appetites (cf. 20). The figure of the trickster characterized by his abilities of cunning in the first place can be found in many Western mythologies as well, albeit mainly as male. He is present in Greek legend as Hermes or Prometheus as well as in German storytelling for example, where he appears as 'Reinhard der Fuchs' or Felix Krull. Nonetheless, he mostly plays a supporting role in Occidental literary traditions while he/she can be considered as central character in all North American lore. His/her importance in the Indigenous world can be ascribed to his/her capacity in transforming on the one hand and Native unlimited acceptance of wholeness on the other, both principles mirroring Native holistic thought patterns. The natural belief in 'transformation' refrains from the eager adherence to well-known, universal truths, which sometimes seem to lead to procrastination and blockade new aspects. Furthermore, 'wholeness' also requires the so-called bad, uncontrollable facets of life like pain, fear and chaos, which Western societies often attempt to ignore or dispel. Aboriginal communities, though, welcome the adding of disorder to order since only a world with both features in it equals an entity. As



Fig.4.6. Daphne Odjig, *Nanabush*

an enemy of boundaries and an archaic shape-shifter, the demigod-trickster moves between and dips into all forms of limitations, thereby proving binary oppositions wrong and narrow-minded. On the top of that he is chaotic, gross and physical and most important of all fallible, these being characteristics connecting him/her more to the errant human than to the otherworldly spirits, which mirrors a religious hierarchy unknown to the Roman Catholic church for example.

Nanabush plays an important part in Native storytelling of former times as well as an even more essential one in today's Indigenous resistance art (cf. p 140 ff.). Just as he/she switches positions and angles within the lore, he/she also overcomes the limitations of being just a character within the stories by entering the realm of the storyteller him/herself.

Canadian Aboriginal writers consider the transformer character a symbol of cultural rebirth because he or she communicates values that are essential in Native cultures.... In an oral culture, the technology of survival consists of an intimate knowledge of one's environment and respect for all beings, of 'accepting' and 'understanding' each other. This is achieved by "becoming the other." The teaching of this way of thinking was and still is communicated in the form of a story.... The teller him/herself becomes the transformer taking on the possibilities and limitations of

another being, a character in the story ... just as Nanabush has to accept the limitations of the being into which he or she is transformed. (Eigenbrod 96)

As a consequence, the oral mediation of culture is experienced and valued from a common perspective everybody within the Native society has the ability to gain. No one is excluded. Everyone owns his/her place in the community's myth as well as he/she has access to learning about cultural history. Being bare of most hierarchical structures and thus of selective authorities, who are adjudged to tell objective historical facts, the 'truth' thereby

is not just a mere confirmation of a speaker's veracity. It is at the same time a philosophical proposition that, in saying, a speaker casts his words and his voice only as far as his vocabulary and his perception will enable him. In so doing the tribe was denying that there was absolute truth, that the best a speaker could achieve and a listener expect was the highest degree of accuracy. (Johnston 12)

### **THAT MAKES SENSE! – THE ART OF STORYTELLING**

Retzlaff says that apart from oral reflection of history requiring a style of short sentences, repetitions, interjections, questions to include the listener and demonstrative pronouns to verbalize body language (cf. 25-53), it has to be stated that Indigenous storytelling depended on the application of all senses to experience it to its fullest extent. Thereby, a skilful teller with vivid facial expressions and a captivating voice was just as indispensable as the smell of the warm bonfire intermingling with the scent of a soft southern wind, the sound of the sniffing dogs in the background and the accidental but constant and excited touch of the arm of the neighboring listener: "Oral people must be good listeners, seers, smellers, feelers and tasters. Their experience of reality is acute because their senses work together harmoniously and equitably.... In oral cultures hearing and smell, senses that are inclusive rather than selective, incorporate everything that is in their presence" (Sheridan 26-29). Such being the case, experience of history became very subjective and very personal, integrating not just every single listener in the band's history being told at that special place in time but also the place and the surroundings themselves serving as another lively feature solidifying common culture.

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In order to deepen this lively perception of history, a good storyteller was rather a performer than simply a speaker retelling lore again and again. In Native societies storytelling had religious connotations as well as artistic value since

myth, like music, were designed to be heard. While principal themes were endlessly repeated, interpretations varied, so that the telling was never the same; far from exactly recounting memorized stories, each myth teller re-envisioned the tales afresh, even while retaining their substance. This meant that the myths were flexible in a way ... they are 'narrative music' to be 'played by calling images into the mind with the spoken words' [Bringinghurst 53].... As well, Aboriginal cycles of rituals, by commemorating mythic beliefs and keeping alive memories of historic events, reinforced a sense of both identity and community solidarity. (Dickason, "The Many" 118)

According to this form of high art compared to music, stories "even when dealing with events that occurred within the range of human memories" (Dickason, "The Many" 118) were symbolizing more than they were reporting, "which means they cannot be read literally, but must be interpreted" (Dickason, "The Many" 119).

Furthermore, apart from the mere understanding of history, personal memories intertwined, making historical knowledge shine in a very different light than Western perceptions of the past do:



Fig. 4.7. Susan Point, Coast Salish, *Memory*

Memory is a beautiful gift.... Memories are also experienced at the somatic level and in the soul. Memory, in the context of Indigenous oral traditions, is a resonance of senses – it evokes the relationship the listener had with the storyteller, and it evokes the emotional responses and the feeling of total absorption experienced at the time. The smells, nuances, facial expressions, body language, and range of audience response are as much a part of the memory of the story as the story itself. Very few historians recognize the deep effect that the oral transmission of knowledge has on the



individual. Among them is Morris Berman, who tells us that participation, or identification, is highly sensuous in nature, and it is a mode of knowing that cannot be intellectually refuted because of its immediate, visceral quality [112]. (Wheeler 191)

Also in storytelling the social patterns of personal self-determination within the superior goal of balancing out the whole community could be found. "The emphasis on oneness opposed to separations and divisions is an essential characteristic of tribal – and that means also oral – cultures.... blending together the individual and the communal, the commonplace and the spiritual, the human and the supernatural, thus reflecting a circular rather than a linear way of thinking" (Eigenbrod 98). This all-embracing perception of history was grounded in the belief of "listening to a collective voice of every living thing" (Marchessault 188) when storytellers spread their knowledge:

In the Cree world [for instance], everyone's personal, family, and regional histories interconnect and overlap, all are extensions of the past, and all are grounded in *wahkotowin*, kinship/relations. According to Nehiyawi-wihtamawakan, *Cree teaching, etymology*, we inherit relationships and obligations from and to the generations behind, among, and before us, to live on this earth as we know it, and to honor our homelands. Our histories are infused in our daily lives – they are lived experiences. So it is that the memories of our forefathers and foremothers become our own. (Wheeler 196)

Consequently, storytelling being shaped by a cyclic thought pattern throws a different light on the experience of time, which cannot be described as a linear one. Hele for example writes that

Aboriginal concepts of history maintain that it is a fluid motion, bound by neither time nor space. Yet, as noted by the late Rodney Bobiwash, former director of the Native Canadian Centre, the true nature of Aboriginal perceptions of history is better explained as a whirlwind. Or, in the words of David McNab, 'circles of time are ever-expanding and infinite' (3). I would add that such circles are also concentric and interlocking. The more complex understanding of Aboriginal conceptualizations allows not only an escape from circular determinism, but gives us the tools of comprehending the past within a new context. Simply, the past, present, and future reside together, yet they come before and after one another as the whirlwind spins history. (149)

Olive Patricia Dickason does not speak of 'whirlwinds of history.' She, however, stresses the importance of place for Aboriginal people, for "they traced their histories in myths that tell of their development as human beings through their relationship with the spiritual powers and with their land..." ("The Many" 118).

Since place rather served as a means for finding answers and therefore identity, time – not being considered as a scale for personal (materialistic) success (as often in

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Western societies: 'Time is money!') – was experienced differently from European perceptions:

The Aboriginal conception of time as a web of interacting recurring cycles spanning the present, past, and future, did not do give importance to chronology; rather, its mythic thought focused on how people related to the natural world, that sustained them, to the human world that provided social context, and to the spiritual world that gave meaning to it all. (Dickason, "The Many" 118)

Hence, "myths, rituals and by extension the arts can, in an allegorical sense at least, be called the history books of the First Peoples" (Dickason, "The Many" 119) while most of the Western world with its millions and millions of written pages describing historical events of former times, is conveying the impression that "history only happened to white people" (Francis 168).

### **SLAUGHTERING THE SEMANTICS – WHITE EXPERIENCE OF HISTORY**

The attachment of 'oral' and 'literate' to a distinction between cultures is a shorthand reference to two related things, history and legitimacy. For hundreds of years, knowledge and ways of knowing in most of settler culture ... have included alphabetized, literate media. For thousands of years there has been an oral tradition in indigenous cultures. That is history. There is also a history of attitude here. Literacy and orality are valued and legitimized differently, and the difference in how we have valued those is part of our joint history. Schools teach literacy. There is no question that literacy is a good thing. The issue is the consequence of assuming that literate definition has priority. (Sheridan 23)

Literate definition has had priority in the past centuries and therefore has been proving and still constantly affirms that "history is written by the victorious" (Furniss 199). Apart from the winners' ability to control historiography, this saying also indicates that history has to be WRITTEN DOWN in order to count as a former measurable reality, which – being approved in a literate way – then becomes the basis for political decision-making or social statuses. In not having a writing system historical knowledge of oral cultures was mostly excluded in historical books since "the lack of writing was assumed to mean that they did not have a history. Oral testimony was discounted as unreliable and no subject to proof" (Dickason, "The Many" 120), as it "did not stand up to the tests of academic scholarship" and happened to be devaluated as "'hearsay and anecdotal' ...

useful only insofar as they provide insight into Indigenous attitudes and motives" (Wheeler 199).

### **BOOKWORM PRACTICES – OR HOW TO FILE AWAY NATIVE HISTORY**

As in all these other cases mentioned before, here again European arrogance shaped by well-established, capitalistic thought patterns prevented the "Canadian new arrivals" from experiencing and respecting a different world view presented to them by the First Inhabitants, who had been living well according to their principles for thousands of years. Canadian public not only ignored but rather destroyed the Native transmission of history. Consequently many aspects of the lore never appeared in today's Canadian comprehension of the country's biography, let alone materialized in history books. Instead, European explorers,' traders' and settlers' reports were published in the those books since they were written down and, such being the case, manifested. Yet, those documented experiences and impressions were rather subjective, characterized by Western morals and ethics: "it is in these images that the prototype of later popular stereotypes are found ... leading to the nineteenth and early twentieth century 'static and unchangeable' literary view of Indians as romantic figures of no historical significance. In this view, Aboriginal identities and histories were frozen in time" (Dickason, "The Many" 122).

Apart from the European chronicled semantics pushing the First Nations to Canada's periphery, European syntactics reveal Occidental mechanisms of historiography, in so far as the inflexible, static modus operandi of historiography produced a picture of Canadian Indigenous people just as irreversibly archived in the minds of Canada's citizens as the documents themselves: well protected and filed away in the cabinets of Canadian national record offices. The invariable historical image of the average First Nations citizen and his underprivileged treatment in Canadian society, therefore, leads back to the Western feeling of superiority on the one hand but also to the method of capturing days of yore itself.

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historical

adjective

1 *historical evidence* DOCUMENTED, recorded, chronicled, archival, authentic, factual, actual, true. ANTONYM mythical, legendary. (*Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*)

Looking up 'historical' in the *Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*, the hit one gets mirrors White conception of time and history: "[H]istorical evidence" as well as the synonyms "authentic" and "true" prove that history spread by the dominant culture inherits characteristics of 'legitimacy' and 'credibility' by nature while "factual" conveys the feeling of a guaranteed, selfless objectivity a society can trust in and make decisions on trouble-free. The adjectives "documented," "recorded," "chronicled," and "archival" give information about the method of capturing historical events, which are always visible and, as a result, confirmed on the one hand while they are put in a strictly assigned, chronological order on the other, assuring static equilibrium and due to that security. The antonyms "mythical" and "legendary" mirror on the contrary the greatest deficiencies historiography can be shaped by, namely the celebration of subjectivity and personal, individual perception at the cost of objectivity and factual thinking.

As for the mechanisms and perception of time,

as developed in the Western world, history is essentially a chronological and analytical narrative of 'significant' human actions, based upon written documentation, particularly when derived from official sources. Its path is linear, and its overall direction is from the simple to the complex, as peoples work out their destinies within the limits of their time and place – 'the arrow of change.' Fundamental is the concept of time, framed by a beginning and an end.... RCP sees Western history as speaking to the past while Aboriginal history is speaking to the present.... Western history views past events as one-time occurrences from which consequences may or may not flow while Aboriginal history sees events, even those originating in the distant past, as ongoing processes. (Dickason, "The Many" 118-120)

While in Native societies holistic thought patterns strongly influence the experience of time, insofar as history becomes ubiquitous, not differentiable from past, present and future because the effects of events spread in every direction, the Western mind strongly cleaves to order and final completion. To White system of thought, holistic principles are not only incomprehensible but also frightening. A commercialized elbow society is not constructed to think in reciprocal terms, for it defines itself over time since time is money and therefore, absolutely necessary for measuring financial success. Adding to that, time

fortunately means transitoriness, forgiveness of 'dead bodies' and other sins originating in the rather egoistic goals of capitalism.

However, place – the identification tool of most Aboriginal societies – demands a form of protective behavior being based on personal postponement in the first place. Western human beings often tend to leave place, though, whenever it does not fulfill the current personal requirements (cf. immigration to America for instance). They often do not only believe that 'time heals all wounds' as the old saying promises but also that time (or God himself) gives absolution. Hence, it is always possible to try a recommencement and leave the chaos created behind (hidden and hopefully getting dusty somewhere in the archives of time), for, in contrast to many Native societies, chaos is not accepted as a welcomed part of the whole but rather as something deeply unpleasant, something one has to escape from. Chronological time which concludes events, in contrast to stable place, becomes a worthwhile companion here.

The cyclic or spiral perception of history and time, in which past, present and future interweave and no parting line can be found, also includes the acceptance of a collective voice, meaning that historical events of former times, recent occurrences and personal memories overlap constantly.

Storytellers work by direct personal contact with small communities whose members they most likely know while mainstream historians for most part deal with more widespread communities through the medium of print. Even though one is direct and personal while the other is once removed and impersonal, they both work to realize a sense of identity and to reinforce community solidarity. Where the Western historian seeks detachment and objectivity, for the Aboriginal storyteller and his listeners the subjective experience is an integral part of the story.... As the RCAP (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples) (1996) sees it, where the literate world aims at a universal history, in the oral tradition a historical account depends on "who is telling it, the circumstances in which the account is told, and the interpretation the listener gives to what has been heard. In other words, it is in all aspects local.... (Dickason, "The Many" 119)

Thus one can notice two contrastive approaches concerning the perception of history. One is linear and dependent on the written text. For the "historians are most comfortable working in isolation with documents" (Wheeler 197) since a typical characteristic of Western historical transcripts is extraction of 'facts' while the "nuances and types of oral data" (Dickason, *Canada's* 196) are considered superfluous, needing to be left behind. Mere facts evolving from personal distance tell the 'real, true history of a country' as other forms of historical transmissions are visible and tangible to the Western historian

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but not understood, let alone captured. "It is then that the story dies because the teachings, responsibilities, and shared experience inherent in the social relations of the story are absent, dismissed, or forgotten.... Oral stories become de-spiritualized, sanitized, amputated" (Dickason, *Canada's* 196-197). While cyclic thought patterns complete history in Native terms according to a covering of communal memory, exactly this communal memory disposes Aboriginal history from being called such, at least in Western conceptual thinking leaving these holistic principles as transmitters of cultural habits at best.

Memory being shaped by personal experiences and extreme subjectivity deriving from the deeply unique – ergo emotional – use of ALL senses will not be acknowledged as 'factual' in Occidental societies. A society in which natural and supernatural are not been separated, in which myth and actual events intertwine, and in which therefore interpretation is a respected faculty while mere reporting is absent, will most likely not be considered as a society of reliable witnesses of a time period. The Age of Enlightenment made objectivity and the absence of emotionality the main goal in science, always searching for the lowest common denominator presenting historical reality as fact-based as possible in order to guarantee valid authenticity. Experiencing history as something collective, holistic and flexible, spreading in every direction whether past, present, future, the community or one's most inner self, then becomes fearful in a society where everything needs to be tangible, to be able to be ticked off at a special point in time without much trouble. A capitalistic society with its individualistic or even egoistic members needs to defy everlasting ties and reciprocal relationships since they confine personal freedom and personal gain too much.

## **BLAME IT ON PHIL COLLINS' TAPES – LOST IN MEDIATION**

Western societies often seem to be in need of plastering up any form of introspection for they tend to harshly work against tranquility whereas it naturally is an important integral part of oral cultures. "A book ... always has something to communicate.... To read is in the essence, the entry point into an exclusively symbolic reality at the cost of the reality it presents" (Sheridan 24). Yet, books and alphabetization have only been the starting point. Over the past several centuries, Western cultures have been pimping and elaborating different media mechanisms to silence the need for a silence:

Take, for example, contemporary people arising from sleep and turning on the television, so flickers and technicoloured lights fill the room while accompanying background noises created an ambient and habitual atmosphere of chronic hyperstimulation in the home. This hyperstimulation becomes subsequently manifested in things like Walkmans [today iPods], vision processed through psychedelic tinted sunglasses, and neon clothing. Together, they create a portable and prophylactic aural and visual hyperstimulation that cancels unmediated reality by emulating the electronic environment. This preference for replicating hyperreality is, in part, coming to terms with urban reality as a mediated experience in preferential to accepting the sensual experience of experience on its own terms. This is a roundabout way of saying that reality as a perceptual, sensual experience is preferred when it is boosted into mediated and therefore conceptual experience. Why else would joggers listen to a Phil Collins tape, dress in neon yellow, and wear purple sunglasses, unless the experience of running was somehow enhanced by these accoutrements? (Sheridan 25)

This example of people jogging through a forest without even noticing it for what it is becomes a typical prototype for behavior patterns in today's world. Literate cultures often abandon all senses the human being has at his/her disposal, reducing them mainly to sight (being most important in a literate culture) and hearing (in combination with sight the most important sense for watching TV). Hence, running through the forest will not result in experiencing it to its fullest extent. "In oral cultures, hearing and smelling, senses that are inclusive rather than selective, incorporate everything in their presence. Living in a sensitive relationship with the land means oral cultures knew the land through all their senses" (Sheridan 29). Many Western joggers, on the contrary, outbrave the all-embracing perception of the land surrounding them constantly by not only not paying attention to the smell of the autumnal fir needles, the feeling of touching the ground covered with foliage, or the taste of the fall wind, they even overlay those senses they practically cannot deactivate. That is why Phil Collins' voice is preferred to the sound of

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the woods and why watching the changes of an autumnal forest is transformed by neon pink psychedelic sunglasses. In oral societies, sensual activities are naturally highly developed since they are fostered by the fabrics of circulating historical knowledge. Hence, members of these cultures know abstraction as well as the pure, undisturbed feeling of the very moment, which can also be described as a centeredness only achievable by the ability to stay silent but also to silence the mind. Western cultures on the other hand seem to be lost in mediation.

Silence appears to be the key to a healthy self-fulfilled life, but that exact silence seems to be a condition, the average Western human being is not able to bear while in Occidental cultures 'saying nothing means having nothing to say,' quietude is a major topic in Native teaching, for being still and able to listen will tell the teacher when someone is able to learn a lesson. "Silence is the space between stages of development that keeps the stages from blurring together. Books and electronic media place all information within the scope of the reader, and require no elder to judge preparedness for the next step of spiritual development" (Sheridan 27). So while "orality is sensual life and its recognition" (Sheridan 28), we can see that the ability to have access to every possible field of knowledge via internet has changed the world of information dramatically over the past decade as this information explosion is put over the need of sensual "reflection explosion." Knowledge and teaching become omnipresent but except for the fact that no Elder is filtering it anymore, this knowledge always seems to be shaped by a great amount of artificiality. Although children can have a three-dimensional perspective while walking through a computer animated forest learning about the animals and the plants, only two senses are involved: hearing and seeing. The holistic entity, which has been an essential part of Aboriginal cultures in order to determine one's personal place in a 'whole,' is often not asked for in today's world anymore. As a consequence, finding one's place in society and one's personal centre to become a 'whole,' healthy person might be growing harder and harder.

Considering all of these mechanisms and fabrics concerning the Western perception of the world, in which the method of transferring history in a literate way and the Age of New Media has often led to a life in confusion, a period of counter-measurements is indispensable. Western philosophy with its belief in chronology tends to look ahead or indulges in the past. Yet, the mere present seems to have been lost along the way. Today's capitalistic societies' goal is to stimulate the economy. Therefore, its handyman 'media' will frequently egg the consumer to strive for something. That being



so, he/she will never be fed and always has to move on looking into the future and the opportunities for gaining glory and wealth or whatever else it might promise. Past, in this case, serves as a nostalgic means to either inform about what one has had or what he/she should have had and still needs to achieve. The Western human being always seems to rush somewhere never standing still to breathe, be silent and think, and if he does stop coincidentally and becomes aware of insufficiencies in his/her life, a fast, bribable, loud substitute is always available to dull the creeping feelings of uneasiness. Be that as it may, times are changing, and cross currents occur as naturally as the trends they are set against. Thus it comes as no surprise that yoga and Buddhism, in which techniques of quietening the spirit and mind are practised, became popular at the end of the last century but again, Western appropriation of Native practices does create a slightly bitter aftertaste of commercialization.

## 4.3 ADORNING ONESELF WITH BORROWED PLUMES – FALSIFICATION OF ORAL HISTORY

### DEFROSTING THE 'PLAINS INDIAN'

Of course, Western civilizations – as being the victorious ones in fighting Indigenous cultures – have extracurricularly gained the hegemony in 'writing world's history.' Thereby, Occidental historicization of Indigenous societies has been following an unfavorable strategy for centuries shaped by two main features: repression (of unpleasant facts like European barbarity) and nostalgia (meaning the everlasting celebration of the 'Plains Indian'). Those two facets of Native historical representation in the Western world provoke several effects influencing the perception of the Natives concerning themselves as well as the dominant culture's image of them.

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### 'INDIAN' TENTS WITH A ZIPPER – AN EXPERIMENT

If you for instance ask German children between eight to twelve to draw a picture of an 'Indian' without giving them any guidelines, a tent with a zipper will probably be the most modern accessory you will get. It appears to be as easy as that, namely asking some children to tell you about their image of an 'Indian' to find out how an average Western society member experiences America's Native Peoples of today: the prevailing



Fig. 4.8. tent with zipper (Svenja 8 years old)

picture is still the one of a typical 'Plains Indian' of the nineteenth century as if all of those bands had been put to sleep in a time capsule being opened whenever the trend happens to be 'Native American' (the last time this occurrence took place on a large scale basis was probably the opening of *Dances With Wolves* in 1990, which again is a movie glorifying the long gone days of the most popular Plains Indians, the Sioux). Then the 'Indians' may jump out on their horses with long

black flying hair, screaming loudly, proudly wearing buckskin and feathers just in order to consolidate the picture of the 'Historical Indian,' which seems to have been taking root in the heads of Western cultures as unwaveringly as indestructibly.

Drawing pictures of their personal imaginative 'Indian,' eight German children painted one or more Native people with long black hair, wearing a brown (leather) dress and feathers sticking vertically from their heads. Nearly all of them have war paint on their faces but are laughing happily at the same time. The surroundings are determined by wide, open spaces, green grass, bushes and hills, animals like birds and dogs are steady companions (one of them admitted that 'Indians' do ride horses but it would be too difficult to draw one). Apart from the typical elements children usually draw whenever they paint a scene, namely green grass on the ground, a blue sky or blue clouds and a sun, two of the girls also drew a colorful rainbow, which in one case represents the name of the Indian girl drawn. Props are mostly tents with bright designs (one of them having a zipper as locker) as well as camp fires. One of the boys drew a cooking pot and some stones to make fire. For activities many of the 'Indians' dance, one of them screaming "Bububububu" while doing so, another one, a 'Squaw,' is carrying a basket to pick some berries from a bush next to her.



Fig. 4.9. 'Indian' with war paint (Rabea 7 years old)

Generally, all of the German children tended to paint their pictures in bright colors (like most children do). The landscape is very colorful as well as the accessories the 'Indians' possess while the 'Indians' themselves – meaning their skin as well as their clothing – are in most cases brown. Although many of them have geometrical war paint on their faces, they are grinning, which stresses the cliché that 'Indians' live a happy, lively 'camp' life in a friendly natural environment shaped by dancing and cooking. Furthermore, especially German children have a very positive experience of 'Indians' since regardless of the signs of war on their skin, 'Indians' are not frightening at all.



Fig. 4.10. Indian girl cooking (Greta, 8 years old)

## RIDING A HORSE IN THE 'COUNTRY OF LAKES' – HISTORICAL FACTS

The test above indicates that over the past 200 years, although many documentaries on America's Native Peoples have been released, and although Oka and other public political issues have been widely broadcasted, the 'Historical Plains Image' froze up, never to be defrosted again. After all, it is rather small period of time, in which the general and overall depiction of the '(Plain) Indian' arose, a very small amount of time compared to the thousands of years of Indigenous cultures, which had developed in America. Attention has to be paid to the word 'cultures' in so far as there are to date at least 130 different Nations in Canada trying to make clear that each of them has to be considered as unique. There have been and sometimes still are Nations of fisher men at the coasts and inland, Nations, who were resident, some grew crops and lived in solid villages, some roamed the country by canoe. There was only a very small amount of Nations, who lived a nomadic life in teepees, hunted the buffalo and rode horses (according to Taylor about 70% of Canadian Natives are probably not able to ride a horse since they were brought up in the city, apart from the fact that people living in a country possessing more than 30,000 lakes are likely to choose a mode of transportation other than a horse (cf. *Futile* 108-109)). Nevertheless, First Nations had at least been living for 12,000 years on Turtle Island<sup>9</sup> and over the thousands of years their life and culture changed according to three major technical inventions: the spear thrower, the bow and arrow and the buffalo pound; "each of them brought new efficiencies to hunt" (Wilson, C. 270). Yet, the birth of the 'real, natural Plains Indian' can ironically be ascribed to the intrusion of the Occidental races into America. When the Spanish brought the horse to the New Continent in the seventeenth century, they provoked not only the development of the typical American horse, the 'mustang' but also involuntarily fostered a new lifestyle concerning the Indian bands living in the Plains. Horse and 'Indian' seemed to be created for one another. According to their reciprocal relationship with animals, a culture of riding horses evolved within the short period of 200 years becoming as harmonic as rarely seen in the world.

Holistic cultural thought patterns changed, however:

[p]erhaps most significantly, high status now depended on having horses, creating a new impetus for raiding – and with the gun the level of violence increased dramatically. In addition ... life in the Plains was no longer entirely indigenous: the

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<sup>9</sup> Turtle Island is the First Nations name for Canada.

Europeans were also there. Although Plain life in 1850 was still grounded in the past, in many regards it was consciously different from anything that had been gone before. (Wilson, C. 272)

Consequently, with these two new elements of gun and horse, Plains life grew much more dangerous and therefore also more adventurous and mystical. Which male would not call such a life worthwhile? For practically every moment promised the opportunity for a White man to prove himself: 'Indians' fighting their guerilla wars in the woods was one challenge but facing screaming 'Redskins' attacking while galloping sideways on their horses or the defence of a wagon trail seemed the life a Western daredevil should lead. Ward Churchill, though, cannot resist denouncing the illusion in all of that:

Witness how gratuitously we expend ourselves while riding our ponies around and around the circled wagon of our foes (time after time after time). Watch as we squander our strength in pointless frontal assaults upon the enemy's most strongly fortified positions (again and again and again). Worst of all, observe that we don't even know how to use our weapons properly. (178)

### **FOR UGH! SEEMS TO BE THE HARDEST WORD – MEDIA DISTRIBUTION**

From one point on, 'coloring' Occidental media distribution concerning the New Continent accentuated the 'Plains' Indian cliché vehemently, triggering an avalanche never to be stopped again. As Daniel Francis points out in his book *The Imaginary Indian*, this reduced, inauthentic image, which Canada's First Nations have to cope with even to this day, had its essential makeover when at the beginning of the nineteenth century pioneers entered the country. They were finding their personal conquest in keeping up the picture of the Aborigines, who were said to be destined to vanish anyway in the next decades. Artists like Benjamin West, Paul Kane, Edmund Harris or Emily Carr painted pictures of Indigenous people whose colors and forms were shaped by the idyll, romanticism and exoticism they subjectively felt were appropriate for a race about to be wiped off from the canvas of history in the near future (cf. 17-36).

After that Buffalo Bill Cody formed another snowball about to roll endlessly: "The Greatest Novelty of the Century" (Francis 87) was the next – now lively – canvas, which stated the image of America's Indigenous peoples even more. Cody premiered with his Wild West Show at the end of the nineteenth century staging a triumphal processions,

#### 4. DIS-TEACHING: ADORNING ONESELF WITH BORROWED FEATHERS – FALSIFICATION OF HISTORY

not only in North American metropolises, but also in Europe, by reaching an enthralled White audience practically panting for the adventurous stories of America's Plains life. In a mighty effort with about 150 Native, White and Mexican actors, a great number of Plain animals and authentic Plain props Cody created a 'perfect' picture of the good old days.

The Indian Wars, the attacks on stagecoaches and settler's cabins, the torture scenes, all ended with the cowboys putting the Indian to rout. The Wild West Show was not a platform for Indian grievances; nor was it a travelling museum of aboriginal culture. It was dramatic entertainment, offering non-Native urban audiences a chance to see their fantasies about the American West brought to life. (Francis 94-95)

When suddenly a third, world-changing medium came into existence – taking the Western culture like a landslide – White audiences, mostly identifiable by rather employing only two of their senses, namely seeing and listening, finally found a new means to experience different (exotic) cultures: sitting on a cozy chair comfortably and eating sweets just happened to be a nice side effect while watching 'history' on the screens of movie theaters and later on the small screen. As movies came up at the beginning of the twentieth century 'the story of America's 'Plains Indians' fitted in since it provided two of the main characteristics a good, entertaining movie needed: dramatic action and exotic locations. Indians were used for their entertainment value meaning that cultural accuracy was considered as rather vexatious than desirable.

As a result of subliminal racism, White snobbery and a supreme indifference concerning historical facts ("Never let facts get in the way of a good story [Taylor, *Funny* 77]), White people with bad makeup and unnatural wigs mostly occupied 'Indian' leading roles. Additionally, some directors "ran the English sound track backward to get authentic-sounding Indian 'gibberish'"(Churchill 184), and many Native characters had 'the boon' of extremely easy lines, while the actors playing White leading roles (no movie on 'Indians' without a White leading role) had to memorize pages upon pages:

Most often, however, filmmakers have simply followed historian Francis Parkman's notoriously ignorant comment that the word 'How!' constitutes 'a monosyllable by which an Indian contrives to express half the emotions of which he is susceptible.' Or, in fairness, they have elected to enrich Parkman's vocabulary by adding 'Ugh,' 'Ho' and a smattering of guttural grunts. To this has been added a weird sort of Pidgin English best described by Raymond Stedman as comprising a 'Tonto School of Communication.' Consider as sufficient illustration the following four consecutive lines delivered by the faithful Indian companion during a *Lone Ranger* program aired on June 30, 1939.

Who you?  
Ugh.

You see-um him?  
Me want-um him. (Churchill 184-185)

It is a proven fact that here – as well as in history books, paintings, dime novels and Wild West Shows – the dominant race is playing the oppressive part exclusively, thereby 'holding the wheel of media distribution' with white knuckles fiercely – just like in Film Noir where bad women were portrayed in strong leading roles at first sight. Yet, being secretly a great threat to men's androcentric worldview, there was virile dominance hidden under the surface because being the master of voice-over, the 'broken male leading role' told the story from his point of view and therefore had control over the wild women's actions and external perception. The same more or less subliminal mechanism can be applied to the representation of Native people in Canada, as the White population has always been the storyteller and rarely hesitated to form cultural and historical facts according to mere White concerns. Native Canadians often became the plaything of Western arbitrariness. Thereby, Hollywood's invention of the beaded headband in order to keep the braids in place was one of the minor modifications of historical facts. According to general societal trends in the dominant culture, the depiction of First Nations people always had to surrender to White will. "The careless treatment of the 'Indian' reduced the complexity of Native cultures to a few familiar stereotypes" (Francis 107), which underwent diverse changes from 'Bloodthirsty Enemy' to 'Noble Savage.' Nonetheless this image has always been a frozen-in-the-past-one shaped by the policy of representing "'Indians' as European categories of thought rather than as human beings" (*Report* quoted in Lischke 5).

Frances says that today's commercial world has spotted and occupied the image of the 'Noble Savage' as well. There is a car called 'Pontiac,' after a well-known 'Indian' (cf. 171). Diverse baseball and football teams can be found like 'the Braves,' 'the Redskins' or 'the Indians,' whose fans raise fake tomahawks in the air to motivate their teams (cf. Francis 174). Now 'Indianness' is associated with bravery, physical prowess, natural virtue, speed and power. Nevertheless, in advertisement for instance all of these characteristics are directly related to the far away past of the Plains in the nineteenth century and therefore support a relic function of the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Many aspects of Native culture have been appropriated over the years and turned into commodities to help sell products to the marketplace.... Products are linked to

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the Indian in the expectation that some supposedly Native virtues will rub off.... The advertising image is based on stereotypes of the Imaginary Indian already abroad in the culture. In turn, advertising reinforces the stereotype by feeding it back into the mainstream culture in a self-repeating loop. (Francis 189)

The overall consequences concerning this archaic as well as oversimplified representation of Indigenous peoples is permanently underestimated. Living in today's world but being condemned to live in the past, First Nations people are often forced as well as expected to stay marginal to modern life since a relic of the past appears to be no threat to a present, much more sophisticated society. Once the depiction of the historical 'Plains Indian' had been implemented, it dominated public life concerned with Natives, starting with politics and ending with the entertainment business. Reserves for example were created due to the uncontrollable moving of Plains nomads who, being stateless,<sup>10</sup> had to be bound to a limited space. On the other hand many other bands, which had been resident for thousands of years, were bundled to reserves as well. "The Plain stereotype, it must be remembered, is in part a fusion of two conflicting stereotypes, both held by Europeans for centuries – the Indian as the uncivilized and barbaric savage and the Indian as noble savage, the untutored child of nature. Noble he may be, but in the eyes of the law, a child" (Wilson, C. 274). So in the end, the created image of the "typical" 'Plains Indian' legitimized the observed banishment to Canada's margins in so far as the defenceless 'Indian' as being old-fashioned and stranded in a modern world had to be protected first and from himself.

Furthermore, Drew Hayden Taylor tells us about the absurd trend in today's entertainment business, the White adoration of the 'Noble Savage' provokes to this day proving that little has changed:

On a modern level, many of my Native actor friends constantly deal with preconceived notions, which they are often asked to portray. They tell me of the 'three question rule' they often had to face at auditions. First question: 'Do you speak a Native language?' It was never: 'Do you speak YOUR Native language?' Since most didn't care if a Cree spoke Haida or an Oneida spoke Inuktitut, as long as it was a Native language. Second question – befitting a noble warrior proudly surveying the limitless prairies, what do you look like without your shirt? ... Third question was usually: 'Can you ride a horse?' Since almost 70% of Native people live, or were brought up in an urban environment, that one was always the hardest to fake. Still, most say, they can. It's a matter of pride and a certain hope that something on a genetic level will kick in. (*Futile* 108)

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<sup>10</sup> cf. chapter 'Chaining The Canoe For Good.'



And even if the 'Indians' themselves refuse to perform the historical 'Plains Savage' or at least play it with a teeth grinding, sarcastic smirk on their lips, there will ironically still be hordes of Occidental people who hatch into the role of a historic 'Plains Indian' with the biggest, most innocent smiles on their pale faces. Since one of the most absurd effects of this creation of a 'Historical Indian' occurs when White people adopt the 'Noble Savage image' they have created all by themselves in the first place – yet, with the premise of earnestly believing it to be full of pure verisimilitude.

### **BETTING ON THE RED – PLAYING 'INDIAN'**

'Playing Indian,' indeed, has a very long tradition in Western societies as the 'American Wildman' represents an awareness of life mostly shaped by the constant 'smell of perfect freedom' being an experience many children in a Western world full of orders, etiquette and restrictions long for:

It is no surprise that as children we are fascinated by the Imaginary Indian. The Imaginary Indian is, after all, much of a child himself: unsophisticated, undisciplined, independent. Too high-spirited and wilful to perform the essential business of industrial society, the Imaginary Indian is the perfect model for youngsters chafing against the rules and duties of the adult world. Children love animals, so does the Imaginary Indian. Children love to roam freely in the woods; so does the Imaginary Indian. Children love secret ceremonies and dressing up in costume; so does the Imaginary Indian. Children yearn to perform brave deeds in combat; so does the Imaginary Indian. Children are in rebellion against the established order. So is the Imaginary Indian. (Francis 144-145)

The major part of Western youth has known and been adoring this 'Imaginary Plains Indian' for centuries. He for instance has occupied a main role in carnival, where the 'Indian' dress and accessories have been heading the sale statistics permanently for years, next to the pirate, the sailor, the knight and the prince ones. Moreover, he is a frequently played character in every European backyard or forest.

However, this 'going Native' attitude cannot only be reduced to adventurous children but has also been popular among the Western adults for many decades: "And what is the hit 1990 movie *Dances With Wolves* but a rewrite of *Two Little Savages*, with Kevin Costner in the role of Yan,<sup>11</sup> heading off to the frontier to play Indians with his

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<sup>11</sup> This is a popular juvenile story from 1911 about two White boys playing 'Indians' in the woods.

friends the Sioux? Seton gave expression to a persistent theme in North American culture, a desire on the part of Whites to go Native, a desire which is not, it seems, always confined to childish play" (Francis 157). Adults' bias towards the former North American Native lifestyle can be divided into four different sectors, each determining the lifestyle of the Occidental human being a bit more extensively than the others.

### **GIMME SOME EN VOGUE LEATHER HEADBANDS – 'INDIANS' AND FASHION**

The first one can be described as quite sketchy since it does not really influence the thought patterns of people performing it. Fashion being inspired by North American Native wardrobe has been popular since the 60s, and even today it can be found as 'Eskimo boots' for instance are never out of fashion. The whole 'Indian' fashion era started, when Hippies discovered headbands, love beads, fringed jackets and feathers for 'Indian-like' accessories in general served as natural symbolic emblems against the conservative Western societies but also



Fig. 4.11. Paris discovering the 'Indian'

more recently, cleaner and wealthier Americans and Europeans, particularly the French, wear fashions derived from Western cowboy and Indian styles.... urban Jewish designers like Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein created things made of hide, bones, and shell to join the populist boots, bandannas, hat and denims in 'Indian' colours, with Indian design motifs. Santa Fe Chic, as it has been dubbed, shows us in furniture and other decorative objects as well, and the urban wealthy drape themselves in antique and 'designer' turquoise and silver ornament. Combining the hobbyist instinct with ostentatious display of wealth, these play Indians are concerned about authenticity as much as with style. (Green, n. pag.)

Consequently, this style merely concentrates on the outside, not on the inside any more while the Hippie generation still employed the Native symbols to stress their strong and deeply pure connection to nature, to get in line with the oppressed and to celebrate the boundless freedom these peoples formally had as it was longing for it itself, later Native fashion can be ascribed to mere experimenting with different traditional ethnic styles.

## GIMME SOME YUGOSLAVIAN WOODS – WINNETOU AND THE GERMANS

However, taking us directly to the second group of 'playing Indians,' there is also a way of dressing as 'Indian' far beyond the mere approval of the latest *Vogue* cover, which can be especially spotted at the outskirts of the German woods of the Schwarzwald where

German hobbyism culminates ... in a passion for things being Indian, including camps in the Black Forest or Thuringia, where families can go, living the 'authentic' Western and Indian life for their vacations.... It is in Germany that the most highly elaborated forms of hobbyism take place .... So passionate is this movement in Germany that Karl May's books are kept in print, long after school-age Americans read Fenimore Cooper, and Germans make ritual pilgrimages to America where they visit Indian Country. (Green, n.pag.)

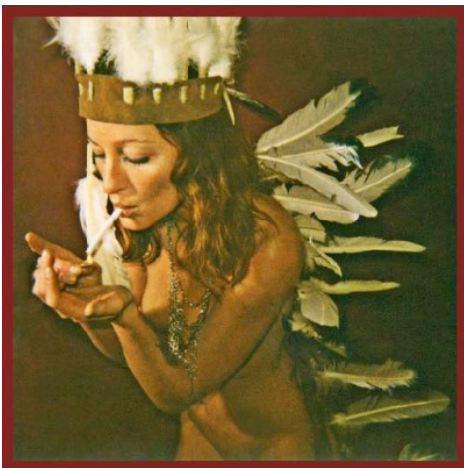


Fig. 4.12. Hippies discovering the 'Indian'



Fig. 4.13. Germans discovering the 'Indian'

It seems as if Germans apart from being addicted to the Middle Ages (aka dressing and living as knights, witches, etc.) have a special weakness for Native North American Peoples as well. This can partly be attributed to Karl May (1842-1912), "who had never set foot on American soil and, who produced most of his works while serving several prison sentences for grand larceny" (Bartelt 45). Nevertheless – or just because of that, he became the author of many novels with explicitly exotic settings.

Karl May's popular setting is the Great Plains of America, where the Apache 'Winnetou' lived. Winnetou rose as one of the greatest heroes in German entertainment literature as he was admired as a role model for he possessed the biggest amount of wisdom, forbearance and courage one can imagine. Yet, as in many publications on

#### 4. DIS-TEACHING: ADORING ONESELF WITH BORROWED FEATHERS – FALSIFICATION OF HISTORY

Natives authored by White people, stereotyping and historical incorrectness based on personal experience and inclinations proved to be inevitable: the German readership – adored an Indian chief, living and practising in a mighty exotic culture which the author had neither researched probably nor experienced. Buscombe explains that apart from his rather poor knowledge of America's Native Peoples in general, personal preferences 'alienated' the overall picture as May was said to be a secret homosexual, who created his 'perfect match' with this young, beautiful Indian chief with black, long hair as soft as a summer breeze and eyes as dark and deep as an American tarn. To complete this abstract depiction of a 'true American Indian,' *Winnetou* went to the big screen in the 1960s with a French actor called Pierre Brice in the leading role and the landscape of Yugoslavia serving as the setting to double for the Great Plains. Needless to say that the delighted German public all along was confronted with an image of Native Americans which could not have been more unrealistic. Nonetheless, they did love it dearly and do to this day (cf. 189-208).

#### **GIMME SOME OVERPRICED 'INDIAN' NAME – NEO-TRIBALISM**

Notwithstanding, in a third sector of the game of playing Indian, 'playing' turns into an urgent desire for a whole metamorphosis, for becoming an 'Indian' goes far beyond part-time antiquarianism and is led as a lifestyle.

In the so-called postmodern culture of late consumer capitalism, a significant number of white affluent suburban and urban middle-aged baby-boomers complain of feeling uprooted from cultural traditions, community belonging, and spiritual meaning. The New Age movement is one such response of these feelings. New Agers romanticize an "authentic" and "traditional" Native American culture whose spirituality can save them from their own sense of malaise. However as products of the very consumer culture they seek to escape, these New Agers pursue spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase. Although New Agers identify as a countercultural group, their commercial actions mesh quite well with mainstream capitalism.... The community they seek is only imagined, a world conjured up by the promises of advertised products, but with no history, social relations, or contextualized culture that would make for a sense of real belonging. Meanwhile, their fetishization of Native American spirituality not only masks the social oppression of real Indian peoples but also perpetuates it. (Aldred 329)

Nevertheless, the average White refugee is demanding "personal transformation" and "spiritual growth" while the realization of a unique human potential additionally comes

with it, as well as the "development of psychic abilities and the optimum of physical health through alternative healing" (Aldred 330). As service in return he/she will respect nature and will live in harmony with it (cf. Aldred 330). Generally some White defectors from Western societies seem to be searching for a meaning in their lives, as "individuals feel increasingly isolated and lonely as social relations in consumer culture continue to break down. People seek neo-tribes in a desperate search for community.... These neo-tribes are essential in the formation of identities in consumer societies ... the self-fashioning of identity has relevance for New Age appropriation of Native American spirituality" (Aldred 345). Since today's elbow societies are often shaped by individualism, frequently leading to feelings of loneliness and valuelessness, two facts come as no surprise: on the one hand the trend of sensing 'tribalism as an 'en vogue-lifestyle' becomes allegeable, on the other the immediate commercialization of this development will be inevitable. Even the astonishing success of the epic *Dances with Wolves* can partly be ascribed to that: in contrast to the painful trend, which had been destroying Native communities for the last decades, namely the oppressive political transformation from tribal social networks to the rather lonesome nuclear family ones, this movie on the adoption of a White soldier by a Sioux band propagated the transmigration from a White family into a Native tribal one for the first time in Hollywood's big screen storytelling (cf. van Lent, Aldred, Leuthold).

After all, "New Age interest in Native American cultures appears more concerned with exoticized images and romanticized rituals revolving around a distorted view of Native American spirituality than with the indigenous peoples themselves and the very real (and often ugly) socio-economic and political issues they face as colonized peoples" (Aldred 331): there is no different explanation than that for scenes, in which pale, carried away-looking White people wrapped in buckskin, theatrically raise branches of a hallowed birch in the air to receive transcendental oscillations from hazy animal spirits. Those people have been spending many nights guarding other buckskin and feather wearers, who have felt lost for years and are waiting for answers to major problems in life and/or their own personal 'Indian Name' (e.g. 'Rainbow Flower,' 'White Wolf,' etc). At the end of the night all of them should be filled with wisdom since everybody is enlightened and possesses a new, ornamental name to be presented as an alias on the I.D. card while he/she owns a little less money:

#### 4. DIS-TEACHING: ADORNING ONESELF WITH BORROWED FEATHERS – FALSIFICATION OF HISTORY

Vizenor labels this desire 'nostalgia,' arguing that the proliferation of plastic shamans grows out of a nostalgic longing for an "authentic" spirituality [25].... Real Native Americans are not a part of most Euro-Americans' lives. Yet non-Indians feel that their own lives are increasingly 'unreal' and 'inauthentic,' so they imagine a pre-industrial, pre-European America, where things were 'real' and 'authentic,' not representations but originals. Thus they simulate the original 'authentic Native American spirituality' and consume it. Meanwhile, their simulations allow them to ignore real indigenous peoples and the historical and socio-economic relations that tie them together. (Aldred 343)

Therefore, as Sheridan says, in today's society of hyperstimulation and 'nature-loving' joggers mostly concerned with their mp3 players (cf. 25), ethnicity seems to approve as a secure and inexhaustible source for authenticity and in times of capitalism ethnicity can easily be purchased by ordering books, clothes, DVDs, dream catchers or wondrous birch branches. Ethnicity smells like naturalness and naturalness promises centeredness, which promises freedom from the gnawing feeling of solitude.

Hay states that considering Native storytelling, it becomes obvious that in contrast to Indigenous communities, 'going Windigo' is not reduced to frightening individual cases creating strong, terrifying mythology but metaphorically 'going Windigo' in the sense of becoming depressive because of neglect and deprivation, has to be considered as an endemic disease in Western societies (cf. 2). Consequently, people will search in different religions and lifestyles for wholeness, a place to belong to and their personal part in history. Canadian Native principles promise all of this. Storytelling creates community and warmth, being bare of cold factual historical representation and rather encouraging the cahoots in a collective voice as well as an interactive function in a communal history, which will never forget the individual as it is the case in Western historicization on a daily basis.

This typical perception of Western world inhabitants would not disturb anyone if it was not influencing White perception and therewith White policy making in such an enormous way. According to Aldred, Vizenor's "simulated shamanism preoccupied with the 'authentic' Indian, takes its place in this racist dominant discourse of oppression" (25), for New Age Shamans and their disciples

pose a certain danger because they are stuck in the image of a romanticized Noble Savage that promises an unattainable salvation from boredom and melancholy. Vizenor appears to be even more bothered by the fact that these plastic shamans and their simulations undermine indigenous peoples' struggles for survival. He believes that the simulated shamans' obsession with the 'real' and 'authentic' undermine those he calls 'postindian warriors.' Vizenor uses the term 'postindian

warrior' to refer to those who help indigenous peoples survive. He suggests that postindian warriors must embrace the complexities of postmodern culture to help indigenous peoples to survive, rather than play notions of 'authenticity.' Vizenor believes that the dominant discourse has maintained its own racist notions of 'authentic' representations of Native American cultures in its scholarly archives and elsewhere that have proven oppressive of indigenous peoples. (Aldred 343)

## **GIMME SOME NATIVE GENES – INDIAN BY EJACULATION**

Taking a look at the different stages of 'playing Indian,' namely childhood games, adult hobbyism (mostly of German origin) and the New Age adoption of an Indigenous lifestyle to find truth, wisdom and affiliation, it becomes obvious that in today's Western world 'Indians' and their representation play a more essential role than generally realized. They serve as subjects of identification, mimicry or even as one of 'fusion,' commonly provoking obsessive behavior of the 'Wannabe-Indians,' which could also be described absurd; a form of behavior Drew Hayden Taylor experiences on a regular basis. This takes us to the fourth sector of 'playing Indian' where in contrast to the former three sectors, an 'actual Indian' becomes a mandatory necessity for the first time, (before, the 'Wannabes' could play 'Indian' without involving a real one):

Recently an Elder from my community told me about a visit by two White women to his house. These were the most recent in a regular influx of what he calls 'wannabes, groupies, and do-gooders,' who and I paraphrase their words, 'I-really-respect-and-honour-your-culture-and-want-to-be-a-part-of-it-so-please-let-me-participate-and-learn-from-your-sacred-and-ancient-ceremonies-so-I-can-understand-your-ways-this-isn't-just-a-phase-I'm-going-through-I-really-mean-it-so-can-I-huh?'

My Elder friend and I sat around for a good forty-five minutes trying to figure out what, specifically, they wanted to 'understand'? Why we eat so much macaroni and tomatoes; why seventy-five per cent of the Native population doesn't vote? And why we wear buckskin on hot summer days? ...

Is it any wonder that my Elder and I are a little cynical? After five hundred and one years of oppression, destruction and general annoyance we are now, overnight, chic. Irony can be painful. (Taylor, *Funny* 108-109)

Taylor also wonders if there could be something like a driver's license test to give the bureaucratic White Canadian citizen the irrevocable, written ratification of a certified Aboriginal group affiliation: "I am curious at what it currently takes for a non-Native to call themselves a Native person. Must you take Ojibway 101? Show a marked preference for

French braiding your hair? Learn how to kill a deer with a corkscrew? Make bannock with your elbow?" (Taylor, *Furious* 118).

But the most irritating action of turned around assimilation in Canada (and the USA as well) is described by Taylor as "spousal cultural appropriation" or being "Indian by ejaculation" (*Furious* 117). In the 60s Eldridge Cleaver wrote a book introducing the so called "Soul-on-Ice-Syndrome," which exemplified the trend of young White middle class women to date black men, mainly in order to perform their kind of middle-class rebellion. Years later, due to the New Age movement and *Dances with Wolves* the 'Redman' seems to stand for this left-handed compliment of improving White women's propagated political correctness. Correspondingly, many examples can be found like this:

This blonde woman who was visiting my friend had recently divorced a black gentleman. (I wonder if they met during the 60s). Now she was becoming fascinated with Native culture and I guess Native men. At one point, according to her, her parents had asked her if she was ever going to date a White man, to which she replied: "I doubt it! They have no mystery." (Taylor, *Funny* 108)

Exotic mysticism with a shot of the taste of forbidden fruits appears to be the essential characteristic Native men (and women) possess. These authentic mystic elements have to be considered as false and inauthentic in most cases on the one hand. On the other, exactly these facets blur the authentic reality and identity of Native people, who are trying to adjust to and at the same time shape the postmodern world of today as Vizenor points out stressing the importance of the Postindian warrior. A White woman called 'Rainbow Flower' with dyed black braids, years of practice in tanning leather (and wearing the respectable outcome), a precise performance in sun dance ceremonies, the ability to bake the best bannock and the strong belief in the healing waters of the river in front of her house will not be satisfied with a Native man called Jimmy Stuart with short black hair, years of practice in switching TV channels as fast and informatively as possible, a precise performance in dancing square dance, the ability to identify every singular Italian noodle correctly by its shape and color and the strong belief in the next championship of the local hockey team. Yet, as Taylor declares: "We must not forget that there are some Native people out there, that for one reason or another, want to be White. So we're willing to make a deal. Ship ours back, and we'll ship yours back too" (*Funny* 110).

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The answer to an authentic lifestyle may lie in between, in a place where everyone gets what he or she precisely and truly needs from one culture or the other to feel a little bit happier, and where an intelligent, funny, reassuring or heartbreaking combination and interaction of seemingly divergent cultural facets suddenly – in the right moment – forms a new and genuine whole. However, in order to achieve this in a final step, Native resistance has to be performed first.

## 4.4 BURNING DOWN THE THEATER – RESISTING THE IMAGE

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### UNWRAPPING THE TURBANS – INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS

I don't mean to sound bitter, but you can't grow up Native in this country without feeling a certain animosity towards this big, overwhelming and faceless government organization that was set up specifically to run your life. And I have always marvelled at what a misnomer the name Department of Indian Affairs was itself.

As a child I always had visions of people in turbans from India running around having affairs with each other. You can imagine my disappointment when I managed to get a job there eons ago and discovered the boring reality of working in a DIA office. (Taylor, *Funny* 55)

Politically, Canada's First Nations people are finally starting to ride the wave of freedom and self-determination. The big, opaque institution of the DIA, controlling all major aspects of their lives has been closed and the path towards self-government is being evened slowly but steadily, meaning that decision-making on health care, education, etc., is beginning to be put in the hands of Aboriginals. This stony but deep-rooted resurrection of a broken people can be ascribed to two characteristics, which Olive Dickason points out in her work *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*: "persistence of identity" and at the same time "adaptability" (51). According to their thought system of multiplicity and shifting in cyclic movements, Canada's Aboriginal peoples have been able to adjust to new living circumstances in almost every possible changing situation. Some included the horse in their culture, thereby creating a new one, they gave up the snowshoes for a jet ski, but they are still hunting and they were deprived of their language, but they are still telling their stories, even if the tongue and the vehicles they are distributing it in are different ones.

Control over the representation of heritage, David Lowenthal reminds us, is 'essential to autonomy and identity' [302]. Native American and Canadian First Nations people would add that it is essential to cultural survival and self-determination. Native interpreters are using their personal, family, and community histories to replace 'master narratives of cultural disappearance and salvage ... [with] stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle. "We are playing ourselves," they tell us: "we are still here' [Clifford 214]. In doing so, they challenge public historians to recognize the importance of their voices and their encounters with site visitors. (Peers 59)

With the combination of the capabilities of adjustment to current living circumstances and the faith in their unique identity, pioneers of Canada's Aboriginals – politically active ones

as well as artists and other groups – are attempting to find a special place in society for their Nation(s). Yet, they are walking a rocky road or rather a tightrope.

In order to rewrite Canadian history and to draw attention to Indigenous dimensions in Canadian identity finding,

Aboriginal peoples have become grounded in the independent histories of each. Aboriginal histories written by Aboriginal people differ significantly from those written by non-Aboriginals. In addition, these historical representations affect how Aboriginal people see themselves and how they continue to be seen by others to this day. In order for Aboriginal people to see themselves in a light more consistent with their own cultures, these representations must be changed. (Lischke 3)

The main question is how these representations are modified. As has been pointed out before, First Nations have to live with a great number of stereotypes, which affect their being in Canadian society: be it political decisions, the attempt to purchase a house or the true perceptibility of one's own self. In his discourse *Permission and Possession: The Identity Tightrope* on marketing dominant society products with 'typical' Indigenous features, Philip Bellfy states that as long as you are not in control of your own images, either historical or contemporary, you do not control your own identity, which leads to "walking that tightrope between who we really are and who we are perceived to be by those who create popular culture" (30-31). The image as well as the perception of identity is taken out of the hands of the ones who should own the right to determine it, causing damage to a people. Yet, members of the dominant culture are often not willing to forsake their stereotypical customs of representing their Aboriginal fellow citizens (cf. 30-31).

Taking a look at the different topics having been discussed until this point, every one of them has been spitting out one or more stereotypes, which in its entirety seem to be multitudinous as well as sustainable. White perceptions of Aboriginal sexuality as well as their own sexual drives have produced the 'Innocent Pocahontas,' the 'Lecherous Squaw,' the 'Wild Rapist' and the primitive but highly 'Erotic Exotic.' The Native connection to the land they walk on and immigrants' feeling of being out of place had provoked the depiction of the 'Luring Wildman' in the bush in the first place. Later it switched to a dubious role model for relieving outdoor activities and the figurehead for environmental issues called the 'Greening Indian,' taking another bend to the left, when reaching Oka, where the 'Radical Guerilla Indian' was created reminding of the 'Brutal

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Wildman' again – only dressed in camouflage this time. First Nations measures of education and teaching differing so vehemently brought two antithetical stereotypes into being: adopted as 'Unteachable Stepchildren,' comprising Native adults' inability to speak proper English, one became the 'Stoic Indian,' who is perceived as 'Lazy Welfare Parasite' in today's world. The other cliché constantly stressed the wisdom of ancient storytelling, thereby giving rise to "the fourth stereotype, the mystical all-knowing Indian with one foot in the astral plane, the other in a canoe ... they melt in and out of the bush almost as effortlessly as they speak metaphorical wisdoms" (Taylor, *Funny* 84-85). Finally the historical 'Plains Noble Savage Indian' floats above all of those stereotypes like the sword of Damocles – permanently stabbing.

Taking a look at this development of constant solidification of stereotypes in Northern American societies, Native people seem to have been taken out of the real world in a sustainable way. Eventually, the dominant culture has banned them into a theater where they are allowed to live or better 'act' but solely according to the rules created for them. Screenplays have been written, scenarios have been built, actors have been employed, albeit exclusively by White directors. Characters and appropriate features and traits have been invented, yet reduced to major attributes. Over the years the White directors have given life to a small number of different figures. They can vary in their behavior at least to some degree, very seldom some new ones are appearing, but the main figures last, possessing a potpourri of character traits, which happen to be interchangeable, yet only in the overall realm of existing clichéd customs. With this basis given, every Canadian Native person is allowed to pick one of those roles and expected to zealously act in it without any respect for his/her real identity, which at one point or another has to be dropped. Sometimes a White audience is watching different plays; attendance varies – according to trends in the media society, but not too often, and any kind of anomaly or scandal needs to be ignored or erased.

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Nevertheless, a current will often produce a cross current. If it is a political one, like the barricades of the Oka crisis, the huge number of land claims or one arising from a cultural mindset being naturally applied on a daily basis: opposed to the common idea of the 'never ever amused' Indian, Native culture is deeply moulded by subtle humor in almost every situation in life, being especially present in times of physical as well as mental hardship.

## **STAGING A NATIVE COMEDY – UNEARTHING NATIVE HUMOR**

### **THE ATMOSPHERE: 'TEASE FOR PEACE' – COMMUNITY BALANCE**

According to Indigenous studies experts humor is essential to Native societies: it "has been the key to Aboriginal communities' survival. Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, for instance, writes, '[w]hen people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anyone drive them to extremes, then it would seem to me that the people can survive'" (169 quoted in Fagan 25). Considering the superstructure of Aboriginal societies, "community is continually being built and challenged, and humor can play a role in both these processes. On the one hand, humor is deeply social: a shared laugh is an affirmation of norms, attitudes and assumptions in common. Humor can allow the tolerance of disruptive forces, teach social values and enforce social norms" (Fagan 25). Hence, it keeps the community, consisting of differently thinking and acting individuals, in balance, as Métis educator Fyre Jean Graveline explains: "Too much of one thing can lead to imbalance. Don't take life too seriously. Don't make yourself bigger than you are. ... Too much power and too much seriousness are feared, for they can unbalance life in the community and the environment" (214 quoted in Fagan 26).

Consequently communal wit fulfils two tasks:

while humour can reinforce social cohesion, the flip side of this is that it can be used to pressure people into such cohesion. Community depends on a degree of conformity, and humour can be a way of establishing conformity without directly criticizing, blaming or interfering with others, thus maintaining social harmony. (Fagan 36)

Sophisticated strategies of teasing help members to stay within the consensus of tribal opinion and prevent the community from a great amount of discrepancy and conflict. Due to their dependency on needling, it has become a major character trait in Native communities over the centuries influencing their lives on a daily basis as well as measuring the prominence of individuals as Taylor states: "We love to make fun of ourselves as individuals or as a group. Second, teasing is universal in rez country. Oftentimes you don't know you've been accepted into a community until you've been teased. It even got an anthropological name: permitted disrespect" ("Whacking..." 75).

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This "permitted disrespect" is represented among others by Nanabush<sup>12</sup> the trickster, who shapes Native societies in nearly every aspect of their daily routine. In contrast to conservative Western cultures, Nanabush's main characteristic may be that he/she is allowed or better encouraged to act without respecting any kind of borders. Therefore, he/she is the master of teasing, for he/she is privileged to even ridicule and burlesque the most sacred religious festivals. Yet, at the same time, Nanabush is the greatest victim of gibe for he/she is constantly prey to the limitations of nature, which he/she has to face, but does not accept. Thereby Nanabush is in a continuous mode of stumbling and falling, which makes him/her a recurring object of amusement as well as an anchor of desperate hope when the times for the Canadian Natives were changing for the worse.

#### **THE PROPS: THE KNIFE AND THE SPIRITUAL PEMMICAN – RESISTANCE HUMOR**

In the introduction of his award winning play *The Rez Sisters* Tomson Highway points out the importance of Nanabush in resistance culture:

Some say that 'Nanabush' left this continent when the whiteman came. We believe he is still here among us – albeit a little worse for wear and tear – having assumed other guises. Without him – and without the spiritual health of this figure – the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (xii)

In the times of colonization, Nanabush's function in Native societies has changed. The shape shifter became a connection to the old stories of one's vanishing identity, as well as he/she suddenly fulfilled the character traits of a perfect role model, a strong anchor or a buoy who kept Native people from fully drowning in the ocean of the dominant culture's regulations and the "biting knowledge that [they were] living as an exile in one's own land necessitates" (Gunn Allen, n. pag.). With his/her attributes of being a force of regeneration, a survivor and a figure who absorbs the worst, stands up and moves on, Nanabush spoke to the weakened Native bodies as well as he/she spoke to their hearts and souls. For he/she constantly revolts against authorities, rules and routines. Thereby, this character became an antagonist to Christian doctrines for in contrast to Jesus (being a shape shifter and the 'human/godly' connection to God as well) the trickster possesses vicious character traits: in Native mythology evil belongs to the cosmos as well as good.

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<sup>12</sup> cf. chapter 'Let Chaos Ring.'

Consequently, Nanabush will not have to suffer permanently nor will he/she be crucified since he/she is never made responsible for flagitious behavior. This shape shifter rather slips into different disguises optimistically with the main goal of celebrating life and having as much individual fun as possible.

Thus, the trickster emerged as a personified mirror of the kind of subversive humor Canada's First Nations had to employ in order to survive.

Contemporary Native authors skilfully employ subversive humour as an artistic strategy both to heal from and to understand historical and personal trauma and to fight the adversity they face. Humour is a means of drawing attention to a range of serious issues, from the perpetuation of stereotypes to land claims, residential schools, forced integration, foster parenthood, benighted government policy, environmental destruction and attempted annihilation. With the help of the strong forces of humour, Native writers challenge given power systems, lay open the relativity of all positions, subvert the processes of domination, inspire social change and promote a new consciousness. (Hirsch 104)

Just as Nanabush shifts his/her shapes in order "to straddle the consciousness of man and that of God" (Highway, *The Rez Sisters* xii) as well as to live life to the fullest extent and watch the world from all kinds of different perspectives, the rangy Native wit, having been refined over centuries, was now able to shift its shape and to adjust to the current living circumstances. From being the great adjuster in First Nation's communities, Nanabush now became the buoy of resistance since "a person with a sense of humor can never be fully dominated, even when imprisoned, for with the ability to laugh comes a measure of freedom – if not movement, at least thought" (Hirsch 107).

All in all, we can state that, in contrast to first thoughts concerning the wit of oppressed and humiliated peoples, especially and foremost humor lies at the core of its culture (just think of the delicate Jewish humor), inasmuch as it becomes an essential tool to survive traumatic situations ("Even in the darkest moments there were always sparks of humour" [Lawless quoted in Hirsch 104]), as well as it promises a legal as well as likeable niche to perform resistance from the underground. Drew Hayden Taylor describes the essence of Native subversive humor, which

comes from five hundred years of colonization.... With legalized attacks to our culture, our languages, our identities and even our religion, often the only way left for Native people to respond to the cruel realities of Fourth World existence was in humour. Humour kept us sane. It gave us power. It gave us privacy. Whenever two First Nations people got together, something magical was sure to happen: there would be laughter. Whether it was children in residential school, or people on the

#### 4. DIS-TEACHING: BURNING DOWN THE THEATER – RESISTING THE IMAGE

trapline, or a bunch of guys working high steel, Native humour was a little hit of home tucked away for when we needed it. Sort of like spiritual pemmican. ("Whacking" 69)

He further indicates its 'rebellious soul,' which can be contributed to the fact that

a good portion of Native humour springs from a sense of survival. Frequently, it's reaction against the world. And anything born of survival will have barbs and sharp teeth attached, to provide protection and refuge. Humor can also take the bruises and scars of depression, oppression and suppression and act as a salve or tonic to take pain away. It often works as an antidote even. ("Whacking" 69)

Or as Atwood puts it, "they get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny" (244). Consequently, Native humor is in addition to serving as the buoy of survival also a tool of criticism in disguise, offering the humorist the opportunity to criticize authorities not only getting away with it but even gleaning appreciation. Or as Kate Vangen says: "Making fun – laughing with rather than at – becomes a way of living with difference" (192) taking us to the field of political incorrectness.

#### **THE AUDIENCE RESPONSES: FREE TICKETS TO POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS**

Concerning political incorrect humor, it could be stated that wit is one of the few aspects of life in which most Aboriginal people may have advantages over the White population in so far as it guarantees a full time jester's license. Thomas King for example hosted and wrote a nation wide, popular comedy radio show on CBC in the 90s called *Dead Dog Café* where he portrayed First Nation's lifestyle in a quite ironic and self-depreciating way. He told Drew Hayden Taylor in an interview that most of the negative comments he received for the show were given by non-Natives who gave statements like "If you guys (the producers/writers/actors) are white, you're not funny. After that King would tell them that, in fact, they were Native. These people would then respond grudgingly 'Oh, that's okay then'" (*Furious* 97). Consequently, even if not having anything else, suppressed peoples seem to own a complimentary ticket concerning political incorrectness:

Over the years, the concept of political correctness has developed into a double-edged sword. Originally seen as a way of instituting equality and respect



among people of different races, economic groups, genders and religious backgrounds, it has evolved into a rigid construct with specific boundaries and rules. Some people argue that in its attempts to liberate, political incorrectness has created restraints. Accusing someone of being "politically incorrect" means they are inconsiderate, rude, insensitive, brutish and anti-social. This is usually because they have made a comment or joke at the expense of a person different from themselves.

Introducing the First Nations identity into this environment, or the identity of any other oppressed, marginalized population, sets the normal perspective of what is allowed a little of the centre. Humour, by its nature, is often at somebody's expense. Rare is the joke that has no victim. That immediately makes it a potentially 'oppressive' medium.... 'What do you call a politically correct comic? Boring!'

Add to that volatile mixture the teasing and survival humour common in First Nations humour, and conflict with political correctness is bound to happen. (Taylor "Whacking" 70)

Hence, today's Native humor has to be perceived with differentiation. At its core lies a sophisticated tradition of teasing. Furthermore, crossing the Indigenous border and raking into the well-covered grounds of the dominant culture, "native humour pushes the envelope. It asks questions. It makes statements. It goes places polite and civil humor won't go. It reflects injustice and anger. It showcases observations and commentary" (Taylor "Whacking" 69) and is therefore often able to undermine the neatly marked out grounds of White society as well as shrilly pelt it with its own muddy stones.

In order to present the stages of political incorrectness more illustratively, Taylor creates a 'Graph of Political Incorrectness.' On the x-axis are people "from marginal backgrounds, with the most oppressed ... the bottom gradually working their way up to the 'socially accepted' ladder ... ('Ladder of Status').... The list includes 'kikes,' 'chinks,' 'fags,' 'dykes,' ... 'micks,' 'chicks,' etc., on up to the top, where the male honky proudly surveys the graph" ("Whacking" 71). On the y-axis we can find jokes dealing with race, ethnicity, religion, etc. Taking an overall look at the graph, one has to notice that those situated at the top are virtually not allowed to make jokes aimed at those being situated beneath: "In this instance, being part of a privileged elite is a limitation. Successful jokes are filled with helium, not lead" ("Whacking" 71). In contrast, those at the bottom just need to grasp into the plumply filled bag of ethnicity jokes on people who are situated above them, to then knockabout the gags. That is why many repertoires of African American, Native, Turkish, Asian or other ethnic minority comedians mostly consist of jokes about the dominant White culture. Furthermore, this kind of wit also works sideways, meaning that an ethnic group can make fun of itself as well as everyone else, who is on the same level of the 'Ladder of Status.' Such being the case, a joke like "How can you get twenty-four Indians into the back of a Volkswagon Bug? Simple: throw a

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case of beer on the back seat" ("Whacking" 72) told by a Native comedian will probably produce a 'knee-slapper' among a Native audience. When performed by a White stand-up in front of an Indigenous audience, it could either instigate a riot, or with White spectators, embarrassment and consternation. There are some exceptions, though, which follow a special rule: the owner of a higher position in this graph is also allowed to joke about character traits of someone who is situated beneath him/her. Nonetheless, he/she has to follow a rule revealing the joke as a compliment rather than criticism. So if a Caucasian comedian makes fun of the penis-size of a black man, the black man will likely recognize this as typical Caucasian envy and not as an attack on his ethnicity. In order to measure the political correctness within this graph in the right way, one also has to take the concept of cultural appropriation into account, which to Taylor is dependent on the personal sphere of knowledge:

Everything you have learned, everything you have experienced, everything you have participated in, everything you have come to understand lies within your sphere. Some things are positive, some negative. In relation to cultural appropriation it could be argued that you should write only about something within your own sphere of knowledge. Otherwise, you are intruding on another person's (or culture's sphere). Once outside your personal sphere of knowledge you are in danger of ramming into another sphere, potentially causing great damage to both spheres.

The same principle can be applied to the world of politically incorrect humour. When you are making a joke, it is prudent to ensure the subject you are making fun of lies within your sphere of knowledge. ("Whacking" 73-74)

Consequently, it becomes quite delicate not to say snobbish to make fun of a group of people beyond one's personal sphere.

Therefore, one could argue that comedians living at the periphery of society have to be considered as smug as the ones acting within its centre when attempting to tickle the funny bone of their audience with politically incorrect statements. Yet, it has to be remembered that in the spheres of the political correctness graph the minority groups almost exclusively live within the dominant culture. Thus they own the questionable privilege of invisible observation, meaning that although they tend not to be recognized as full members of a society, they still watch, experience and analyse its cultural mechanisms and traits on a daily basis. "By contrast, unless specifically inclined, White people have a limited concept of Native or Chinese or Hindu life, outside the occasional restaurant meal or movie" ("Whacking" 76). Taylor compares this circumstance to the United States/Canadian relationship:

[a] similar model might be Canadians in Hollywood. It's often been asked why there are so many successful Canadians in the American comedy business – witness the careers of former cast members of *Saturday Night Live* or *SCTV* and individual comedians like Jim Carrey, Mike Myers, and Leslie Nielsen. One theory has it that by coming from Canada, these comics have the opportunity to observe American culture from the outside. Because of American cultural dominance, their sphere of knowledge grows to include the United States. By contrast, the American knowledge of Canada remains constant at the level of Mounties, hockey players and polar bears. ("Whacking" 76-77)

After all, this rather 'trivial' graph reveals many truths and could be considered as an unorthodox but qualified indicator of measuring and judging political incorrect jokes. Despite the fact that it possesses many ('color') shades, it nevertheless opposes four different groups, who seem to have been automatically following unwritten, albeit very strict 'common rules of humor' for decades. On the one hand, we can find the minority comedian as well as the minority audience, on the other the dominant culture comedian as well as the dominant culture audience. While within 'their spheres' (meaning minority comedian performing for a minority audience, dominant culture comedian performing for a dominant culture audience), making jokes appears to be a quite easy venture, the problems, attacks, violations and indispositions arise when those two groups interact. Often a White audience feels uneasy at first when confronted with typical Indigenous jokes by Natives, for the accusation of racism always seems to float like a big thick black cloud over its head. Yet, after years of Native comedy in Canada a slight development can be detected since there are 'in jokes,' which

allow the listener to feel in on the joke. If you are non-Native, you can pretend to have a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture than you really do. And you'll appear tolerant. So there is a hip quality to laughing at these jokes; it allows you to indicate that, yes, the First Nations got a really raw deal, but hey, we're all in this together now, and isn't it good that we can have a bit of a chuckle over what is, really, a serious flaw in Canadian history. (Ferguson 125)

However, the situation may become much more conflicting when a White humorist makes fun of Native stereotypes and an Aboriginal person is watching (Whites performing jokes on minorities in front of a White audience will probably be put on the 'racist scale' and then be judged by whoever hears the calling). Drew Hayden Taylor for example suddenly found himself in the following situation: he was watching an episode of the popular cartoon show *The Simpsons* created by the Caucasian author Matt Groening, which is known for working on two divergent stages: one kept simple for children, one – on a much higher politically incorrect level – in order to keep the grown-

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up audience interested. In this episode the main character and yellow patriarch Homer Simpson is dressed as an Indian chief, sitting on his couch, watching TV, a beer in his hand while his children beg him to play with him. He relents letting his wife Marge say something like:

'Good, I didn't think Indians just sat around watching TV and drinking beer.' I [Taylor] was amazed. I did not know if I should be outraged and insulted. Then I realized I was sitting there on the couch, watching television, with a glass of wine in my hand. I later contacted a friend of mine, Don Kelly, a Native comedian and rabid *Simpsons* fan, to see if he had seen the episode. Don told me, he had, indeed, seen the episode. He remembered the line I was referring to. He too had a moment of indignation at the implication – until he realized he was sitting on the couch drinking a beer. He had to decide whether to be outraged or amused, and since it's always more fun to be amused, he enjoyed a good belly laugh.  
You can always be politically correct tomorrow. ("Whacking," 79-80)

Apart from this little anecdote, we can generally say that although, Canada's First Nations had and have to bear such a great amount of humiliation, there has always been humor at the core of their culture, serving as a tool of survival, for it often helps them to deal with their traumatic horrors of history. Yet, it also does not only raise up their hopes and disposition, it also raises their status in society as it veils accusations while putting them on the table at the very same time.

This 'helium' balloon of Native humor – composed of traditional means of teasing, self-deprecating behavior and desperate defence – leads to ascension within the dominant society. Moreover the political incorrectness graph proves that this kind of humor requires an ability to observe the dominant culture in an intelligent and sensitive way, showing that First Nations people in Canada are far from the one-dimensionality and out-datedness, the Western society often tries to lie upon them. Rather, their special form of humor enables them to employ a secret weapon, also serving as remedy, besides the public fight on political battlegrounds. In the Native



Fig. 4.14. Bill Powless, Iroquois, *Indian's Summer*: inspiring questions asked by the artist: "Is the melting Popsicle a veiled critique of contemporary Indian culture or a comment on the man's sexuality? Is the painting, in its flagrant reference to and rejection of a romanticized notion of "Indianness," just one more attempt to demystify the Indian artist and his art? And is the use of critical humour a mere passing fad or an expression of a newly discovered cultural confidence?" (Ryan 13)

artist world much accusation and vociferated pain can be found but there is also much wit. Or as Tomson Highway puts it, characterizing the essence of Native culture with only one paragraph:

When creating the universe and everything in it, one god may have said: 'Let there be light,' but the other – his wife, the one we never hear of ... – begged to differ. What she said instead was, 'Let there be laughter.' (*Me Funny* 168)

## **4.5 TEACHING THE WORLD – NEGOTIATION AND RENEWAL**

'Teaching the World' is a slogan of essential importance. Before the Europeans entered Canada Elders 'taught children the world,' how it moves in cycles and how those cycles are kept round and running by balancing out the social life within a community while living as a self-determined person the same time. When finally the Whites came and forcibly 'taught the Indigenous people their 'superior' Western world,' they concurrently bundled them into the everlasting role of featherbrained students who would never see through the mechanisms of this seemingly complex, capitalistic elbow world led by 'patriarchs holier-than-thou.'

Native storytelling in its ongoing communal processes had 'taught a world' in which teaching in the usual sense of learning linear historical facts was useless to strengthen one's identity or to discover the place where one belongs since a holistic band life guaranteed these features right from the day of birth. Western historicization with all its linear, factual characteristics began to teach the world how to discern these unworldly Indigenous students. Often ill-favored verities were palliated, simplifications and generalizations were practised, stereotypes were invented and then cemented for centuries. First Nations people were suddenly caught in this historical representation of their past like in a scabby, old theater where few people came by for a visit to watch outdated plays with wrecked characters and worn-out actors.

Notwithstanding, Natives were trapped in this situation, which felt like a chain reaction of unfortunate events having changed from a reassuring cycle into an unhealthy, indeed a vicious one, at some point in time. They had been defeated and forced to act an archaic, unrealistic role. This was and still is permanently distributed and amplified by history books, modern media and Occidental 'Wannabe-Indians.'

Western societies therefore not only 'taught the world,' what 'Indians' are supposed to be like and behave like in Western civilization, thereby actually determining political decision making and thus Native living circumstances. They also 'taught the Native world' not only how it is supposed to work in the present (if really having to live up to any standards, then at least to White ones), but also how it approximately worked in the times before Europeans even had entered the country (buffalo hunting/teepees/horse riding/feathers vertical on the back of the head/etc.). Consequently, First Nations, being robbed of their 'true history' and therefore their identities were forced to give up on their natural internal perception and take over the only – clichéd – external ones presented to them.

Nevertheless, The Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples "maintains that the history of Indian-European relationship is understandable in four essential stages: (1) separate worlds; (2) contact and co-operation; (3) displacement and assimilation; (4) negotiation and renewal" (Hele 151), and finally "negotiation and renewal" seems to be within reach.

Canada's First Nations have now started to write plays of their own, to take Native history into their hands and to 'teach the world' (meaning the often ignorant Western societies) about their actual relevance in Canadian history, as well as they tell how three-dimensional they really are – sometimes with judicial, sometimes with executive, sometimes with legislative means and sometimes with the power of humor.

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Furthermore, Canada's Aboriginals have found at least one useful tutor to do so, promising them a high degree of visibility as well as the odor of up-to-datedness and a great variety of technical tools to convey their message, as they are now turning the game around by 'adopting' one of Westerns' favorite children and influential "transmodern teacher" (Hartley, "Democrataintment" 525): television.

# **PART FIVE: TIME TO START A NEW RELIGION – IN-TEGRATING TELEVISION**

## **5.1 INTRODUCTION OR HOW TO DO THE SPLITS**

One leg:

TV is called a medium because it is "neither rare nor well done." (Fleras, *Mass Media* 132)

Second leg:

It has been said that the three most amazing things ever invented by the white culture are the air conditioner, the push up bra and television. However, many of those same people (and quite a few others) would argue that television has done almost as much harm, if not more, to damage Native culture than Residential schools and Country Music combined. (Taylor, *Furious 70*)

These two quotes can be seen as good representatives of the venture to be taken on the following pages, for in their very brevity they contain all the elements to be analysed in the representation of 'First Nations Culture in Contemporary Canadian TV Series.' We have been talking about Aboriginal peoples' life and their current place in Canadian society to a great extent before. Now the mechanisms and strategies of the 'chosen tool' for presenting the media image of Canada's First People has to be illuminated as this medium called mainstream television<sup>13</sup> cannot be considered objective. Yet, especially its lack of being a neutral cultural transmitter reveals how Canadian society experiences its Aboriginal neighbors on the big screen, and thus according to television's cultural dominance in real life. The combination of the two statements uncovers the dilemma television representation of First Nations is characterized by: television is a medium, whereas the term 'medium' reflects its preference for 'middleness,' mostly discriminating against the ones who live at the periphery. Furthermore, this medium is not only not 'rare' but actually the most present media (except the World Wide Web) in today's world while

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<sup>13</sup> When the term 'television' is mentioned, this will always refer to mainstream television.



its preferred mechanisms of serial storytelling have been as healthy for the Canadian Aboriginals as residential schools according to Taylor (cf. *Furious* 70).

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Therefore, to be able to measure the influence of television series on society in general, TV's role and overall relevance have to be defined at first before the typical 'Western Western' representation of 'Indians' is added to the equation. In order to see through the game of television shows, the general means of production and the employment of Westocentric ideologies underlying TV programming have to be illuminated. Another factor that needs to be considered is multicultural Canada and its mediascape, as well as First Nations endeavours to leave the periphery and become acknowledged as television players of high value, which in a self-repeating loop should finally lead to citizens of high value in Canada.

## 5.2 THE TWO FACES OF MAINSTREAM TELEVISION

### THE SEE-THROUGH, TEACHING, DEMOCRAT WITH A COMMUNICATIVE STREAK

TV is often seen as "Fenster zur Welt" [window to the world] (Hickethier 50), as "mirror reflecting our own reality back to us" (21). It is therefore loaded with the media license of authenticity, seemingly qualifying it by nature to tell the "touchstone stories of our time" (Fleras, *Mass Media* 135) while constantly offering freshly modified social identity on the side. Permanently promoting this self-imposed monumental credo, TV is persistently interfering into Western families' daily routine since, "for many people ... TV has the same status in their lives as the food they eat for breakfast, or the way their faces look in the mirror in the morning" (Alan 3). Naturally it is a taken for granted medium blurring with the other domestic surroundings in the home (cf. Creeber, *Tele-Visions* 19). Only that it spreads much more liveliness than aunt Phyllis' dark brown cabinet while diffusing intimacy and the reassuring sound of the contemporary outside world. The family inside can then discuss those sound bites at the dining table.

On the top of that, television is frequently used as a pastime substitute or easily 'accessible educator' (to put it in a context of parental vindication), meaning it is seen as a provider for role models or as a "transmodern teacher" (Hartley, "Democratainment" 525), conveying

general knowledge and facts about the world.... Teaching different segments of the population how others look, live, speak, behave, relate, dispute, dance, sing, vote, decide tolerate, complain; television is a major source of 'people watching' for comparison and possible emulation. (Hickethier 50)

Television people (entrepreneurs and executives for instance) like to sell the small screen as the great communicator, whose programs tie the members of its audience 'Hippie-like' together – on a family microcosmic as well as a country (not to say worldwide) macrocosmic basis built on freedom and equality. It is doing so by creating common experiences and therefore overall topics of conversation everyone can take part in without any restricting form of citizenship, gender, age, class or ethnicity: for as long as the person has watched the program to be discussed he/she is in. As a result, this televised knowledge ought to produce a common past, a common history, so to speak, practically blowing up every sociological boundary while creating universally employable role models and codes of conducts leading to a better common future. Insofar

mainstream television will successfully fulfill the tasks the 60s and 70s movements failed to complete. This suits Dines' and Humez's statement claiming that "television is arguably the most powerful ... of contemporary social forces" (Dines cited in Fleras, *Mass* 134) since it is "offering the largest amount of information to the greatest number of people at the lowest possible cost" (Fleras, *Mass* 134) and therefore can be considered 'democratic.' Besides, people find four divergent kinds of 'easily satiable' conveniences while consuming TV

- Diversion: escape from routine or problems, emotional release
- Personal relationships: companionship; social utility
- Personal identity: self reference, reality exploration; value reinforcement
- Surveillance: forms of information-seeking (Mc Quail 388)

Considering these four different interactions the average viewer performs every day, one could argue that television, indeed, serves all of those positive functions already mentioned above. It is the 'good-willed,' teaching communicator, offering a window to the world in order to bring people together in the poor conversation microcosm of family life as well as in the unknown macrocosm of a multicultural, multi-class society by creating a common televised history for all while providing an all-embracing, personal fulfilment at the same time. This may be considered as a popular misconception, though.

## **THE TRUE CORNER PILLARS OF A HOUSE CALLED TELEVISION OR WHEN A HIPPIE DRIVES A CHEVY**

Judging television as 'good-willed,' teaching communicator, offering a window to the world (cf. Creeber, Hartley, Hickethier, Fleras) is forgetting the most important force, TV's motor, so to speak: actually, 'tattle-tailing' television's make-believe doctrine of 'final universal democracy' and individual fruition is its permanent partnership of convenience with capitalistic businesses, being a relationship, television may be as dependent on as a Chevrolet Impala is on gasoline. Thereby, TV is often not interested in solving social problems but rather in the "(1) need to access and sustain the market, (2) the availability of program material, and (3) the practical economics of program production" (Fleras, *Mass* 153). The conditions being such, the attentive viewer as well as the media psychologist and the Minister of Education regularly find a great gap between what the

## 5. IN-TEGRATING TELEVISION: THE TWO FACES OF MAINSTREAM TELEVISION

mainstream media claims to do, which is "inform, entertain, persuade, challenge or transform" (appearing as a hippie), and what it actually does "namely (a) make profits (b) attract audiences, (c) bolster advertising, and (d) secure consumer patterns that massage the message of more for the many" (but driving the environmentally unsuitable Chevy) (Fleras, *Media* 49).

With its will or its obligation to generally have to adjust to the lowest common denominator the overall audience is able to provide, TV thus has developed technical as well as ideological tools and strategies to fulfil its capitalistic requirements. According to this equation, it primarily needs to satisfy the expectations and desires of the social and cultural middle of Western societies. Consequently it has been addressing the White middle class for decades since it fulfills the four magic criteria of marketing:

1. Identifiable
2. Measurable
3. Accessible
4. Substantial enough to be potentially profitable (Wilson, C. 300)

Since minorities could usually not live up to these prerequisites, they were often pressed into positions and roles, which mainly served the reinforcement of White middle class ideologies, involuntarily supporting commercial goals. To the same extent as TV indulges its potential buyership, it not seldom vampirizes those seemingly not worth the effort, consequently casting a different light on its image as a 'the democratic, common history transmitter.'

Basically, television is composed of diverse corner pillars guaranteeing its foothold as one of the most assertive media in today's society. These pillars consist of ideologically as well as technically based stones, which being tidily piled and plastered, form one of the most formidable contemporary forces. First of all, from a mere technical point of view, TV has become "part of our day-to-day-existence" (Allen, *Channels* 3) as it seemingly naturally coexists with our daily activities (cf. Allen, *Channels* 13), inasmuch as it is an established constant companion in almost every Western household. This development partly took place due to television's internal technical mechanisms of "what's next?" (Postman 123), and its constant ogling with presenting dilemmas in the most bombastic way while letting final solutions fall by the wayside. Thus TV's permanent intrusion into domestic life by employing narrative strategies of penetration – being supported by filmic means of production – can be considered successful.

These narrative strategies, though, as well as the mere filmic means of production like camera and lighting are based mostly on ideological concepts of Westocentrism and Mediacentrism. Both are often accompanied by the plain phrase of: "Keep it safe, simple and familiar!" (Fleras, *Mass* 146), or as Fleras also describes it in a more embellishing way:

The unwritten rules that comprise television's 'holy codes' should come as little surprise. The persistence of the family (both real and fictive) has proven to be a central motif, as are values of secularism over religion, a belief in individualism rather than collective enterprise, a fascination with conflict and confrontation, and adherence to traditional virtues. These codes impose frames of interpretation that audiences can relate to without fear of disorientation. The end result of this programming conformity is nothing less than the perpetuation of a boxed-in-reality.... The primacy of entertainment as the basis for TV programming remains unchallenged. Television wants to embrace as many consumers as possible, with the result that any extremism is generally sacrificed for fear of alienating audiences or repelling advertisers. Issues pertaining to diversity or change may be comprised or excluded in the rush for some common middle ground. (91)

Watching these technical and narrative stones holding together the commercial and ideological pillars of a monumental building called television, some aspects have to be highlighted: television possesses each of the ambivalent characteristics mentioned above, mainly due to the fact that its strongest pillar – or its gasoline's main ingredient – lies in the striving for wealth. In order to fulfil this goal TV has to follow special procedures, which naturally entail the solidification of a system of ideological codes mentioned by Fleras. "To keep it safe ... and familiar" (*Mass* 146) means to stick to a concept of ethics and morals the biggest group within the audience corresponds with and purchases according to, leaving little room for different, alternative, less mainstream ways of thinking.

On top of that to 'keep it simple' may have been breaking the neck of peripheral thinkers since the day the first person has switched on a TV. C. Wilson mentions that apart from the fact that minorities have usually not been experienced as potential commercial target groups and, as a result, not been considered worthwhile being represented quite realistically, they have become the constant victims of television's reliance on binary oppositions as they have almost exclusively been found in the right (approximately the bad) column. To build an easily absorbable environment within the realms of television, which promises a simple entrance into the current program as well as clear messages concerning products to be sold, TV therefore creates media symbols

## 5. IN-TEGRATING TELEVISION: THE TWO FACES OF MAINSTREAM TELEVISION

working like short cut computer screen icons. Those put television characters in the seemingly fitting column as soon as possible (cf. 45), which in the end

will bring something we want to the screen. The symbol is the icon we see on the screen, and the stereotype is the function the computer brings to the screen when we click the icon. In the same way media images of people of color, such as the fat Mexican maids, fast-talking black street hustlers, noble Indian chiefs and karate-chopping Asians, have become symbols that trigger stereotypes of the people portrayed and others who share those characteristics. (46)

Due to that technique, TV is able to catch the potential viewer by quickly delivering a collective consciousness to him/her in terms of the person seen on TV, spreading value systems to be employed, behavioral peculiarities to be expected and finally products to be sold in order to comply with this person or to set oneself apart from it. Furthermore, in having created television genres, already determining typical characteristics of television roles, TV has been able to solidify a vast amount of additional short cuts in the past few decades.

Thereby, C. Wilson says, minorities permanently have to face and fight burdens concerning the public image as well as the self-image (since the minority people themselves are constantly watching the stereotyped versions of themselves), as far as these short cut computer screen icons (cf. 45) influence their real life experiences everyday: acting out like a vicious case of irony of fate minorities' basic reality is barely represented on TV while television's fake reality usually components in their real lives.

So as it turns out, television is, indeed, opening a window to the world as Hickethier says (cf. 50). Nevertheless, this lookout often gives a very limited view of the outside environment in the end, and is ergo not only reflecting a very one-dimensional reality back to us, but to special people – living at the periphery of society – no reality at all. So how can it then tell the touchstone stories of our time, when it frequently ignores the stories of contrasting groupings within a society? This distorted reflection of reality on screen casts a different, namely more unsettling light on television's role in domestic surroundings and on consumers' watching habits. TV is put in the role of a "transmodern teacher" (Hartley, "Democrataintment" 525) and simultaneously spreads the odor of intimacy, as well as it is seen as a mediator being so distinctly and persistently used as a spin doctor that it, indeed, has to be considered an exceptionally important social force. Notwithstanding, the taste of the furiously propagated, democratic notions of perfect equality underlying the concept of television hits a sour note, insofar as this whole

building, regularly harbouring the majority of the Western world's population, is built on capitalistic pillars permeated with pigeonholes of a rather one-dimensional ideology. The hippie is for sure driving his gas-devouring Chevy on high speed.

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Canada, on the contrary, being the first official multicultural country in the world with its propagated "two-fold belief in the dignity of persons and the privileging of the individual" (Beaty and Sullivan 13) should be able to present a different media landscape than the clichéd one the average Western viewer is used to. A new, alternatively constructed country which is celebrating difference and is not seldom described as a pace-setter for the successful attempt of 'living together in difference' should be able to break with the typical strategies of televised cultural simplification to create a platform every minority group is welcome to put its foot on. Thereby it should be paying special attention to one ethnic people walking the Canadian ground and being one of the cinematically most misrepresented minorities of the world, too: the so very much adored and at the very same time mutilated 'Indian.' Yet, if accepted or not, the US American created, 'good-old' traditional Western mythology seems to stick like glue to almost every media represented person with high cheek bones, (long) black hair, black eyes and a rather bronze colored skin...

## 5.3 THE CRUX OF WESTERN WESTERNS

### HOW THE WEST WAS WON AND WHERE IT GOT US

As Leonard George, actor, storyteller and elected chief (1989-2001) of the Tseil-Waututh Nation points out:

In hindsight, we can easily say that the native people of North America were oppressed by three major forces. These were government, religion and Hollywood.... The media established in people's minds an image of Indians so powerful and controlling that even today it is hard to rise above it. (M.J. *Outside* 15)

Media 'Indian' representation has had a very long history on the US American screen and consequently also in the reception of the 'Indian problem' in the whole world, for American film making has profoundly influenced worldwide motion picture and has been determining universal television as well, as TV naturally took over its one-dimensional ideology (sometimes called MacDonaldization) of blandishing the White middle-class.

In the United States, the country having invented the very popular genre of the 'Western,' 'Indians' from the beginning on played an essential role for

(i)n the western movie, the necessary obstacle against which the hero struggles in the acquisition of his 'rightful' place is the American Indian, who happened to have been keeping the seat warm for twenty-thousand years or so. The western movie accurately if unintentionally displays the mental gymnastics the settlers and pioneers had to perform in order to declare the land their own. (Kilpatrick 42)

Thereby, the White conquerers did fulfil their seemingly heroic role as far as in the Western "'knights of true cause'" were set against the 'forces of evil and pagan savagery' represented by the Indian" (Wollen 4)<sup>14</sup>. This role allocation emerges as **the** filmic sequel of the decade-long White dealings with guilt and justification concerning the theft of Native land, stringently not being admitted as a crime as John Wayne, one of the most popular actors in American Western, proves in a *Playboy* interview: "I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves" (Kilpatrick 45).

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<sup>14</sup> John Ford movies, especially *Stagecoach* (1939), *They Died With Their Boots On* (1942), and many more represent these images.



Apart from the fact that 'Indians' were still considered as "obstacles over which the whites must ride" (Buscombe 81), especially the narrative mode of filmic representation amplified Natives' subordinate role. The violent, ripping Aboriginal could easily be reduced to a "short cut computer icon" (Wilson, C. 45) being an essential – but flat and mostly dumb – character, employed to spur on the content and intensify the tension. This can be spotted in many Western movie plots but the most popular scene appeared in the movie *Stagecoach*, in which the latter is attacked by 'Indians:'

Speed and action were important, not reality, so it was also possible for the hero to knock two Indians off their horses at the same time. The point was not to show realistic altercation.... Ford [the director] noted that it would not have done for the Indians to shoot the lead horses instead of firing madly into the air because 'it would have been the end of the picture' (32), and that's a hard argument to refute. (Kilpatrick 54)

As a result, the Native American was not just reduced to a stereotype anymore but also to a mere filmic means of production involuntarily serving the cinematic dramatics.

In the second half of the last century, though, Natives were optionally switched to new stereotypes. In the 60's for example the political situation had changed and Aboriginals were suddenly recruited as secret protesters of a more leftist oriented Hollywood, which was sublimely revolting against McCarthyism and later the Vietnam War. Therefore, the narratives changed as far as the army suddenly became the brutal enemy, and since Natives do look a bit like Asians they 'worked quite well as a substitute' for the Vietnamese (see *Little Big Man* (1970)). The 90's preferred to show Native communities giving socially lost White men a safe home in tribal communities. This was a decision quite comprehensible by then, inasmuch as bands were presented as much more manageable and cosy societies than the fast running, superficial Western world (see *Dances with Wolves* (1990)). Additionally, the mourning for the familial bounds of the vanished race fitted the upcoming "imperialistic nostalgia," which is described as "a tendency by white colonialists to regret the passing of cultures that they themselves destroyed" (Buscombe 78).

## MY PARENTS HAVE BEEN TO THE WORLD AND ALL THEY BROUGHT ARE THESE DAMN STEREOTYPES

Out of these switching – albeit one-dimensional – media Western world views old stereotypes solidified while new arose as well, summarized shortly in the following list, which should be accompanied by a quote from one of Western director John Ford's writers:

He [Ford] gave me a list of about fifty books to read – memoirs, novels, anything about the period. Later he sent me down into the old Apache country to nose around, get the smell and the feel of the land. When I got back, Ford asked me if I had enough research. I said yes. 'Good' he said, 'Now just forget everything you've read. And we'll start writing the movie!'. (Holly quoted in Nolley 76)

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### The Homogenized One

1. Detribalized (cf. Nolley 78)
2. Exclusively Sioux (including the 'Indian-Tool-Kit')
3. Part of the landscape (prop-like, no individual character)
4. In death no funeral needed ⇨ just falls off his horse (cf. Nolley 81)

### The Ripping One

1. Him attacking ⇨ called a massacre,
2. Cavalry attacking ⇨ called a victory (cf. Friar 207)
3. Lurks in the bush, rapes White women
4. If woman (squaw) ⇨ seducing White man into oblivion

### The Historical One

1. Riding mustangs in buckskin forever and ever and ever...
2. Giving long wise speeches (retelling the 'as long as the last tree'-saying forever)
3. Mysterious instincts ('Red ears' hear sounds much earlier than White ones (e.g. horse patter, train sounds)) (cf. Friar 243)
4. Sings and dances like in a Dionysian orgy
5. Ultimate statement ⇨ doomed to vanish (cf. Kilpatrick 142)

### The Spiritual Guru One

1. Traditional ceremonies can be practiced with only a pipe and without any traditional knowledge (cf. Adare 78)
2. Knowledge is passed on without any requirement
3. Having the "My Man Friday Syndrome" (subservient, yet, honorable character, capable of assisting the dominant culture in the fulfillment of its destiny) (cf. Adare 81)

### The Good vs. The Bad One

1. Lakotas = good vs. Pawnees = bad
2. Skin lights up proportionally to their goodness (cf. Kilpatrick 82)
3. Only individual 'Indian' can be good, within group 'Indian' is bad (cf. Kilpatrick 2)

4. Helping Whites, assimilating = good, resisting (but hopelessness of his cause) = bad (cf. Buscombe 34)
5. The more fluent in English the more morally capable (cf. Kilpatrick 146)

#### **The Stoic One**

1. Forever folding his arms on his chest (cf. Friar 86)
2. Forever looking into the far distance with a flat hand above his eyes
3. Goes 'poof!' if he ever dares to laugh

#### **The Saving Sidekick One**

1. Assisting, sheltering Whites
2. Eagerly sacrificing himself for Whites

#### **The Better (White) One**

1. Psychic vampires ⇨ adopting 'Indian' ways to become better 'Indians' than the 'Indians' (becoming war chief, marrying the most beautiful band girl, etc.)
2. Vision Quest makes him wiser than the 'Indian'
3. Purified (cf. Kilpatrick 129)
4. Cultural mediator for non-Native audience (cf. Stromberg 39)
5. Hunt as initiation rite
6. Massacre to prove commitment to synthesis of cultural contradiction
7. Renaming to confess true identity
8. Becoming Indian hippie

#### **The Pocahontian One**

1. Ecologist and athletic type
2. Imminent need to fall in love with first White man she sees and sacrificing herself for him (cf. Kilpatrick 153)
3. Has to die ⇨ no hanky-panky between races (cf. Friar 40)

So naturally motion picture as **the** 'new' Western instrument of communication absorbed historically established 'Indian' stereotypes like a sponge, assimilating and intermingling them. Hereby, it was employing some new facets according to current social trends, yet never letting go of the images connecting them with the old stereotypes, and in the end consolidating the latter on a visual basis, working even more effectively on the human mind. In doing so, it was strengthening Westocentrism in the most sustainable way.

## **5.4 WESTOCENTRISM IN WESTERN TELEVISION WITH WESTERN ROOTS**

As a leading amplifier the mass medium of mainstream television came into being then, solidifying the movie's one-dimensional characters in diverse sectors, employing diverse instruments to do so. Being a medium of intimacy, which exposes its ideologies on a regulated basis, TV has been and still is broadcasting its "short cut computer screen icon[s]" (Wilson, C. 45) (taken over from film) in a much more penetrating way than cinema could accomplish since it is not experienced now and again but permanently in the viewer's own home. Hence, the tube acts like another beloved family member, which is reassuringly bubbling out its ethics and morals around the clock. Television and stereotyping in general appear to be the perfect match, seemingly even more effective than cinema and stereotyping. In the need to fulfill the goals of capitalism, TV practically lusts after stereotypes in order to fill its moneymaking icons with life while giving itself the appearance of a neutral cultural transmitter conveying the 'knowledge of the world.'<sup>15</sup>

The 'Indian' fits in here, for his image has been loaded up for centuries and he has become a very strong signifier with a great amount of emotionalism attached, especially in North American societies but also in the Old World, whose inhabitants have been and still are longing for the enthralling opportunities life abroad seems to offer. And if this life (in North America itself as well as in the far away countries) cannot be accomplished due to a deficiency in location, capital and/or personality, products will be thrown 'in your face,' which will subdue the desire by dispelling those lacks or by consuming supplementary satisfaction to numb 'the pain.' These products can be little helpers, like clothes, cars, drinks and food,<sup>16</sup> whose images should bring the consumer closer to the object of desire and synthetically pimp his/her life but also the television show itself, which as great cultural transmitter of up-to-datedness frequently serves as a much more thrilling substitute for life than the boring routine experienced everyday.

Minorities in general and 'Indians' in specific occupy their steady places in this great apparatus of mainstream television, being employed whenever the stars of current social circumstances come into alignment. Then they may suddenly be 'needed' to stress

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<sup>15</sup> cf. chapter 5.2.

<sup>16</sup> Germany for instance broadcasted an interesting ad in 2008, in which the enormous effect of a band-aid is promoted by a painless Indian, who wears it according to the popular German saying: 'Ein Indianer kennt keinen Schmerz [An 'Indian' knows no pain].

special desires and lacks in Western societies, yet practically serving as instruments of reassurance to confirm the Western "holy codes" (Fleras, *Media* 91) of conduct. On the contrary, strategies spreading the feeling of Natives being favorable subjects (not mere objects) of consumerism themselves – with the equation of realistic representation rising proportionally to consumerist capability in mind – have barely ever occurred, inasmuch as public as well television's men of action do not account Aboriginals as "substantial enough to be potentially profitable" (Wilson, C. 300). This can be ascribed to discrimination having solidified itself in reality, which being heavily supported by stereotypical media representation then developed a life of its own, provoking a self repeating loop of oppression and heteronomy.

## **5.5 THE CURRENT OF CANADA'S TELEVISION FLOW**

If there is a current in a society, which produces a common history, in which a special group is only enlisted as a little branch floating along, a cross current is likely to be found as well. While many perceive mainstream media as "increasingly centralized, standardized, and preoccupied with the trivial or sensational," Aboriginal and ethnic media initiated a "crusade for justice and equality" in the last twenty years (Fleras (2007)). Thereby, minority groups had, have and will have to overthrow literally as many obstacles as the White mainstream media have created in the last several decades – technically as well as ideologically – in order to become media dam builders in the end:

With images as powerful as they are, minority women and men are under pressure to reclaim control over how they are portrayed as one way of escaping those 'psychic prisons' that deny or exclude (Husband, 1994; Riggins 1992). Knowledge is empowerment, or so we are told and reclaiming control over minority representations is critical if minority women and men are to take charge as subjects of the world rather than objects for manipulation or amusement (Hanamoto, 1995). Yet, claims to ownership are not simple and straightforward... The challenge must begin with the problematizing of dominant categories – themselves often invisibly yet powerfully normative, seemingly natural and superior yet socially constructed, and ostensibly neutral yet ideologically loaded. And working within the system may be counterproductive – akin to walking up a down escalator. That is, how effective is minority resistance when the very people being resisted against control the representation basis of that resistance? (Fleras, *Mass* 307)

This question Fleras raises will be one of the major ones to be answered in this work, whereby – since Canada is the media landscape to be explored – some different facets concerning this media representation have to be taken into account: Television as one of the most frequently used 'windows to the world' (since the window to be opened can be found in virtually everyone's living room) enduringly touts a common history with common role models and common codes of conducts to create an easily manageable collective hippie consciousness of reciprocative hugging. Merely because of the impact it has on the average viewer, its mechanisms always have to be considered worth analysing since it secretly tells a society so very much about itself and how it really sees the world.

Additionally, it keeps building up simplified images people have to cope with in the real world. Fleras mentions that those images are often dominated by US American ideologies, which have found one of their greatest allies in television shows as far as the different genres of these series are constructed according to television's holy codes (cf.

*Media* 91) of traditional Western virtues, as well as "short cut computer icon" (Wilson, C. 45) figures. Moreover, series promise the "what's next?" (Postman 123) narrative strategy of penetration on a daily (soaps) or at least weekly (sitcoms, dramas, etc.) basis.

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Having this in mind, a discourse on First Nations in Canadian TV series should be very fertile in order to illuminate Canada's current relationship to 'its' Native inhabitants, inasmuch as this country's unique mediascape provides us with some major controversial facts offering prerequisites for examination: First of all, in contrast to US American series, where Native Americans are mostly stuck with the 'sidekick role,' Canada regularly broadcasts its own dramatic and comedic series dealing exclusively with First Nations' communities on public (e.g. CBC) and private channels (e.g. Showcase, Global TV). Secondly, Canadian television attempts to differentiate itself from US television while Canadian viewers ironically mainly watch US American programs. Consequently, the question could be asked: is Canada so desperately trying to find ways of dissociation that it even instrumentalizes its unwelcome First Inhabitants? And in doing so, is it nonetheless employing the US American Western stereotypes it has been bombarded with from 'down under' for decades? And if it does, is this taking place on purpose or not? Besides, Canada possesses a unique media landscape with **APTN**, the first national Aboriginal broadcaster in the world, providing an extraordinary platform for Native Peoples, giving them the opportunity to take control over their own image. Does it really "create media without the stereotypes and clichés of Aboriginal people that are still rampant in Western media discourses" (Knopf 173)?

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At this point we have already discussed the basics, namely in how far television ideologies work in general and therefore influence the viewers. Secondly, traditional media Western depiction concerning 'Indians' was examined and now to find out how Native television representation in Canada works, we will concentrate on universal television techniques and its distribution of ideologies. To analyse the representation of First Nations in contemporary Canadian TV series then, we first have to put an eye on **production techniques**, typical **Western narratives** and **genres**<sup>17</sup> to later compare these global, Westocentric-based substructures to our concrete Canadian television

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<sup>17</sup> Hereby special emphasis will be put on strategies and mechanisms essential for the series to be analysed later.

shows on Natives with respect to their traditional life style and history of colonization<sup>18</sup> in order to find out what has been adopted and what has been altered. For, although these television shows focus on First Nations and pushing them away from the periphery, they nevertheless have to follow Westo- and Mediacentric mechanisms and strategies. Artistic niche filming will not address and in the long run alter the thought patterns of the average viewer. By furthermore, taking a look at the characteristics of **Canadian media institutions** and their depiction of a multicultural country, we should be able to measure, where the country's media representation of 'its Natives' is located at this point in time. Furthermore, we will be able to estimate the extent of Native media counter measures, unique in worldwide television history.

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<sup>18</sup> Therefore read part two to four of this thesis.



## **5.6 THE TOOL KIT – TECHNIQUES OF PRODUCTION**

### **ONCE UPON A PRIME TIME – NARRATION**

#### **HOW THE BARD GOT INTO THE BOX – FROM ORAL TO LITERATE TV**

"Television is the principal storyteller in contemporary American society" (Kotzloff 67). To Fiske and Hartley it is the embodiment of the 'new bard' since in today's world TV has become a substitute for the former tribal poet of oral societies and for the troubadour of the Middle Ages, who sang of tragic heroes and their struggle for love and freedom and by doing so, mirrored a culture's dominant morals, beliefs and longings (cf. Fiske, *Reading* 85-100). We may acknowledge that in today's world mainstream television has indeed often adopted the role of a common storyteller, which constantly fulfills its bardic function of mimicking the surrounding world. Additionally, it constructs a common cultural memory, which is not only reduced to the USA or North America in general, but which covers the whole Western World for

the domination of multinational capitalism in the international media scene could be thought of as oppressive and stifling. Yet, also because of their shared experience of culture, the audiences of postmodern media have a ready-made language in which to speak to each other and to understand each other's realities become a powerful political and cultural force. (Bignell (2008) 171)

As television is regarded as the 'Babylonian transmodern storyteller,' it seems to be quite useful to relate its narrative mode to the oral and the written one discussed before,<sup>19</sup> to fathom television's technical modes of production and correlate them with the two cyclic and linear modes in order to find out how Aboriginal in contrast to Non-Aboriginal narration fits into this new media form of lore.

Ong believes that "electronic media brought us into the age of secondary orality.... This new orality has striking resemblance to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas" (Ong 136); and Fleras decides that it could easily compete with the characteristics of print for "television should be proud for it is more interested in (1) reflecting rather than educating viewers, (2) stimulating rather than elevating them, (3)

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<sup>19</sup> Further information can be found in chapter 4.2.

presenting images rather than arguments, (4) addressing the general public rather than an educated elite" (Fleras, *Mass* 140). Considering these two statements, some of the most important characteristics defining television's narrative mode become obvious. First of all, Fiske acknowledges the formulaic in that "television may embody the repetitious, straightforward structure of a folk tale, but they must be able to build into it contradictions that weaken its closure, and fragmentations that deny its unity" (*Television* 148). Furthermore, "the true nature of television [is] flow not show, process not conclusion" (Fleras, *Mass* 140), which is a general mode of perception corresponding with a circular mode of unassertively changed repetitions rather than that of one time occurrences and static events of the past. Moreover, the preference of the communal and the refusal to merely satisfy an elite lead to a medium, which may be experienced as 'universal,' for it has produced an alternation from who speaks to who is watching. As a result, the gossiping afterwards serves as an entrance into a group. Fiske suggests that

a folk, oral culture still lives despite the dislocations of mass society, and that television is not only readily incorporable into this, but that it is actually essential to its survival. For television provides a common symbolic experience and a common discourse, a set of shared formal conventions that are so important to a folk culture. And an oral or folk culture provides the television viewer with a set of reading relations that are essentially participatory and active, and that recognize only minimal differentiation between performer and audience or producer and consumer. (Fiske, *Television* 80)

As a consequence, a feeling of distance will rarely turn up. Television is – much more insistently than film and motion picture – trying to keep as little distance to the audience as possible. It has a good initial situation, indeed, since as the typical everyday companion its presence emits a smell of normality and intimacy and as it follows oral culture in that sense, it provides immediate social experiences while writing produces abstract knowledge.

Reading and writing represent an ordered activity that processes information in a linear, logical, and rational manner. With writing, people are immersed in the linearity and abstractness of an alphabetical culture. A sequence of information is produced that arranges itself logically, that is, one word at a time, one idea after another, one page after the next (McAllister 1995). But television as a medium is destined to do it differently: it shapes information in ways that emphasize 'experiences.' The jumble of disconnected images and discourses challenges the linearity of print as a preferred means of processing information and codifying reality. Random images break up this habitual linear process. More importantly, the visual component provides a visceral emotional appeal that can be easily transformed into entertainment format... In short, television and print represent alternative modes of persuasion.... Print is associated

with insight and reason; television is synonymous with experience and emotion.  
(Fleras, *Mass* 138-142)

## LOOK WHO'S TALKING – THE NARRATOR

Narrators play an essential role in practically every form of media. They are the main factor concerning oral cultures' survival while they have always played an important part in the literature, too, being the object of endless scientific research in literary studies. Yet, for the main part motion picture as a visual means of communication, has created alternate functions for the narrator:

**Voice-over** narrators seem to constitute the most obvious equivalent of the narrators one encounters in literary texts. But there is a crucial distinction between narrators in written narratives and voice-over narrators in that the latter typically cannot be conceptualized as the source of the information conveyed by the visual track, which after all, constitutes much of the story. Voice-over narrators are thus at best a partial equivalent of literary narrators; they generally have a more limited range of functions, being usually restricted to explaining features of the narrated world, commenting on them, or adding information, which is not provided visually. Like narrators in literary narratives, voice-over narrators can be categorized on the basis of whether they double as character on the story level or not (cf. Kotzloff 1992; 80). If they do, they are **homodiegetic narrators** if they remain restricted to the discourse level, they are **heterodiegetic**. (Allrath 14)<sup>20</sup>

Chatman explains that as filmic narration is naturally limited, voice-over can mostly be found in typical recurring serial corner posts, for example at the beginning of the episode when, the narrative voice-over accompanies the initial sequence of images, explaining them and launching the plot but then relinquishes to the visuals (cf. 199; 322) or at the end, when he/she regularly draws a moral on the basis of the episode's content (cf. Allan 84). Nonetheless, it can also be used to evoke intimacy, hence, a greater amount of identification with the characters, when employed constantly within the episode to explain the feelings of the protagonists (cf. Allrath 15) like *Carrie in Sex and the City* does for instance.

When comparing homodiegetic voice-overs to literary narration, one factor always has to be kept in mind, namely that a filmic voice-over can hardly be entirely neutral for in

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<sup>20</sup> A third kind of narrative mode would be the intradiegetic voice of a narrator who addresses a 'you' which is living within the story line. This could be a person or a group within the action the narrator is talking to (cf. Allrath 19).

contrast to the printed one, the film narrators always uses spoken language. Consequently,

(t)hey are to a certain extent individualized by their voice. One also has potentially meaningful features like intonation and pauses in the voice-over narrator's discourse, which are usually not indicated in a written text. In addition, viewers presumably quite readily categorize most voice-over narrators as male or female... (Allrath 14)

which is automatically opening a Pandora's box filled with typical Western ideologies to be applied in order to judge the overall situation and the narrator's nature. Furthermore, the narrator is **the** teller of the story, ergo the informant, the audience will naturally rely on and trust. That being so, the figure representing the voice-over will also reveal something about cultural thought systems of subordination. For example many narrators commenting and explaining Aboriginal lifestyle appear to be White, meaning that the audience is made to believe that they are experiencing the Aboriginals through the seemingly infallible and trustworthy eyes of White people (the most popular example may be *Dances with Wolves*).

Generally, voice-over narration may be more important concerning the perception of the action than is usually assumed. Walter Benjamin once said: "Traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way that hand prints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (5) and Kotzloff finds that "analysing television narrators then, involves putting a magnifying glass to these individualized prints" (85). Nevertheless, the camera has to be acknowledged as the chief narrator.

### **THE TAKEOVER OF THE MECHANICAL EYE – CAMERA WORK**

Despite the fact that we have been talking about narration primarily until this point television is a visual medium in the first place, meaning that narration is determined by the camera work to a great extent. Generally, we may realize that as television audience our perception is controlled by the camera, which, is according to technological and commercial means never neutral, yet, giving the impression to function as our personal eye, as the 'media tool camera' is practically never to be seen in the picture. Thereby, we watch a world which is highly characterized by the frame<sup>21</sup> constantly limiting the picture.

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<sup>21</sup> The different forms of framing called shots as well as angles and camera movement are discussed in the appendix.

Belà Balázs therefore refers to the "schöpferische Kamera [the creative camera]" (37) as the visual techniques of shots and angles determine the way we see the televised reality. To him, every picture not only shows a bite of reality but also a point of view, insofar as the position of the camera also represents a position in life (cf. 37).

Hence, as Hickethier explains, television's camera work wants to provide us with diverse concepts. First of all, it needs to mediate to the viewer that he/she is offered a first-hand look at a **reliable reality**, which means that the camera eye is seemingly put on the same level as the viewer's eyes. Secondly, it has to spread the reassuring feeling of the **viewer's superiority** concerning the situations within the actions. It does so partly because the viewer has probably been following different narrative strands and is therefore kept much more 'in the picture' than the respective protagonist but also partly because of the camera work (cf. 130-33). Third, camera work nonetheless produces an extremely **subjective omniscience**, for it imposes on us a special social order of the filmic entities. Every single picture conveys a framework of persons and objects. The presentation of these encourages us to spot relationships, hierarchies and meanings between them. We ought to observe social distances, constellations of conflict, social classifications, etc. (cf. Hickethier 53), and hereby we are heavily dependent on exactly the picture within the very frame the camera is releasing. Furthermore, the camera controls directions and courses of motion, which does have an effect on viewers' perception of the action and the storyline. However, apart from the creation of pictures, which seem to determine the viewer's perception habits and the narration with the audio narrator fulfilling his/her part as well, a closer look at sound in general has to be taken. Although television is considered primarily a visual medium, sound maintains the television flow.

## **LISTEN TO YOUR HEART – THE SOUND**

"The experience of watching television is equally an experience of listening to television" (173) says Butler, which becomes quite logical, when considering that it is television's main goal to keep the audience attracted in a (home bound) surrounding confronting the viewer with a considerable amount of distraction like screaming children or duties like cleaning, cooking, etc. to be fulfilled. Sound becomes a very effective stimulus in these situations. Additionally, within the narrative sound is able to manipulate

viewers' understanding (cf. Butler 178) in following three strategies: sound and image can support (e.g. classical music and a bombastic landscape) or contradict (e.g. voice-over speech tells a different story than the pictures show) one another or help to emphasize selected elements within the image. Another task of sound is it to maintain the television flow and the continuity within scenes, since fade outs, fade ins and cross, meaning sounds, which jut out of one scene and acoustically continue at the beginning of the next, link the various segments of the plot lines and soften disruptions (cf. Butler 180-181).

Generally TV sound can be divided into three categories, namely **speech**, **music** and **sound effects**. "**Speech** most commonly takes the form of dialog among the characters" (Butler 174) in television series, which is regularly not addressing the viewer but rather puts him/her into an eavesdropping position. Moreover, we have the voice-over, and in some cases we even have a protagonist directly appealing to its audience (like *Malcolm in the Middle*), who is following a strategy mostly known in advertisements, news shows, etc., putting the viewer in a much more interactive perception situation due to its highly stimulative nature (cf. Butler 174). While camera work is often concerned with the arrangement of complex narrative situations, especially **music** gives the emotional point of view in many cases:

In today's television, the soundtrack has become increasingly important ... music [has] become an increasing part of the 'feel' or mood of ... a series in a world where all human life seems to be played out to a soundtrack. In particular with the aim of attracting the elusive 16 to 25-year-old market, TV drama has increasingly used contemporary pop music over its images, emulating MTV. [It is used] to boost the personal confidence of each character [of a series for instance] ... [or] ... to give [a] series its 'feel' and to underline, and occasionally comment on, the mood of characters in moments of interaction. (Creeber, *Tele-Visions* 84)

Music serves different functions within television's realm. It binds the MTV generation to the series as it provides it with the hipness an average member of this generation feels when knowing the songs underlying the storyline. Furthermore, the series itself may be valorized by the popularity of a hot music artist (Dido's title theme to *Roswell* "Here with me") or the music will stress the show's image. Rock Music may reveal the controversial attitudes a teenage series has to mediate in order to appear authentic as well as well-grounded emotional lyrics may unobtrusively reveal the feelings of a protagonist to the

viewer.<sup>22</sup> Naturally, **sound effects** also contribute to the liveliness of television series. They may provoke a great amount of immediate attention, when a sudden scream or a bomb explosion is employed. They may also serve the need of creating a particular image "When a [Native] character appears and the noise in the background is a low rattle, the audience makes an obvious association between the character and a rattlesnake and identifies him as the dangerous and sneaky villain" (Kilpatrick 39). In many cases they fulfill their most important function, though, when creating an offscreen space:

a voice or sound from offscreen helps to create the illusion that life is going on all around the characters that we see onscreen. Offscreen space thus aids the construction of the continuity of space – that is, the sense that the onscreen space continues out beyond the camera frame.... In short, sound draws the viewer's mind out past the frame into a fictional world that has been created for this narrative. (Butler 188)

At last, a major distinction has to be made based on plot and viewer's perception; when analysing the sounds we have to differentiate between **diegetic** and **non-diegetic sounds**. Diegetic sound consists in speech, music and sound effects, whose source is in the world of the story and it can be objective (e.g. a simple dialog between the characters) or subjective, when sound comes from within a character's head or a character's voice-over and cannot be heard by the other characters (cf. Butler 189). On the contrary, if the sound is not a part of the character's world, but only the viewer's one, it is called non-diegetic. It may then

evoke or underscore a particular atmosphere, it may create suspense or interpret the narrated story. The lyrics of vocal music may comment on the story.... If the viewer is familiar with the music ... the 'appropriated score' (Levinson 1996: 249) may bring alongside 'associations, deriving from the original context of composition or performance or distribution, rather than just general associations carried by musical style or conventions' (ibid). (Allrath 16)

Apart from sound, camera work and narration the actor inspires the picture.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Indians' on the contrary, have hardly been accompanied by emotionally well-grounded songs, for their musical associations have often been reduced to tom-tom drum sounds (cf. Kilpatrick 38).

## STAYING REAL – CHARACTER BUILDING

When considering characters in television series we may acknowledge that we are reading characters according to special historical and cultural codes. Butler finds three initial situations which influence television character perception: "(1) our understanding of the world, of television and of genre, (2) the context (e.g. program) in which the character appears, (3) the viewing situation itself (Did we have a large meal just before turning on the television? ... How large is the television?, etc.)" (35). According to these demands, being based on historical and cultural codes, a **typology of character signs** will be employed in order to make the viewer press the right "short cut computer screen icon[s]" (Wilson, C. 45) in the right social surroundings:

**Viewer's foreknowledge:** advertisement before show starts, credit sequence to rehearse characters' relationships and presenting them in their milieu, etc.

**Character name:** signifies character traits, reveals kinship (same last name) and ethnicity (foreign name), which then provoke stereotyping or defeat it

**Appearance:**

**The face and hairstyle** (bushy eyebrows = stern and powerful, bronze face with convex formed eyes = stoic)

**The body** (strong male figure = physically powerful, female overweight = motherly features)

**Costume:** heavily dependent on trends of that time, special outfits reveal special character traits

**Objective correlative:** environmental and other objects signifying character's features

**Dialogue:** what characters say and what other characters say about them

**Lighting<sup>23</sup> and Videography or Cinematography:** lit from below = sinister, low and high camera angles make characters look goofy or superior, etc.

**Action:** determines a character's attitudes and moral stance (evil doing evil is evil) (cf. Butler 36-39)

Furthermore, except for the characterization, which is evolves from the script, the profound talent of the actor can be detected in what he/she does which is **not** described in the script; "how a line of dialogue is spoken, and how a gesture is made and how a smile is smiled" (Butler 40). Hickethier states that only if the actor is able to give his

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<sup>23</sup> Lighting will not be discussed separately as most television series are shot in high-key lighting (cf. Butler 108).



personal performance of the character he plays combined with the time adjusted expected general acting skills, will he/she be able to to add special nuances to the character he/she presents to the audience. Performers who were in times of social insecurity also able to show the vulnerable side of an outwardly strongly masculine protagonist by employing the god-given raw material to insert fine shades of softness for instance were said to be extraordinary actors since they were able to mirror the collective mentality of a nation (cf. 181). Concerning Natives, Graham Greene and Gary Farmer as the "first, modern, realistic contemporary Indian-selves in *Powwow Highway* (1989) and later in other roles as well" (Jojola 15), have been ploughing a lonely furrow for a very long time. Notwithstanding, every character has to act 'somewhere.'

## **INSIDE OUT – THE SETTING**

"In a television program, setting often determines story and theme, rather than vice versa" (Butler 98). Two kinds of sets can be found: studio sets, which are "constructed and location settings, which are selected.... The decision to stage a program on studio set or on location is in equal parts economic, technological, and aesthetic" (Butler 93-94). Filming outside tends to be much more costly since the technology is not easily accessible and controllable. Moreover, special genres fulfill special plot line needs, as genres mostly concerned with emotions (e.g. soaps) do not need action-packed outside surroundings like action shows.

Generally settings can be introduced in several technical ways, for instance by voice-over narration or characters, inserted captions, landmarks or different kinds of establishing shots. Furthermore, it is "often more than a mere place of actions; it frequently carries meaning in and of itself in that it contributes to characterization, to the creation of a certain atmosphere, or to the representation of a character's mood" (Allrath 34). To Balázs for instance nature has always had special meaning concerning its filmic image as "Natur als neutrale Wirklichkeit nicht existiere. Sie ist immer Millieu und Hintergrund einer Szene, deren Stimmung sie tragen, unterstreichen und begleiten muss [does not exist as neutral reality. It is always milieu and background of a scene while its main function is to convey the scene's mood, stress and accompany it] (98), and Hickethier also finds that nature is not only a place of action or background but also a metaphor indicating human relationships and moods (cf. 74).

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All of those different techniques of production elements can be unveiled as cultural indicators as they subliminally, yet noticeable to the attentive viewer, not only tell about societies' thought patterns but also solidify them from behind.

## **5.7 "SAFE, SIMPLE AND FAMILIAR" – WESTERN NARRATIVES**

The average White mainstream television viewer seems to be predictable as he/she is rather interested in content, action and plot. He/she wants to be told special stories, which are ringing special bells of ideas and at the same time diminish potential lacks and deficits creeping up one's back at night. At the same time, television should offer sensual gain in experience and provide the viewer with the reassuring confirmation of higher personal self-conception in life. "Medien bieten mit ihren Angeboten damit den Zuschauern Gratifikationen, die diese für die Stabilisierung ihrer Lebenssituation benötigen [Media offer the audience gratification, they need to stabilize their situation in life] (Hickethier 221).

### **MEDIUM MEANS IN THE MIDDLE – MEDIACENTRISM**

#### Mediacentrism

asserts the superiority of westocentric values and practices in a manner that is pervasive yet unmarked to escape detection. Under mediacentrism, reality is routinely and automatically interpreted from a media point of view as natural and normal while other perspectives are dismissed accordingly... Cultural differences are slotted into a single perspective that privileges media-defined values as standard by which others are judged for what they are not, rather than in terms of who they are. (Fleras, *Media* 48)

Therefore, although it wants to create the impression of democratic neutrality and objectivity,<sup>24</sup> mainstream media is "circulating mainstream-dominant discourses, metaphors, images symbols, meanings, and unstated assumptions and subtexts" in order to reinforce "standards of 'whiteness'" while spreading the "discourse of 'mainstream' as normal" (Fleras, *Media* 1-2) and determining what is acceptable and desirable. Frequently we find the "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55) delivered by a person literally fitting the standards of a middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, White man:

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<sup>24</sup> cf. chapter 5.2.

## 5. IN-TEGRATING TELEVISION: "SAVE, SIMPLE, FAMILIAR" – WESTERN NARRATIVES

what is emphasized over and over again is our commonalities rather than differences, our individuality rather than tribalness, our accomplishments rather than inheritance, and our character rather than colour. However unintentional the consequences, the effects of this systematic propaganda are anything but inconsequential. With mediacentrism, the messages are clear: (a) cultural diversity is forced into a single paradigm of acceptability; (b) the West is assumed to be the pinnacle of evolution and progress; (c) as a centre of civilization and rightness, the West has the right to do as it pleases; and (d) the West is sanitized of all wrongdoings while 'others' are blamed. (Fleras, *Media* 55)

### WHO NEEDS SHADES OF GREY? – BINARY OPPOSITIONS

In order to clearly state Westo- and Mediacentrism, television has occupied typical narrative clichés of Western myth on the one hand and on the other it has refined them in employing filmic techniques of production. As organizing principles of a culture are deliberately used to make sense of interactions, relationships, behavior, belief and urge, they serve the "short cut computer icon" (Wilson, C. 45) strategies of TV quite well. Thus if we consider hero and villain for instance, after the harmony is destroyed the hero will fight for its return while he is embodying the social values that stabilize society. "The villain embodies the forces of disruption and the conflict between them is the conflict between equilibrium and disequilibrium" (Fiske, *Television* 139). Furthermore, hero and villain can generally be characterized by classifying them into a binary opposition chart, like

Good: Evil  
Masculine: Feminine  
Culture: Nature  
Active: Passive  
Thinking: Object of look  
Controller: Controlled  
Western Middle Class: The Other  
Attractive: Unattractive  
Humorous: Humorless  
Successful : Unsuccessful  
Etc. (Fiske, *Television* 132)

The White middle-class man always being at home in the left column of that chart will then be affirmed in most cases, meaning that good will triumph over evil, virtue over vice, etc., therefore brightly reinforcing Western mythology and thought systems. As television believes in its "short cut computer screen icon[s]" (Wilson, C. 45) and in the constant

creation of strong conflicts, binary oppositions could not be more functional to series' storylines and are consequently massively supported by techniques of production. This starts with the surroundings characters live in, continues with names, outward appearances, camera angles, dialects, costumes, props, ability to lead conversations, musical background, etc. – and those practises are presented in a manner that is pervasive yet unmarked to escape detection.

Fiske mentions that with regard to mere appearances heroes tend to be more attractive than villains (e.g. a light face vs. a darker, more exotic one). They tend to be lighted more favorably, they tend to be more tastefully dressed, tend to wear less flashy make-up. Besides, they tend to speak in a more sophisticated way (e.g. with no distracting accent), their dialogs tend to be more intelligent and tend to be more humorous. They tend to call more comforting environments their home and tend to be surrounded by nicer sounds within them (e.g. bird twittering vs. construction noise). They tend to deal more naturally and easily with wealth and money. They tend to move in a more harmonious, less disrupting way concerning the actions shot by camera and the camera in general tends to show their best side by using the more opportune camera angles (cf. *Television* 4-13). Fitting the persistent use of binary oppositions is television's dealings with gender.

## **WHERE FEMINISM FEARS TO TREAD – GENDER**

### **DON'T YOU EVER DARE TO BE A – WOMAN!**

"The female breast is a particularly powerful symbol in patriarchy because it represents both sides of women: the mother and the whore: the bearer of men's children and the arouser of his lusts" (Fiske, *Television* 164) and although especially in American television the breast is not allowed to show, it may serve as a metaphor for the paradox of media female imagery while it supports the binary opposition theory as well. There are diverse female roles in TV like "the imp, the goodwife, the harpy, the bitch, the victim, the decoy, the siren, the courtesan, the witch, the matriarch" (Fiske, *Television* 113) related

to special stereotyped behaviors and then stressed by special subliminal but strongly influencing means of production.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the question of 'female control' within the narrative has always been a delicate topic. First of all, the "ability to understand, facilitate, and control relationships ... [is] often shown as ... [the] source of women's power, used disruptively by the bitches and more constructively by the matriarchs. Men are often shown as deficient in these abilities and knowledge, and cause many problems by this masculine lack" (Fiske, *Television* 182). Television shows tend to support these feminine abilities by the use of facial close-ups, which actually reveal emotions "before the age of film only a lover and a mother saw" (Porter 786). Consequently, female viewers will positively respond to these means of production as they acknowledge

the feminine skills of 'reading people' ... [as] the means of exercising the feminine ability to understand the gap between what is meant and what is said. Language is used by the men to exert control over the meanings of the world but women question its effectivity in this.... Close-ups also encourage women's desire to be implicated with the lives of the characters on the screen. (Fiske *Television* 183-184)

The other much more threatening side of this relationship coin would then not be the nurturing abilities, but the sexual, seducing one. According to unwritten television law, this can be achieved on a temporal basis (sexual dependency) but not constantly. Besides, the 'bitch' is known to attempt to achieve her personal goals by intriguing on the one hand and making use of her sexuality on the other hand. Therefore, she "turns traditional feminine characteristics (which are often seen as a weakness ensuring her subordination) into a source of strength. She uses pregnancy as weapon ... she uses her insight into people to manipulate them, and she uses her sexuality for her own ends, not for masculine pleasure" (Fiske, *Television* 190) the last one being the biggest affront to the buffeted soul of man.

In youngest television history, a change has taken place, though, as shows like *Sex and the City*, *Gilmore Girls* and *Desperate Housewives* found their way into viewers' hearts. Between 1998 and 2004 the girl gang of *Sex and the City* captured the current zeitgeist such intensely all over the Western world that the show goes down into

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<sup>25</sup> Blond hair is not only blonde hair for instance, but it may convey characteristics like being superior (Aryan ideologies) as well as newer connotations, since Marilyn Monroe alone, as one of the most popular actresses in the history of film brought blond hairstyle to another, more three-dimensional level. From her suicide on it has been representing the antagonisms of a highly admired woman, who is still considered as **the** sex bomb on the one hand but at the same time as an extremely sad and vulnerable woman broken by this image in the end.

television archives as one of the most if not the most influential at the turn of the millennium. It freed women from the roles they had been given for centuries:

*Sex and the City* constructs a partly fictional landscape where women's endless consumption (whether it be materially, social or even sexually) consistently refuses to limit itself to traditional social ('feminine') norms. The intense desire for sexual fulfilment, the ceaseless enjoyment of consumerism and even the 'luxury' to keep looking for a decent man ... construct a female-centered universe where women refuse to settle for anything less than complete satisfaction. As a result, *Sex and the City* creates a fictional universe where women's desires have few limits and where women's concerns are finally allowed to dominate, consume and dictate the action. In this way, the series allows itself the possibility to create a world that explicitly goes against masculine power and desire, and produces a radical form of narrative that re-interprets life from a wholly 'feminine' perspective. (Creeber, *Serial* 149)

Nevertheless, it has also been argued that *Sex and the City* perpetuates "discourses about women's self-absorption, the focus on heterosexual sex as the barometer of personal and social success, and the normalization of commodity fetishism as the environment, in which women exists 'by nature'" (Bignell, (2008) 227). Furthermore we – although talking about independent, intelligent New Yorker thirty-something women– still have an old-fashioned, typical topic overshadowing the narrative: the unrelenting search for Mr. Right taking us to the televised representation of men.

## OH, COME-ON! BA A – MAN!

The typical televised man? "Red-blooded, competitive, omnipotent, irredeemably sexist and emotionally illiterate" (Ross 147), and he is proud of every single one of these characteristics. Today, one could say that those characteristics are exaggerated. Nonetheless, one of the main aspects of "masculinity in our culture is its connection with 'testosteronized' maturity. 'Be a man' is a frequent admonition to young boys that often requires them to behave more maturely than their physical age. Many popular narratives dramatize the "boundary rituals" whereby a youth crosses into manhood" (Fiske *Television* 200). Thereby, maturity can be divided into two different categories. One would be a ripeness of intelligence-based experiences, which have been transformed into wisdom (the male guardian for instance). The other much more common (and often much more preferred) form will be achieved by physical strength:

Male infants learn quickly that masculinity brings with it social power. But, in order to achieve this power ... Easlea (1983) suggests that in many tribal societies this involves access to the power of "men's magic." In our societies technology and science have replaced "magic" as the social manifestations of male power. For boys, guns and machinery are not just symbolic compensations of their lack of physical strength, nor ways of compensating for their envy of women's procreative power, they are their means of entry into the masculine. (Fiske, *Television* 202)

The car for instance, is more than a symbol of masculine power, endless freedom and a cowboy-like mobility. Driving a car is the "practise of those values, it is not a substitute for masculinity, but a means of achieving it" (Fiske, *Television* 258), whereby the bigger, the more expensive, the louder the car, the more masculinity is being driven down the road. Additionally, the gun is sometimes described as a "penile extender" as it closes the gap between the penis and the phallus, the latter being a cultural construct of total masculinity never to be achieved in reality.

Nevertheless, masculinity is practically not achievable in today's society as man is also put in the role of the "breadwinner," letting him constantly drown in the dilemma of serving himself and his freedom and fulfilling the constricting responsibilities of home and family. Therefore, he is permanently experiencing a "vacillation between power and subjugation, between freedom and restraint" (Fiske, *Television* 206), leaving him in a capitalistic society, in which he should obey to the requirements of his job and his family,



but simultaneously has the opportunity to 'buy' his masculinity, his feeling of perfect freedom in his leisure-time.<sup>26</sup>

Television will frequently make this paradox a subject of discussion in accompanying young men on their deeply bothersome way to manhood. Therefore, it will hit topics like competition between youngsters in school or sport teams as well as in peer groups like gangs, where "maintaining their membership involves a constant performance of aggression and toughness.... Aggression is the basis of much working class style, and of male youth style in general. Masculinity is performance" (Fiske, *Television* 209). On the one hand, this aggressive proving of oneself triggers a television series plot as it provides confusion and action. On the other hand, the masculinity substitute of goods and commodities serves television's capitalistic nature. It will sell products to its male viewers, promising the immediate rise of testosterone when purchased, for "capitalism needs this gap between the material experience of men and the ideological construction of masculinity to keep men striving for more and more achievement in order to maintain the naturalness of the ideological concept of progress, which is so central to capitalism" (Fiske, *Television* 210). Another important characteristic of male action apart from competitive relationships is the rather harmless male bonding, which is "goal-oriented and not relationship-oriented.... It depends on action not on feeling" (Fiske, *Television* 213) and therefore disembarasses the often quite homophobic man from any homosexual accusation.

However, many male series tend to follow special strategies confirming the male viewer in his masculinity, when being a fan of this show. Those can be described as follows: "[d]etermination to succeed replaces feelings, mechanical ingenuity replaces insight into people, and success in problem solving replaces the process" (Fiske, *Television* 215), the antagonist thereby deliberately – not to say disgustedly – turning their backs on the scary major attributes of femininity.

Gender roles in television appear to be as solid as a rock or at least very sticky, stiff and hard to modify as they tend to cling to Western narratives, which have been proven sufficient for a very long time. It will be one of the goals to find out in how far gender in Native series has been adjusted to these ideologies or if the representation of Native women and men (also compared to White protagonists in the actual show) differs significantly. Nevertheless, apart from gender representation in general, genre happens

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<sup>26</sup> This could for instance be a deodorant.

##### **5. IN-TEGRATING TELEVISION: "SAVE, SIMPLE, FAMILIAR" – WESTERN NARRATIVES**

to be a strong brake (as it is mostly based on steady characterization within its realm), as well as it can be an indicator for change (when finally, according to new hybrid forms, slight modifications in overall images of figures can be spotted). Hence, genre is a useful source to spot in how far a society is walking a progressive path.

## **5.8 "IT'S LIKE PORN ... I KNOW IT WHEN I SEE IT!" – GENRE**

Genre is a category, difficult to define. Mittel draws a connection to pornography by comparing the recognition of pornography as a genre with that of television series and the impression the viewer has of either one of them "I know it, when I see it!" (1) and later adds "instead of asking what genre means ... we need to ask what a genre means *for specific groups in a particular cultural instance*" (5). Butler finds that genre is "what most viewers think it is" (338). Considering these statements, it appears that television genre has to be seen as a very blurry object to be examined – subjective and hardly tangible. This could probably be ascribed to two characteristics defining it. Except from its prevailing basic features genre is closely linked to historical shifts. That being so, dynamics outside generic texts are included, for genres respond to "cultural circumstances, industrial motivations, and audience practises" (Mittel 6) in the quickest manner.

Furthermore, in today's mediascape we find a great amount of cross-genre mating. Television is always likely to create coalition audiences by developing series shaped by different genres such as *Smallville* is uniting divergent viewer groups (typical Teenage Show (girls) about Superman as teen with Science Fiction/Action elements (boys)). "The audience is no longer regarded as a homogenous mass but rather as an amalgamation of micro-cultural groups stratified by age, gender, race and geographic location. Therefore, appealing to a 'mass' audience now involves putting together a series of interlocking appeals to a number of discrete but potentially interconnected audiences" (Allen, *Channels* 342).

As genre is genre, it has to respond to typical mechanisms and ideologies bound to it (e.g. Westerns tell the binary story of the opposition of nature and civilization, "police dramas [serve] as conservative rituals of assurance" (Mittel 15)). Thus it always has the opportunity to affirm its predominant system of values. It is also able to infiltrate and make fun of these values by turning inside and using its own conventions for ironic undertones. Thereby it often creates genre parodies as well as a pleased, televised audience, which confidently spots generic irony and is egged on and flattered by the enigmas of intertextuality presented to it. Allen describes these mechanisms as a "process of oscillation, in which emotional involvement [confirmation of cultural ideologies, personal approval of a person fitting these conventions] alternates with ironic detachment [confirmation of viewer's filmic 'see-through' skills]" (*Channels* 346). Although today's genre makes extensive use of a wide intertextual media scope, this can only

work (meaning become a major economic success), when it is conscious of its generic roots, which have to be watered carefully. If television is not aware of those roots consisting of the typical Western ideologies and holy codes (cf. Fleras, *Media* 91) of television, the whole series will be likely to wither in the end. Therefore, it is very essential to take a look at the protocols, the roots, so to say, of different genres, which are and have been modified according to cultural changes, yet tend to cling to special rhizomes at the same time.

## THE GOOD – SITCOMS

"Sitcoms have become our most pervasive, powerful, and cherished form of media output. They flow into every corner of our lives" (Abelman 330). Family sitcoms can be seen as the "bedrock of broadcast television" as they teach "how to watch television (media literacy)" (Hartley, "Situation" 66) being a reliable transmitter of Western social codes and values they are appropriate for grown ups as well as children. Fitting into typical television strategies of stereotyping, sitcoms generally follow the simple pattern of binary oppositions in order to develop its thirty minutes long (about twenty-three minutes without advertisement) story line, characterized by "the problem of the week" (Fiske, *Television* 146) dealt with according to the same four stages format of "familiar status quo, ritual error made, ritual lesson learned, familiar status quo" (Marc 190-191). Sitcom conflicts triggering off this format can mostly be reduced to oppositional categories shown in this graph:

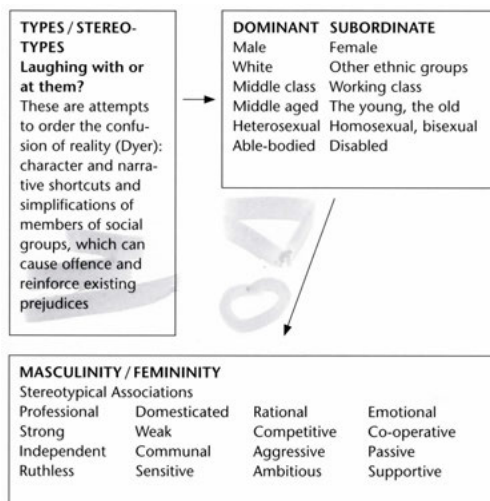


Fig. 5.1. Sitcom stereotypes

The interaction between these characteristics then become the corner pillars to create a sitcom's typical humor by

contrasting these values, when they are each embodied in a character and also by aligning a character who might be expected to represent one side of the binary with the other side.... Sitcom narrative works through setting up oppositions and connections, which by the end of an episode have been laid to rest.... The audience needs to recognize the narrative codes of sitcom and the stakes of the binary oppositions in order to accept the surprising reveals and conflicts

which the narratives require. (Bignell (2008) 94)

Furthermore, as Abelmann explains, these binary oppositions initiate "outlandish situations" or an "ingroup-outgroup scheme," which the characters are thrown in at the beginning of the show and from then on have to deal with week after week anew (316). Those outlandish situations revolve around an artificially created clash of social conventions (e.g. a hysterical Jewish downtown girl living with a British upper class Musical Director (*The Nanny*)).

Just as a sitcom's plot tends to be formulaic, the characters are created in a simple manner as well. They can generally be considered rather flat, often comic-like, overacting and misinterpreting situations week after week, giving the impression that they hardly change, grow or learn from their mistakes and are therefore easily predictable and consequently easily perceptible. "They give us characters whose habits, foibles, and responses to situations we know as we know those of our own friends and family. What's more these characters – unlike real people – do not deviate from their habits. They provide a sense of family warmth without confusion, without ambiguity," says media critic Jeff Greenfield (Abelman 316).

*The Partridge Family*: Come on, get happy. Proof that a widowed housewife in the 1970s can take a house full of rambunctious children and form a successful rock band. Comedian Paula Poundstone once noted that, when she was a kid, she tried to kill her dad, so her mom would take the family on tour. (Abelman 325)

Being the media prototype of ideal, traditional Western virtues, the sitcom finds its home in the home. Responding to the saying: 'Home is where the heart is,' the series are usually being shot in a domestic atmosphere. In fact, there may barely be any person in the Western world who would not be able to walk through the Huxtables' living room in the dark without hitting furniture (*The Cosby Show*).

Furthermore, sitcoms predominantly concentrate on the aches and pains of family life with the goal of mediating how raising children should be approached in order to create a decent Western member of society. Tolerance is generally capitalized as well as life skills like "talking not fighting" (Hartley, "Situation" 66). "The sitcom seems to require the presence of a quasi-family structure to satisfy the needs of the viewer. The TV viewer is always addressed by the sitcom as a member of a family – 'from our family to yours'" (Feuer 69). Even in times when the nuclear family has often fallen apart and family sitcoms turn towards patchwork families (outlandish situation), single or gay

parents or to friends as substitutes for a family (*Friends*), the typical Western family virtues of respecting each other, listening, finding one's place in the hierarchy, etc. will in most cases be conveyed in the front line<sup>27</sup>.

### THE LESS GOOD – THE DOMCOM

Special attention should be paid to the hybrid sitcom format of the domestic comedy (domcom) as being a concept strongly employed in our Canadian Native sitcoms.

The humor of a domcom is inherent in the relationships of the characters. The depth and warmth of character interaction – the establishment of a 'family' and a focus on domestic issues – is the basis.... As such the humor tends to be more realistic than presented in a sitcom. Rather than being dependent on a bizarre situation and the confused antics of an ironic character, domcom humor stems from the interaction that develops between the characters; it depends not on situations but on people. (Abelman 326)

Additionally, because "the humor is relational rather than situational" (Abelman 326), the domcom is not only restricted to one storyline but follows multiple strands within one episode, which then again demands "multiple, mimetic protagonists" (Abelman 327), whose various, changing interrelationships are likely to become a kernel of one of the storylines. While domcoms concentrate on domestic life, they do not require an actual nuclear family as protagonists but rather a manageable amount of people who only need to "imply family roles and relations" (Abelman 327).

Consequently, all domcoms have an authoritative 'father,' the source of guidance and knowledge who sets the other characters straight in times of trouble or doubt; the reassuring 'mother,' the nurturer, the soft shoulder, the good listener; and the troublesome 'child,' the initiator of conflict, the individual in need of direction, guidance and nurturance. (Abelman 326)

As a domcom – dependent on relational humor – calls for more complex and ambiguous characters in order to keep the storylines going, those roles are

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<sup>27</sup> Another kind of sitcom, which has become popular in the last decades, is the workplace sitcom (*Susan*), where in contrast to family sitcoms the emphasis is rather put on sexual tensions. Naturally one can find hybrids of both as well (*Seinfeld*, *Friends*). Workplace sitcoms will not be of much interest here, though.

interchangeable; in *Home Improvement* for instance the childish father Tim frequently needs to be counselled by his motherly male neighbor. Due to that interplay and the constant gaining of experience and wisdom by changing standpoints as well as a confrontation with serious subject matter (like drug use, etc.), domcom characters are allowed to "experience the aspects of human relationships and their consequences" (Abelman, 327), and as a desirable side effect they are able to grow.

### **GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN**

Apart from the fact that sitcom (domcom included) always seems to spread the odor of traditional Western values, it – maybe due to its constant necessity for new assembling of binary oppositions and new outlandish situations – has become the "perfect format for illustrating current ideological conflicts while entertaining an audience" (Feuer 70). Taking a look at the sitcoms of the last decade, they provide a fertile ground for introducing minority problems without causing a scandal. This could be ascribed to special norms, usually kept (children will watch it) while humor tends to hide the seriousness of the underlying situation. Here we also often find a kind of 'new' (but actually century old) humor, which will then see the light of the media day, so to speak:

The sitcom focuses on the very humanity of its characters and stories in a way which laughs at, rather than dwells upon, life's vicissitudes, and, it is a light-hearted, 'people-centered' approach which gives the genre a broad appeal, accommodates many kinds of different audience, and ... brings an innocent, common and timeless 'feel' to the situations. Thus the comedy ... masks many of the political dimensions ... [it secretly reveals]. (Wells 181)

The *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* for instance gave a (dismantled) Black American humor its platform while *Seinfeld* brought Jewish teasing to the masses. Humor is always an easy way to integrate a minority into a society and sitcom for the masses is a promising means to do so.

Furthermore, this genre is able to convey unspeakable topics in a life-affirming way. Single parenthood has been addressed from an early period on, changing from widows (*The Partridge Family*), to the divorced (*Cybill*) to the attraction towards alternative sexes (*Two and a Half Men*, *Modern Family*), as well as non-standard bodies

as in *Roseanne*, which is challenging typical 'suburban middle class thinking,' since Roseanne is a "fat woman who is sexually normal, a sloppy housewife who is also a good mother, a loose woman who is tidy, who hates matrimony but loves her husband" (Rowe 91). Thereby she is celebrating dysfunctionality while giving it the right to be an ordinary condition in every average family.

Thus sitcom has the ability to create

comic structures which legitimize the expression of a variety of political agendas, and consequently, the creation of a multiplicity of possibly contradictory discourses.... The situation comedy can provide a legitimate context, where, within apparently conservative and consensual limits, complex, sometimes subversive discourses may be rehearsed. Significant ideas and issues are addressed in seemingly innocent and trivialized parochial situations, but are engaged with and resolved in a symbolic way through the mediation of comic exchanges and events. In many senses, the sitcom is the most appropriate site for these small acts of political and ideological 'smuggling,' and this is central to the genre's endurance and constant rejuvenation.... (Wells 181)

In this stance sitcoms may often, in contrast to general estimations, be even more socio-critical than drama series.

## THE BAD – DRAMA

In contrast to sitcoms dramas are usually presented in an one-hour time frame (forty-two minutes without advertisement), meaning that they offer much more airtime to develop a plot. Generally, a drama episode's narrative will start in a **state of normalcy**, which will be unhinged by the upcoming conflict of the week. After the conflict has been successfully established, "**pollution** typically entails the posing of solutions or the laying of strategies to resolve the conflict" (Abelman 406). From then on **guilt** becomes the major factor to thicken the plot, for the characters will now attempt to resolve the disequilibrium that resulted from the pollution. "The guilt presented in dramatic programming often takes the form of failed solutions and errant strategies. Therein lies the drama" (Abelman 406). Toward the finale of an episode, **redemption** will be within the range of vision. The conflict will be resolved for instance in an action-packed climax, which may be only a temporal closure in some cases since there has to be a story to be told next week, meaning that the villain escapes again or appears in another form anew



(see *CSI:New York, etc.*). Family drama on the contrary may tolerate a final solution as the character has to be able to grow. In the end, redemption will fade to **purification**. The status quo (or state of normalcy) is achieved again after nerve-racking forty-two minutes. But talking about series the next problem is already waiting around the corner (cf. Abelman 406).

Moreover, character building is of great importance: Westocentric based drama series tends to be obsessed with traditional heroes, who are usually "independent, emotionally and intellectually balanced, dedicated, morally incorruptible, just and always dependable" (Abelman 407). They can be divided into different categories as the leader-centered character is

depicted as superior in intelligence and ability to control his/her environment when compared to the average person, but only in degree by virtue of some special ... preparation (e.g., military, espionage, marital arts). This type of character generates a configuration of symbols for acting skilfully and competently on the same kinds of circumstances the audience confronts and others find compelling, thereby creating a sense of leadership and bold authority. (Abelman 407)

Abelman explains that romantic character has some "innate quality or natural capacity" and is therefore able to control his/her environment as well. "This type of character generates a configuration of symbols for acting bravely and well intended in real-life circumstances. Others find the behavior to be valiant," which then creates a heroic odor to be adored (407). Yet, a hero is nothing without his antagonist.

If we want to find out how Western ideals are defined at the moment, we just have to take a look at the current villains on TV as the average of their characteristics will reveal what current ethics and morals are not like. Generally, "[v]illains are dependent, emotionally imbalanced and intellectually unstable, selfish, morally corrupt, and undependable" (Abelman 412). Furthermore, they can be characterized as ironic protagonists, who "articulate, defend, and represent positions that are inconsistent with other characters and known events in the course of the program or in the world at large. This results in the inability to control themselves, the circumstances in which they live, and other people" (Abelman 412), giving the program its dramatic dimension. Dramatic programming is rich and full of hybrids, yet some major basic formats have been populating the Western mediascape for centuries.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> We will concentrate only on the formats important for the shows to be examined. There surely are mystery, adventure, war, spy, medical and legal dramas as well.

## THE UGLY – THE POLICE DRAMA

The central character of the detective has to be established in the narrative as the representative of law and order. He or she embodies the values acceptable to the audience as the consensus of view of right and wrong, and by his or her actions shows how ideological, common sense justice works in practise to keep society on a more or less normal and comfortable track. (Bignell (2004) 130)

Nonetheless, although a new 'detective market' of vulnerable, broken figures has been created in the last several decades, who constantly walk a thin line between law and delinquency, the average detective arises from a pot of rational thinking, heterosexual, White males. Despite the fact that he/(she) will also be more or less forced to use violence, disobey rules or tell lies, the hero and the villain can be distinguished by the "effectiveness of the methods they use, and the aim, which justifies their behavior" (Bignell (2004) 131). The average detective (even though he/(she) may be shabby, darksome and shows dichotomous demeanour) will re-establish the common legal justice system in the end, as he/(she) has had (in contrast to the criminal), an unmistakable sense of justice from the beginning, the viewer can generally take this for granted given the morals and ethics of this specific genre. Thereby, television is not representing social reality but rather a reality the audience wishes for, for it – serving simplified images – evokes the feeling of a security which the 'normal world' with its unrecognized criminals directly in our midst can never provide.

Watching action series in the safe surroundings of home, this format does not mirror a homely atmosphere back to us, as the sitcom does for instance with its emphasis on cosy places and family life reflecting a 'reality' the viewer is invited to reconcile his/her own family life with. The action series rather addresses the longing for a brighter, much more interesting, action-packed lifestyle. It therefore presents a form of action taking place "in the public realm of men ... as male power and legitimacy cannot be expressed in the home but must be displayed and defended in the public turf" (Fleras, *Mass* 151). This public realm serves diverse functions since it demands camera shots and angles much wider than the close-up ones in soaps for instance stressing the emotionalism mirrored in the actors' faces. Wide perspectives on the contrary hide these feminine, strongly subjective expressions (cf. Fiske *Television* 183-184) while putting the emphasis on physical action (fights, car chases, etc.), as well as they create a kind of emotional distance asking the viewer to neutrally observe the action in order to be able to solve the case together with the detective. Moreover, many detective series live from

urban environments: the city is the place to be, for it is as loud, impulsive and contorted as the protagonists and the crimes committed. Here detectives can go undercover, where they simulate criminal behavior and are able to act according to their own rules, which have been adjusted to the surroundings they have to work in (cf. Bignell (2004) 121-130, Bignell (2008) 130-134, Miller, T. "The Action" 17).

As drama generally does, crime shows also follow a special narrative entrance with a disturbance of the social harmony (murder, etc.), which triggers the plot line of "finding the explanation for the disturbance/removing the destructive force .../providing the conditions for the restoration of order and balance" (Bignell (2008) 130), which in the end will lead to the equilibrium of the social world by the detective.

The ideological work that the police series does is therefore to provide a means of representing society as a fundamentally ordered and balanced network of relationships, introducing a challenge or threat to society, and dramatizing the ways in which this threat is removed. (Bignell (2008) 130)

Hereby, it becomes essential that the threat **is** removed at the episode's end, so that everyone can go to bed and sleep well.

Like the characters and situations in sitcoms crimes, villains and detectives reflect current issues in society. For instance *CSI: Miami* with its glossy print postcard format, its solid male detectives (like the main character Horatio) and its model female detectives seems to long for a perfect picture postcard reality, which has been vehemently ruptured by 9/11. Furthermore, this is about 'capitalistic television,' meaning that it gives us what it believes we want to see. When comparing television crime with reality delinquency, TV shows do a poor job reflecting the police and gangster world: true crime is generally not that easy to detect, while actual crime records dare to resist television strategies of creating the right amount of tension and mystery, yet resolving the plot 100% in the end. Such being the case, it is only logical that teen series hardly reflect teenagers' lives.

### ...AND THE CUTE – THE TEEN SERIES

With the rise of the teenager cult in the 60s, television teen shows emerged as well, for teenagers can be considered as a grateful audience. Davis says that first of all, they have a considerable amount of leisure time and consequently plenty of time to watch TV. Secondly, Western adolescents dispose of relatively large amounts of money which they tend to spend easily, serving the economic goal of television. Third, most Western teenagers are constantly living on the edge between distinguishing themselves from their parents or/and other peers while at the same time they are in a desperate need to find their identity and socialize and occupy their place in society (cf. 1 ff.). Television teenage shows are useful tool here since they try to serve as counselor and delimiter in these hard and confusing times. Moseley furthermore explains that as teen television is mostly engaged in maximally authentic reproduction of teenage angst, dreams and longing, its style of production will usually be rooted in melodrama and daily soap style, meaning a high amount of close-up cameras as well as music pregnant with meaning and analytical dialog (cf. 43).

Typical topics would be friendship, love, sex, relationships with parents, pregnancy, drug abuse, fashion, the need to conform to the current ideal of beauty, etc. All this is overshadowed by the wasting feeling of 'in-betweenness' almost every teenager has to cope with at one point in his/her adolescence. 'Otherness' becomes the keyword here whereby this forsakenness is not seldom expressed by superhuman powers the protagonist possesses and is not yet able to cope with (Creeber (2001) 41-43) ( *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, Roswell*):

Many of these shows deal with questions of difference, otherness, increased power and the impact of these on personal and community relationships: a significant number of them draw on other cult television forms, using supernatural power as a motif through which to explore these concerns. Many shows give the sense that to be a teenager is to be not quite human. (Moseley 43)

## PLEASE GROW UP QUICKLY AND STAY YOUNG FOREVER

Although concentrating on teenagers of about thirteen to nineteen years old, we can detect a special phenomenon in most of these teenage series which becomes the most obvious when considering the language used, which is usually "too sophisticated for the ages of the characters; [reveals] frequent intertextual references ... and a blunt somewhat melodramatic use of emotion and aphoristic psychological reasoning" (Davis 1). This strategy, though, serves a special need, namely to bind a grown up generation to this programme, too, viewers, who feel as if they are living their "teenage years again after a life-time of accumulating emotional knowledge and language" (Birchall 185). As Williamson, the creator of *Dawson's Creek* puts it: "It's like my childhood comes to life, but now I get to go to the places and create these situations where I can change the ending and have it turned out like I wish it would have" (Birchall 185). So in the end, the director as well as the late recipient who has already outgrown the teenager years is granted a pretended chance to become a master of language. Birchall adds that thereby he/she may overcome the terrible teenager angst he/she had to face as an adolescent, which may lead to the assumption of having resolved teenager traumas at a point in time when the mind is able to cope with them adequately (cf. 185).

Consequently, teenage series are a proper means in today's mediascape, as society dictates that you should grow up quickly and then stay young forever (achievable mostly by consumer goods). The mechanisms of teen shows with highly eloquent and psychologically sophisticated adolescent protagonists correspond to this need. For they provide the young viewers with a mindset of experiences, insights and attitudes they usually are expected to have at the age of thirty while they supply the nostalgic thirty-somethings with a memory of youth much easier to bear than the ones they really have and, additionally, keep them in a cosy state of youthfulness. Also fitting this phenomenon is the creation of typical teenager characters, who strongly correspond to melodramatic role models: "the representation of a heroic, self-sacrificing character typical of the woman's melodrama; and the portrayal of the troubled youth of the male melodrama [James Dean]" (Banks 18).

### **'LOOK, WHO'S SUDDENLY BEING EMOTIONAL' – BOYS**

In order to equip the typical teenage girl watching her weekly shows with a proper (albeit very unrealistic) picture of today's male adolescents and their emotional capabilities, teen television moved away from the testosterone driven type and conjured the

thoughtful young men, aware of their masculine and feminine sides – and comfortable with both. They choose as their friends and lovers smart self-confident girls, and they look up to their companions with an affection bordering on reverence. In addition, they are respectful of their gentle supportive male guardians.... However, the strong female role models who raised this new style of young man – namely the biological mothers – are missing. The erasure of the self-sacrificing mother figure forces a dynamic change and, in this iteration, inscribes the teen male as the suffering martyr with the text. This new hero, who at the same time can be unabashedly emotional and decidedly masculine, offers himself up each week for physical as well as emotional torture. (Banks 20)

As this new generation of young men is emotionally confident and eloquently able to convey insights without being weak losers, the contemporary teen hero is not "the shy, insecure, neurotic or effeminate teen male" (Banks 22) of the 50s melodrama anymore, but appears to fulfil the criteria of a best girlfriend as well as a boyfriend. He is strong on the outside, but soft on the inside and wise beyond his years. This can also be detected in the smart choice of his girlfriend, who has happened to be much less the blonde type in the last decades (meaning they are also far beyond the superficiality of looks) and who is welcomed to be at eye-level with him (cf. Banks 20 ff.). Furthermore, he has to have the "cuddle factor," meaning

long on head hair but sparse of body hair, and sad-eyed like the puppies with which they are so often photographed. In short, television teen idols must be male but not phallically male. Teen idols offer to girls objects of desire that are heterosexual but not overtly masculine or sexually threatening. These idols channel adolescent desire into a containable space. (Sweeney 51)

## LOOK WHO STAYED THE SAME – GIRLS

Characterizing boys and girls at the end of the last and the beginning of this century seems to be a twisting task as feminism and postmodernism have disturbed the universal guidelines of gender practised for centuries. Yet, taking a closer look at the prospects concerning gender today, one frequently has the impression that altered attitudes and behaviors are effusively supported at the surface while the old traditional ones are still floating buoyantly beneath. This trend can be especially experienced concerning the representation of females in television, where old thought systems seem to be constantly employed subliminally.

In Western culture, women thereby have always played this paradoxical role already mentioned before, which is naturally also reflected in contemporary media narratives:

The girl continues to be an ambivalent creation in her cultural context and for her intended audience, retaining her ability to act as a redemptive or threatening figure. Both heroic and vulnerable, she continues many of the negotiations begun by earlier girls, but with a post-modern, arguably post feminist twist. (Bavidge 50)

The rather easily manageable 'All American Girl' of teenage series emerged from books like *A Little Princess* (1904), *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) or *Little Women* (1868/1869) or the Enid Blyton adventure stories. To this day they are intelligent, independent and playful,<sup>29</sup> at least as much concerned with the struggles of their education and their personal fulfilment and identification process in life as with romance, albeit in the end – after having experienced their adventures – they need to go back into a life of domesticity. The former 'Be Good!' message has been transformed into a 'what it feels like to be a girl' statement due to the feminist and post-feminist period, though. Yet, Beverage reveals that the girl will become 'good' in the end by revealing her true role, optionally "the domestic angel, the dutiful daughter or the helpless romantic heroine," who will "prove to be a salvation of her community or family and particularly, of her father or father figure" (44 -45).

Nevertheless, the adolescent girl has at the same time always provoked a subliminal fear, when she is not that easily tangible and tameable. As "her identity, her body and sexuality, as well as her moral, physical and intellectual education – has been recognized as a site around which many of culture's concerns and anxieties

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<sup>29</sup> These are features reminding of Pocahontas.

cohere" (Bavidge 44), the 'media figure of the girl becoming a scary woman' has to be played down. One of these strategies is strongly connected to capitalism:

The body of the young girl – whether athlete or potential Miss America – is the site of heated battles, not only among parents ... but also among those who would exploit her sexuality, lure her to internalize their fantasies and purchase their products.... Told to develop her mind, she is simultaneously bombarded with messages that reinforce the ancient message that the body is the primary source of her power, that she is primarily decorative, that she should have a model's body, that she should be beautiful within a narrow range of cultural stereotypes. (Saxton xxi)

Therefore, consumer culture is not so much experienced as a means to gain the Spice Girls<sup>30</sup> promoted Girl Power, but rather it has to be seen as an entrapment, in which the right mascara reveals the right female role in society while covering up 'true nature' with make-up. This characteristic is one of the facets of the depiction of a 'Lolita.' For "Lolita's victimhood is associated with her seduction by the popular culture she adores, figured as slavish devotion to mass culture, itself feminine, frivolous and empty, and most often associated with teenage girls" (Bavidge 47).

Victimhood in general always has to be taken into consideration, when analysing media representation of women since they are desirable and horrifying to the same extent, leading to the assumption that "the traditional images have prevailed and continue to be circulated by a culture industry primarily interested in making profits by gambling with our subliminal sexual fantasies and reinforcing male notions of rape" (Zipes 93). This appears to be a very harsh argument. Yet, when examining the picture of women on television that self-confident, independent behavior is in quite a number of cases still subliminally undercut by storyline finales or means of production.

Hence, the media teenage girl growing to be a woman in Western societies has to face many obstacles, as she constantly has to encounter the "tensions between social and domestic duty, erotic desire versus family" (Bavidge 49).

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Nonetheless, in order to provide a fully colored picture, we now have to add another packthread to the carpet of analytical theory we are weaving, namely the position fixing of the Canadian mediascape.

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<sup>30</sup> This is a very popular British girl band of the 1990s.



## 5.9 THE KNOTTED – CANADIAN MEDIA INSTITUTIONS

\*\*\* **fact 1:** in 1949 there were 3,600 television sets in Canada – today it has more televisions than people (cf. Beaty 103) \*\*\* **fact 2:** in the year 2000 Canadians watched 22 hours television per week (cf. Fleras, *Mass* 136-137) \*\*\* **fact 3:** visible minorities made up 13.5 per cent of all characters, but only 10.3 per cent of primary characters (cf. Frankenberg quoted in Miller, M.J. *Outside* 45) \*\*\* **fact 4:** in 2003 Aboriginal people are in less than 1 per cent of the series although they are 14 per cent of the population in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (cf. quoted in Miller, M.J. *Outside* 46) \*\*\* **fact 5:** the most popular entertainment programs on Canadian television in 2006 were: *CSI*, *American Idol*, *CSI: Miami*, *Survivor*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *The Amazing Race*, *House* and *Criminal Minds* – *Corner Gas* on place 13 in the list was the only Canadian one in the top twenty (cf. Beaty 68) \*\*\*

Bhabha says that telling stories about a nation is an indispensable aspect of a nation's existence (1 ff.), and Peter Dahlgren is of the opinion that television "has become for better or worse, the major institution of the public sphere in a modern society" (x), while Kilpatrick states that television has

played a major part in the production of national symbols. As these symbols become part of each individual through the media, they effectively break down the separation between public and private, local and national. This produces a nationalist discourse, a primary function of which is to develop a national mythology of historical origin. (5)

Furthermore, television can serve as an indicator of the current relationship between national culture, media hegemony and the mass audience. Especially in terms of Canada, it therefore informs us in how far multiculturalism with all its facets of freedom, tolerance and respect for individual differences is practised in reality. The facts from the beginning of this section tell of the significance television possesses in Canadian society. It also tells about Canadians' ambivalence concerning its contents, though.

Positive critics like Druick state that Canadian TV represents itself as more authentic compared to its neighbor to the South for it promotes a heavy documentary influence, takes up contemporary topics more frequently and is proud of the avoidance of Hollywood's nostalgia (cf. 7 ff.). Besides, it is "less reliant on stereotypes and formulas, demands more engagement from the audience, works harder to activate the meanings from the text and has the courage to be more ambiguous and does not shy at an open

end" (Druick 7). On the contrary, Peter Kenter, who fondly wrote a book on Canadian television remembers

that the term 'Canadian television' conjures up few magical images and suggests all the charm of monotonous educational programming we were forced to sit through at school, when a television strapped to a towering metal cart wheeled into the classroom. 'Canadian television' suggests unfunny comedies pushing lame jokes top-loaded with Canadian references, and unfortunate documentaries about abandoned prairie towns and the dietary habits of northern denizens. It's the type of programming you'd swear was conceived by government bureaucrats instead of artists. It's programming so self-righteous beneath its Canadian-content halo that it doesn't care whether you enjoy it – or even watch it. (vii)

Due to this 'bureaucratic directed self-castigation,' Canada's having one of the most impressive telecommunications in the world for "a country sprawling and sparsely populated depends on media to construct a community, and television for many is the glue that connects our isolation" (Pevere n.p.), Canadian TV nevertheless seems to fail its major duty of bringing Canadian stories to Canadian people apart from the "dietary habits of northern denizens" (Kenter vii). According to Beaty and Sullivan, this image of irrelevance can be attributed to the "Beethoven vs. Aaron Spelling dilemma" (18), meaning that Canadian television is always in the need to balance sophisticated filming (which nobody wants to watch) with mere entertainment programs (actually being much too American and contemptible). Hence,

the key strategy of a distinctly Canadian television culture can be defined as one of middleness. Canadian television cannot be highbrow because those pretensions threaten to alienate the very audiences that nationalists seek to enlighten and bring into the fold. To create difficult programming would be in opposition to the values of multiculturalism, where plurality, democracy, and tolerance are at a premium. At the same time, Canadian television cannot be low because that is the position that we have ceded to the Americans, and the occupation of this position would fail to sufficiently distinguish Canada from ... the USA. Thus Canadian television achieves a middle position primarily through its definition of itself as neither/nor.... Fear of homogenization from our neighbors to the South helps support cultural policies that allow for a more subtle form of homogenization from within [Apparadurai 1990, 307]. Television, with its promises of attaining a pure expression of middleness, is a chief tool in this strategy (Beaty 20).

Yet, apart from the fact that in Canada, television is one of the most regulated and constantly examined media as it is the lifeline to the minds of a nation's people, which should not clog the national arteries with toxic content from somewhere else in the world (especially the South), the Canadian audience constantly throws a monkey wrench in the Canadian media bureaucratic works. For the average Canadian viewer thinks all by him/

herself<sup>31</sup> (cf. Beaty 10-11, 68-70): 'Yes, I want to support a distinct Canadian identity also on a media basis, but I really, really, really have to watch the new season of *Grey's Anatomy* and/or *CSI: Miami!*' and by doing so, simply resists watching what is good for him/her.

Canadian television has maneuvered itself into a cul-de-sac: it tries to keep out the American media flooding from the South and it does so by differentiating itself with highbrow programming and adhering to a national homogenization it does not possess in the first place. Therefore, it does not only spread the odor of inauthenticity but it is also not able to captivate the soul of its divergent citizens effectively. Beaty and Sullivan criticize that Canadian television leaders do not move "beyond the obsession with American competition to think not only more globally in terms of cultural flow, but also more locally in terms of audience participation." To them Canada is "once more missing a crucial opportunity to live up to its goals of multiculturalism and create, new, global ways of transforming television into a medium of communicative action" (136). Canadian television consequently has to stop clutching to a form of homogenization represented by a Westocentric mass audience, as television itself best reveals its strength as a media means of multiplicity and multiculturalism, for it may mirror Canada's postmodern idea of nation building quite well with its abilities in fragmentation and hybridization as Beaty and Sullivan find (136 ff.). But this seems to be a very hard task, indeed.

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<sup>31</sup> Proportionally more Canadians watch *America's Funniest Home Videos* than US Americans.

## 5.10 WHAT ABOUT CEASE FIRE? – MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADIAN TV

Punished with a low self-esteem in general Canadian television winds itself like a snake in terms of the representation of its minorities, and some would argue that exactly this is keeping Canadian television away from a confident image of self since it refuses to represent a multicultural Canada as it really is. Some minorities are highly accepted but others – less convenient ones – are framed as "a threat to the status quo, a risk to national interests, inconsistent with core values and institutions, and inimical to united and prosperous Canada" (Fleras, *Media* ii). Fleras for instance also finds that especially in news coverage (which is conceived as one of the most neutral media) "minority women and men are (a) misrepresented by being refracted through a white mainstream gaze, (b) denounced as social problems and outsiders that are eroding Canada's social fabric, and (c) criticized as 'others' in contrast with hardworking and law-abiding white Canadians" (*Media* 44). According to the average viewer, First Nations may occupy the pole position here.

Due to this pale male representation this kind of image also radiates to the roles minorities occupy in television series. Television makers have adopted different strategies for coping with the unpleasant situation of perceiving people just for the sake of it, but who in the end are not even considered part of the target group. Fleras describes these strategies in his work *Media and Minorities* (cf. 142-148): The first one originally applied in the 1950s, was invisibilizing minorities. This means the creation of television shows in which for instance a Native can never be found in the main cast, thus avoiding the question of having to deal with Native problems in Canada. When this policy got less effective over the years, stereotyping minorities became more common. It fit into television's narrative style (see "short cut computer screen icon[s]" (Wilson, C. 45)) as well as it kept minorities in their places, namely the ones the mainstream viewer had elaborated for them. Villains for instance were frequently likely to be cast as people of darker skins and harsher accents. Another mechanism to keep minorities in their given places in society while avocationally delivering an attractive action-filled plot, is problematizing them meaning that the distance between 'minority them' and 'mainstream us' is factiously widened and widened. When First Nations in news media are only represented as the successors of Oka activists, as defiant reclaimers of land, as brutal, cigarette smuggling gang members, the mainstream audience will then experience them

only as such. They are problem people, parasites in the state, and while this image is sold to the viewer as reality it is also strongly strengthened by television shows, in which one-dimensional Aboriginal characters open casinos non-stop, just to obtain money under false pretences greedily or filthy Native beggars linger on the sidewalk (cf. 142-146). Ornamentizing minorities became another tactic when Western societies in general felt obliged to be more tolerant:

Mainstream media tend to portray minority women and men as ornamental features of society. Rarely do they appear average, normal, tax-paying Canadians with a broad range of opinions on subjects that extend beyond their race or community. Rather, minority women and men tend to be trivialized ... as tokens in sorting out who gets what in society. This ornamentizing effect is achieved by casting minorities in roles that are meant only to amuse or embellish. Minorities are coupled with the exotic and sensual.... Most minority roles on television consist of bit parts, a kind of walking away from the camera. (Fleras, *Media* 146-147)

Considering the very successful show *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* for instance, based on a White woman living as one of the first doctors in the West at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seems quite logical that numerous Natives are involved in the plot. A neighboring tribe had been created. Yet, despite the fact that this series was considered as progressive, for Jane Seymour emerged as one of the first leading female performers in a series, it was nevertheless not progressive enough to present the Natives as more than part of the landscape surrounding the village of Colorado Springs (except for one character called Cloud Dancing, who was befriended with her and Sully, a White man close to the Cheyenne and later her husband). The last way of framing minorities according to White needs is the strategy of whitewashing them. As "whiteness was normally associated with acceptability while non-whiteness evoked menacing images of danger, pollution, or 'dirt'" (Fleras, *Media* 147), minorities tended to be airbrushed, to be washed clean, so to speak, in media, especially in advertising. "In an industry geared towards the creation of visually appealing images that tap into the fears and fantasies of the targeted audiences, advertisers insisted that their products be sanitized and bleached of colour for fear of alienating their primary (white) audience" (Fleras, *Media* 147). This leads to the assumption that the more Caucasian one looks the less intimidating he/she will appear and the more acceptance as well as negotiability he/she will provide. Although a trend towards diversified presence can be seen in the representation of minorities and although a modern society of today and especially multicultural Canada claims to promote acceptance, freedom and foremost tolerance nowadays, all of these different strategies are still widely practised in television.

[S]ubtle images that codify racial preferences remain in circulation. Differences are rarely taken seriously; preferred instead, is a kind of pretended pluralism that revels in surfaces rather than substance. People of colour are not fully accepted as equivalent to whites but as inferior or irrelevant in a society that endorses only an acceptable face of diversity (Fleras, *Media* 148).

Media narratives not only tell us what we obviously think and what our ideologies and attitudes are composed of but also that they constantly solidify them.

Considering this, Canada – with its multicultural demand concerning tolerance and its deeply discordant mass mediascape – becomes a playground of ambivalence, which seems to be screaming for examination. Besieged from the South with a superior media enemy spreading its Western stereotypes and being equipped with a depiction of its First Inhabitants running hot and cold in so far, as in the media circus they personify the 'Noble Other' as well as the 'Problem Other' one, Canadian television is left with the feeling that Aboriginal concerns are "too subtle, sensory, complex, spiritual and empherma" (Mander 78) to be tackled seriously. Or as it is stated in Canadian media, First Nations bear the official approved stamp of being "safe, exotic and somewhere else" (Switzer 21-22). After all, Canada placed minorities and especially First Nations in a Catch-22 situation as

minorities were criticized for being too different, yet chided for not being different enough. They were taken to task for aspiring to be the same yet vilified when falling outside the audience comfort zone of safe, squeaky clean, and accessible. Minorities were praised for their diversity, but too much difference was deemed contrary to national interests. They were expected to make a positive contribution to society yet criticized as too pushy if successful. (Fleras, *Mass* 288)

Notwithstanding, they are prepared to fight their media Native Wars.

## NATIVE WARS

Canada's mainstream media have been accused of harbouring a love-loathe relationship with minority women and men. To one side, media rely on minorities as content for narratives, an angle for spicing up a story, a catalyst for driving plot lines, a foil for showcasing main characters, and spicy ingredient for imparting a dash of colour to an otherwise pallid cultural package. To the other, minorities are subject to dislike by mainstream media because of their status as the 'other.' Repeated references to minorities as irrelevant, inferior, or unmarketable contribute to their marginality in the mainstream media and society at large. In between these poles are intermediate positions that reflect a fundamental ambivalence. (Fleras, *Mass* 285)

First Nations in particular have been kept in media prisons as Canada, the country characterizing itself as the country most favoring differences in the world, rather sticks to casting everyone the same or saying it differently – difference is good as long as it is not too different, which again means that gliding within the winds of Westocentrism is desirable. Canadian television not being more different from most mainstream television in the world does not seem to be able to give up its pale male views.

Consequently, Aboriginal people have to stay in their small media niches, where they are supposed to fulfill narrow roles meaning that if a Native actor is cast for a show, he/she will probably also play a Native character – preferably in buckskin. In order not to confuse anyone (White), they were (still are) frequently portrayed as "(1) pure, innocent, mindlessly ecological, vulnerable, and like in children in need of government protection, (2) violent threatening savages and in need of government control, (3) hapless victims with problems that require government assistance, (4) whooping and silly one-dimensional warriors and independent nations outside of government jurisdiction" (Mihe-suah quoted in Fleras, *Mass* 285).

So how are minority women and men gaining back control over their images? Images they themselves often have been facing in such a permanent way that differentiating between reality and image may have become a vague venture? Furthermore, what about television concerning this undertaking? On the one hand it cannot be ignored, as it has to be seen as one of the most important windows to the world (cf. Hicketier 50) opening a view to ways of living, which in the end may influence people's general ideologies. On the other hand, television has in the same instance been the "short cut computer icon"-favoring enemy (Wilson, C. 45) since the day the first 'Stoic Indian' put his hand to his forehead, for it – stoically itself – has been spitting out stereotyped, one-dimensional pictures for a long time. Nevertheless, television is supposed to be a democratic storyteller and a "transmodern teacher" (Hartley,

"Democratainment" 525) and therefore predestined to serve the needs of a storytelling culture to tell its "touchstone stories" (Fleras, *Mass* 135).

## THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

An acceptable televised representation of First Nations in Canada has been and still is a very tottery walk on a very tensely spanned tightrope. Different measures have been taken from the different sides of this rope. Yet, one recurrently has the impression that this rope is constantly in danger of tangling up and strangling a given victim. Notwithstanding, series with or even on First Nations have been created since the late 50s in Canada, such as *Radisson* (1957-58), in which Aboriginals were played by Whites with bad make-up, *The Beachcombers* (1972-1990), on the way to representing First Nations more realistically by having the Native Jesse Jim as a protagonist resembling a figure walking between the White and the Aboriginal worlds, or *Spirit Bay* (1986-87), which was set on a reservation. A Native way of problem solving could never be employed before the 1990s, though, as it would not fit the typical TV plot lines.

The most popular show in Canadian TV, however, was *North of 60* (1992-97), which was based on a Native community in the small town of Lynx River coping with 'typical' Native problems of unemployment, HIV, alcoholism, etc. While the show was praised as the first program depicting First Nations hitches for the bright Canadian public on a prime time basis and integrating them into Canadian mediascape, contrary voices were also heard, as for example Drew Hayden Taylor criticized that "each episode became a tour-de-force for dysfunctionism" (*Funny* 89). For the members of this community had to face virtually every imaginable Native problem several times within its six seasons while the protagonists at the same time seemed to have been obliged with a penalty in case they dared to laugh or even smile.

So again, Native mentality appears to have fallen prey to television mechanisms of storyline and computer-icon character building. Apart from the additional fact that the main character happened to be a White Mountie, who was sent out into the wild bush to provide "the conditions for the restoration of order and balance" (Bignell (2008) 130). Thereby he was representing "[White] values acceptable to the [White] audience as the consensus of view of right and wrong, and by his ... actions show[ing] how [White]



ideological, common sense justice works in practise to keep [Native] society on a more or less normal and comfortable track" (Bignell (2004) 130).<sup>32</sup>

Taylor also states that the world for Aboriginal screenwriters is a jungle as they, according to White financiers, optionally write in a too Native style or a not Native enough one. Due to that development, Taylor asks himself if there happens to be an "Aboriginal suitable quotient" (*Funny* 68), which Aboriginal writers constantly fail to meet. Taking a look at the 'screenwriting situation' concerning Native television in general and the shows to be analysed in specific, we may keep in mind that according to First Inhabitants' problematic sociological background of being a forgotten minority, First Inhabitants working in the entertainment business have been 'a rare commodity' for a very long time, as creative and talented Natives were barely nurtured.

Nonetheless, times are changing. First Nations' potentials are acknowledged and promoted while they are intervening and taking over their broadcasting responsibilities: today's television shows on Natives tend to be created in mixed teams of well-matching professionals (as is generally common in the television production apparatus), yet hardly without Native input at its very basis. Be it in form of screenwriting, directing, financing, consulting, producing, etc., in this new millennium those shows have to pass a Native filter of Aboriginal demands first. Thereby, a trenchantly interacting production-collaboration consisting of Canadians with different backgrounds may serve a round, three-dimensional, in-depth plot line adjusted to Canada's multicultural zeitgeist much more than sometimes assumed.

Apart from screenwriters, actors have to deal with typical problems already mentioned before as well, as they are in most cases reduced to playing pale male-favored stereotypical horse riding 'Noble Savages' of a long lost past. These roles do mostly inherit an irrevocably given "typology of character signs" (Butler 36) (for instance: name: Flying Bird, Black Wolf, etc., appearance: long black hair, bow and arrow) and leave very little room for personal performance. Nonetheless, one of the most popular Native actors Rodney A. Grant (*Wind in his Hair* in *Dances with Wolves*) got used to this: "I've to feed my family.... If I'm going to be an actor, then I've got to take the roles that are offered to me.... I accept that the story is being told from a White point of view because basically if a non-Indian hadn't told the story, then the story wouldn't have gotten made" (Kilpatrick 215).

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<sup>32</sup> This fortunately slightly changed in later seasons when Native Michelle Kenidi (Tina Keeper) was finally upgraded from RCMP Constable to Corporal, gaining more responsibilities (yet steadily accompanied by a White Officer).

## RETURN OF THE NATIVES

Canada is presenting an alternative and much more powerful means for its Aboriginals to regain control over their Native image: APTN has been populating



Fig. 5.2. APTN: is not only hosting fictional series but also News...

Canada's complicated mediascape since 1999 via cable, and it is available in over 10 million Canadian households. As a national television network exclusively dedicated to Aboriginal programming, it is on a legally approved "crusade for justice and equality" (Fleras (2007)). It counter-reflects the public opinion spread by much large-scale media and celebrates minority success, accomplishments and

aspirations.

Moreover, it serves as a "secure haven from the stereotyping and distortions that abound in mainstream media" (Fleras, "Ethnic" n.p.). Thereby, it flouts mere capitalistic ambitions as commercial "bottom-line mentality will invariably clash with minority demands for balanced and contested coverage, given media preference for moralization over context, conflict over co-operation, the episodic over the contextual, personalities over issues" (Fleras, "Ethnic" n.p.). In doing so, it builds bridges "connecting the 'here with the there,' by ways of the 'in between'" (Fleras, "Ethnic") and at the same time creates "a nationwide media space to heal the historical communication ruptures within society" (Roth 257). Heather Norris Nicholson also stresses that First Nations with their will to adjust to current circumstances have been occupying the New Media effectively over the last decades:



Fig. 5.3. ... children's programs ...

Indigenous peoples now find that modern screens ... offer unprecedented opportunities for making themselves more visible. Various kinds of screen constitute

an accessible visual space that not only helps to overcome earlier processes of cultural subordination but offers persuasive means for fostering alternative images and identities of modern Aboriginality.... As they offer new ways of constructing cultural identities through visual imagery, they refocus attention on and beyond the legacies of exclusion, stereotyping, and misappropriation that colonialism long helped to build. (1)

APTN has taken its job seriously. It attempts to strengthen the broken souls of Canadian Natives, fights to put Native (media) depiction in the right perspective and hereby states that it does not only want to be a Native storyteller but is happy to "tell the stories to all Canadian people" ([aptn.ca](http://aptn.ca)). Such being the case, it tries to walk the tightrope between being an anchor for Natives in search of their identity (and therefore it has to take a position which may be quite progressive and uncomfortable for the mainstream public at times). Yet, it wants to incorporate this in many cases ignorant public at the same time in order to make it understand. Furthermore, it offers the prospect of keeping the Canadian Aboriginals from being forgotten in making them constantly visible on screen while at the same time is trying to fill the gap between traditional storytelling (by the Native elder) and the (post)-modern one (television).

Although APTN constantly has to fight for broad acknowledgement in the reality of the Canadian mediascape, Canada with its ambiguous way of dealing with



Fig. 5.4. ... documentaries, cooking shows and everything else to be expected of a major national channel

multiculturalism and Natives has nevertheless to be given credit for creating the space for an exclusively Aboriginal television channel, which has been given the opportunity to

seek the balance between its individual autonomously shaped representation and its insertion into Canadian society.

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And now we will find out in how far this taken for granted medium with the superficial ambition to reflect our reality and the underlying one of pleasing the masses is able to find a balance concerning a proper representation of Canada's First Nations. Nearly all of the criteria to be employed seem to be triggers for an ambivalent vicious circle:

television is a good-willed, teaching communicator selflessly offering a window to the world (cf. Hicketier 50) in order to bring people together in the poor conversation microcosm of family life as well as the unknown macrocosm of a multicultural, multi-class society by creating a common televised history for all

BUT

television needs to keep it "safe, simple and familiar" (Fleras, *Mass* 146) to encourage mass audience purchase behavior

BUT

First Nations do not fulfill the criteria of being a mass audience (cf. Fleras)

CONSEQUENTLY

First Nations are condensed to one-dimensional, computer-icon images (cf. Wilson, C. 45), which have been solidified by techniques of production based on Western Narratives for a very long time

AND

although a multicultural country, Canada's mediascape (like most Western ones) is strongly based on these television strategies

CONSEQUENTLY

in order to appeal to a broad public, television makers (if Native or not), having the ambition to change the picture of Canada's Aboriginals for the better, must walk a tightrope as they have to adopt these strategies at least to some extent to create a change in people's minds in the long run

AND

this can be achieved by employing fictional television shows for they appear to be light fare, as – due to their teaching effect and their narrative strategies of penetration – they may have consistent positive effects on the average viewer and the psyche of the injured Native communities as well

AND

television is a good-willed, teaching communicator selflessly offering a window to the world (cf. Hicketier 50) in order to bring people together in the poor conversation microcosm of family life as well as the unknown macrocosm of a multicultural, multi-class society by creating a common televised history for all

BUT

television needs to keep it "safe, simple and familiar" (Fleras, *Mass* 146) to encourage mass audience purchase behavior

BUT

First Nations do not fulfill the criteria of being a mass audience

etc.

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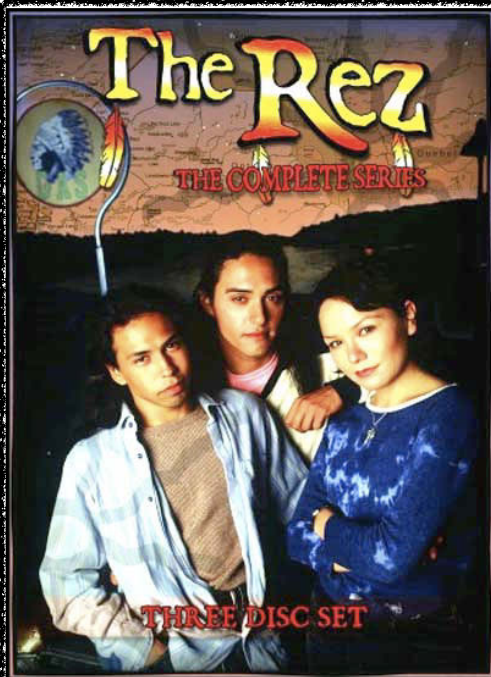
In the upcoming part, we will discuss five shows set in Native environments: two dramas called *renegadepress.com* and *Moccasin Flats* and three sitcoms called *The Rez*, *Hank Williams First Nation* and *Moose TV*. It will be the major goal to find out in how far these shows are burdened with this vicious circle, meaning with the handicaps of typical television series' mechanisms on the technical as well as the ideological basis in general and with the clutter in the Canadian mediascape in specific. Before, Natives were forced to write in the conquerer's tongue to make their voices heard, and now they have to wed the conquerer's new favorite media family member, television in order to become visible. How do the shows deal with obstacles concerning this amalgamation? Do they submit to them, make fun of them, or even invent new ways to change First Nations' media imagery profoundly, and therefore finally manage to break the circle not only in media fiction but also in reality? Do they manage to perform a natural adaptability of mass media to guarantee a great amount of visibility? How does authenticity fit in there? Do they succeed in putting typical genre stereotypes into a natural Native context? And what about the dealings with the everlasting Indian short cut computer screen icons (cf. Wilson, C. 45)? Are they taken up or ignored? How are Native traditionalism, Western narratives and pop culture set into relation with each other? In the end, it all comes down to this question: Are the contemporary commercial series on Native people able to modify Aboriginal images for the better in a sustainable way? However, up to this point in Canadian society, colonial-shaped bias on Natives has not yet been redefined yet.

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On the basis of the three anthropological branches of over-sexualizing, un-mapping and dis-teaching First Nations, we will now find out in how far television shows are able to down-sexualize, re-map and re-teach Canadian Aboriginal culture. To accomplish this, five TV series on Natives are analysed. Before, the shows and crews will shortly be introduced.

# THE CREWS

## THE REZ



is a domestic comedy with dramatic elements premiering on CBC (a national public network) in 1996 (6 episodes) and being renewed for a second season in 1997 (13 episodes). Now the half hour format is regularly broadcasted on APTN. The episodes were scripted by John Frizzel and Native Executive Story Editor Jordan Wheeler (*renegadepress.com*, *North of 60*). The First Nations actors were experienced as "director observers on the set," while Frizzel saw himself more as a facilitator than a writer (cf. Miller, M.J. 199). Executive Producers were Bruce McDonald and Norman Jewison.

Preceding the television series was a movie called *Dance Me Outside* (Director Bruce McDonald) from 1995, which was based on the book of the same name by Canadian author W.P. Kinsella.

Yet, both the movie and the series correspond only loosely to the literary text as well as to each other, creating their own story lines and plots.

*The Rez* is set on a small reserve in the Canadian bush. It is rather untroubledly run by a Cree community, an 'average' Canadian 'small town' neighborhood of more or less wise Elders and a more or less vibrant youth searching for fun, love, easy money, themselves and a purpose in life. The main cast is a group of four young people, Silas, Frank, Sadie and Lucy, who are either friends or lovers. They are surrounded by a mostly elder minor cast of caring mothers, a medicine woman, a rather corrupt chief and a White outsider Femme Fatale. Although there is constant quarrel between the different 'rez' members because of their strongly divergent character traits and mentalities, the community in general is a quite healthy one. People care for, advise and support each other no matter whether they are relatives or not. Even though the setting is kept rather unpretentious, indicating a lower class neighborhood with little income and rather modest needs, *The Rez* does generally not answer t typical prejudices concerning the public opinion on First Nations. Families are barely complete, yet delinquencies, gang life, drug abuse and prostitution are not to be found. Small town life on the reserve is determined by the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

"*The Rez* dares to go where no other series about Native life has gone. Into the quicksand of humour ... leaving the viewer howling. And thinking" (Lyn Cockburn, *Calgary Sun*, 24 September 1997).



**Silas Crow (Ryan Rajendra Black)**



is the main protagonist and recurring voice-over of *The Rez*. He has a cohabitational relationship with his best friend Frank – both of the for the 'Infantile Sidekick Tontos,' much to his long-time girlfriend Sadie's sorrow. Furthermore, Silas lives with his caring mother Simone and his mentally retarded brother Joseph. While he happens to be a scallywag in the beginning of the show, he nevertheless finally hears his call and becomes the storyteller of his community in the end.

**Frank Fencepost (Darrell Dennis)**



is the other member of the 'Infantile Sidekick Tonto'-duo. Apart from having an on/off relationship with Sadie's friend Lucy, Frank is mainly dedicated to his best buddy Silas, and is far from any serious professional goals in life. He rather spends his daily routine with hanging around, doing some occasional jobs or practising his vocation of being a connoisseur in the art of living. As Silas notes once, Frank is a modern trickster. Notwithstanding, he has to be considered as a nerve-racking but good-at-heart person.

**Sadie Maracale (Jennifer Podemski)**



is Silas' mature girlfriend and a 'political animal.' As 'Pocahontian Warrior' she presents herself as an activist, intransigently fighting for Native issues on a small scale – being an assistant to Chief Tom on the reserve – as well as on a big scale as a Native Youth delegate. In contrast to Silas and Frank, Sadie lives for the ambitious goal to change the world for the better for Canada's First Nations. Thereby she sometimes unwittingly tramples on the feelings of the beloved persons surrounding her.



### **Lucy Pegamegaaba (Tamara Podemski)**



is Sadie's best friend and has been Frank's girlfriend for years. She is strong willed and full of ambitions longing for the big stage as she wants to become an actress and a singer. Therefore, Lucy finally breaks up with Frank for good and leaves the reserve to 'make it' in the big city of Toronto.

### **Mad Etta (Elaine Miles)**



is a medicine woman. Being exceptionally wise, she is frequently asked for advice but is also feared for the powers given to her by the ancient traditions. Silas and Frank believe that "she has eyes on the back of her head." Of all the people living on the reserve Etta is the one having the exclusive link to the mystic world, therefore she is the well accepted counselor, guardian and healer of the community.

### **Chief Tom Brightstar (Gary Farmer)**



is the reserve's man in charge. Notwithstanding, he practically never does anything beneficial for his community but rather lines his own pocket. Furthermore, he mostly strikes the viewer as being lazy or absent (due to his golf engagements) whenever he is needed, leaving the unwelcome tasks to others like his assistant Sadie.

**Eleanor Nanabush (Patricia Collins)**



is the woman in charge of the reserve's only bar and gas station. Although she is new and insists on being the outsider of the community, she is not because of the color of her skin but because of her apparent contempt for humankind in general, leading to a permanent snubbing of her surroundings. As 'Trailer Park Tramp' alike Eleanor appears to be overdressed, egocentric, selfish, loud and implacable. Yet, deep inside she is a good person.

**Joseph Crow (Herbie Barnes)**



is Silas' mentally retarded brother and second son of Simone. Having kept a child-like behavior, Joseph is the well-protected sunshine of the reserve's community, who is adored by everybody living there, and who will be defended with life and limb, when Canadian officials attempt to take him away into social custody.

**Simone Crow (Shirley Cheechoo)**



is the life experienced mother of Silas, Joseph and an elder sister, but literally she fulfills a nurturing function concerning all adolescent characters as Frank and Sadie are also constantly supplied with food as well as with advice. Simone's past was shaped by alcohol and drugs and the loss of her husband and father of her children. Yet, she has overcome all of the obstacles in her life and managed to raise her children all by herself evolving as a wise, strong, confident and trustworthy woman.

## MOCCASIN FLATS



is a hybrid form of a drama series with action and police as well as teen show and soap elements. It ran for three seasons on APTN as well as on Showcase (a popular cable television speciality channel) between

2003-2006. The half-hour format consists of 2x8 episodes (seasons 2 and 3) and 1x6 episodes (season 1), and is based on the successful short film of the same name from 2002. It was nominated for diverse Gemini Awards (the Canadian Emmy Awards). It is the first TV show which was exclusively created, written and performed by a Native production team in North America. Executive Producers and Creators were Laura J. Milliken and actress Jennifer Podemski (Sadie from *The Rez*) with Big Soul Productions Inc., redcloud studios and Stephen Onda Productions Inc.. Stacy Curtis, Rob W. King, Dwayne Beaver were Directors amongst others while Penny Gummerson (*renegadepress.com*) was a Writer for instance. APTN was involved in the production process, too.

The show is set in the North Central district of the Canadian metropolis Regina, which is almost exclusively inhabited by Natives of various Nations. Rather left alone, the community in the 'Flats' lives in a ghetto atmosphere being determined by gang life, drug abuse and prostitution. Yet, the characters can be divided into two different camps, whereby lines are constantly crossed. One group consists of dealers, pimps and prostitutes, who are making or following the harsh rules of street life. Set against this are wise Elders, social workers, police officers as well as a decent youth, trying to live a proper daily life right next to the horrors and tragedies surrounding them. The strongest and longest fights and border crossings are committed by prostitute Candy (who becomes a social worker), her weak Hip Hop boyfriend Red, police officer Amanda and music producer Michael. They all have to cope with the later re-integrating pimp John and other fallen adolescents. The general atmosphere constantly switches between domestic and brutal while the characters deal with love relationships and true friendships as intensely as with malpractice and crime solving.

"The Hood is a horror show, plain and simple. Which is why this series is so interesting--it doesn't pull any punches about life in that area" (fan (<http://www.turtleisland.org/discussion/viewtopic.php?t=1206>)).

**Matthew Merasty (Matthew Strongeagle)**



is the good-hearted, puppy eyed-boy of the show. In contrast to the other characters, he can be considered as a quite morally stable member of the community, who supports his neighborhood by setting up a Native Hip Hop label or teaching children in a drum class. Matthew lives a traditionally based, balanced life with his aunt Betty. After his best friend Dylan has left the 'Flats,' he falls in love with Tara, the girlfriend of

his arch enemy Jon.

**Candy (Candace Fox)**



starts off the show as a merciless prostitute 'Hoe Squaw,' who is addicted to all kinds of drugs and is HIV positive. Later she escapes from life on the streets and tries to become a decent person in order to get back her baby daughter, who has been taken away from her. Learning it the hard way, she will finally become a 'Pocahontian Warrior,' who manages to find redemption in Native traditionalism as well as in her boyfriend

Red (at least for a while) and in her profession of becoming a social worker.

**Const. Amanda Strongeagle (Andrea Menard)**



is the show's 'Gay Pocahontian Cop-Warrior.' Amanda is strong-willed, fearless and brave in her job of defending law and order in the streets of the 'Flats' while her personal life constantly tends to fall to pieces as she is not able to lead healthy romantic relationships with the women she likes.



### **Jonathan 'Jon' Bearclaw (Landon Montour)**



is the community's leading pimp and drug dealer living a relentless 'Hip Hop-Gangsta' lifestyle at the expense of his prostitutes like Candy, Dana or Sarah. Later, he attempts to clean up his act for the well-being of his girlfriend Tara and their son Ethan, but reverts to the bad behavior of drug dealing again, finally ending behind bars for good.

### **Red (Ron Harris)**



is a promising Hip Hop artist, who will eventually be signed by Michael's record label. Red's past corresponds well to the 'Gangsta Hip Hop' lyrics he writes, as we learn that he has been in jail for "being an Indian." Deep in his heart, he is good-natured, for he proves himself as Michael's friend and main artist and as an affectionate boyfriend to Candy. Notwithstanding, he is not able to resist temptations leaving him wasted,

alone and drug dealing in the end.

### **Tara (Sarah Podemski)**



starts off as Jon's ingenuous girlfriend and caring mother of his child giving him a second chance after he gave up to his harsh pimp life. Yet while he betrays her, she falls in love with good-guy Matthew whom she then leads quite a fulfilling relationship with.

**Dillon Redsky (Justin Toto)**



is a kind young man, who is offered the opportunity to escape the 'Flats' with a basketball scholarship. Being raised rather traditionally and being Michael's best friend, he is nevertheless getting in with bad company as his romantic relationship with Jon's prostitute Sarah breaks apart. Finally Dillon has to decide whether he wants to start a promising future or not.

**Sarah (Kristin Friday)**



is one of Jon's prostitutes but she has been trying to slip away from living on the streets as she has already abandoned drugs while finding the strength to escape within the relationship to Dillon. Although they break up in the end, his love for her becomes her last exit. She manages to take her life into her own hands and leaves the 'Flats' for good to start over in Vancouver.

**Danna (Danna Henderson)**



arrives in the Flats as a young, naive girl who had to deal with a broken family all her life. She will be beguiled by Candy and later by Jon, who forces her to join his prostitute crew, thereby giving way to her development from an innocent, wide-eyed teenager to the stoney-hearted female pimp she becomes in the end.

## HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION



is a half-hour sitcom regularly airing on APTN since 2007. After the movie *Hank Williams First Nation* had been very popular in Canada in 2005, a spin off was created in the form of a season run of 6 episodes. The setting and most of the

characters were kept, but some actors changed. The show was written and produced by Aaron James Sorensen and co-produced by Métis Ron E. Scott. Furthermore, it was created in association with APTN.

The series revolves around an isolated Cree neighborhood in Northern Alberta called Wapahoo Nation which spends its daily routine quite untouched by the Canadian state in general. Family bonds and cooperativeness are strong while the small town habitants resolve typical everyday problems. Thereby a group of adolescents, Huey, Jacob and Sarah, predominantly deal with classic teenage troubles like having crushes or finding goals in life. They are watched over by the wise Elders of the community, who themselves are confronted with quirky trials and tribulations of daily life. The atmosphere is whimsical and very life-affirming, which can be ascribed to a very beautiful landscape and a cozy, pastel colored town as well as to the characters' unique charms and their self-deprecating love for Country Music. Consequently, this music constantly plays on their autonomously run radio station, thereby backing up the name of the show: *Hank Williams* (one of the most popular Country Musicians in the world) *First Nation*.

"One easy way to be sensational is to be very heavy and dark. The other way is to be funny and touching and smart. Which is what I'm trying to do" (Creator and Director Sorensen (<http://www.canada.com/reginaleaderpost/features/takingcentrestage/news/story.html?id=97013c23-73df-4b51-9dcb-dbf6c15d5aa6&k=67077.com>)).

**Huey Bigstone (Sheldon Elter)**



'is one part of the 'Multi-Colored Sidekick-Smoothie-Duo' together with his best friend Jacob. Huey enjoys his life in Wapahoo to the greatest extent as he – being a jack-of-all-trades – is not only a part time DJ, an event manager and an ice-cream truck owner but also successfully turns the head of Jacob's sister Sarah. Huey can be considered as the prototype of a cheerful soul, who can – although he stumbles from time to time –

always count on the childish charms of his Cheshire Cat smile.

**Jacob Fox (Colin Van Loon)**



is the other member of the 'Multi-Colored Sidekick-Smoothie-Duo' since he mostly spends his time with his best friend Huey. Thereby Jacob always gets involved in Huey's lightheaded schemes having to pay for their failures as well. In contrast to his sister Sarah he rather appears to be quite dumb, therefore he is constantly in need of his grandfather Adi's supervision and physical as well as mental support.

**Sarah Fox (Teineil Whiskeyjack)**



becomes the prototype of a 'Pocahontian Cinderella' as she, although she is very ambitious and intelligent, is at the same time beyond the feminism of the 'Pocahontian Warrior' since she also gives up to typical feminine characteristics of emotionality and bewilderment. This especially becomes obvious every time problems concerning her crush on Huey occur. Notwithstanding, supported by her

grandfather Adi, her grandmother, her brother Jacob and even Huey, she sets her hand to the task of going to college in Montreal, a goal confronting her with a trauma triggered off by the bitter 'Outré Siren' Monique, who teaches her the French language.



### **Uncle Martin (Jimmy Herman)**



is Jacob's and Sarah's great uncle and in contrast to his active, counseling brother Adi the purest prototype of a 'Stoic Indian,' as he never ever talks and just inspects the scene his arms folded on his chest. He seems to be completely unworldly and over-challenged with today's culture, except for Country Music and Hank Williams, whom he adores deeply. Martin is a very likeable character who constantly gives the impression that he is by far wiser than he tends to convey.

### **Adelard Fox (Gordon Tootosis)**



is Jacob's and Sarah's grandfather and together with his wife the legal guardian of the two. Yet, he not only parents his grandchildren but as the kind soul of Wapahoo, and as a typical wise and trustworthy Elder, he constantly gives a helping hand by offering respectful advice and sharing his life experiences.

### **Chief Chicken-Wings (Raymond Carifelle)**



has been Wapahoo's Chief for years. He appears to be a quite phlegmatic, unworldly person yet he is deeply respected by the community for his constant engagement and his reliability.

## MOOSE TV



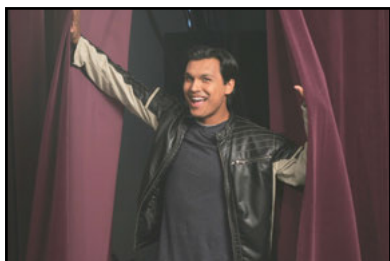
is a sitcom which consists of 8 episodes running half an hour, which premiered on Showcase in 2007 and is now broadcasted on APTN. The show was produced by Co-creators and Executive Producers Ernie Webb and Catherine Bainbridge who had filmed dramas

and documentaries about Native life in Canada before. The team also included Director Tim Southam (*One Dead Indian*) and Novelist/Scriptwriter Paul Quarrington.

The show is about a quirky Cree small town modest in appearance called Moose, somewhere in the Northern Quebec bush. People of all ages are humble and rather slow, letting the corrupt chief Gerry make the rules (except for the 'New Age-Indian Wannabe' Joan). This changes when his hyperactive lost son George returns after years of absence and stirs up the community by re-activating an abandoned governmental donated local TV studio. The inhabitants then blossom and enrich the programming with creative shows representing their life in Moose. Each episode revolves around a different format like soap opera, reality show, etc., most of them put in a Native context. *Moose TV* thereby takes an ironical look behind the scenes of local TV stations. Conflicts mostly concerning the shows' content, production and financing become major topics. Also personal relationships between George, his best friend Clifford and their crushes Robin and Alice as well as trouble with George's estranged father drive the action.

"We allude to a few things [Native issues] but it's done in a comedic way. We're not beating a drum, if you will, to send a message across. We're just being silly and having a good time" (Ernie Webb, Creator and Co-producer (<http://www.moosetv.ca/prodnotes01.html>)).

### **George Keeshig (Adam Beach)**



comes back to his small home town after a seemingly excessive life in the big city and immediately takes over the tiny broadcasting station, thereby becoming the cheesy and cocky 'Boyish TV Wannabe,' who – when the viewer takes a closer look- appears to be quite dumb and definitely clueless. Nevertheless, this does not keep George from behaving like the Big Boss. Therefore, his formerly best friend Clifford and his 'to-be-girlfriend'

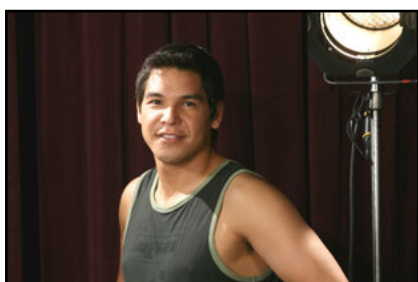
Robin are constantly in need of restraining him from endlessly spreading silly ideas while his father Major Gerry persistently attempts to put a spoke into his personal as well as his broadcasting wheel.

### **Robin Cheechoo (Michelle Latimer)**



has also moved from the big city to Moose, but in contrast to George's party reputation, it is rumoured that she has become a nun due to her innocent prudish appearance and behavior. Nevertheless, the 'Pocahontian Nun' is quite professional concerning her job at the broadcasting station, possessing the strength and intelligence to frequently bring her secret crush George down to earth again.

### **Clifford Mathew (Nathaniel Arcand)**



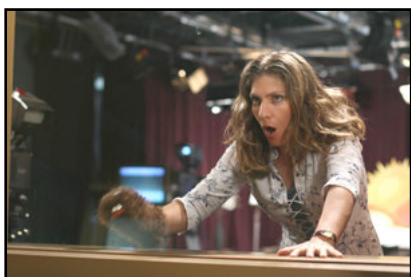
has stayed in Moose, in contrast to his childhood friend George, whereby the friendship of the two fell apart because of their recent contrasting living circumstances. Unlike George, Clifford is an even-tempered person, who believes in traditional Native values and therefore – better than George – he immediately discerns the possibilities Moose TV has to offer the community.

**Gerry Keeshig (Gary Farmer)**



'is George's estranged father and Mayor of Moose – and indeed a quite bad one as he is a typical authoritative and greedy politician, money-mad to that extent that he even tries to secretly turn the community's Sacred Spot into a tourist sight, which will in the end be exposed by 'Indian-Wannabe' Joan Littlebear Whitney and her beaver.

**Joan Littlebear Whitney (Diane Flacks) and Beaver**



'are inextricable linked with each other by Joan's hand, yet Beaver seems live a rather independent existence as he tends to state delicate issues on his own, although he hides under the cover of being a juvenile teaching puppet. Notwithstanding, as does not live in Sesame Street, his children's program frequently slips into accusations concerning the misconduct of Moose's locales.

Topics which stick in Joan's craw as she – being a typical White New Ager disappointed by the Western style of living – has adopted a kind of Native traditionalism she as only White member of the community exclusively and obtrusively performs. Still – despite her nerve-racking behavior – Beaver and she herself are perfectly accepted.

**Ernie (Chief Leonard George)**



'is a well-respected unflappable (stoic) Elder member of the community, who hosts the television show 'Ernie Makes a Drum' in which he – surprisingly – builds a drum, but according to his own rules and not the broadcasting production ones, thereby driving action-loving George insane.



## RENEGADEPRESS.COM



is a half hour teen drama, which has been regularly broadcasted on APTN since 2004, it premiered on Global TV (private television network) in 2008. The show has over 5 seasons (13, 9, 9, 13 and 8 episodes), the last one first airing in 2008. It has been awarded 2 Gemini Awards. The show was amongst others funded by APTN while it was produced by Vérité Films and created by Robert de Lint and Virginian

Thompson. Supervising Producer Jordan Wheeler (*North of 60*, *The Rez*), Consulting Producer Sara Snow and contributing Writers Carol Greyeyes and Penny Gummerson (*Moccasin Flats*) were also part of the production team.

The main cast consists of a spectrum of inner city teenagers attending the same high school, who share interest in creating a 'counselling' underground ezine (an internet magazine) called renegadepress.com. The series deals with typical, sometimes delicate, current youth issues like every form of drug abuse, mobbing, teenage suicide, anorexia, love sickness, etc. These problems are normally investigated, solved and morally illuminated in one episode, often by the main protagonists Zoey and Jack. According to Canadian multiculturalism the show attaches great value to all kinds of cultures and nationalities. Therefore, the cast is Chinese, Polish, Indian, Iranian, Swedish, Black, Spanish, etc. Special emphasis is put on the Native Jack and his family, though, whose traditions as well as typical First Nations conflicts and difficulties are given insight into in particular.

"We're not a cookie-cutter show. It deals with a lot of serious issues that a lot of shows won't address. It speaks to the audience, letting them know they aren't alone in their struggle to find their happiness" (Ksenia Solo (Zoey) (<http://www.renegadepress.com/static/about/show/renegade.php>)).

**Jack Sinclair (Bronson Pelletier)**



As trustworthy, 'Puppy Eyed Indian' is the show's main male protagonist. Having moved from the reserve to the big town to live with his father Wayne and his sister Crystal some time before, he has built up quite a healthy social network in his new world. Jack is extremely fair-minded and honest and has created a website called [renegadepress.com](http://renegadepress.com) together with his friend Zoey, which has become the main social platform of his high school. Furthermore, Jack is a Hip Hop artist.

**Zoey Jones (Ksenia Solo)**



appears as the typical all 'Canadian Girl.' She is doll-like and graceful, yet very self-confident, veracious and one of her main characteristics may be her love for justice. She and Jack are not only best friends administering and writing for their ezine [renegadepress.com](http://renegadepress.com), they are also involved in a constant on/off romantic relationship. Later, after having broken up with Jack and after her parents have been divorced she begins to fall apart and becomes a 'Cam-Hog Lolita.' She gets addicted to alcohol, which she finally manages to overcome with Jack's help, which gives her the chance to become a professional dancer after high school.

**Nicole (Teineil Whiskeyjack)**



As Jack's first girlfriend on the reserve he used to live on with his mother. When they finally meet again some years later they fall in love a second time and Nicole as 'Cam-Shy-Anti-Pocahontas' is starring in Jack's first Hip Hop video involuntarily playing the 'Pretty Pocahontas.' Nonetheless, Nicole is a very confident, realistic person as she has been experiencing the harsh depressing reality on the reserve for quite a long time. That is why she constantly gives Jack a piece of her mind when she feels that he is romantically glorifying 'rez life.' Later they break up but stay friends.

### **Crystal Sinclair (Rachel Colwell)**



is Jack's younger sister, who is turning from a rather naive child to a self-confident adolescent within the show. First and foremost, she is very righteous, tolerant and a trustworthy friend, who tries to help whenever she is needed. This becomes extremely obvious when she stands by her best friend, who becomes addicted to the drug Crystal Meth.

### **Wayne Sinclair (Lorne Cardinal) and Lydia**



is Jack's and Crystal's caring, wise and competent father, who – after having overcome an alcohol addiction – has regained his ancient roots and is able to guarantee his daughter as well as his son a balanced out lifestyle. Wayne and his wife have been separated for years, splitting the parenting of their children. That is why Jack has been living with him and Crystal for only a rather short period of time.

Notwithstanding, they are a very close and healthy family at least to the point when Aunt Lydia visits and residential school abuse comes to light.

### **Tina and Stephanie**



are two girls, who have been taken away from their Native family and have been living with a White couple for quite a long time. When Jack starts to date Tina he is suddenly confronted with Canadian government's arbitrariness as their relationship is threatened because both girls are about to be sent back to their relatives against their will.

# **PART SIX: DOWN-SEXUALIZING THE CANADIAN NATIVES – OR HOW TO GET INTO THE 'RING THING'**

## **6.1 HER SKIN WAS HOT, HER HEART WAS BEATING FAST, HER HANDS WERE TREMBLING**

Spying via movies and tv into the bedrooms of First Nations people, the Canadian public probably expects to find four different sexually active Native lovers. The first one would be the beautifully feathery, yet naive and inexperienced '**Pocahontas**,' who with her little, trembling, copper hands admiringly caresses the chest of a muscular White sex-god while from a distance robins quietly perform the soundtrack for her defloration.

The second fantasy about Native women would satisfy needs rather more pornographic. A well-proportioned '**Squaw**' with a provocative sparkle in her wild black eyes, would surrender to the muscular, White sex god full of primitive relish proven by an endless, loud, 'Indian-like,' liberating screaming, which would wake every bear in the next 100 miles from its hibernation.

As for sexually active Native men, on the one hand a horror scenario would be created in which a ruthless, ripping '**Wildman**,' whose dull primitivism denies him sexual sensibility and a proper performance in the art of erotica, rapes a will-less White woman, whom the White muscular sex-god would have been able to satisfy in the most proper way; the terrifying, monotonous sound of war drums can be heard from afar in the background.

The forth lover is a muscular '**Noble Savage**' (or, better, a half-breed) Indian, whose long black, soft hair gently brushes the woman's hot skin while he artistically is able to control his wildness in the most pleasurable way to take his woman passionately to 'the sky' and back where she wakes up in his protective arms. This scene may be accompanied by the gentle blowing of the first summer wind. (Yet. the White muscular sex-god would be more muscular in comparison, and for sure he would satisfy the woman even better.)



## 6.2 SETTING THE PATH FOR CULTURAL MASTURBATION

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Considering the five television shows *The Rez*, *Moose TV*, *Hank Williams First Nations*, *renegade.depress.com* and *Moccasin Flats*, it has to be stated that all of these four different stereotypes are acknowledged by the screenwriters and are consciously employed. What comes out in the end, appears to be like a boxing ring with four opponents, one waiting in every corner to fight one of the others and even more important the stereotype he/she should represent. The main characters in those five shows are postmodern hybrids of these stereotypes. They gain their enhanced traits from several factors, developments and specifications while being created to rebel against the "circulating mainstream-dominant discourses, metaphors, images symbols, meanings, and unstated assumptions and subtexts" (Fleras, *Media* 1-2) in television. Current cultural trends and manifestations as well as the technical production codes of the various genres will be taken into consideration in the following analysis.

Generally, we can argue that the broadband fight against these one-dimensional characters presented above has first of all to be considered as one of the main goals of these series. Secondly, this fight will mostly take place in form of a battle between these different stereotypes, which may have risen due to one of television's holy codes of "conflict and confrontation" (Fleras, *Mass* 146). Comparing the shows' main figures, we are able to spot various fight constellations involving Native and White warriors, who, nevertheless, all find their ground in the clichéd roles described above, either by confessing or even enhancing facets of them or by knowingly or unknowingly counteracting them.

Hereby women in the long run have the upper hand. Although or maybe just because Native women get the short end of the stick in a Western patriarchal society, as on the one hand Natives usually are situated on the right (the worse) side of the binary opposition scale (e.g. Culture/Nature; Mastery/Submission; Mind/Body; Active/Passive), and on the other hand women in general occupy this place as well (e.g. above and Head/Heart; Rationality/Emotionality; Phallus as presence/Vagina as absence), Native women have been proven as significant role models for Aboriginal resistance.

Thereby we always have to consider the disastrous history the Natives had and have to face with regards to their sexual identity. As one of the crucial parts of subjugation was the destruction of erotic, gender and social life while concurrently imposing the uptight European sexual traits, an intensive nausea concerning the private

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: SETTING THE PATH FOR CULTURAL MASTURBATION

body was automatically provoked. The cyclic-thinking, whole bound Native communities suddenly had to cope with the destructive schism of body and mind, extracting them from their homes (sent to residential schools) as well as from one of their natural life elixirs. Or as the writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm puts it

[b]efore this [finding her sexuality again] I had lived, primarily in my head. Being in love taught me that I was physical, emotional and spiritual as well as intellectual and that all aspects of my being needed to be healthy, and in balance. Despite my flaws and imperfections, my scars and weaknesses I felt beautiful and whole. (117)

Exactly, therefore, to gain back this feeling of 'wholeness' and balance, Native television series send their protagonists on a 'quest of (cultural) masturbation,' so to speak. Nonetheless, for them this crusade becomes even more challenging than for the average non-Native: feminism has blurred gender boundaries for everybody living in the Western world the same, often leaving overstrained, emasculated men and anxious, masculinized women behind. By choosing characters, whose sexual identities have literally been raped and left traumatized and broken behind by historical developments, the message grows even stronger. Hence, it becomes even more fundamental to accompany the different shows' protagonists in their closeness and distance relations and their hopeful attempts to lead healthy relationships or to desperately avoid them, as all those estimations are based on the respective figure's particular comprehension of his or her gender role measured against common sexual stereotypes he or she has been living with.

With this basis, Canadian Native TV series become televised 'cities upon a hill' to investigate current Native gender behavior in Canada, naturally in direct interaction with a non-Native one. Are Aboriginal communities going back to their traditional gender virtues, meaning they are ready to nakedly dance around the tree of knowledge and if so what does this provoke? Do they nowadays act according to European apprehensions meaning that sex spotted by the typical "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55) is not seen as mere 'carnal desires' to satisfy anymore, but is always accompanied by an uneasy feeling of tasting forbidden fruits? Or do we find a hybrid understanding of manhood and femaleness in line with a common postmodern ideology of fragmentation, meaning they have entered the garden again, are moving around the tree of knowledge but they are rather square dancing and definitely not naked?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> cf. part two.

In mirroring Native gender politics in how far does this representation respond to typical Western small screen virtues? In how far do these series have to give in to the lowest common denominator and an overall cultural conformity in order to reach the broad Canadian market? And in how far does this automatically interact with the "too subtle, too sensory, too complex, too spiritual and too ephemeral" (Mander 78) and "safe, exotic, somewhere else" attitudes (Switzer 21-22) Canadians tend to have concerning their Aboriginal fellow men? Do First Nations TV shows work against this 'too everything' mentality (cf. Mander 78) to fight exclusion and make a stand as being 'the same as everybody' with the same 'sexual orientation' problems the average Canadian has to face? Or do they maintain a buffer between themselves and the rest? And combining these social as well as technical obstacles and possibilities, how do they make use of them to fight the stereotypes of 'Pocahontas,' 'Squaw,' 'Raping Wildman' and 'Noble Savage' mentioned above?

## **6.3 BITCH WRESTLING**

In this boxing ring of four of the different stereotypes in television series namely 'Pocahontas,' 'Squaw,' 'Wildman' and 'Noble Savage' Native women do not go into the forest just to pick berries. They are generally over gender roles dragging them in the corner of a gatherer with sticky fingers and submissive eyes. Today Native women enter the forest to hunt themselves, taking down the 'Noble Savages' who look rather helplessly<sup>34</sup> while mostly leaving the role of the 'Concupiscent Native Tramp' to the White women in the action. Taking a look at the female protagonists of the five shows, it becomes quite obvious that often – especially in the sitcoms we discuss here – sophisticated, self-assured Native women are constantly put into sharp polar positions to rather constrictive, libidinous White ones. This is done to solidify the picture of strong, likeable females, who apart from being 'Native,' display a great number of character traits the average Canadian public can easily identify with.

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To illuminate the televised picture of the 'Contemporary Native woman' we will first stay within the realm of mere femaleness, meaning we will watch the 'bitch fights' between the women we are presented in these series in order to find out in how far the rubbing of girlish red skin against aged white skin unveils the image of today's Aboriginal womanhood. Later we will switch to a bisexual universe as well, where male skin will grind against female skin, which will tell us how today's Native women are measured against today's Native men.

### **'POCAHONTIAN WARRIOR' VS. 'TRAILER PARK TRAMP' – SADIE AND ELEANOR**

#### **THE ENTRANCE OF THE PEROXIDE MENACE**

According to sitcoms' basic theme of 'ingroup-outgroup' and its need for the clash of social conventions, *The Rez* provides us with a red-dressed, peroxide blonde "outlandish' situation" (Abelman 316) right from the beginning, after the initial situation of

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<sup>34</sup> cf. chapter 6.5.

a rather unagitated and un-stylish, common small town life in a Canadian reserve 'in the middle of nowhere' is established. The peroxide wearer provokes the first major explosion in the very first episode when she clashes with the 'Pocahontian Warrior' for the first time.

Eleanor Nanabush's arrival rolls down like a landslide reminding of the 'elemental force consisting of attractiveness and fear' associated with the stereotype of the 'Squaw.' It is given even more impact by its spiritually predicted announcement by the village's medicine woman, whose formerly spoken words "A change is coming" are now confessed by Eleanor's sudden emergence and underlined by telling, mystic Native flute music (REZ 1/1). Before Eleanor's appearance the town's community sits homelike around a warm fire wrapped up in warm, thick winter clothes, namely turtleneck pullovers and fur jackets. Leaving her car, the viewer can immediately notice that the White woman not only destroys this cosy, familiar campfire atmosphere on the spot but also the ordered, traditional life of the whole community for good as she resembles the complete opposite of the people we have already met.

The first impression we have is built up by an insistent 'typology of character signs' and stressed by an extreme close-up merely on her hips and her bottom where we notice a deeply red dress and plenty of big, artificial looking golden jewellery. Then the camera tilts up to her rather older face (she is in her fifties) where burlesque-like red lipstick can be perceived, and which is framed by died, blonde artificial looking, bushy hair. As a



Fig. 6.1. *The Rez*: Eleanor greeting her darlings



Fig. 6.2. *The Rez*: the Native anti-pyramid

loosening move, she greets the astonished Native group with a self-pleased, seemingly benevolent "Hi, darlings" putting them in a 'to be nurtured' position right from the beginning.

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

The very first shot lastingly characterizes Eleanor and her position in this community. It takes the same line as a film noir *mise-en-scene* where the overpowering, deeply scary sexuality of the *femme fatale* is accentuated by shots merely on body parts in order to, first and foremost, satisfy voyeuristic needs. As a second filmic tactic, the first shot being an extreme close-up one, leaves the viewer at least for a short amount of time in confusion as he/she is not able to group the whole picture. Consequently, in the face of the obviously approaching menace the Native community lines up like a pyramid wall against the White alien intruder closing in on them with Silas, Frank and Sadie at its peak. They repellently fold their arms on their chests, being together in a medium close-up from that point on while Eleanor is constantly alone in a close-up on the other side (REZ 1/1).

As a result the filmic devices of camera work and props predict the clash which is finally to come in the second episode: Summer Storm vs. Landslide, Native vs. White, Community vs. Single Person, Natural vs. Artificial, Goody-Goody vs. Bootyliscious. Not only the style and the behavior of the two but even their names tell of the roles they occupy within the action. Eleanor is said to have its roots in 'Aquitaini,' meaning 'the other' while Sadie is a modification of 'Sarah,' which is the Hebrew name for 'princess,' taking us back to Pocahontas but – as the name is altered – Sadie's main goal will become the transformation of the 'Indian Princess' stereotype.

### **THE FIGHT OF THE POCAHONTIAN WARRIOR AGAINST THE TRAILER PARK TRAMP**

The second episode (REZ 1/2) presents the viewer with a controversy, which will come up frequently in this discourse as it touches on a fairly sizeable number of topics while employing various binary oppositions at the same time. In "Golf and Politics" Sadie finds out that the Ashnabi Nation (the rez's band) has been cheated of three acres of its land unfortunately running right through Eleanor's bar and gas station. This triggers off the typical sitcom imbalance in the status quo creating three dimensions of binary oppositions, which then will set on each other. One would be male vs. female, the second Native vs. White and the third 'Pocahontas' vs. 'Squaw.' We will now first concentrate on the last dimension.

Comparing most of the shows to be examined, a striking fact becomes obvious. The classic attributes of a 'Squaw' are automatically passed on to the female White characters within the action (who in the realm of general film stereotypes could also be acknowledged as female figures with strong 'femme fatale' characteristics ). They are constantly put into contrastive juxtapositions to Native women who rather add up to sympathetic 'Pocahontases,' yet in a very modified way. By introducing the problem of 'land claims' *The Rez* is the first and most drastic show letting those two different stereotypes clash in a face to face 'fight' about some guys (Silas and Frank), a jukebox and some red tape. The two times Sadie and Eleanor fight over three acres of land in the bar hereby become a presentation of archaic contrapositions, concerning their divergent appearances as well as their respective dealings with the cowardly acting Silas and Frank (Silas is Eleanor's employee and Sadie's boyfriend), who are sneaking around helplessly (constantly on the run to escape confrontation).

### BOOTILLISCIOUS

The scene starts with a sexual assault by Eleanor suddenly emerging behind the boys, who can be spotted up front in a medium close-up, pinching the surprised young men in their bottoms saying: "Mmh, muscular!" (REZ 1/2). Eleanor is naughty enough to 'sexually harass' two males at the same time, and she makes use of her tantalizing forces to boss them around as well: "Looks like a scar.... Now, many women find scars attractive.... Now get rid of that sign" (REZ 1/2). Frank, formerly unwilling to move anyhow because of hurting wound in his face jumps up and takes off an unpleasant protest sign while she shamelessly watches his back. Furthermore, Eleanor keeps the two Native boys for a starvation loan without even hiding it:



Fig. 6.3. *The Rez*: Eleanor flirting

Silas: Thanks for keeping us on. Some would let have us go for signs of trouble!

Eleanor: Where else would I find staff as cheap as you two? (REZ 1/2)

Sadie on the contrary, either ignores them (knowing they will not be any help in her political striving for justice) or enthusiastically tries to make them head for active positions, meaning they should stand up as men as well as Natives (they fail both).

Consequently, on a rather small but distinct basis, Eleanor represents the frightening seductress we already know from classic television series' gender roles. She uses and exploits the men in her surroundings by employing her sensuality for her own ends, not for masculine pleasure (cf. Fiske, *Television* 190). Thereby she shoots her weapon of sexuality exclusively for her own benefits – a strategy, man has not only been scared of since Joan Collins<sup>35</sup> played out her bodily amenities, but which can already be spotted in the outcome of the Adam and Eve tale, being a story of a voluptuous woman picking up fruits, yet not for the mere reason of reaping them. In this example the White 'Squaw' exploits the (stereotypical ripping) Native man for her personal comfort, which again presents a subordinate Native person at first sight. In terms of gender studies, though, this turn-around strategy reveals the disengagement from the typical sexual clichés of the 'Native Rapist,' the 'Virtuous White Woman' and the 'Lascivious Squaw.'

### IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STYLE

Fitting these revised stereotypes is also the concrete comparison of Eleanor and Sadie in "Golf and Politics" (REZ 1/2), who with practically every fibre are put into the sharpest polar positions. This becomes apparent by turning the main attention to their clothing. As usual Eleanor wears bright coloured rather short pieces (this time an orange top, a fake leather skirt and high heels) bulkily pimped with her big fake golden jewellery, fake golden belt, her bushy, blonde hair and her deep red lipstick. All these accessories combined then make her appear like a cheap 'Trailer Park Tramp.'

Sadie on the contrary deliberately refuses to identify with nubile attributes. Making use of the female 90's 'Generation X' image, which is especially represented by Courtney

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<sup>35</sup> Joan Collins played the bitch in *Dynasty* (1981-1989).



Love (singer and widow of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain<sup>36</sup>), Sadie identifies with Love (in episode one "Dressed like a Fish" she even states that she would want Love to play music at her funeral), whose song "Miss World," "is not only critiquing patriarchal beauty culture, with its emphasis on hierarchical display of the female bodies; she is also expressing a jaded weariness with conventional forms of femininity" (Wald 164). Standing in line with Love, one of the outriders of later feminism, Sadie therefore supports the nineties' common Rock Music zeitgeist concerning the "refusal of the gaze" (Wald 164) in a natural way. Sadie wears Grunge style throughout the whole show (except for one special occasion), consisting of holey, used-washed blue jeans, Doc Martens<sup>37</sup>, over-sized T-shirts, lumberjack shirts, wide pullovers and a leather jacket. She never puts on make-up and has a rather short, easily manageable haircut.

By merely inspecting the different styles of the two women, we can deduce whole character ideologies: Sadie is a young Native woman, who has self-assuredly risen over 'Pocahontian' as well as 'Squawish' stereotypes since she is neither a naive, playful dress-wearer nor a fan of a slinky style. She even overcomes Native female stereotyping to that extent she leaves femininity in general behind, refusing to be reduced to it. After all, she adjusts her personal style rather to the Native guerilla protesters of Oka than to any strongly female role model. It seems as if she folds her arms as tightly before womanhood in general as she does it before Eleanor in particular, who embodies the kind of femininity Sadie scorns the most. Furthermore, Sadie does prefer a practical style being quite realistic, for living in the 'bush' rather demands a woodcutter look than a mini skirt.

Eleanor on the contrary, first and foremost, reveals by her trampy appearance that she does not belong in this setting. Additionally, in propagating a rather tantalizing look she turns her back on conservative Christian belief systems, which are deeply grounded in the demonization of sexuality. She refuses to be a woman locked and 'wrapped-up' up as a scary object and sticks to role models from the femme fatale pool using sex for her personal benefits. Whereby her short, tight outfits serve as assessors as well as weapons.

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<sup>36</sup> Nirvana was one of the most popular and most influential Rock bands of the 90s while their lead singer Kurt Cobain was forced to be the megaphone of the Generation X. He committed suicide in 1994. Courtney Love keeps being on the covers of entertainment magazines to this day, as she is always part of a new scandal.

<sup>37</sup> These are the typical heavy worker boots of the 90s.

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

Yet, Eleanor is in her fifties, which doubles the odor of cheapness, having been established with great attention to detail before: she wears plenty of showy golden trashy jewellery. She has blonde, bushy hair fulfilling a Marilyn Monroe role but her Blonde image can rather be associated with the older Monroe, who tried to keep up to a beauty, which was fading. Her clothes are tight and in bright reddish colors. In later episodes she



Fig. 6.4. *The Rez*: the Orange 'Trailer Park Tramp' and the Black 'Pocahontian Warrior' are getting in the ring

wears a fur in a femme fatale manner. Yet, this again is a fake one telling about the artificiality surrounding her.

By equipping the White feminine main figure and the Native female protagonist with these contrasting costumes, the producers, screenwriters and directors make a clear statement about whom to identify with: Sadie has adjusted to the modern Grunge style while Eleanor is stuck in the depths of the 80s, picking out the cheapest looking pieces of that time. The producers, by taking this prop decision, willingly let Sadie escape the typical voyeuristic "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55), and direct it straight toward Eleanor. In doing so, they put the emphasis not on Sadie's body but on her political and social actions. This fashion ideology may subtly force especially the adolescent audience to identify with the Native woman since she is presented as up-to-date and, although

living in the middle of nowhere, as being miles away from the 'unwordliness' of an old-fashioned 'Pocahontas.'

### **YOU ARE GETTING RED-TAPED – THE BOUNDARIES**

Compared to Eleanor, who tends to sit in a rather arrogant manner on a high bar stool focusing attention on her naked legs in her black high heels, Sadie is moving around constantly during their argument. She draws boundaries by sticking red tape to the floor and the walls, she clips boycott placards and vociferously moves the jukebox. Thereby the old Country song playing keeps skipping, which – besides all her mere zest for action – appears like a fierce statement: she disrupts a kind of music, associated with an 'Indian-hostile' Cowboy attitude<sup>38</sup> on the one hand, and with the feminine gender role model of a loving wife, waiting for her husband at home, cooking his favorite dinner on the other.

Sadie's extreme movements also stress her strong Native warrior ambitions and abilities. She is not stoic, lazy or a passive endurer of bad living conditions, and she resists the obedient 'Pocahontas' image. She is active and full of effervescence and belligerence and therefore able to change the 'Native' world (for the better). After all, Sadie is like a reversed mirror of former times: now she draws boundaries and takes the land without asking, and additionally, she fights this battle without the use of the 'typical feminine weapons' of seducing.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of the stumbling block then, namely the Native land claims, a tendency becomes obvious, which could also be spotted right in the beginning, when Eleanor arrives and is portrayed in detail shots and close-ups conveying isolation (REZ 1/1) while the whole Native community is united in medium shots:

Sadie: Look, this isn't personal, but you're on our land! (some Native men line up behind her).... Well, we are a very patient people!

...

Eleanor: My people ... well, I don't know anything about my people. But I am a pit bull, honey! I get this bone between my teeth and I give up to no one! No one!"

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<sup>38</sup> We will later find out that the Indian/Country music relationship does not work out that easily and that differentiations have to be made (cf. Hank Williams).

<sup>39</sup> cf. chapter 'Where feminism fears to tread.'

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

Evolving from this dialog as well as the different camera shots, we find some deeply grounded thought systems in the ideologies of the two antagonistic women. Eleanor lives up to the typical White standards of a capitalistic elbow society, in which everyone fights for 'his bone' for him or herself (as hard as a pit bull if he/she has to). Sadie's ambitions, on the contrary, are rooted in the well being of the whole community, she will fight for throughout the series.

### **CAN A MISANTHROPIST BE A RACIST?**

Taking a look at the entire series, we will find developments<sup>40</sup> but also very many affirmations of the gap presented here within the first two episodes, this gap will be reinforced by a great number of incidents as well as in little details. Eleanor stays an outsider, as she is the rare bird of the community. This cannot only be assigned to her 'light skin color' but more likely due to the eccentric behavior she just refuses to give up. In fact she stresses her extra-ordinariness in every situation, sometimes even for the community's benefit. In one episode, for example, she is set on a hypocrite Aboriginal politician (by corrupt Chief Tom), who promotes a strictly Native lifestyle, yet, willingly falls prey to Eleanor's seductive faculties (REZ 2/1). Nevertheless, Eleanor is not only 'sexually' discriminating (her employees) but also 'ethnically.' She does not care about conventions or political correctness, concerning the rather delicate circumstances of the people she lives with in this community. So, strictly speaking, Eleanor cannot be considered as a racist. She is unkind to anybody, which unhinges the problem of White discrimination in a typical sitcom-like manner, for "significant ideas and issues are addressed in seemingly innocent and trivialized parochial situations, but are engaged with and resolved in a symbolic way through the mediation of comic exchanges and events" proving that "the sitcom is the most appropriate site for these small acts of political and ideological 'smuggling' ... central to the genre's endurance and constant rejuvenation" (Wells 181). After all someone, who is a misanthropist cannot be convicted of being hostile towards a special ethnicity. Furthermore, Eleanor will constantly be used as a buffer concerning typical prejudices the general public might have against

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<sup>40</sup> Later they will agree on a solution of the land claim problem, then conveying the impression that women are able to put their guns at rest when it is reasonable, in contrast to the behavior of many men.

Aboriginals since she lives a disagreeable lifestyle often mistakenly associated with Native people:<sup>41</sup> she tends to be stoic, indifferent and – 'as underprivileged (White) trash' – an outsider to society in general. Additionally, she gets drunk and is nearly raped by a couple of White men but is saved by Silas' smart, experienced mother, as well as she is the one, who is suddenly confronted with her grown-up daughter Tanya whom she gave away as a baby, something often associated with broken Native families. Generally, we can easily draw a binary opposition chart of Eleanor and Sadie:

<b>Eleanor</b>	<b>Sadie</b>
white	red
blonde	black
sexy	masculine
individual	community
egoistic	altruistic
body	mind
old	young
artificial	natural
rather cheap	rather sophisticated
'Trailer Park Tramp'	'Pocahontian Warrior'

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<sup>41</sup> cf. chapter 'Today's Saddest Nation.'

## POCAHONTIAN CINDERELLA VS. OUTRÉ SIREN – SARAH AND MONIQU CINDERELLA'S MISCARRIED ENTRANCE

In *Hank Williams First Nation*, Sarah Fox can also be considered as a 'Modified Pocahontas,' who has adjusted to current postmodern living circumstances and goals. Like Sadie's, Sarah's image is based on her intelligence rather than on her physical attributes. This will immediately be stressed in the first episode, where the viewer learns that Sarah is the valedictorian of her high school's graduation class. When Sarah later enters the Edmonton Mall to buy a prom gown, she refuses to take a slinky red one and finally turns up with a pink Cinderella gown (HW 1/1). Nevertheless, Sarah is deprived of the sweet 'fairy-tale-Princess'-charm this kind of costume usually implies since she has to steeplechase her big prom entrance on crutches, due to the fact that she fell from a fake Pirate ship right into the Edmonton Mall's dolphin tank when attempting to spy on her crush and his new girlfriend (HW 1/1). After all, *Hank Williams First Nation's* humor practically lives from these little comedic scenes bearing great cultural meaning. Although Sarah is a contemporary young Canadian Native women full of ambition and aims, she is 'still more Sarah,' meaning more 'princess-like' than her filmic forerunner Sadie for instance. This alternation in the employment of a rather 'brute anti-female power' may be ascribed to the fact that with the beginning of this millennium feminism has been on the counter-march in so far as it has softened itself and stopped to sharpen its claws. As a consequence, Sarah may be allowed to possess more 'womanly' attributes again, of which one is the strong inner, yet 'Western' desire to be a princess. Nevertheless, the show will not let her get off the Native hook that easily. It secretly infiltrates her with the Native-typical teasing wink of an eye mentality, hinting at the 'given' that if a Native woman is not even able to successfully spy anymore, her dream of walking the halls like a Cinderella on a ball will literally 'walk on crushes.' Hence, if a fairy tale loving Cree girl is not able to sneak off a fake Disney pirate ship in a mall without embarrassing herself (ergo she is not even able to adjust to



Fig. 6.5. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Sarah being a hobbling Cinderella



Fig. 6.6. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Sarah touched by the Edmonton Mall's dolphins

the simple requirement Disney demands of a Native woman, namely being an airy, yet muscular 'Pocahontas' gracefully looping through the brush) she cannot expect to get her fluffy Disney Cinderella dream fulfilled.

After all, this little episode becomes an example of how the interweaving of friendly Native teasing wit of 'permitted disrespect'<sup>42</sup> combined with an ironical postmodern humor works to expose stereotyping in general, trying to depict the Native characters as loveable, refreshingly self-deprecating and intelligent observers of modern life. Furthermore, this kind of humor discerningly relies on sitcom opportunities of secretly challenging and dissolving borders by laughing at them (cf. Wells 199), in this case addressing the hardly conquerable 'boundaries' Western society created to keep the 'Historical Indian' sneaking at the peripheries of a modern world while having eradicated his traditional skills and competencies at the same time.

## **THE BATTLE OF THE POCAHONTIAN CINDERELLA AGAINST THE OTRÉ SIREN**

### **SENSE AND SENSUALITY**

Just as Sadie's characterization is strongly built on the contrast to the White seductress Eleanor, Sarah also has to face a White temptress in *Hank Williams First Nation*. When she needs a tutor to teach her French in order to be able to attend the University of Montreal, she becomes exposed to Monique, the mother of one of her friends, who is of French origin and operates as a social worker in the town of Wapahoo (HW 1/3). Their interaction is tinged with an ironical postmodern note and plays off of the arrogant attitude many European invaders tended to have to the First Inhabitants. It is triggered off by the superficial strand of Sarah's inability to speak French. Nonetheless, the underlying statement involves a hidden criticism of colonial assimilation practises.

'Otré' Monique, good looking but beginning to be beaten by age as she is in her 'adolescence-cracking' forties, sees herself sitting opposite a young, beautiful, modern 'Pocahontas' blessed with innocent 'world-conquering' goals and extraordinarily full lips. Monique's jealousy of Sarah's youth is stressed by the use of camera shots: in the first

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<sup>42</sup> cf. chapter 4.4.

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

shot/counter shot<sup>43</sup> – keeping them apart anyway, as they are never together in the first scene – Monique is constantly shown in a wider medium close-up, implying that it can only be to her advantage not to show her 'more worn-out' face too closely. On the contrary, Sarah, in her unblemished girlhood, is presented in head close-ups, particularly stressing a sexy pout she is apparently not even aware of, opposed to Monique, who – albeit in French, so Sarah will not understand it – jealously addresses her great beauty and youth.

Just as with Sadie and Eleanor, the Elder White woman is the one who feels the permanent constraint to hide her advancing decay behind sexy clothes, make up and a dyed blonde mane. Thereby Monique is more chic than peroxidized Eleanor, yet she wears a blouse with a plunging neckline, a short skirt stressing her exposed legs and high heels (in the bush) while Sarah, more girlish dressed than Sadie, wears a Surfer style outfit (tight T-shirt, jeans, Flip Flops<sup>44</sup>).

### **A SEXY FRENCH ACCENT D'INSENSITÉ**

However, this scene's main critical statement results from the meaningfulness of language. The confrontation between both women joins together three languages: English, French and Cree. Monique, feeling the urgent need to act superior to Sarah, reveals some subjective 'personal truths' concerning the younger woman. Yet, she does so in French, knowing that Sarah will not understand a single word, thereby oppressing her by making her insecure. Using the French language goes much further than the mere comprehension of what is said. Monique states that English is a 'crude language not to be spoken in this house' (her own daughter does not speak French by the way) while French is the "language of love" (HW 1/3), a statement she makes while eccentrically stroking the naked skin of her décolleté. Cree, on the contrary, happens to be a "silly language" (HW 1/3), she argues by ridiculing the term 'Wapahoo,': the howling sound of the name not only being a proof of the bashfulness of the language (her Native neighbors are constantly talking in throughout the series next to English), but also of the

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<sup>43</sup> Shot-countershot is a continuity editing principle that alternates shots, particularly in conversation scenes between two characters/180° rule means that cameras remain on one side of the axis of action in order to preserve the scene's spatial continuity and screen direction (cf. Butler, 376, 378).

<sup>44</sup> Sandals called 'Flip Flops' are a surfer's typical beach wear.



locals' goofiness and unattractiveness (whereby she as a social worker has to listen to their sad stories all day – "thank god, they are not true!" (HW 1/3)). Furthermore, this 'dumb' term 'Wapahoo' is a painful but significant reminder of the place she has unfortunately become stranded in, despite her beauty, metropolitan experience and former lifestyle as a 'high society' sports figure (she used to be a professional cheerleader). Stressing 'Wapahoo' like a wolf howling, Monique underlines how she is bound to this location, one that is so far off the beaten track that even unpleasant predators live there in quite an undisturbed way.

After teaching the all-exceeding language of French did not work out too well at their first meeting, Monique walks different paths of 'assimilation' starting with the assignment to talk like herself, namely to "spéééck tééé Inglish wit a sexiii French accent" (HW 1/3). Therefore, she accentuates the seemingly overshadowing sexy appeal in her language, which she constantly underlines by exaggerated sexualized gestures like excessively pursing one's lips, Sarah for instance shall perform in order to pronounce the word "Alors" correctly. This leads to a final climax when Monique decides that "French is a language that moves and if you want to speak it, you've got to learn to move with it" (HW 1/3). The conditions being such she forces Sarah to dance with her around the 'tree of knowledge' but not nakedly in free movements (cf. Highway, *Me Sexy* 140), but in a 'ballet-silk-gown' style. Apart from the fact, that already the dancing stick she keeps swinging all the time, thereby requiring much medium close-up space to capture all her eccentricity than Sarah gets, may remind the viewer of a weapon she wants to control Sarah with, the distribution of space, which had been quite unbalanced before, is taken to its boundaries now. As Monique pushes Sarah to dance a cabaret-like performance next to her, in which she 'makes the music' by singing herself and calls on Sarah to copy her moves, Sarah is not only robbed of any form of own decision-making, let alone self-expression, she is also deprived of space. Monique in her self-righteous manner relegates Sarah to the fringe, then into the background, punches her without noticing it, shakes her harshly and finally hits her with her shawl. Thus we again find socio-critical allusions to happenings, which have taken place before in the history of Natives and Europeans in Canada, happenings that mirror European arrogance, unasked overtaking of space and violent assimilation tactics.

Monique feels extraordinarily superior to Sarah, who is young and beautiful but 'bare of any kind of proper culture.' To Monique French has to be regarded as a sensual language, in so far as it cannot be considered as merely sexual, for it is the language of

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

'sophisticated movement,' representing a culture with challenging dancing and distinguished singing habits, the culture of the Cree Nation of Wapahoo can – according to her beliefs – not live up to. Sarah only obliges Monique to be her language tutor to learn a language in order to go to university. But Monique cannot resist teaching her a whole lifestyle, which to her mind is much more sophisticated than Sarah's own postmodern-Native one ('Monique' comes from Monica and is said to mean 'adviser/counselor' in Latin). Therefore, she not only attempts to turn Sarah around (she even has to speak 'her English language' with a sexy French accent)<sup>45</sup>, she also takes away space from Sarah in order to spread out herself.<sup>46</sup> Trying to assimilate the girl by attempting to change Sarah's gestures and mimics,<sup>47</sup> she forces her into the role of a little eccentric French woman at the same time.

Under the 'white as snow'-skin of sitcom we find a slender, humorous reign of criticism equipped with hidden "barbs and sharp teeth" (Taylor, "Whacking" 69) here, so typical for Native fun-making as it is a sophisticated form of resistance humor wrapped up in a comic, innocent family TV format here. Yet, it offers "oppositional ideas, depict[ing] oppression and struggle, and reflect[ing] a critical consciousness that stops just short before political mobilization" (Hamamoto, 27).

Notwithstanding, this strand becomes even more fraught with meaning when applying Tomson Highway's theory of different languages to it for Cree

is neither a language of the mind nor a language of the senses. It is a language of the flesh. A physical language. It lives in the human body not above the neck, as English does, not between the neck and the waist, as French does, but one step lower: between the waist and the thighs. Cree lives in the groin, in the sex organs. It lives ... [in] a region of the body that has ... become so alienated from the head that speaking of it in English is a shameful, dirty, embarrassing, disgusting ... evil thing to do. (*Me Funny* 160)

To Highway Cree goes further than French could ever do as it is sensual, but still strongly tied to the long lasting European conventions of contempt in terms of sexuality. While Monique then aims at employing sexual connotations in order to use them like a fountain of youth, she fails to produce the connection between body and mind, she nevertheless strives for so desperately by combining her sexy French speaking with 'appropriate' sensual gestures. Yet, these movements and pronunciation do not only

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<sup>45</sup> cf. chapter 'Down-Sexualising the Indian.'

<sup>46</sup> cf. chapter 'De-Mapping the Indian.'

<sup>47</sup> cf. chapter 'Dis-Teaching the World.'

unveil the hysterical attempts of an older woman to gain back an attractiveness she seemingly has lost when leaving Montreal, her entire bizarre behavior also illuminates her wilful ignorance in seriously dealing with the funny, 'body and mind embracing' language she probably hears everyday.



Fig. 6.7. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Monique – feeling that youth is wasted on the young

Hence, Sarah's not knowing the language of love and sensuality may be considered as unsophisticated, but in the end Monique is the one who can be considered as ignorant. For she experiences this beautiful place on a daily basis, but in persistently keeping to herself and her 'superior' culture, she fails to cherish the advantages of the culture she lives in. The French language here becomes a barrier as she sticks to it and her shallow interpretation of its characteristics as if by super glue; even when she speaks English she needs to promote her French roots. Furthermore, she never tries to learn Cree in any way, not even with a 'sexy French accent.'

**ASSIMILATION – FRENCH STYLE**

Thus Monique's endeavours could be seen as a general Western misinterpretation of Native life hidden in the misinterpretation of Monique's personal life whereby Sarah is the trigger in this case. Native culture is experienced as being inferior, not even comparable to the culturally sophisticated French one. But taking a closer look at the interaction of the White seductress and the Native innocent girl, we notice that we have to look beneath the surface which may leave us with the impression that almost everything concerning Monique is fake while Sarah is natural.

First of all Monique takes over the active parts in these two scenes while Sarah is left in a more passive position. Yet, this does not weaken Sarah's standpoint at all, as she is one of the main characters of the whole show in the first place. Secondly, Monique tries to perform an assimilative strategy based on sexuality on Sarah, which taking a look behind the curtain, does not only fail on the superficial basis, as it exposes an eccentric White woman, but bears a deeper meaning in many aspects when looking beneath the surface of the mere action. In this case, the artificial White performance of seduction and assimilation only strengthens the naturalness and happy-go-lucky nature of the 'Postmodern Pocahontas.' Therefore, Monique unwillingly becomes an impetus for the presentation of a healthy, loveable community, on that she abhors so much. So when contrasting Monique and Sarah a graph such as following can be drawn:

<b>Monique</b>	<b>Sarah</b>
old	young
life behind her	life in front of her
blonde	black
eccentric	natural
desperately sexy	beautiful without even knowing it
arrogant	open-minded
advisor	princess
'Outré Siren'	'Pocahontian Cinderella'

## POCAHONTIAN NUN VS. ALL KINDS OF MAN EATERS – ROBIN AND HER ANTAGONISTS

### BEING A POCAHONTIAN NUN

It should come as no surprise that *Moose TV* also presents us with a feminine protagonist, who is set in a sharp sexually-based contrast to (mostly) White minor characters. Hereby, Robin is the figure, not sharing the name of the princess Sarah but of a familiar bird noted for its beautiful singing; her character is played against the stereotype of a Pocahontas. The series (and all its characters) pushes the exaggeration of these stereotypes to its limits at least in some aspects. Robin's main feature next to her great intelligence and ability to see through people and expose their crookedness and suspect communication tactics by quick-witted honesty, is her naive prudishness. This prudery is evident in contrast to her 'Squawish' sister Alice, who describes herself as a party girl and a lover of "wet, wild, slippery sex" (MT 1/3). The most significant



Fig. 6.8. *Moose TV*: Robin while disciplining George

antagonism between the two of them is portrayed in a scene in which both are spending time in the forest. Alice wears a tight shirt with leopard spots on it, clinging to a stump like a wildcat presenting her cleavage, thereby unveiling a 'wild, perverse sexuality.' On the

other hand 'decent' Robin is dressed in a white blouse and sitting against the tree rigidly, listening to her sister, who advises her to show more skin and to stop dressing like a librarian (MT 1/5). Throughout the whole series, Robin is characterized as a person who is rather sexless. Right from the beginning, she learns that gossip has been spreading saying that she has become a nun after leaving Moose for the past six years. Furthermore, she constantly wears white, high-necked blouses and dark suits not only putting her into a sharp contrast to her tramp sister but also to the White women getting lost in the small Cree town from time to time.

## **THE ROW OF THE POCAHONTIAN NUN AGAINST THE MAN EATERS**

### **GERMAN SEX – RAW PLEASE**

Giving us a distinct impression of European sex life, we have the German sex maniac appearing in episode five, who – when spotting the main character George – introduces herself with the words: "Scheiße [shit], you arrre cute! You must come wiz us! [to her husband while scratching his breast]! He must come wiz us! You will have a mighty erection!" Later, once – the German couple has already stripped down to its underwear in the forest – they find their sacred spot, and the woman groans: "Zis place isn't too rocky! Blood and pain is good! My shakras vibrate intensely!" She finally jumps into her husband's arms loudly screaming and hoarsely demanding: "Make me a baby!" while both of them are having sex against a tree (MT 1/5).

In this episode, we see that stereotypes concerning Native 'rough unbridled sexuality' are turned around rather brutally as the 'sophisticated' Germans, 'the people from the land of poets, philosophers and scientists,' are portrayed as being full of raw carnal desires, stripped of striving for calmly approaching sex and rationally studying it to analyse and classify it.<sup>48</sup> First of all, the White woman admits openly that she wants to make use of George to satisfy her lust. Later the couple behaves like prudish Whites' worst fear: two or even more Native persons ripping off their clothes whenever they feel sexual attraction and having wild sex right at the spot. Thereby, they do not care about the sensitivities of 'innocent' people watching. Yet, here we have the White persons, who

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<sup>48</sup> cf. chapter 2.3.

act like the catholic virgin's (in moral terms) great fear while the Natives stand next to this spectacle with shaking heads and bewildered, scared or revolted looks on their faces.

### **THE HEIDI<sup>49</sup> STYLE**

This 'sledgehammer method' of turning Native sexual stereotyping around can also be spotted when naive Robin meets with a White female lawyer, who successfully seduces George whom Robin secretly has a crush on (MT 1/4). Right from the beginning, the attorney exposes herself to George's hand camera, who is accompanying a group of White lawyers to the forest. They want to live a recreational lifestyle for several days. Wearing very short shorts and a tummy shirt, the female lawyer poses in front of George's camera like a pin-up girl, curling her hair, giving him hot looks through the camera lens and parroting sentences George needs her to perform to produce a proper 'Survivor'-Show for Moose TV later.

George's cam thereby tilts up in extreme close-ups from her naked legs to her waist, her breasts and then her face, mirroring the typical voyeuristic look, film likes to present when putting a woman in the sexual spot. When the attorney finally seduces George by offering sex to him directly on the spot, we are shown a multi-dimensional filming of the next scene: George is shot from the back, the blonde, sexually-aroused lawyer in front of him facing the camera, providing us with a larger frame of the scene (couple kissing). Yet, a smaller frame is employed as well, which is shown on George's little cam display. Here the viewer sees extreme close-ups of the lawyer's body parts as George advances on her while filming. Then, when George turns the camera down carelessly in order to take part in the sexual action, the display shows Robin in a modest pantsuit, coming up from behind stopping at the right spot to be kept in an American medium shot, implying that Robin will not let herself be reduced to voyeuristic extreme close-ups. George, constantly stresses the voyeuristic nature of television ("Let it be more sexy! Television IS sexy!"), yet he is never able to convince Robin to join in.

When the two women (fighting over the same man (who happens to be Native)) finally meet, we can detect strong visual differences again. The rather older attorney has blonde, curly, wild hair, wears skimpy clothing, sacrificing practicality (short clothes are

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<sup>49</sup> Heidi is a Swiss girl from a juvenile book of the same name by Johanna Spyri. She is associated with typical German female characteristics, though.

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

not too appropriate in the bush because of mosquitos, branches, etc.) to the more personal need of looking sexy. On the contrary, Robin is dressed in a white blouse (also not too practical) and long black pants, her black hair in a conservative, centre part but shining brightly, stating:

You like that whole Heidi kind of look?

Attorney: What? Watch for your step! You don't want to put your foot in anything!

Robin: Oh, nice talk for a lawyer, or are you from that secretarial pool? (MT 1/4)

With this provocation the lawyer raises her fists to start a 'bitch fight;' which stops abruptly when other people approach.

Also in this scene from *Moose*

*TV* Pocahontas comes out on top of the White tramp, the latter keeping to offer her bodily amenities in the first place and therefore appears as cheap, while the former rather puts her brains first and not her body. The 'Pocahontian Nun' is the linguistically more sophisticated one being highlighted by the fact that Robin's opponent as a lawyer should generally be the more verbally skilled. Yet, she is overpowered by a young, prudish Native women and is only able to defend herself by making use of her well-manicured nails.



Fig. 6.9. *Moose TV* : behind the scenes – preparations for George filming sexy Heidi with his hand cam

### TWO FISTS FOR A 'HALLELUJAH'

In *Moose TV*, a modern Pocahontas is presented as the person to like, ergo the person to identify with as well. In contrast to *The Rez*, we do not find a constant White, sexually-explicit opponent here but rather a number of supporting actresses, who only appear in one episode each. Like Sadie and Sarah, Robin also seems more intelligent and natural, the more the slinky antagonist gets sleazy and artificial. Robin specifically sticks out by her command of words as well as by her naivety, which in combination make her a conquerer of White femme fatales.



<b>Seductive Opponents</b>	<b>Robin</b>
White	Native
European	Native
body	mind
seductive	prude
old	young
verbally illicit	verbally sophisticated
slinky	naive
few clothes	many clothes
lustful	conservative
open	secretive
'Raw Man-Eaters'	'Pocahontian Nun'

## **CAMERA-SHY ANTI-POCAHONTAS VS. CAMERA-HOG LOLITA – NICOLE AND ZOEY**

While comedy shows, because of their need to create "outlandish situations" (Abelman 316), have to build up strictly divergent roles, meaning that visually extreme antagonists will constantly occur, drama series also address this topic of female representation according to ethnicity. As this theme always tends to walk a very thin line, employing it in a comedy show can be acknowledged as the easier distribution format. The naturally accepted requirement in sitcoms for strong binary oppositions and strong stereotyped figures allows the seemingly politically incorrect actions and portrayals to be peppered with innocent, humorous notes. Drama, on the contrary, tends to stick to political correctness as the main ingredient in its narratives. Hence, the portrayal of a Pocahontas becomes quite a dangerous challenge in dramas. The Drama *renegadepress.com* did accept it, though.

### **THE ENTRANCE OF THE DRAMA QUEENS**

In its fourth season *renegadepress.com*'s narratives have changed. The main protagonists Jack and Zoey have broken up. But while the Native boy lives his life in a quite balanced and happy way, White upper class Zoey starts to fall apart, creating a launching pad for the series' plot to focus on the antithesis between a sexually-charged Pocahontas and a White Squawish seductress. The episode "Alternative Realities" (RP.C 4/8) starts with an exceptionally stereotyped website-collage of a sexy Pocahontas, which can be accessed by a link on Jack's home page called *renegadepress.com*. There we find some pictures of a pretty Native girl dressed in the clichéd costume of an outdated stereotype, namely a pink bikini-like leather top, a headband with a feather sticking out from it at the back of her head and some colourful war paint on her face. First we are made believe that this girl is Jack's new Native girlfriend (played by the same actress, who plays Sarah in *Hank Williams First Nation*) but later we find out that she is not. Although she wears some very thick winter clothing when meeting Jack's music manager, Nicole is asked to play 'the sexy Pocahontas' in Jack's upcoming music video.

Meanwhile, doll-like Zoey – lost in her overall desperation – more and more turns into a Lolita sending fiery looks at her new boyfriend while walking with hypnotically

swivelling hips and provoking the boy with suggestive talking, which in the end leads to miscarried lovemaking.

## THE CRUSADE OF THE CAMERA-SHY ANTI-POCAHONTAS AGAINST THE CAMERA HOG LOLITA

### THE GREEDY EYE OF THE CAM

This episode now puts those two girls into a very sharp contrast which is intensified by setting it against the background of modern media serving as the typical voyeuristic eye. Yet, while the Native Nicole feels uneasy in the situation of being



Fig. 6.10. *renegadepress.com*: 'Mall Pocahontas' in pink (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

exposed to the platforms of media right from the beginning, Zoey uses the greedy camera eye to support a hedonistic self-portrayal. Inspired by the 'pretty Pocahontas' pictures on the internet ("What do you think? Am I internet material?" (RP.C 4/8)), Zoey therefore stages a sexy photo shoot right in class by sitting on her new boyfriend's lap (namely in a dominant position above him) and fixing the camera with a seductive look. She is in control – of her boyfriend's helpless libido, her self-expression as well as the

technical equipment which is recording this sexually-charged interaction.

The shooting of Jack's video on the other hand takes an opposite development: Nicole (still in her winter clothes at the beginning) gets to wear a short skirt and a slinky top in order to loll on a couch, "acting all sexy" (RP.C 4/8) as the manager instructs her while Jack – representing the classic pimp style of Hip Hop videos – performs his song with showy gestures in the foreground. The entire video turns out to work in typical Rap style: the male character is the great man of action, rapping while commanding the space with his feet on the urban warehouse grounds they are shooting in. His head is illuminated by a black and white 'rez' projection thrown at the wall behind him. He is

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

walking between the worlds as he has been living in the city for nearly all his adolescent life but utters lyrics romanticizing the reserve he came from. Nicole is kept lying on the couch helplessly, trying to act luscious. She is made a mere sexual object behaving like the stereotypical depiction of a lecherous woman reminding of the 'cheap Pocahontas' from the website, whose only task is it to reinforce the omnipotent 'man of action' in the foreground. This image is even further strengthened when Jack lifts her up and kisses her wildly in a slow motion, a sequence that emphasizes their hot erotic interaction. Finally, she is put back on the sofa and filmed in black and white: first from a very low, worm's eye angle stressing her legs and then in extreme close-ups stressing her mouth and her neck, whereby the camera pushes her almost viciously into the role of a seductive 'Rez Girl' leaving the attentive viewer with the impression that she is visually raped. This is the point where she objects, breaking up the shooting by asking Jack desperately: "Is this how you see me? Who you want me to be? Your pretty rez girl? You don't even know what a rez girl is anyway!" (RP.C 4/8).

Zoey and her boyfriend on the contrary, find themselves in a parallel scene, which



Fig. 6.11. *renegadepress.com*: Nicole's pout becoming the victim of voyeuristic Hip Hop aesthetics (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

evolves in a similar manner. Zoey comes over to her boyfriend's house to have sex with him for the first time and while he is putting on music she drapes herself on the couch. She is framed in a medium shot, from a worm's eye view as she is stripping off her jacket as if she were on a playboy shoot. They start kissing wildly, but suddenly Zoey notices that he has placed a camera to film them having sex. She takes the tape out of the cam and leaves while his last words are: "I thought this is

what you wanted.... Hey, you were the one giving all the signals!" (RP.C 4/8).



Fig. 6.12. *renegadepress.com*: Zoey's doll shape becoming the victim of voyeuristic teenage aesthetics (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

Later in this episode we find Nicole and Jack talk about the escalation of the previous situation, which results in the promise to attempt to "not play these roles" (RP.C 4/8) while Zoey absolves her boyfriend telling him with a seductive look that they "are o.k." (RP.C 4/8). Yet, when she is alone, she constantly rewinds the tape watching her persuasiveness and being shocked and disgusted by it.

The overall theme of this show is stated by Jack on cam and put on *renegadepress.com*'s underground ezine (internet magazine):

"John Lennon once said: Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.... It seems we all try at one time or another to be somebody else. But how we see ourselves and how others see us can be two completely different things. And when we start to blur fantasy and reality, we need to step back and get some perspective [Zoey watching tape]. Otherwise we lose touch with who we really are!" (RP.C 4/8)

### **THE QUARREL WITH ONESELF IN THE GREEDY WORLD OF MEDIA**

When considering the drama series and comparing its character-portrayal to the sitcom ones, we may notice that here a much more differentiated standard has to be applied since the characters are permanently developing within the show and can therefore not be assigned to a special stereotype that is opposed to another one as easily as in comedy. Roles which are acted out are not as static and clichéd as in sitcoms and especially in teen series; they are analysed regularly and – if needed – revised (being a natural course in teen drama as the figures have to make and correct mistakes to act as proper role models).

As it is the main goal of teen shows to reflect teenage angst, dreams and longings (cf. Creeber, *Genre* 43, Banks 17-29), evolving from the painful feelings of constant 'otherness' and a hardly understandable and hardly bearable 'in-betweenness' between all kinds of different people and worlds, an ethnic combined with a sexual 'inbetweenness' becomes a convenient topic for the authors. Especially when keeping in mind that the

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH WRESTLING

producers of *renegadepress.com* consider their series as a means to stress the importance of multiculturalism and tolerance in general in Canadian teenage culture. Here in this case, the trials and tribulations of multiculturalism are not only concerned with ethnic stereotyping in general but also with gender. Hence, there are more poles of 'inbetweenness' than usual as far as we are not only confronted with the juxtapositions of 'girl' vs. 'womanhood' but also with 'Native' vs. 'White,' men vs. women, and 'Native female' stereotyping vs. 'White female' stereotyping.

In order to keep the line of political correctness here, we are presented a 'Native Squaw,' who is violently put in this role but needs to break out as she is a decent, rather 'Cam-shy Anti-Pocahontas' in reality. She is set in sharp contrast to a White 'Hog-Cam Lolita' propagating the typical characteristics of the 'Squaw stereotype' who tests her boundaries. As the teen series has to be politically correct, different roles have to be arranged in certain ways. Especially *renegadepress.com* makes a point by relieving its main Native cast Native problems evolving from prejudices: Jack and Crystal have a warm caring family life (uptown girl Zoey has not), Zoey gets an alcohol addiction and Crystal's best friend, who happens to be White, becomes addicted to Crystal Meth a drug that is prevalent in Canada's Native communities.<sup>50</sup>

What becomes obvious here as well is that today's modern media may play an important part in defining one's personal image. So, we are concerned with the two poles Jack already mentioned in his internet speech: 'fantasy and reality' on the basis of the characteristics of the contemporary mediascape. Not do we only have gender ethnic stereotypes, which are turned around, we (and the characters) – as the show has to keep up with modern standards and modern platforms that youth excessively make use of – have to deal with them on a merely extinguishable recorded basis, too. *renegadepress.com* therefore reminds us that cameras are equipped with a voyeuristic eye, stressed when Nicole feels visually raped. Zoey's final experience then becomes even more disturbing since the voyeuristic look is carried to its extremes as the greedy cam is personified. It becomes the 'technical eye' of Zoey's boyfriend with the advantage of not only possessing a rerun of the scene in one's memories but having it on tape without losing any of the 'dirty' detail.

Especially here, the question of the feminine body in the light of filmic media is being examined: in a postmodern manner we do not only have the film, but the filming in

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<sup>50</sup> cf. chapter 'Today's Saddest Nation.'

the filming presented as another, individual form of reality within the show's plot. To some extent this happens in *Moose TV* as well because of the handi-cam. Hereby, Zoey, the apparently 'All Canadian Girl' with her graceful shape, her blonde, thick curly hair, her doll-like face and her big blue eyes, fits to the role of an archetypical victimized Lolita, for she is "associated with [a] seduction by the popular culture she adores, figured as slavish devotion to mass culture, itself feminine, frivolous and empty, and most often associated with teenage girls" (Bavidge 47). In time she feels stripped of any identity for she not only distances herself from the 'All-Canadian Girl' she has been for three seasons, she now literally offers her body to the stereotype of a Lolita.

The dark, black-haired, exotic beauty with the almond-shaped eyes, on the contrary, who plays the clichéd role of a 'Sexy Pocahontas,' too, rejects this image. In doing so she informs the teenage viewer that stereotypical thinking and behaving just nurtures a fictional picture of yourself, which will only make you sad, for you firstly only play a role and secondly, will never be able to keep up to the claims it forces on you. After all, it will only hinder you in finding your true identity at last. Therefore, both girls can be contrasted as follows:

<b>Nicole</b>	<b>Zoey</b>
supporting actress	main cast
natural	artificial
self-assured	searching for identity
Native	White
black	blonde
exotic	doll-like
resisting voyeuristic cam	using voyeuristic cam
Native outsider being a role model	'All Canadian Girl' going astray
scorn the cam	hog the cam
'Camera-shy Anti-Pocahontas'	'Camera hog-Lolita'

## 6.4 BITCH FIGHT – REVISED

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This night's bitch-fights we provide the first rumble between the 'Pocahontian Warrior and the Trailer Park Tramp,' followed by the 'Pocahontian Cinderella against the Outré Siren' scratching their finger nails. After that we come to the 'Native Nun against all kinds of Man-Eaters' and in the end, we will watch the 'Camera-shy Anti-Pocahontas attacking the Camera-hog Lolita.'

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These fight constellations, sounding like quite promising video clips with the possibility of sexually explicit scenes, take of the cudgels for Aboriginal women in Native TV series in the end. Or to say it more simply: whenever a strong Native woman is spotted, a slinky White one will not be too far away. As all the shows already analysed prove, Native women are constantly set into a strong polar position to White characters whereby the Native women almost always reside on the more likeable end of the binary opposition scale. Pocahontases are there but merely used as an opportunity to ridicule the classic stereotype and/or to present a revised, modern Pocahontas in a shining light. The tantalizing Squaw, on the contrary, is mostly skipped in Native surroundings or generously yielded to White and elderly, wanton sirens who furnish the Native women a fit occasion of being represented as likeable and identifiable to the viewer in every modern living circumstance. This process of accepting the Native woman is mainly achieved by television characterization tactics rebelling against the reinforcement of "standards of whiteness" (Fleras, *Media* 1-2), working antithetically (through the binary oppositions effect) and being supported by technical filmic strategies. All in all, this can be reduced to a manageable number of equations being based on the dealings with sexuality and community affairs which lead to the creation of a role model (sexuality + community affairs = role model).



## SEXUALITY – MARILYN MONROE IS OUT

The shows' First Nations women will not let themselves be simply reduced to female sexuality implying that their strength can and will be found in their heads while they refuse to expose their bodies to the "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55). Hence, they will not dress provocatively in contrast to their White opponents. They would rather wear black and earth tones than sexually coded pink, red and orange. They are proud of black, straight, and rather conservatively cut hair while the White women around them fancy a styled blonde look associated with Marilyn Monroe's buxom, archetypal sex-symbolism of the previous century. In opposition to the White coquette, the contemporary Native female refuses to showcase her breasts for she neither accepts nurturing expectations demanded of an 'earthly mother' nor the sexual satisfaction demanded of a 'Squawish Prostitute.' Generally, she understands it to draw boundaries between her body and her surroundings feeling the need to protect herself due to her painful prehistory of assimilation and oppression, thereby having to give up the proclaim that sexuality could be an essential part of "Indigenous liberation" (Justice 106). Additionally, she is set in sharp contrast to the femme fatale, who infringes upon the sphere of any other person recognizing their promiscuity.

Furthermore, in filmic terms she gives the impression that she is a master of the camera in being able to influence the way it records her for the better, namely by refusing to give up to extreme voyeuristic shots. The White vamp on the contrary, virtually lusts for the latter as well as she seems to have been perfecting her sport of 'posing' to its limits. Therefore, the sleeky White elder woman in the surrounding of the young, aspiring Native one is drawn exceptionally calculating, using – being a typical femme fatale television icon (cf. Fiske, *Television* 183-184) – her femininity (sexuality) for her own ends. This may on the one hand be scary for the manly viewer while it on the other represents a strong Native woman, who floats above this diminishing of her body but also above the chances of a healing, a truly lived sensuality could be offering.<sup>51</sup>

Such being the case, for mere filmic characterization strategies one can say: the cheaper the one appears, the more precious the counterpart becomes. The more artificially disgusting the counterpart, the more naturally likeable the protagonist. The more the one is 'Schein' (illusion), the more the other is 'Sein' (reality).

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<sup>51</sup> cf. chapter 'The Disadvantages of Decency.'

## **COMMUNITY – POCAHONTAS IS IN**

In addition to the dealings with body and mind, Native women also stand out because of the leading roles they play in their communities. While the White seductresses (the ones who live in the Native community on a daily basis) tend to act passively and bored in respect of the band's desires (although the members constantly try to integrate them), the younger, more inexperienced Native women aim at changing the living circumstances of their communities for the better. The female control they naturally inherit is virtually never used to conspire against someone or to influence relationships and people for their own advantage as *femmes fatales* normally do; they only try to do good in a nurturing, nevertheless 'not-hunter/gatherer-staying-at-home'-sense. As a result, their focus is inward and they are insiders while the seductresses are outsiders whose focus remains outward. Within this kind of community (in the case of the shows being the ultimate, 'to-join' community for everybody watching), the non-Natives are positioned at the margins while the Native women are directly in the centre, being conspicuous by their presence. The 'White Others' are being conspicuous by their absence. Due to that the White women are constricted to passiveness while the Native ones are active do-gooders.

## **ROLE MODELS – WORN OUT SIRENS OUT**

Considering these two dimensions of sexuality and community affairs, it becomes obvious that Native women in these series are built up as role models while the White seductresses serve as stirrups to create a depiction of a Native young woman to identify with. Consequently, the more the siren sighs, gives slinky glances and lounges about, the more she distances herself from an image of serious admiration. Meanwhile, on the opposition pole the Native girl presents an image of a woman, who can talk intelligently, has a confident glance and an attractive gait.

In most cases, the White seductresses superficially envy the Native women because of their youth. Being about seventeen to twenty-five years old, these 'girls' have a life before them, full of an not spent beauty they are not even aware of and full possibilities the elder women let elapse. Age in a Native society has always been of great value. But as these White women have lived their lives in Western societies before, they

do not consider the wisdom of age worthwhile and rather stick to the 'Grow up quickly and stay young forever'-myth. According to this world view then, the Native girls have a distinct advantage over the latter. Youth promises the chance of changing the world to them, being on the verge of activity, presence and inclusiveness, goals the worn-out sirens desperately attempt to re-capture again or at least to replicate with artificial (cheap) accessories. Thus seductresses are portrayed as ignorant and primitive, making the Native young women in being far from forest-dwelling Pocahontases and old-fashioned, nostalgic Pauline Johnsons seem even more sophisticated and cosmopolitan.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover and foremost, today's Pocahontas has to be considered as extremely modern (according to the time the respective series is set in). Sadie wears the popular Grunge style of the 90s. Sarah dresses in trendy surfer clothing. Robin is quite conservative. But Nicole has to be considered up-to-date, too, while her White opponents choose sexually explicit costumes over up-to-datedness. Dress identifies the position these women have and will occupy in the Canadian society in the future. They are neither as 'unwordly' as Pocahontas has been nor can they be considered as "safe, exotic and somewhere else"(Switzer 21-22). The shows' authors and directors put emphasis on the fact that Native young women are exactly here. They fought their way to centre stage and refused to be left in the background. They are main characters in almost all of the shows while the White ones are left to the place the Aboriginals normally were pre-scribed to: the margin. In fact, the world has been turned around in these series as the Whites suddenly do not define themselves over 'Indian' stereotypes they created themselves any more. The Natives define themselves over stereotypes of White people created in Western media. Thus they clearly get the upper hand in this context.

Furthermore, Native women are not simple and not stoic but active benefactors who keep their community together and do not at all suffer from a loss of identity anymore. In these shows the young women know who they are, and they are proud enough of what they have become to look into and to tackle a bright future, a future that many Natives consider as long being lost to them. Therefore, having fought this hard fight for identity formation and having not been defeated by the bad living conditions, the Aboriginal women in these series are presented as healthy role models for Natives as well all Canadians in general.

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<sup>52</sup> cf. chapter 'The Art of Picking Berries.'

## **6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: BITCH FIGHT – REVISED**

The main female characters of today's First Nations television shows are neither Pocahontases with little, trembling, copper hands admiringly caressing the chest of a muscular White sex-god, nor are they lecherous Squaws pretending to go into the forest to pick berries in order to have wild sex. Today, Native women go into the forest, but they do so to hunt all by themselves as we will see now.

## **6.5 'POCAHONTAS' VS. THE 'INFANTILE ANTI NOBLE SAVAGES' – GENDER FIGHTS**

As the contemporary Pocahontases have fought and won their battles against the White seductresses, they can also be unleashed to battle their gender counterparts, namely the 'stronger sex,' that they are sometimes romantically linked to. Yet, in the following cases the Native men are as less blood-thirsty rapists lost in uncontrollable wildness as they are exotic sex-gods bound to controllable wildness. In fact, they seem to be as unsatisfactory in bed as they are in daily life. Therefore, they are not able to compete against their strong female opponents in any case.

Whereas television as a 'window to a (patriarchal) world' still often represents special ideas of femininity being attached to personal self-effacement, balancing out relationships, and being emotional strongholds while counter-measuring masculinity in the face of a "traditional image of the red-blooded male, competitive omnipotent, irredeemably sexist and emotionally illiterate" (Ross 147), especially sitcoms on First Nations in Canada work against those ideologies vehemently.<sup>53</sup> Attributed to that, many of the young males presented in these formats are further from being desirable 'Noble Savages' than 'stubby German Winnetou-Wannabes,' for they would rather prefer male bonding to a romantic relationship with all its profound, grumpy consequences of adulthood – if the women in their life would only let them.

Taking a look at different protagonists' ideologies and traits in the various sitcoms, a pattern of characters becomes quite obvious: two comical-like, nonviable friends posing against (one or two) ambitious young women, who are on their way to take the world.

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<sup>53</sup> cf. chapter 'Where Feminism fears to tread.'

## **THE PHLEGMATIC ENTRANCE OF THE 'INFANTILE SIDEKICK TONTOS' DUO – THE REZ**

Being opposed to an armada of snarling women, which as in a comical super hero story or Wrestlemania<sup>54</sup> show would feature characters like the 'Pocahontian Warrior' or the 'Trailer Park Tramp,' Frank and Silas only have two opportunities to survive in their harsh 'boxing ring' world. One would be to become a 'Flashing Red Savage' and or a 'Thundering Dark Wild Man' taking part in the battle. Silas and Frank, though, prefer to share the role of the 'Infantile Sidekick Tontos,' who are sometimes only useless sidekicks to their female partners but mostly just irksome ones to themselves, bound to one another by invisible handcuffs of shared immaturity.

### **PETITION FOR A WOLRD WITHOUT WOMEN – MALE BONDING**

#### **THE PETER PAN-COMPLEX**

The episode "Dirty girls, kill, kill!" (REZ 1/6) deals with the problem of Silas and Frank suffering from the 'Michael Jackson/Peter Pan-complex' characterized by the vehement refusal to grow up.<sup>55</sup> This is representing the will not to live in a world of emotional wholeheartedness, ambition and the acceptance of consequences for personal behavior. At one point Sadie laments that the boys are "always wearing emotional diapers" indicating that Silas and Frank not only manage to misinterpret the feelings of their female associates but linking them to un-toilet trained babies who must rely on a grown-up to take care of their needs. In other words, they lack any romantic "Über-Indian" qualities (Taylor, "Indian" 27-28) like protectiveness and a commitment to self-abandonment.

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<sup>54</sup> This is a popular competition of extremely muscular men and women who slip into the roles of modern day Gladiators with special 'unique' characteristics and outfits; the battles are rehearsed and faked, though. Famous wrestlers like Hulk Hogan or Bret 'The Hitman' Hart are celebrated like pop stars.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Pan, the protagonist of a novel created by J.M Barrie, is an impish boy who refuses to grow up, spending his endless adventurous childhood in Neverland as leader of a boy gang, thereby meeting 'wondrous characters' like mermaids, Indians (!), fairies and pirates and from time to time some ordinary children/Michael Jackson the former 'King of Pop' (1958-2009) is said to have been emulating Peter Pan as he – as a result of a broken personal childhood – constantly attempted to 'buy' it back as a grown up (he even owned an estate called 'Neverland').

As with a number of other episodes this one also partly relies on one of Frank's crazy and diverting ideas for making 'easy money' (Frank: "Thirty girls in string bikinis getting down in big fats of pudding. Like ... who wouldn't pay to watch that?" (REZ 1/6)) and Silas' attempt to cover up for and support his best friend. Another example would be Frank's amusing revenge in the manners of the A-Team on a White, racist construction boss by letting his truck explode, because he has been discriminating against Frank and Silas for days while mature Sadie "would have dealt with it officially" (REZ 2/9).

This irresponsible behavior is accompanied by a kind of stoicism, a typical stereotype concerning the filmic image of Native Americans "forever folding their arms in front of their breasts" (Friar 86). This refusal to show ambition and their strong bonding by sharing their laziness is proven in an obvious way when Sadie organizes a construction work job and tells the boys about it while they are idly sunbathing on the hood of a car:



Fig. 6.13. *The Rez*: Silas and Frank as masters of procrastination

Sadie: I got you a job!  
Frank: Road Construction, eh? That's pretty hard work!  
Sadie: Yeah, you guys start tomorrow!  
Frank: Me? You know, I got really sensitive skin.... Just because you have a real job, you think everybody should.  
Sadie: You should try it sometime... (REZ 2/9)

In contrast to most of the active women, the two boys, are static figures as they are usually lying or sitting somewhere – 'just

watching the scene, hardly moving.'

Throughout the entire series the boys are very often framed in medium shots while others are given their individuality by head and shoulder close-ups; thus we are presented with a very intimate male bonding here, based on their desperate need for a naive kind of freedom usually associated only with children.

### A UNIVERSE WITHOUT WOMEN

This interdependence is also mirrored in Silas' and Frank's typology of character signs in the form of their admiration for two postmodern media archetypes, namely the MTV created comical characters of *Beavis and Butt-Head* and their preference for Heavy Metal styling. They are – especially in the first season – costumed in tight jeans, metal band T-shirts with horror prints on them, leather jackets and wear long hair. *The Rez's* two main male characters not only occasionally remind of *Beavis and Butt-Head*, they literally imitate them in some scenes making the concrete link not only imaginable but testable. Yet, *Beavis and Butt-Head* are known for being young adolescents spending their days on the couch commenting on 'the culture' surrounding them without showing any ambitions in life ('White Trash Stoic Indians,' so to speak). "The joke is at the expense of a whole genus of American males, represented by two teenage MTV addicted mid-western metal-heads, who share a sofa instead of a bed" (Simpson 140).

Extreme forms of male bonding play an essential role in the ideological world of those comic characters. But they also serve as one of the corner stones of Heavy Metal where male allegiance becomes an ultimate characteristic while women are often excluded from this world or only tolerated as mere sexual objects (for example as voyeuristic victims fighting in a pudding kiddie pool). Reality often reveals them as a 'scary folk of see throughers,' who are miraculously able to blow off the cover of the emotional (and sexual) universe of men (emotional diapers) as Walser affirms in his discourse on Metal Music: "[m]odeling male power and control within the context of patriarchal culture, and metal's emanation of masculinity include varieties of misogyny as well as 'exscursions' of the feminine – that is, total denial of gender anxieties through the articulation of fantastic worlds without women" (Walser 110). Thus a world where male bonding becomes a religion, portrays itself much more harmless and safe, for it is

goal-oriented, not relationship-oriented. The relationship is there to serve a common goal, not the needs of the relationship itself; it depends on action, not on feeling. The need to depend on others is there, but it is externalized onto a goal, not internalized into a basic need of the male. The closeness of the ensuing relationship does not therefore, threaten masculine independence. (Fiske, *Television* 213)



## THE BITCHINESS OF THE REAL WORLD

Yet, the series plays a mean trick on Silas' and Frank's desperately defended ties of manhood for they are not being able to measure up to the standards of the typical Metal freaks' commitment to male-bonding or to the men-of-action requirements of the show, *The A-Team*, for instance. The characters of *The A-Team* thereby are the prototypes of filmic male attachment, as they have created a world in which women play a strongly subordinate role since they mostly occur as supporting actresses lasting only one episode while the confirmed 'testosterone-led' team strives for the realization of the goal-oriented fulfilment of justice in determining the climax of every episode.

The screenwriters of *The Rez* on the contrary bundle bonded, 'postmodern media-contaminated' Frank and Silas to a world of unemployment without the possibilities of long lasting, world-changing goals and with very few other men to interact with, but with the greater prospect of becoming permanent couch potatoes. Actually, they are thrown ironically into a world of 'the other extreme,,' as they are exposed to a society ruled by amazon-like women, whom they have to cope/fight with/give up to in almost every aspect; they have a mother messing around with them (Silas' mom: "You know how to cook bannick?" Frank [enthusiastically because he is hungry]: "Yes!" Mom: "Then do it yourself!" (REZ 1/5), girlfriends making decisions for them without even asking, female bosses confusing them with their sex theories, a medicine women, they are scared of, etc). Consequently, the 'Infantile Sidekick Tontos' do not have a ghost of a chance against the amazon armada of 'Pocahontian Warriors.'

Because of this, it becomes virtually impossible for the two boys to find or to even measure their masculinity against a male ideal. They rather live their manhood at random trying to support it by the masculine, hard appearance that Heavy Metal style offers them. This male bonding of the two masculine Native protagonists does vehemently hint at the dysfunctional world the two boys are living in: their choices of style, role models, childish behavior and 'non-ambition' become logical consequences of dealing with the circumstances they have to face on a daily basis. Hence, Heavy Metal, as well as the imitation of *Beavis and Butt-Head*, the refusal to grow up, the cultivation of the 'Stoic Indian' and the anti-cultivation of the committed 'Noble Savage' stereotype are the engines, which keep the machinery of a feckless male image rolling. Heavy Metal styling for instance puts emphasis on manly roughness, non-conformity, the immanent will to live the life a free man ought to live. This is shown off by the enjoyment of horror scenarios, proving fearlessness, as well as leather and metal ornament, stressing the

wish to act out and prove oneself in a war- and hunting society. Nonetheless, Heavy Metal is a prototype of a 'there is no ying without a yang'-mentality, for this genre is as popular for its power chords and horror scenarios as it is for its love-play with androgyny and its gathering place for gender-irritated, male youth flaunting the invisible 'big L'<sup>56</sup> on their foreheads. They mainly prefer to act out in a safe, imaginary world where 'complicated, terrifying women' are reduced to mere pornographic sex objects or alternatively are entirely non-existent.

Silas and Frank also are caught in this trap, just like many Western male teenagers are. Yet, their situation is even more delicate as they have lost the war and hunting-society their culture was prominent for for centuries, giving their male members access to a warrior-shaped manhood and masculinity for free. Now they are left with nothing to fill this gap as they are not part of the capitalistic society of today, able to earn their places as breadwinners. As a result, they cling to popular music pieces of a bold manhood and other comical characters also following this unstable path to a doubtful virility. "Hero figures such as B.A.,<sup>57</sup> the Incredible Hulk, ... or Superman are popular among ... boys ... who occupy powerless social positions in the family and school. The physical strength of such heroes is frequently extended by cars, guns and machinery" (Fiske, *Television* 201).

At the same time, Silas and Frank do not directly relate to these 'man-of-action-comic figures' but remain perennial couch-potatoes. As a result the two boys will likely be caught in their world of mediocrity,<sup>58</sup> bound to another, bound to their limited space, bound to their weak, wan bodies, bound to a daily routine without any form of adventure to come, bound to living circumstances without the prospect of wealth like a fancy car to arrive. Superficially, they are typical geeks<sup>59</sup> with all the clumsiness and chaos, the viewer needs to have for a good laugh. But subliminally this is a statement whose political depth hints at the burdens of 'the saddest Nation.'<sup>60</sup>

Also considered in this regard is the childish behavior of the two boys.

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<sup>56</sup> This is a common sign among today's American youth to inform somebody that someone is a 'loser' ('L')/thereby the thumb and the wagging finger are splayed out in the shape of an 'L' and put to the forehead.

<sup>57</sup> He is the muscular black guy from the A-Team.

<sup>58</sup> Silas will escape at the very end, though, in answering to his calling as a writer (cf. chapter 'Tarantino would be proud of you').

<sup>59</sup> Together with 'jerk,' 'meek,' etc. this is a classical labelling of insecure adolescents who do not fit the average – let alone – the common 'cheerleader/quarterback' image, as they appear 'weird' to the public for not sharing typical 'cool' teenage hobbies and styles.

<sup>60</sup> cf. chapter 'The Saddest Nation,'

One aspect of masculinity in our culture is its connection with maturity, 'Be a man' is a frequent admonition to young boys that requires them to behave more maturely than their physical age. Many popular narratives dramatize the 'boundary rituals,' whereby a youth crosses into manhood. Masculinity can never be taken for granted. Boys learn to prove it constantly in various forms of competition with each other... this competitive proof is often channelled into school and sport ... [or] found in the peer group or gang. Maintaining their membership involves a constant performance of aggression and toughness. (Fiske , *Television* 200- 209)

Taking this statement into consideration, it may become obvious that Silas and Frank are constantly overtaxed by the demands of manhood and therefore stick to the safe side by passionately keeping to their childishness; there are no apparent perspectives to be found that offer worthy alternatives. They live in a society barren of peer groups to measure up against, yet full of women telling them what to do. In order to ensure at least a tiny number of male goal-oriented relationship, they may have to maintain their bonds as much as a drowning person grasps at a life preserver, even while, additionally, the image of the 'Noble Savage' haunts them with embarrassing effect.

### **DEMISE OF THE 'NEXT HOT THING OF THE 90S' – THE 'NOBLE SAVAGE'**

The 'Noble Savage' with the "glistening coppery skin and long raven-black hair ... [wearing] little more than a breechclout" (van Lent 214-215), is put on *The Rez* agenda in episode three called "A Little Revealing." This is a very expressive and suggestive title, as this show does not only reveal the bodies of the two male protagonists in the face of some greedy-eyed women, but it also uncovers the series' dealings with the image of the 'next hot thing-Noble Savage' that was so popular in the 90s. In this episode, the women of the small community organize a bachelorette party. The 'Native' stripper whom they hire, a guy called "Spreadeagle," who in Silas' opinion "wears his butt on his breast" (REZ 1/3), turns out to be too expensive. As a consequence, Silas is talked into taking over.

This episode's plot (REZ 1/3) is a combination of a sitcom's general ability to convey delicate political topics and to celebrate dysfunctionality, as well as Natives' teasing philosophy of 'Don't take life and especially yourself too seriously.' The

"outlandish situation" (Abelman 316) in this episode is triggered by one – later two (as Silas chickens out) – average-reserve-Native boys, who are suddenly put in the bizarre situation of having to live up to the image of a 'Wind in his Hair'-Go-Go-Dancer, who is the personification of a testosterone-fueled protector, of being an exotic hunk with perfect control over his body, of being a sex god, who stirs up the blood of all the women around. They fail in every aspect.

This failure can be ascribed to diverse inauspicious factors which deny Silas any form of 'saviour for bored wives daily tristesse.'<sup>61</sup> First of all, Silas is not a confident 'hunk' as the wearing of a tiny speedo on his thin body with a chicken breast attests. When Silas is shown in this outfit while the camera moves in an extreme close-up shot from his boots and socks over his skinny, naked stork legs, to his sparsely filled tiny pants, to his petite, hairless breast, stopping at his panic-distorted face, the viewer may notice that this voyeuristic emphasis on his 'bodily virtues' does not convey his personal satisfaction about his erotic abilities but rather his imminent will to escape the situation like a scared rabbit running from a predator. The predators in this case are Etta and Sadie, who according to the bird's eye angle on him, watch him like an inferior – dissatisfying – object.

Furthermore, in his clumsiness, Silas all by himself dispels any kind of exoticism related to an 'Indian stripper.' He decides not to dress like a 'Noble Savage Indian,' not even like a cop or a fire-fighter but like an ice-hockey fan with a wide shirt and a striped bobble cap, a cap which lets Frank (who has to take over the performance and the clothes in the end) look even more like a geek, when he finally 'performs' on stage looking like a "bunny caught in the headlight" (REZ 1/3) as Eleanor states.

Taking a look at this stripping-disaster, it becomes clear that the screenwriters dispossess their two male characters of any form of 'next hot thing of the 90s' characteristics as well as of the typical television series' male gender image of the "red-blooded, omnipotent, sexist"-'Come-on! Be-a-man'-man (Ross 147). This is mostly



Fig. 6.14. 'Indian' male stripper

<sup>61</sup> cf. chapter 'Diet Coke Indian'

documented by their awkwardness concerning exotic eroticism, an exoticism that the average Western dime-novel-reading housewife would likely prefer to experience.

Moreover, the delicately outlandish basic situation (cf. Abelman 316) of two boys is emphasized by, having them strip in front of their female family members; moms, cousins and aunts are sitting eagerly in the front rows armed with cameras and video cams. As Silas puts it quite desperately just before he passes out from the embarrassment: "Dancing on the reserve is like committing group incest!" (REZ 1/3).



Fig. 6.15. *The Rez*: Silas

Generally, the outspoken dealings of the reserve's women in this situation also 'reveal' a lot about gender behavioral patterns as the women symbolically wear the breeches. As a first step, *The Rez* does not present the typical "female nude [who is] depicted as submissive and passive – a projection of the phallogentric desire to control and contain women's sexuality" (Mc Gough 64), but a male nude who – being overcome by his sexuality – is lost in a submissive and passive situation. Comparable to the image of women in *Sex and the City*, this episode is all about female empowerment, about female consumption of male bodies during which women, dictate the action in a female-centered universe, in

which the males float helplessly<sup>62</sup>.

The ability to be able to dance serves as an overall indicator here, revealing important sexual undertones. As Frank, after Silas has already passed out backstage, enters the stage, he is – out of his overwhelming fear – not able to dance at all. He rather performs some strange, gauche maneuvers embarrassing himself deeply in front of the heated crowd. His girlfriend Lucy has to jump on stage, take off his ridiculous cap, turn him on and show him how to make the right moves by dancing herself to finally get him going. This scene shows a 'male-atypical akinesia' in contrast to the usual depiction of the 'Noble Savage,' who according to his (movie) 'savagery features' sings and dances as in a Dionysian orgy and therefore should be a great dancing performer, as the wild

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<sup>62</sup> cf. chapters 2.3, 'Where Feminism fears to treat.'

man, in contrast to the awkward Western male, is said to possess natural control over his body, which – being recognizable by his easy dancing moves – suggests his abilities in bed. This development emerges from Western culture's ancient need to deny the body, meaning that giving up to rhythm automatically turns off the mind, ergo letting go of reason, giving in to scary emotions, and connecting oneself to nature. That is why for centuries the most popular and most accepted form of dancing had to be well-regulated standard dance like the waltz. The Native young man of today as depicted in Frank and Silas' behavior has been robbed of his innate naturalness, though, and putting it as a classical Native subversive humor critique: not only has his manliness been taken away but also his ability to listen and act according to his body and as a last step to move in general (cf. 'Stoic Indian').

Yet, the Native youth, being in the blossom of its manhood, so to speak, does not only disappoint in 'exotic matters' but also on a deeper emotional basis concerning women's socio-cultural demands: For the 'Noble Savage' also represents the family guy, who – with all his masculinity – is able to protect the band and whose deed it is to 'keep the balance and harmony within the community.' Responding to this clichéd feature also becomes a main challenge in this episode, as two of the girls, who are sitting in the audience are about to start a fight and can only be deflected by the stripping dancer:

Etta: Remember Frank, Indians have danced for many things ... rain ... war ...

Frank: Sex?

Etta: Don't think sex, Frank! Think peace! Dance for peace! You may save lives!"(REZ 1/3)

Consequently – in a self-ironic twist determining the humor of this domcom – the full range of the 'Noble Savage' image is used within the action to serve the personal desires of the community's dominating women, who carelessly use outsider prejudices to satisfy themselves. By dancing (erotically), the man again has to save the community's well-being as he naturally did in former times, keeping in mind that dancing usually "develop[s] and reinforce[s] bonds among the kin and community members. It can empower individuals to understand their own roles ... [it] facilitate[s] personal and community transformations. Public transformations ... can effect changes in behavior and attitudes without embarrassment... " (Kealiinohomoku 70).

So, within this episode the stereotype of the 'Next Hot thing of the 90s-Noble Savage' works on quite different levels. First of all, we may acknowledge that the screenwriters are aware that this 'new image' has arisen on the horizon of Native prejudicing. In an attempt to deceive the non-Native viewer, this stereotype is employed to expose it as ridiculous. But at the same time the show is able to use it in order to present some self-deprecating humor. Thirdly, it introduces a discourse of social criticism concerning the current living conditions, albeit within the conservative and consensual limits of sitcom plot line strategies (cf. Wells 181):

In the past sexuality in Native communities had been a link to the natural world, being the tool for emotional well-being as well as the 'entrance to Tomson Highway's Garden' (cf. *Me Sexy* 38 ff.). As already stated, dancing is strongly bound to these kinds of feelings as it in Native societies is a tool to communicate with the natural surrounding world as well. Nonetheless, in the Western universe exactly this kind of attachment to one another and to the world has often been ill-reputed for centuries as being carnal desires, which destroy purity. Notwithstanding the depiction of the 'Chippendale Indian' has recently been evoked by Western societies, thereby exposing themselves a secret lusting after something, namely Native sexual freedom and virility, which had been repressed for centuries and now normally mostly finds its way out on very special, easily justifiable occasions like a boozy bachelorette party or at the performances of a gay singing group called *The Village People*. This Native sitcom puts it on the display, though, reminding the viewer of the effects of this White self-deception and the stereotype resulting from it in a self-ironic, "Don't take life too seriously" (Graveline 214) way.

In the end, making Frank dance serves very postmodern obligations. They are based on a likeable mixture of Native teasing and survival humor addressing painful Western stereotyping and using it for personal benefit – on an internal basis within the action (women being amused) and on an external one, in making use of it by provoking the laughter of the Native as well as the White viewer, who will probably understand the humor on different levels. Within the action the women are the masters of these strategies while the males become mere objects in a double sense: as sexual and amusement objects.

Furthermore, in a politically correct subliminal statement the males are far from being romantic, dime-novel 'half-breeds' or 'Diet Coke Indians' in need of White

characteristics to rise on a Canadian 'diagram of acknowledgement'.<sup>63</sup> They may be ridiculed sexual objects and they may be pitiful victims of their own virility (previously strongly promoted by wannabe 'White Ultramasculines' with the help of either notions of rape or notions of old fashion-based asexuality).<sup>64</sup> But at least Silas and Frank are Canadian First Nations people through and through, and 'their oppressors' are female and coming from their own ranks.

### **THE FIGHT OF THE 'POCAHONTIAN WARRIOR' AGAINST THE 'INFANTILE SIDEKICK TONTOS'**

A normal healthy man should be "self-assured, unafraid, in control and autonomous or self-sufficient, not dependent" (Hite n.p.) while a 'normal healthy woman' is described as "vulnerable, dependent and in many ways childish" (Root 16). Although these characterizations were most popular before the 1980s and feminism has made an entrance in today's Western culture, television shows in many cases still tend to support a patriarchal world view – even today. *The Rez* has been walking a different path.

When in episode six "Dirty girls, kill, kill!" Sadie and Frank are talking about their relationships in a rather desperate manner, the role allocation prevailing on the reserve becomes obvious in a nearly painful way. This is supported by the techniques of production, as Frank stands locked in a telephone cell from a worm's eye camera position while Sadie looks down on him from the stairs in a bird's view. Their discussion develops as follows:

Sadie: When I was little, Frank, I thought you were so cool. You protected me on the school yard, fighting my fights. You taught me how to drive.... Just like a big brother, so cool! What happened?

Frank: You learned how to drive! (REZ 1/6)

This scene becomes symptomatic for this domcom's depiction of male-female relationships on various levels. First of all, it again tells of a young man (actually two because Silas is in similar situation), who got stuck along the way, and who in contrast to his female 'antagonists' has not managed to grow up yet. Looking at the screenwriting

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<sup>63</sup> cf. chapter 2.6.

<sup>64</sup> cf. chapter 'Please, Mercy-Slay me!.'



situation given in the reserve they live in, this can be valued as a socio-cultural critique: families are non-existent now, the community is devoid of male role models, who seem to have given in to the disastrous conditions they were born into (alcohol, etc.), and is full of strong, practical thinking female warriors (Silas' mom, Etta), who fought their battles against their depressing daily routines and social obstacles and won. Therefore, they automatically became great role models for girls such as Sadie and Lucy. But at the same time they left the boys behind, who sometimes secretly long for a carefree 'world without scary women,' a trope in Heavy Metal- and *A-Team* circles, and a world without an armada of Amazon-alikes constantly interfering in their lives.



Fig. 6.16. *The Rez*: Sadie and Frank proportioning the powers

Consequently, Frank's comment: "You learned how to drive!" stands for a whole universe of ambitions and dreams in life, in which the two males are repeatedly left on the roadside like disagreeable hitchhikers.

In a rather simple, literal way, even the prop employment reveals the boys' dilemma. As has been said before, machinery promotes a male's physical strength, especially in a world where we cannot find tribal societies anymore that involves a ceremonial access to "the power of "men's magic," (Easlea n. pag. quoted in Fiske, *Television 202*). Yet, on the reserve the two boys do not even have a car all to themselves, and to make it worse, we learn that Silas owns an old mountain bike while Sadie drives a motorized one. Silas exclusively rides on its back seat, leaving her to decide the speed and direction.

The girls on the show are juxtaposed to the boys inter alia by constantly conveying to the viewers that they not only learned how to drive but also have the ambition 'to take a car and move on' – in this case directly to the big city. Lucy does so, in order to fulfill her big dream of becoming a musical singer and actress, and Sadie follows in starting her political career in Toronto. Being able to drive, the two young women are literally always on the move, changing something while the boys usually appear to be stuck. This is also supported by the camera work, as Silas and Frank are generally shown together in one frame, not moving too much. Furthermore, their childish behavior is stressed when

they run out of the picture frame because something goes wrong and they flee from taking responsibility. The two girls on the contrary are in many cases alone in the picture, which underlines their individuality and their personal power. Additionally, they are virtually always moving, mostly into the frame, indicating that they are lively women of action, who actively take part in the alteration of the situation on the reserve.

Sadie's activism is in contrast to Silas. She starts her political career at the reserve, where, if she stays, she is "not gonna make a difference!" and that being so she wants to "get into the trenches and not stay watching from the sidelines" (REZ 1/2, 2/11). Silas, however, finds his singular ambition in sometimes dedicating himself to the 'unprofitable, emotionally-driven art' of writing.<sup>65</sup> Her activism and the domination accompanying it, constantly jeopardize her romantic relationship with Silas. Throughout the whole series he tends to be like 'the insecure girl in this relationship,' as he keeps telling her that their love will break if she keeps putting her professional ambitions before it, which also involves her staying in the cosiness of the reserve while Sadie wants to leave to change the world. The roles are switched as Frank also notices: he observes that "Sadie is gonna be a queen or something ... but why does it always have to be best? Why can't good not be good enough!" (REZ 1/6).

Also supporting this role-reversal in their relationship is the formerly described Native women's refusal to give in to objectification while objectifying the men rather naturally. This is also indicated by dressing and style. Sadie for instance wears short hair, which is easily manageable (she has more important things to do) while Silas and Frank (maybe according to their Native roots (though, they do not feel any) or maybe according to their great amount of leisure time) wear long haircuts.

So generally, while Silas' and Frank's lives are dedicated to passivity and staying modest if only the women would keep quiet, cook their meals and let them be, the women of the show – in almost every aspect of the binary opposition scale – switch the sides. They are the members of a female Native armada fighting to change the world on a microcosmic scale, namely in supporting the community they live in, as well as on a macrocosmic one, having the opportunity to alter the bad image of Natives across Canada (Sadie in politics and Lucy in her serious ambition as an actress). Silas and Frank, on the contrary, as the 'Boyish Sidekick Tontos,' as an exclusive duo do rather dip into the artificial sandpit of postmodern media hiding from reality for the greatest number

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<sup>65</sup> cf. chapter 'Tarantino Would Be Proud Of You.'

of the show's episodes, until at least Silas hears his calling at the last moment, when he finally successfully and wholeheartedly trades his little plastic spades for a fountain pen.

Yet, 'Boyish Sidekick Tontos' in general seem to be the 'next hot thing' of the Canadian Native sitcoms in the new millennium for the *Rez* Boys figuratively pass over their kiddie spades to the *Hank Williams'* Boys.



Fig. 6.17. *The Rez*: Silas caught in Sadie's backseat

## THE PLAYFUL ARRIVAL OF 'THE MULTI-COLORED SMOOTHIES'-DUO – HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION

Cause I can work and pay the bills  
And make believe it thrills me,  
You can bake a chocolate cake  
And I'll eat it, if it kills me,

"If You'll Be A Baby (To Me)," Hank Williams

As *Hank Williams First Nation* is named after one of the most popular Country singers of all time (while his grave directs the plot of the movie made before the series), he himself and his image will naturally play an essential part in the show. Apart from the fact that he of all people is a representation of the American Cowboy myth – which could be the greatest anathema to the whole Native Nation – Williams is nevertheless characterized as a musical voice-over commenting on the small town life of this Native community. Therefore, the ideologies he stands for keep intermingling with the show's action at one point or another.<sup>66</sup> Although this song above is from the fifties, 'the Golden Age of the Family,' we already see that gender roles are beginning to split open. Both the male and the female are overburdened and discontented with the gender roles they are put in. The male protagonist feels discomfort concerning the breadwinner role ("make believe it thrills me") while he does not have too many hopes in the housewife abilities of his woman at the same time. This confusing situation of unstable gender roles is one, that Williams is said to have given "an individual voice to collective fear and hopes about the body, romance, gender roles and the family" (Leppert 260). Consequently, as Williams' ghost haunts the show, this already indicates that the figures in *Hank Williams First Nation* face similar problems of identity-shaping as the ones in *The Rez* do.

## CHESHIRE CAT SMILES AND BEATLES GLASSES – MALE BONDING

Just as on the show already discussed above, *Hank Williams First Nation* features two 'comical dumb friends,' who live together in a small town somewhere in the Canadian bush and are rather burdened by everyday challenges like finding goals in life or dealing

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<sup>66</sup> cf. chapter 'For Singing Is The Best Medicine.'

correctly with women their age. The main features of male interdependence also determine the relationship between Huey and Jacob. Just like in Country Music where the lamenting cowboy habitually cries out for his lonesome prairie (a universe without scary women as the Heavy Metal/*A-Team* model), Huey and Jacob, too, frequently contemplate life in a world without women where they would live a much more balanced, easy-going existence. The basis of their bonding is primarily characterized by the playful credulity of ten-year-old boys always having a life-changing naive idea in mind; their plans are eventually smashed because of the relentlessness of the real world. Or they end up at the borderline of shattering and have to be saved by a reliable grown-up. The consequences of this behavioral pattern are likely to be ignored in the first place. The two boys do not conform to the "Stoic Indian" stereotype, though, because there is barely stillness shown whenever they are filmed together. In fact, we usually see numerous examples of filial, uncontrolled movement within the shots indicating childish playfulness and a rascally carefreeness.

This kind of infantile naivety is also supported by the two boys' looks. When Jacob for instance comes back from a trip to the United States, telling his grandparents he has a big surprise for them, they believe it to be a girlfriend (which would prove his maturity). But in keeping with his puerile image, he – swollen with pride – brings some metal-rimmed John Lennon glasses back, which he thinks make him "look a lot smarter" (HW 1/1) but in reality confirm his image as a 'jerk.' His wise grandfather acknowledges this by grinningly correcting him and making the comment: "You look like a Beatle!" (HW 1/1).



Fig. 6.18. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Jacob – smoothie without his Beatle glasses

Fitting the John Lennon, 'looking-like-a-comic-figure,' is Huey. He is 'cute' but not in a 'colloquial-English-fifteen-years-old-girl-describing-her-recent-crush-sense' but in the basic one, for Huey is not a sex symbol but rather the 'boy to cuddle with:' he still has some baby fat, his smile reminds of the grin of Alice's Cheshire cat<sup>67</sup> and he wears an innocent Prince Valiant<sup>68</sup> hair cut. This description reveals that the common impression that Huey makes on others can easily be conveyed by calling to mind not one but two diverse figures in juvenile literature. This shows much about the way the screenwriters and directors wanted to make smoothy Huey appear in the show: he could not be further away from the image of a "solid square chin, aquiline nose, chiseled brow and long, flowing raven-black hair that can tell you the direction of the prairie breeze better than any windsock"- 'Noble Savage' (Taylor "Indian" 28), and from an "Ultramasculine Manial"- 'Ripping Wildman' (Cleaver 155). He is closer to the image of the protagonist of a comical children's show on Nickelodeon. Thus Huey does not conform to a malicious and sexualized filmic Native stereotype.

Yet, in contrast to *The Rez* boys, Jacob and Huey have a very strong, likeable and wise father-figure or role model, Jacob's grandfather Adie, who continuously saves his wards from the bad consequences of one of Huey's weird ideas. When Huey for instance – in all his gushing enthusiasm – fails to sign up a main act for the Country Music festival he started to organize, Adie calms him down (in contrast to Huey's and Jacob's steady movements he calmly sits in a truck), helps him out and gives him important advice:

[Huey tells him about his failure]

Adie: You were going after the low hanging fruits!

Huey: How hard can it be to put a concert on?

Adie: So what are you gonna do?

Huey: ... Leave town?

Adie: You know what? That low hanging fruit is always rotten! Easy money is o.k.. But if it's too easy, it can be dangerous. (HW 1/5)

This small conversation fits into the picture drawn of Huey, whose character traits in most cases resemble those of a kid planning enthusiastically on something without thinking of the possible effects, and in failure finding his only way out by leaving the mess behind. Yet, in the end he can count on and will be saved by an experienced grown up and in contrast to Silas and Frank, Huey and Jacob are provided this male saviour.

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<sup>67</sup> This is from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865).

<sup>68</sup> This is a comic strip about an English knight by Hal Foster (1993).



## NOBLE SAVAGES ON MULTI-COLORED ICE CREAM TRUCKS

As has been pointed out before, Huey and Jacob's outward appearance do not have any similarities at all with a 'Noble Savage:' this is stressed by Huey's favorite T-shirt which has the saying "TOUGH GUYS WEAR PINK" on his front. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the character traits of the two are not comparable to those of a masculine fighter who is able to lead a life, in which he can easily support an entire family. As matter of fact, apart from the two boys having great difficulties keeping up to the women in their lives in general, Huey, like Frank, is not too successful in the working world as well, meaning that he cannot be described as someone who will be a breadwinner in the near future.



Fig. 6.19. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Huey – smoothie with his Prince Valiant haircut and his Cheshire cat smile

First and foremost, he tends to have several temporary jobs, but no real one. He for instance is a part-time radio DJ, a part-time bingo announcer, a part-time DJ for parties, a part-time event manager, etc. At the beginning of the first season he even gets the idea of buying an old ice-cream truck and becoming an ice-cream seller:

Huey: It's got speakers and everything! This beauty is a winning machine!

Jacob: How much?

Huey: 5000. I get it for 4!

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: 'POCAHONTAS VS. THE 'INFANTILE ANTI-NOBLE SAVAGES' – GENDER FIGHTS

Jacob: Where you gonna get that out?

Huey: Half of my genes, picklehead! Half Cree is all you ever need!"

[Honest AI, the car salesman approaching]

Honest AI: You want anything?

Huey: How many of those ice-cream trucks do you have, AI?

Honest AI: Just one!

Huey: Sure could use about three of them!

Honest AI: Cash or Charge?

Huey: I am thinking a bit of both!

Honest AI: Then we write it up!

Huey: Let me consult with my business adviser for a sec.

[turning to Jacob]

Jacob: You really want this?

Huey: Ice-cream in summer. What could go wrong! (HW 1/2)

Yet, after having made the deal with Honest AI (Adie: "Do you know, where Honest AI got his nickname from? You do now! So, did anyone ever call you Brilliant Huey?" (HW 1/2)), he gets turned down on the financing and needs Adie to invest in his truck so that he doesn't lose his 2000 dollar deposit. Huey is not only a loser because of the poor investment in the ice-cream truck, he also fails because the ice-cream will not sell too well. Furthermore, the truck implies an infantile scheme, as, first of all, Huey invests all his money in a typical children's idea, which could have evolved from watching *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*<sup>69</sup> too often. Secondly, not only the contents (ice-cream) but also the outside (the looks of the truck) underline the childishness of this investment as the truck looks like it belongs to Pippi Longstocking<sup>70</sup>, with all its different colored paint (green, orange, blue, yellow, etc.). Thirdly, a farraginous ice-cream truck cannot live up to a powerful, black mustang more appropriate for an 'Indian.' At a later point of the plot, Jacob and Huey are even caught inside the truck and left in an embarrassing, immobile situation; the truck it is shaken by the town's angry baseball team after it has broken down and blocks the bridge to their baseball field.

Therefore, as in *The Rez*, the male protagonists' vehicles, which are often repeatedly experienced as 'phallus-ersatz' in Western societies do in these cases directly hint at the value of manhood – leaving their owners rather 'less-gifted' concerning the classic status symbol of a 'patriarchal' society. Using self-ironic, permitted, disrespectful

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<sup>69</sup> This is a juvenile book by Roald Dahl (1964), adapted for film in 1971 and again in 2005 about the candymaker Willy Wonka, who permits some lucky children the entrance to his fantastic chocolate factory.

<sup>70</sup> This is series of juvenile books (1945-1975) by Astrid Lindgren about a girl, who lives in a multi-colored mansion called 'Villa Villekulla' (farraginous mansion).



Native humor Huey additionally is portrayed – except for obviously not being able to be a breadwinner regarding his endeavours as entrepreneur – as a Native person who is not even able to fulfill one of the most archetypical Native skills: Taking a look at the ice-cream purchase disaster, he cannot even trade anymore.

## **THE FLEXING OF MUSCLES OF THE 'POCAHONTIAN COWGIRL' AGAINST THE 'MULTI-COLORED SMOOTHIE'**

If the boys refuse to grow up, the girls have to set the agenda, a theme that is obvious in *Hank Williams First Nation*: Sarah is not only the intelligent one with ambition in life (she will leave the reserve and go to college in Montreal), she as well as the 'ice-cream girl' uses her powerfulness to get what she wants (HW1/3). The 'ice-cream' girl bamboozles Huey when he hires her to sell ice-cream in his truck by argumentatively defeating him. In discussing her loan, she constantly interrupts him and twists his words, which is well underlined by the cutting of these scenes, as we have an intercut to a boat race taking place on the nearby river (HW 1/3). The ice-cream girl's argumentation seems to speed as fast as the high speed boats in the race. The wipe technique used here alludes to Huey's imminent situation: he is permanently wiped out of his argumentation and defeated all along the line.

Later Sarah, in contrast to the ice-cream girl, tries to get a date with Huey by answering classical male desires: this could be ascribed to typical Country Music ethic since she is told by her grandmother to bake a berry pie for him ("the way to a man's heart goes over his tummy" (HW 1/5). This caring and nurturing function goes hand in hand with the archetypical role of the woman in Country Music, who is "primarily responsible for holding the man together ... [and who acts as] ... the stabilizer in the home" (Saucier 255, 251) by building him a cosy domicile where all his simple basic demands like being fed are recognized and fulfilled. In this old-fashioned world the man and his woman get a "little bitty of everything" (Alan Jackson, A., "A Little Bitty") and they are happy with it.

Yet, in the modern world at the beginning of this millennium Sarah and Huey are living in, Sarah will neither be consoled with a "little bitty of everything" nor will she drop into the role of a 'wait-and-see-housewife,' who will endure all the escapades of her man. In starting a romantic relationship with Huey, she superficially follows a traditional formula

of baking the man a cake, giving it to him, and waiting patiently for response (HW 1/5). On a more hidden level, we know that, although Huey at first sight does not respond enthusiastically enough, she already has him in the pocket of her tight jeans, as some filmic means already reveal her dominance of the situation. First of all, while Huey appears to be ignoring her efforts, the soundtrack in form of two Country ladies singing on stage in the background gives a hint when taking a closer look at the chorus. This diegetic sound says that, even though the man who is the object of the song is being a jerk not responding to the protagonist's courtship, the female singer is self-assured concerning her endeavors: "I have the feeling, that you're gonna be mine." Secondly, being less obvious but also related to Country Music *Hank Williams First Nation* is keen on, Sarah wears the outfit she is also (and until this point exclusively) dressed in at the beginning sequence.



Fig. 6.20. *Hank Williams First Nation* opening credits: A tribute to Hank Williams – lead singer Sarah up front

The link to this recurring scene becomes of importance here because it shows Sarah in a quite different light than she is normally portrayed in the show. She wears a rather tight Country outfit, being as black as the clothing many outlaw cowboys in *Western's* used to be dressed in, thereby mirroring character traits of domination, power and steeliness, which reveal a rather tough image, especially when considering Huey's juvenile literature fashion style as well as his "TOUGH GUYS WEAR PINK" T-shirt. Furthermore, the sequence at the show's beginning, presenting the main male characters (and Sarah's

friend Tasha) as members of a band (drummers, bassists, guitarists, etc.), unmistakably puts Sarah in the front row as a singer, who seems to lead 'the gang,' while the others are just accompanying her with their instruments. The attentive viewer may get the impression that, in this recurring sequence as well as in the scene above, where she takes a turn on the boy she wants to have, a girl sets the agenda.

So again, as in *The Rez*, the audience may get the impression that Native women are fighters who get whatever they want, who know about their capabilities and are able to use them for their own betterment and/or the betterment of the world. Furthermore, this image of strong women gets amplified by posing them against the 'comical, dumb male friends,' who – concerning their future plans – rather tend to bet on pudding wrestling or Pippi Longstocking-ice-cream trucks than on college education or political ambitions.

## **THE BLURRED SWITCH ON/OF THE 'BOYISH TV WANNABE'**

### **NO – BONDING**

As Silas and Frank and Huey and Jacob form a very consistent, character-shaping alliance with each other and against the amazons surrounding them, who try to shoot down the boys' comfortable 'red balloon of childishness' with their tight bows and sharp arrows of maturity, George also has a companion by the name of Clifford. Yet, George fights a personal, lonesome fight for the right to keep one's immaturity, as the two old friends have been separated for years because of George's sudden departure. Yet, while he virtually stayed the same in the big town of Toronto, Clifford became mature back in the small town of Moose reminding his old childhood friend of this divergent development in every other situation.

Notwithstanding, George lives the juvenile life to its fullest extent all by himself, meaning he acts without thinking of the consequences and follows big ideas without showing professionalism. While his infantile behavior is neither underlined by his fandom concerning a special musical style, nor by Pippi Longstocking-like props, his immaturity is apparent by his inept, infantile actions, too. For instance, while presenting a morning

show, he simply leaves the studio, wildly waving and excitedly running with the other kids on the street to welcome a movie crew. Additionally, one of his main character traits is



Fig. 6.21. *Moose TV*: Clifford and George in rarely practised harmony

the typical 'I-stomp-on-the-ground-if-I-do-not-get-it-defiance' that children utilize in. Besides, George generally tends to use the small community's TV studio – which was lying fallow before – like a big playground. Here he can check out the 'playground equipment,' slipping into whatever playground role momentarily gets into his mind and act a big shot – like the new leader of a playground gang, who did not even pass the initial rite in the first place.

### **NOBLE? NOT AT ALL AS TELEVISION IS SAVAGING!**

While Frank and Silas are made to act out like 'Noble Savages' in a tragical way (e.g. 'striptease disaster') and boyish Jacob and Huey knowingly hide from him in their multi-colored world, George is the one who is the furthest away from an 'Indian identity.' He is not only quite as 'neutral' as his 'infantile ancestors' in the other shows, but his pendulum is swinging around wildly, on numerous occasions even to the furthest end of

the other side, namely the side the stereotype of the classical 'Western Media Capitalist' is hosting. George's identity is as slippery as a wet fish, which could be ascribed to the fact that he himself promotes the impression that he does not have any stable identity at all: his dad tells him at one point that he has "no talent" and asks him in a dialog "What ARE your people?" after George, being a temporary member of the White movie crew from above, tells him: "MY people don't wanna pay YOUR people!" (MT 1/5). Later also Robin corners him with the insight that he appears to be having no "field of interest" at all.

His most impressive characteristic, though, is George's attempt to fly down from the roof of a house, giving him his community nickname "Superboy," a nickname usually accompanied by an analog gesture of waving arms whenever he is called by that expression. Yet, this kind of teasing nickname is secretly hurting George on different levels since it, first of all, indicates that he is not even seen as a man but still as a boy without having achieved anything. Secondly, it reminds him of the first (and not the last) big crush he had in his life. He directly draws a line to it, when finally telling the story of his nickname and then stating on the seemingly last show as the station is about to bomb: "Moose TV is hitting the ground like a sack of shit!" Thereby, the young man relates his naive jump and following crash as a kid to the current one of the station.

Nonetheless, the station seems to break down because he wanted to make it his own as he likes it to be called "George TV," obviously to provide him with whatever identity he would prefer on his personal playground of self-fulfillment. By doing so, George directly slips into the classic, stereotypical world of mainstream television, whereby his seemingly 'dark horse' character becomes ridden by traits like mere capitalistic motives, egoism, superficiality, and the arrogance of believing that 'watching the number one act on screen' would be enough to satisfy an entire audience, a strategy which appears to be common in today's mediascape of b-, c- and d-celebrities<sup>71</sup> exposing their lives in reality shows.

Furthermore, George proves within the show's eight episodes (here in a quite exaggerated way) that TV provides the gadabout with the opportunity to slip into the roles of others in order to hide the insecurity concerning one's own identity. George tries out a new role within every episode without touching typical filmic 'Indian' stereotyping, though, as he for instance never occupies the role of a 'Noble Savage' and in one of his

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<sup>71</sup> This is a scale of celebrity worth: 'a' would be people like Bruce Willis, Johnny Depp, etc., 'b' would be Eva Longoria (people from popular TV shows, etc.), 'c' would be actors of soaps or Lindsay Lohan (she switched over from 'b,' though), 'd' are people, who got famous because of reality shows like *Survivor* or *Big Brother*.

few acts of mercy rescues Clifford from being dragged into that unfortunate situation. Alternately, he becomes a game show host, morning star host, a reality show reporter, an investigative journalist, all of which he never gives a Native touch or Native identity. Moreover, he also occupies different professions behind the scenes as 'big studio boss,' funding manager, quiz master, screenwriter, human resource manager, etc. and yet, he never finds himself as a person. This is also mirrored by the deployment of cameras, for George is often filmed unnaturally by many cameras in only one scene, as we – due to the TV station setting – see him shot by the normal camera of the real set, the seeming cameras within the prop set, external cameras like hand cameras, an outdoor camera or on the monitor. Just as his identity constantly floats and is not tangible, he therefore is portrayed from extraordinarily many, confusing, fast moving angles and perspectives.

Taking a closer look, George is lost, being a situation which does turn around when he finally gives up the idea of 'him' being the broadcasting agency with all his personal ideas of how 'Western-like' a television channel should be run, and gives in to the idea that a station should be made for the people who watch it, namely the Native community of Moose. The moment he lets them take over, allowing unfiltered Native topics in the ether, issues he personally has dismissed as boring and useless, he seems to be saved as his identity hole will finally be filled with authenticity. Hence, as in the other two shows, we may acknowledge the impact of the society the seemingly 'lost' male protagonist lives in, for this community with a corrupt father figure (Major Gerry), not caring about him at all but also with an attentive and kind-hearted townsfolk, is able to shape George's identity decisively at the end.

### **THE RUMBLE OF THE 'POCAHONTIAN NUN' AGAINST THE 'BOYISH TV WANNABE'**

George's own personal amazon personifies herself in Robin, who outperforms George in every circumstance except for her experience in sexuality. For professionalism, Robin is way ahead of him, since she has been working in the 'television business' before, a statement, which he uses to degrade her by interpreting it as her having been in the 'porn business' and putting her directly on the 'casting couch' (MT 1/1). While this 'interview' takes place then, the camera serves George at first as it moves into an extremely worm's eye position, meandering like a snake towards

Robin's legs. Later, she is in the bird's eye position, though, sitting straight on the couch while George sprawls like a child revealing sublimely that his cheesy charm of seducing is as fake as almost everything else concerning his character traits. He then has to notice that she is superior to him as she knows about funding and how to run a show on television.

Furthermore, we find out in a later episode that when Robin manages the broadcasting program it is well-organized, straight, appealing to its viewers, and due to that quite successful. So generally, Robin is head and shoulders better in the breadwinner field, which is again stressed by framing and character movement. She moves in and out the frame a lot, usually standing, always being on the run to save something while one of George's main actions at the station is to sit on a chair arrogantly, his feet on the desk instructing the others. Yet, his superior gesturing is undermined by the mere fact that the 'big boss' desk does not fit into the small room he calls his office and therefore has to stand sideways. This takes the mastery off of him, leaving him stubbornly having squeezed himself into a 'position' he does not fit in.

Additionally, while George behaves puerilely and does not only appear naive but dumb, for he for instance reveals his lack of knowledge concerning caviar being fish eggs or the number of zeroes in ten thousand, Robin presents herself as very intelligent, rationally as well as emotionally since she is the one who sees through George's facade. Robin's brain power can also be detected by following the lines of argumentation George and she have throughout the whole season. Robin always keeps the upper hand as she is quick-witted and able to deduce conversational tactics.

So in the end, the trend within the three comedy shows is affirmed in *Moose TV*, too: George (as well as the other boys) tends to prefer living in an artificial world that he created all by himself according to his personal naive imagination of how life should be, and it takes plenty of female power to glue him to some sparkles of a meteor called 'Reality,' which sometimes passes by on his personally painted horizon.

## 6.6 GENDER FIGHT – WINNERS AND LOSERS

Considering the description of the Native youth within the comedy shows discussed above, we can notice that in contrast to the ethnicity shaped 'bitch fights' from before, we have no opponents being on a par in this case. For the women are characterized as warriors, as the men appear to be warriors as well – but only in their minds while their bodily as well as mental abilities (tiny/fat; stoic/naive/dumb) leave them figuratively sitting in a sandpit.

In all shows, we will find postmodern media features, the male figures cling to, guaranteeing them the absence of having to deal with manliness 'in real life.' Silas and Frank find their contemporary role models in the immature comic protagonists of *Beavis and Butt-Head* while they are dressed in Heavy Metal styling, being a genre heavily wrestling with gender issues. Jacob and Huey live in a world of multi-colored ice-cream trucks watching their surroundings through old-fashioned Beatles-glasses and the bars of a Prince Valiant haircut, and George uses his town's TV station as a personal playground. This diving into the artificially created universe of postmodern media not only tells about the mayhem of feelings and expectations concerning the boys but also possesses an ironic side effect. It frees the Native community from their "psychic prisons" (Fleras, *Mass* 307) of the periphery, as they are naturally riding the postmodern wave just as any other young person in Canada.

Additionally, in two cases (*The Rez* and *Hank Williams First Nation*) male bonding works as an engine to build the scaffold of a personal, strongly simplified world, in which virtually nothing is expected of them. Furthermore, the different facets of childishness serve various functions, which – in a wide-eyed manner – they believe will protect them from the responsibilities of being the protecting, self-assured, reliable, dominant, sexually mature 'Noble Breadwinner' the world of today wants them to be. On another plot-external, viewer-friendly level these facets of puerility do not scare away a White male audience, which may still feel the fear of the "Ultramasculine Manials" (Clever 155) being much more virile by nature (Clever 155) deep down inside the guts. Comical dumb Native friends appear harmless, though.

Yet, there is a socio-cultural reason why the male protagonists prefer acting like children, too. It is hidden beneath the comedy-classic clumsiness of their 'Non-minority' companions (cf. *Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989)), who have to face gender insecurities as well but barely to this extent – or rather barely without any common ground to be found in their ethnicity. What becomes obvious here is that – according to



the ability of smuggling political issues (cf. Wells 181) that comedy can provide – the young men within these shows refuse to grow up because they don't feel able to create a usable, decent, appropriate uniqueness they would need to exist as a 'valuable' member of society. The conditions being such, all of those Native boys represented here have trouble finding out a) who they really are and b) who they want to be. Sticking to approved puerile characteristics appears to be the only possible alternative here. A form of satisfying wholeness can hardly be achieved, though, as all the young male protagonists have to face a constant egohood splitting more or less intensively. This is implied by the controversy of man- and womanhood in Heavy Metal in *The Rez*, the different camera angles characterizing George in *Moose TV*, the juvenile styling of grown-up Huey in *Hank Williams First Nation*. But also in the desperate attempts of all of them to be successful entrepreneurs, who naively believe in taking the world by letting girls wrestle in pudding, by selling ice-cream out of a truck looking like Pippi Longstocking's mansion, and by changing the world of Canada's mediascape by putting a little, amateurish, local Native TV station in the ether.

Men are cast into ceaseless work and action to prove their worth. The insecure base of masculinity means that it is constantly having to be re-achieved particularly in the eyes of others. "Masculinity then is constructed as agent of capitalism.... Capitalist ideology is equally well served by the ideas that a man must be able to cope with any situation. Masculinity becomes almost a definition of the superhuman, so it becomes that which can never be achieved. Capitalism needs this gap between the material experience of men and the ideological construction of masculinity to keep men striving for more and more achievements.... (Fiske, *Television* 210)

Yet, in these 'broken' societies (being only shown marginally) the male protagonists grew up in, they are – on a political and social basis – constantly excluded from this Western society, where strong capitalistic motives make 'the boy a man' while their fathers being excluded from this universe and robbed of the Native one providing 'man' with clear images of being a provider and defender, are too weak to be paragons. Rather being victims of Western capitalism, usually giving the average Western young male adolescent his opportunities to prove himself and climb the ladder of material wealth, Native male youth therefore often cannot do better than ignoring the breadwinner depiction, which is going hand in hand with the loss of the typical image of Western virility strongly related to material success. Also we see that sexual self-confidence tends to fall by the wayside in these cases.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> cf. chapter 'Oh, Come On, Be A Man!'

In promoting this form of characterization Native sitcoms become a neutral territory for the complicated media representation of young Native men. They are generally represented as much more comical figures than their female counter parts for instance, for – as Mittel puts it– the more comical you are the less vulnerable you will be (cf. 190). Caricature serves as a shield here. Furthermore, the boys – in being mostly portrayed as infantile chaos duos – escape the unpleasant stereotypes of the 'ruthless, ripping wildman, whose dull primitivism denies him sexual sensibility' and of the 'Indian, whose long black, soft hair gently strokes the woman's hot skin while he artistically is able to control his wildness in the most pleasurable way.' In fact, they are just hitting those clichés from time to time provoking a relieving laugh then.

Nevertheless, as the breakdown of the nuclear family became a major topic of sitcoms in the previous years, the First Nations shows swim in this pool of a 'new quasi-family-structure,' sublimely accusing today's society of its vicissitude with rather little effort. It is operated within classic generic images, stereotypes are altered along the way and put into Native contexts. Consequently, First Nations sitcoms can float with the affirmation of family values easily (being appropriate for the masses) while posting critique concerning the current Native situation and "inspiring social change and promote a new consciousness" (Hirsch 104) underneath. In this case, this is partly achieved by letting the male protagonists be tied to their red balloon of childishness, which triggers various outlandish situations (cf. Abelman 316) and provokes laughs but also indicates that confident men are scarce commodities in those communities. Protagonists in *The Rez* have no male shining examples, only rogue and corrupt ones (cf. Chief Tom) and Silas' dad occurring in one episode, being a 'papa who is a rolling stone.' There are no Native parents to be seen in *Hank Williams First Nation*, although we have qualified grandparents and there is an unprincipled father on *Moose TV* having rejected his son for years. The screenwriters create atmospheres like that for a reason.

Watching these sitcoms, it becomes quite obvious that women represent a strong counter pole. They outpace their male counterparts in almost every characteristic. This already becomes clear when taking a look at their counter-image concerning the White seductress, the latter, first and foremost, placed as steppingstones to illuminate the Native girls' brightness and their closer positioning to the horizon of opportunities.

While the boys struggle with their identity, they serve as tough role models. While the young men – giving up their former 'providing post' with a deep sigh of relief – build up their small fake worlds in their little sand pits intensely biting their tongues between

their teeth, the girls are trampling down those worlds of sand in order to find their way to the great, big world outside. They are the breadwinners of the future, the new hunters of the band (and no gatherers anymore), the do-gooders free of female discrimination features, as they naturally seem to occupy the left side of binary oppositions, the men in their lives so easily conceded to them without any fighting.

Apart from the fact that their Pocahontian hearts will never fall in love with the first White man they could sacrifice themselves for, they are active (not passive), present (not willing to be absent), mind-oriented (not body oriented), following their heads (not their hearts), strong (not weak), oppressors (not saviors), thinking (not object of look), disciplined (not childish), work oriented (not home oriented), aggressive (not passive), goal-oriented (not relationship oriented), intelligent (not dumb), successful (not lazy). Regarding the content and the setting of the shows this is explained by strong female ideals in their communities on a superficial plot line basis. On another level responding to the sitcoms' technical needs, we are bound to binary oppositions, first of all, as these are required to instantly trigger off the ritual error to be made in order to serve the 'problem/solution' format (cf. Marc 190-191). Besides, the women tend to solve the problem having evolved out of one of the boys' mistakes at the end and calling them to account, blue-pencilling.

As a result, feminism becomes a major topic here while the constant accentuation on it answers to several functions. First, it puts these sitcoms in line with a universal feminist, now strongly women-oriented trend in television shows, which draws attention to the fact that on a more superficial level (as Native issues concerning gender tend to go deeper than the average as seen above), Native women are not more different from White ones. They rather share the same problems of defending their newly occupied places in higher positions of society while their male counterparts expire to wimpy mollycoddles. Secondly, the employment of these female protagonists stresses that Native women are strong, having left oppression behind. Thirdly, this tactic of putting the emphasis on a kind of oppression linked to feministic motives diminishes the delicate topic of suppression out of racism. These shows want to respond to a Native as well as a White audience. They attempt to show life in Native communities in a rather uncontroversial light to prove – according to general sitcom family virtues – that they are not too different (cf. Fleras, *Mass* 288) from the average Canadian and positioned at the wrong end when talking about 'life at the periphery.' Therefore, criticism has to be very subtle, meaning that placing strong ethnicity-bound racism would not be conducive. Responding to a more 'light heartedly' seen form of oppression, though, originated in the

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: GENDER FIGHTS – WINNERS AND LOSERS

efforts of bra-burning women in the 90s, might serve the goals of the producers of Native comedies to a much greater extent. It fortifies the average Canadian man, who may be deeply annoyed by his teeth-baring woman as well as the average Canadian woman, who may be likewise annoyed by her lazy couch-potato while it subtly focuses on Native-bound problems, which will satisfy the attentive Native audience, for the latter will understand the socio-critical ethnic undertones and the universal nexus and acknowledge the endeavors.

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Drama, nonetheless, rather not 'smuggling' politically explosive issues in a subtextual humorous way (cf. Wells 181), may follow a much more 'in your face'-aesthetic.

## **6.7 FIGHT OF THE NATIVE PIMP VS. GAY COP VS. THE HOE SQUAW VS. THE POPPY EYED ONE**

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In the dramas on Native Canadian peoples, primarily *Moccasin Flats* but also *renge dagpress.com*, we are confronted with the disturbing world of Canada's 'saddest Nation',<sup>73</sup> which ails in a vicious circle of pimping, hooking, disease, poverty, drugs, violence and abuse. Parts of these drama communities are far away from a sitcom typical representation of loving and caring homes we were dealing with before: The series' settings are defined by being at the margins of Canadian societies, as their mere location somewhere in the bush leaves them and their daily routines to themselves. Yet, their cozy life will be disturbed by humorous binary oppositional interactions with outsiders getting lost there from time to time. Especially in *Moccasin Flats*, we are also welcome to take a look at a community at the periphery and its daily routines. What makes the difference and aims at an effect of total disturbance, though, is the fact that this 'fringe' is not rooted in a local aspect but in a socio-cultural one, as the border to this margin runs directly in front of the houses of every other metropolitan Canadian home. Thereby, it reveals a world of horror, one that the 'common' Canadian public would probably rather associate with South African ghettos many thousands of miles away. Nonetheless, we are presented with opposing (and sometimes strongly developing) characters in this society. Whereby – responding to typical drama techniques – the protagonists with all their peculiarities can nevertheless be divided into heroes and villains on the basis of a distinct code of conduct, drawing a strong border of likeliness and therefore clearly defining the forces on the battleground. Notwithstanding, according to drama's need of 'developing, growing' characters, figure alterations are inevitable.

Hereby, differentiated characterizations of female protagonists again play a major role in captivating the essence of the whole series.

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<sup>73</sup> cf. chapter 'The saddest Nation.'

## THE 'GAY COP POCAHONTAS' – AMANDA

Amanda Strongeagle is a quite unique character in Canadian television concerning the representation of Natives. As she has to be considered as a personification of Aboriginal hopes and fears, disasters and blessing, loss and success, floating and strong identity and, first and foremost, as a multi-layered gender symbol for resistance, she may be seen as one of the most influential and most popular characters on *Moccasin Flats*. She may, however according to her rather non-orthodox screenwriting essence be no 'typical figure' to identify with.

In contrast to the protagonists of the other shows, which are rather figuratively sent on the battleground (according to comedic filmic demands; The 'Pocahontian Warrior,' etc.), Amanda literally has to face real fights, which never end without bloodshed. These will finally help to improve her community's living circumstances, yet, they are demanding brutal combating with the urban underground, personified by Jon, the merciless leader and pimp of the hood's gang and his hard-nosed prostitutes.

Furthermore, Amanda fights her personal struggles concerning her romantic relationships.

## THE SECRET OF AESTHETIC SEX

She wanted to Karma Sutra him silly. She wanted him to pin her to the floor, pound her into the earth until she forgot where she ended and began. She wanted him to take her hand in his and place it firmly on his balls while his tongue flicked into her, like a bear licking honey. Until she had to have him and lowered herself onto his stiff, hard cock, pushing down, down. Until rising and falling, she became the sun and he became a tree straining upward, reaching for her. Until she vanished into clouds. And he melted into the earth (120).

What the Anishnaabe writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm describes here may be the – long lost and persistently moaned for – basic essence of Native sexuality being a "physical necessity equal to water and food" (Kleist 17), but also a natural and wholesome tool to "enter the garden" and to send the human body "straight into heaven to commune face to face with god" (*Me Sexy* 39) by having an orgasm as Tomson Highway believes it to be. After all, this small excerpt tells keenly of a healthy form of relationship to sexuality, acknowledging its tender and gnawing beauty and its

overwhelming power. According to Native belief these are features, which not only mirror the natural world around but spread the wonder of materializing themselves in the human body when people melt into each other and automatically, for the period of time during sex, also merge with the rootedness of the earth.

Notwithstanding, *Moccasin Flats* is a show mostly dealing with the effects of destroying this according to many White missionaries 'perverse' relationship to sexuality and about the emotional and physical wrecks this forced abnegation of the body still produces among Canada's Native people. Nevertheless, the show's screenwriters may have created some small loopholes. Especially the character of Amanda is given an opportunity of experiencing this kind of 'former' love-making innocently in that respect as it is not molested by features of force, pain, surrender and violence. In contrast to Akiwenzie-Damm's writing, Amanda enjoys this kind of graceful sex life with women, though, a statement of far reaching dimensions in this case.

Within the show, Amanda's erotic (and romantic) life becomes not only one of the major plots, it is in contrast to the other 'forms of sex' also thematically of great importance since it is the one which is shown most explicitly (the others are in most cases rather implied) and it is represented as very aesthetic. It therefore juxtaposes the enforced and sick sexuality of the Native prostitutes even more: a filmic device, which consequently stresses the kinkiness of that kind of hooking, leaving many (especially White) viewers with even more disgusted and shocked feelings.

In order to create these polar positions so very intensely, Amanda's lovemaking, shown several times with several women, is firstly taking place in the cosy atmosphere of her Tuscan-like home, which is kept in friendly orange and brown colors with comfortable beds and couches and plenty of candles, etc.. The sex itself, meaning undressed body parts like breasts and thighs, appears to be filmed as explicitly as Canadian television allows it to be. Whereby mere naked, rubbing, touched and kissed skin is unveiled in extreme close-ups: special attention is paid to facial expression as well revealing a kind of passion and desire linked to the innocent naturalness Akiwenzie-Damm describes. Yet, while the voyeuristic extreme close-ups underline the fleshly lust, and head and shoulder close-ups dwell on desire, we are also presented medium shots, in which both lovers are displayed together whereby their bodies are embracing themselves nakedly as if they have melted. Furthermore, Amanda's sex is not presented in extreme camera angles indicating that a kind of domination usually related to porn film is not in existence here.

## 6. DOWN-SEXUALIZING: 'NATIVE PIMP' VS. 'GAY COP' VS. 'HOE SQUAW' VS. 'POPPY EYED ONE'

Other sexuality, on the contrary, between various heterosexual sex partners is often not expressed at all and is only hinted at, and if shown, barely practised in a cosy atmosphere filmed in neutral camera angles. The first act of love between Tara and Matt takes place in a small bathroom during a children's birthday party finally stormed by the police. The camera angle is in a straight bird's eye view, just the same as the one employed when Matt is having an affair with the singer Melissa and they are having sex in a film studio. Later being at home in bed, Tara then refuses Matt's advances.

The explicit love lives of other couples within *Moccasin Flats* are factored out. When Amanda is finally (out of homosexual anguish) turning to a man in the last season, her first sexual dream of him, taking place outside on a pink bench at daylight while both of them are 'talking dirty' and she is in an inferior position lying beneath him strongly reminding of a typical porn scene, already denotes that their relationship is built up on artificiality and about to fail.

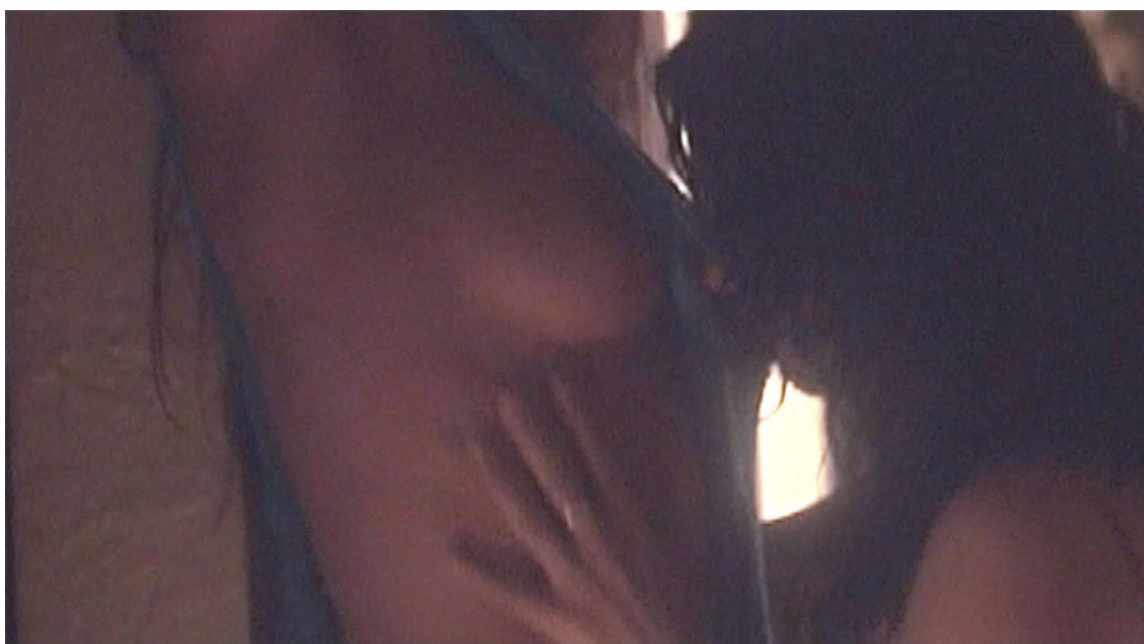


Fig. 6.22. *Moccasin Flats*: Amanda daring to kiss breasts in close-ups

Furthermore, in presenting a berdache sexual life as the ultimate sensual union, as the fulfilment of Native sensation concerning lovemaking, profoundly shaped by an almost religious appeal of sex being the natural linkage to the surrounding environment and the transcendental world as well as the key to personal recreation and wholesomeness, the screenwriters of this show reveal a statement here.

Although, the attitude towards all kinds of different sexuality underwent a massive development towards a great amount of acceptance over the previous decades, there



are still – in some societies more and in some less – seemingly inseparable tightropes connecting 'sexual experience' to old Western religious doctrines being grounded in the regulation of sex and the insertion of acceptable gender roles (cf. Mc Geough 60-61).



Fig. 6.23. *Moccasin Flats*: Amanda and her girlfriend like a knotted Gordian Knot



Fig. 6.24. *Moccasin Flats*: Matt and Tara having sex in the bathroom

. Even today especially the small and the big screen are bound to constantly altering scales (in the one or the other direction) of what is erotic, decent and what perverse being illustratively provable by the dealings with the female breast for instance: "The female breast is a particularly powerful symbol in patriarchy because it represents both sides of woman: the mother and the whore: the bearer of men's children and the arouser of his lusts" (Fiske, *Television* 164) which supports the depiction of the "imp, the goodwife, the harpy, the bitch, the victim, the decoy, the siren, the courtesan, the witch, the matriarch" (Fiske, *Television* 113). In representing a homosexual women leading a satisfying sex life, *Moccasin Flats* tries to escape all of these archetyped Western narratives as Amanda fulfils neither the whore nor the mother depiction. She rather personifies her own sexual image and refuses to be pigeonholed concerning a special static gender category (a process Western societies tend to feel uneasy with) being in alignment with old Native beliefs in the "third gender" (Roscoe 14).<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the character of the homosexual Amanda becomes a figure of resistance and a role model for a healthy sex life without conventions and without the need to correspond to any Western indoctrinated 'pro-creative functions' in order to justify the surrender to 'carnal desires' and the giving up to 'reason.' She is created as the personification of the thesis that "[e]very orgasm can be an act of decolonization" (Justice 106).

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<sup>74</sup> cf. chapter 2.3.

### THE SECRET OF THE CHOICE OF WEAPON

In line with all the modern Pocahontases presented to this point, Amanda also strongly sticks to the left (the 'male' side of the binary opposition scale). Although she is regularly depicted as a female nude (as seen above), she cannot at all be considered as "submissive and passive – a projection of a phallogentric desire to control and contain women's sexuality" (Mc Geough 64). As already discussed before, the figure of Amanda successfully breaks free from this kind of phallogentrism as she enjoys her sexual life with women carelessly leaving behind the rejected, deterred men with their overflowing virility. The time she briefly, 'falls prey' to a man thereby confirms this picture in the end. Her lover, being comparable to the boys discussed before, rather swims towards the female gender pole for he seems to stick to traditional female clichés: she meets him at a yoga course (she actually feels uncomfortable with) (MF 3/3), he is into astronomy and astrology (she does not know anything about (MF 3/3)), he wants her to dance with him (she feels uneasy about)(MF 3/4), etc.. Due to that, we see her crawling towards the opposite direction, towards the male pole, as she occupies the archetypal role of the 'the man' in the relationship.

Furthermore, Amanda does not have the "ability to understand, facilitate, and control relationships ... often shown as ... [the] source of women's power" (Fiske, *Television* 182), as she manages to participate in aesthetic lovemaking but at the same time is not able to have healthy relationships. In truth, she is devoid of traditional feminine skills like reading people and romantic bonding – a lack being usually associated with men as Fiske states (cf. *Television* 183-184). This is especially made a subject of discussion when another of her girlfriends leaves Amanda due to her cheating on her: "You don't want a relationship!" "But I love you!" (MF 2/5), and a former one states, when she asks if she is a "horrible person:" "You are a good cop, but you suck in relationships!" (MF 2/6). Consequently, Amanda does not use any classic female characteristics for seducing as a weapon thereby turning "traditional feminine characteristics into a source of strength. She uses pregnancy as a weapon ... she uses her insight into people to manipulate them, and she uses her sexuality for her own ends" (Fiske, *Television* 190). Instead, she is rather emotionally illiterate and as a cop – sustaining her position in the brutal world she works in – goal-oriented, rational thinking and physically strong. Such being the case, her weapon is no 'subtle intriguing,' but her weapon is a weapon, namely a gun.

In this process, *Moccasin Flats*' genre mixing of teen drama, action and police drama plays an important role as the classic features of police dramas do automatically, plausibly and cleverly, in underlining 'The Cop Pocahontas' switch to the left side of Western binary oppositions. In order to fulfill the needs of keeping the "short cut computer screen icon[s]" (Wilson, C. 45) "safe, simple and familiar" (Fleras, *Mass* 146), the average police officer, as the re-establisher of the common legal justice system has to be a heterosexual, white male in his middle ages (cf. Bignell, (2008) 131). Within the last several decades some of those characteristics have naturally been replaced in one or the other circumstance as times were changing. If we take a look at the development of Canadian series on Natives, the most popular show *North of 60* springs to mind; immediately reminding us of the fact that even in a small Native community the arm of the law – the only one being able to maintain justice among the 'savages' – was a "heterosexual, white male in his middle ages" for a very long time.

Considering *Moccasin Flats*, though, the screenwriters decided on directing the responsible job of the representation of law and order, the embodiment of the values acceptable to the audience as the consensus view of right and wrong, and the role of the bearer of actions showing how ideological, common sense justice works in practise to keep society on a more or less normal and comfortable track (cf. Bignell, (2008) 130) to a figure representing the exact opposite, as Amanda is a homosexual, Native female in her early thirties. Hence, this show declares war on the archetypical Western television series' narratives and in doing so, it seems to shoot with every possible weapon.

In the course of this, a homosexual, young, Aboriginal woman becomes the master of the public realm of urban environment, being loud, impulsive and contorted, usually considered as the universe of man, as "male power and legitimacy cannot be expressed in the home, but must be displayed and defended in the public turf" (Fleras, *Mass* 151) where a challenge lurks behind every corner. Again Amanda responds to the left side of the scale: "Tough/Sensitive; Professional/Domestic, Public/Private; Outdoors/Indoors" (Fiske, *Television* 221), for she plays at the boys' playground where physical action like using weapons, fist fighting and chasing the others has to be considered as desirable since it proves prowess and toughness. This invasion into the men's hemisphere is then stressed by the annexation of typical police drama techniques of production like wide camera shots and angles (needed to portray action scenes properly), which in this case capture the physical and emotional strength and supremacy

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of a Native woman, who makes a stand against the ghetto underworld in Regina being comparable to the ones of New York or Sao Paulo for instance.

The ideological work that the police series does is therefore to provide a means of representing society as a fundamentally ordered and balanced network of relationships, introducing a challenge or threat to society, and dramatizing the ways in which this threat is removed. (Bignell, (2008) 130)

Moreover, as the homosexual, Native woman in her thirties is the one who manages to keep the balance in this community at least to some extent, we may acknowledge the figure of Amanda as a declaration of war on the stereotyping of Western mediascapes as well a proclamation addressing the Western society in general, stating that Native people



Fig. 6.25. *Moccasin Flats*: Amanda bare of any kind of *A-Team* aesthetics

are not too weak, dumb, lazy or broken to solve any social problems on their own.

After all, Amanda can be considered as a round figure full of personal and physical strengths and weaknesses whose creators built up a greatly accepted hero-character,<sup>75</sup> not being able to be pigeonholed or fitting a special Native stereotype in any sense. This could be quite a relief for the audience of a people that went through the 'School of Hard Knocks' concerning prejudice as well as suppression of all kinds for a very long time.

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<sup>75</sup> cf. chapter 'The Bad – Drama.'

## THE INDIAN PIMP VS. THE HOE SQUAW – JON AND CANDY

In Black communities, Hip Hop has become "the central cultural vehicle for open reflection on poverty, fear of adulthood, the desire for absent fathers ... black male sexism ... sexual desires, daily rituals of life as an unemployed teen hustler ... raw anger, violence, and childhood memories" (Rose 18), whereby most of these topics are directly linked to the perception of gender. As Black and Native history on the continent of America have to be considered as two unique ones, there are nevertheless obvious parallels between those two ethnic groups being based on a 'History of Oppression.' Having this similarity in mind, it can be considered as a logical step that Native youth responds to Black Hip Hop Music exceptionally well living its lifestyle in its own modified form.

*Moccasin Flats* as being a contemporary, dramatic show, portraying Canadian ghetto life in South Central Regina, therefore creates a macrocosm of two worlds within this setting. One reminds of a typical Canadian urban one, the other one reflects a brutal ghetto life profoundly shaped by 'Gangsta' Hip Hop ideologies. Yet, these two microcosms interweave constantly, leading to the situation that the 'healthy' one is persistently on the verge of being destroyed by the sick one. This is one of the major filmic plot techniques triggering off the "pollution, guilt, redemption, purification circle" (Abelman 406) as characters from both sides permanently have to decide which side to belong to.

Hereby, Hip Hop doctrines supported by filmic 'typology of character signs' in terms of gender play a major role. They reveal a postmodern 'up-to-datedness' but also indicate a kind of postmodern, mediascape-oriented reality, in which Native principles of healthy, balanced societies are being replaced by communities of painful domination and subordination, whereby the victimized woman regularly accepts the abusive man. Phallogocentric mechanisms concerning personal positioning in rather hostile atmospheres become dominant categories in life. Especially young men have to follow special rites and 'etiquettes' in order to be respected within their territory. Territory (including female body territory) has to be acknowledged as a literal term here, as living within its boundaries is rather comparable to living in a war zone than in a Western urban neighborhood if you are 'truly' living Hip Hop style.

One of the major battle calls would be: "BE A MAN!" then. Having achieved this according to 'pimp credos,' you are seemingly unbeatable. One famous American pimp in

the documentary of the same name for instance states while having been locked away in a jail cell for decades: "I didn't lose anything here. [For] if you haven't lost "being a man," you haven't lost anything important!" (*American Pimp* (1999)). "[B]eing a man" is subjected to a very clear definition of what the authenticity or credibility of a 'pimp' should look like here: measurement scales include the amount, beauty and average profit of the 'hoes' he sends to the battlefields on a daily basis, the size of his penis, the commitment to his bros, etc.. The 'Red Badge of Courage' then comes in the form of respect but more evidently in the form of expensive clothes, jewellery and machinery.

### **BROS BEFORE HOES AND SOME BLINK BLINK AS PHALLUS ERSATZ**

Definition of the term 'bros before hoes' on *urbandictionary.com*:

A term used between male friends when one of them has become a whipped ... [wimp<sup>76</sup>] ... over a girl who in most cases is a tease. When this golden rule is forgotten, the friendship and even brotherly bonds that are shared between the bros can be broken down. Remember, take care of the bros, and they'll take care of you.

According to this rule and common Hip Hop morals, Jon, the major Native pimp of the show, therefore has to live up to the demands of his gang in general and his own as a worthy leader in specific. Not only Hip Hop thought patterns (being rather considered as the ideology of a resistance culture) but also the classical Western gender problems of sufficiency, pertain here for they are satisfied as well: Oftentimes

masculinity is found in the peer group or gang. Maintaining their membership involves a constant performance of aggression and toughness typified by games of dares and challenges. Aggression is the basis of much ... style, and of male youth style in general. Masculinity is performance. (Fiske, *Television* 209)

These performance acts can be split into different segments, which serve mere filmic needs on the one hand, yet, reveal criticism on Canadian cultural elements on the other.

In the demand for suspenseful plots, the frequent challenge for adolescents to "behave more maturely than their physical age" (Fiske, *Television* 200) by constantly performing boundary rituals mirroring Hip Hop credos, is in the case of this show put on a

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<sup>76</sup> This is a male person without courage, weak and 'woman-influenced' ergo 'no man.'

socio-critical basis. Thereby, Hip Hop's bias towards 'representing manhood as a spectacle' in an urban environment fits quite well. It creates a setting, in which the young man has to tramp through the loud, impulsive and contorted jungle persistently, which will form his red-blooded, omnipotent and sexist aura (cf. Bignell, (2004); (2008); and Ross 147). The typical "public realm of men" (Fleras, *Mass* 151) then becomes an ideal playground. It provides endless opportunities for brutal boundary rituals and offers the ability to act according to self-made rules of villainousness (Abelman 412) having emerged from a 'School of Hard Knocks' promising numerous physical action scenes. One of Gangsta Hip Hop's main concepts of presenting delinquency as 'being cool' does also correspond to drama plot lines here, for a Hip Hopper's goal of 'being the king of an imbalanced society' plays into the hands of film's needs to constantly produce disturbance of social harmony (cf. Bignell, (2008) 130) in order to keep the viewer interested.

Additionally, Hip Hop is a musical genre, which is strongly dependent on the question of style, meaning clothing and machinery. Having in mind that today's Western societies have abandoned much of the "former tribal access to men's magic" (Fiske, *Television* 202),<sup>77</sup> substitutes had to be found. Since Black as well as Native communities in these times tend to have a much more improbable entry to the status symbols of a capitalistic world, the final accomplishments of those objects of prestige will naturally be presented like spoils of war in a rather overacted way. Consequently, extremely pimped up jewellery and cars play a very important role as well as a blatant dealing with weapons representing the overtaking of imperialistic hardware (cf. Neu 42): "The use of guns and vehicles (or other machinery) as what can be called 'penile extenders' is an attempt to close the gap between the penis and the phallus, between the real and the imaginary, or the material and the ideological" (Fiske, *Television* 210). Yet, in a broken society, having available neither former 'men's magic' rewards nor today's capitalistic ones, this gap becomes even bigger and harder and more strenuous to overcome. In order to manage somehow, 'traditional manly qualities' have to be practised much more rampantly and aggressively leading to a much higher acknowledgement within the community when finally achieved.

Taking a look at the daily routines of Jon and his posse, we find a disturbing absorption of this kind of mentality as gang life is shaped by destabilizing the streets: by

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<sup>77</sup> cf. chapter 'Oh, Come On, Be A Man!'

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patrolling them with pimped cars persistently, by unabashed dealing, by merciless hold-ups, by brutal fighting, by relentless pimping, by wild fleeing and entrenching behind the curtains of crack houses.

As the matter of fact, Jon and his gang perform their daily life as if they were starring in a Gangsta Hip Hop video clip, an impression being underlined by different techniques of production like diegetic and non-diegetic Hip Hop Music, light, camera angles, etc. When for instance, scenes within the 'Red Soldier' (Jon's posse) gang's home are shown, we are presented very extreme worm's and bird's eye view camera angles whereby the camera often moves very abruptly indicating a documentary filming style. Furthermore, archetypical fly-eye cams are employed, artificial blue and pink light as well as detail shots on commodities like guns, drugs and 'gwops'.<sup>78</sup>



Fig. 6.26. *Moccasin Flats*: Candy drugging – filmed in an almost sacral way

Fig. 6.27. *Moccasin Flats*: Cocain in extreme close-up

Making use of these different mechanisms, which are sometimes directly intercut (and therefore even more harsh and unnatural) with other character's warm, yellow and orange homes filmed in a quiet way without extreme techniques, thus stresses the brutality a Gangsta Hip Hop life 'lived in reality' really bears. Documentary filming techniques like blurred pictures and extreme narrow framing of wild chases and drug dealing underline the sadistic verisimilitude of an existence in absolute chaos far from kinsman like hierarchies guarantying a community' s balance: where no safety and no hold is to be found and where the main goal becomes the striving for dominance over the other (angles), as showing emotions and giving up on a superior position immediately ends in oppression and caging. The life of everyone living in this kind of surroundings is being construed according to the personal position in a pyramid of dominance whereby the desperate aim will be to put as many people as possible beneath oneself. Jon is the peak at first, but eventually the viewer learns that he himself is also dependent on

<sup>78</sup> This is a number of small bills folded together to give the impression of a larger amount of money than it really is (common term in drug dealing).



another drug gang threatening to kill him because he is not able to pay them back. Living this way of life, other people need to become indifferent to the individual. Substitutes like items and drugs serve as ego-boost as well as consolation. Here this modification of goods as ultimate self-help and a personal fulfillment by committing consumption overkill is mediated by extreme close-ups on commodities like drugs, weapons and 'blink blink.'

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So taking a look at the representation of Jon as leader of a Native ghetto gang, it becomes quite obvious that Gangsta Hip Hop ideology, 'law and order television shows' and the general image of men in Western societies complement each other quite well to convey the identity problems many Native male Canadian young people have to face in the contemporary world and why they are in such a persistent need for "penile extensions": for them the gap between penis and phallus ... real and imaginary, of the material and ideological" (Fiske, *Television* 210) is unequally bigger than the one of the average Canadian male youth. Hence, the jump to the other side has to be unequally more radical in order to reach it somehow at least. Leaving other people, oneself and one's personal morals falling along on the wayside in favor for diverting consumer good and a place at the peak of the pyramid just seems to be another price to pay.

## **PIMP YOUR HOES**

I used to f\*\*\* young-ass hoes  
Used to be broke and didn't have no clothes  
Now I f\*\*\* top-notch bitches,  
Telling stories 'bout rags and riches  
...  
Been mackin' for years and ain't fell off yet  
So if you ever seen me rollin' in my drop-top Caddy  
Throw a piece sign and say, 'Hey, Pimp Daddy!'

"I'm a Playa," Too Short

Hip Hop "style is one of boasting self-praise regarding sexual prowess, material success and ... verbal power" (Ryan 125). As already stated before, this lifestyle

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<sup>79</sup> This is a Hip Hop term for jewelry.

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considered as strongly driven by an extraordinary hedonistic force, which seems to respond primarily to masculine needs of domination. Within this context, notions of criminality and delinquency play a major role corresponding to an existence without Western indoctrinated rules and responsibilities of morality. Hereby, a way of living reminding of Mafia practises is copied, which takes place at the periphery of a society, yet, infiltrates the latter and sucks it out and therefore conveys the feeling of supremacy. At the same time, this kind of living spreads a feeling of coolness and freedom often at the expense of the well-being of community affairs, as the most cold-hearted, most relentless person will decide automatically on the directives.

Within this realm of unmercifulness and suppression, women in general tend to be ailing in positions of extreme repression while men find an easy self-affirmation in subduing them for

power is acquired by styling their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies reflect a uniqueness and provoke fear in others. To be 'bad' is good not simply because it subverts the language of the dominant White culture but also because it imposes a unique kind of order for the [young males] on their distinctive chaos and solicits an attention that makes others pull back in trepidation. This ... style is a form of self-identification and resistance in a hostile culture; it also is an instance of machismo identity ready to violent encounters. Yet, in a patriarchal society, machismo identity is expected and even exalted – as with Rambo.... In this way, the Black male search for power often reinforces the myth of Black male sexual prowess – a myth that tends to subordinate Black and White women as objects of sexual pleasure. (Jackson II 121-122)

Although it is talked about the Black male here one can notice the parallels between Black and Native living circumstances in today's Western societies and their turning to old myths of the heritage of the 'Ultramasculine Savage Warrior' (reminding of the image of the 'Bloodthirsty Horny Indian' in a daunting way). Native's affinity with Hip Hop lifestyle being the musical embodiment of this warrior can be considered as a logical consequence.

Many of these young men not only emulate a natural ancient manhood of former times but they often have pursued it in a pathological way, which can be ascribed to the demolition of their cultures and due to the loss of their moral and identity foundations.

In consonance with the minstrel brute, the [Black] stud, playa, mack and pimp images are all Black bucks trying to come to terms with masculinity. A common scapegoat used to justify these roles is emasculation.... Black men incurred psychological damage from enslavement, which left them as undignified expatriates on their own homes, removed from familial responsibilities, ... and in some severe cases castrated. As a result, they were emasculated, dethroned if you will. Anxious to

recapture the ultimate attribute and sign of a man – control – their only recourse was to seize reckless control over and in every visible aspects of their life from women to materialistic sources. (Jackson II 118)

Again, we may spot the similarities between Native and Black history, which is unified in suppression and the annihilation of satisfying gender roles within the community, leaving behind broken individuals without identification opportunities but a great deal of hatred. On a burnt down battleground like this a special kind of fertilizer helps to encourage a dangerous creeper whereby this fertilizer is a 'practical' combination of oppressing women and gaining material sources, called 'pimping.'

In *Moccasin Flats* this gets and stays a major topic as Jon continues to be the brutal pimp sending his girls on the street mercilessly. In watching the show the viewer will learn about typical pimping and hooking practices in a remorseful documentary-style way. Although the screenwriters put emphasis on the fact that the viewers are never presented sex scenes, in which the young prostitutes have to perform intercourse with punters (those are only left to romantic partnerships), we nevertheless are confronted with the shocking details of a community, in which sex and the female body have become a mere commodity far from being a sacred tool to connect to different spheres or as a "fuel for healing" (Justice 106).

Such being the case, we see in Candy's introduction shot for instance how she and a friend wait at the 'whore pit,' and while a john is driving by one of the girls hands over her little baby to the other mechanically and then gets into his truck to 'fulfil her job.' Later, the storyline turns to the classic mechanism of introducing a foreign world to the viewer by employing an outsider character within the plot, who joins this universe and will be informed by its members. Therefore, the audience gets to know prostitution's common rules like the various prices for the sexual practises, how to survive the first hooking (on drugs), how girls get caught in this 'business,' why they hardly get out, why sexuality in general becomes a painful topic, and why people are that callous in terms of their bodies. We learn for instance how the different types of sexual assaulters are called in a colloquial style: "Someone is called Lizard, when you have passed out, a Skinner is a rapist and a Snake someone who does it on his own kids" (MF 1/2), or how little girls were raped by punters while their mothers were grasping them so they could not escape. This information are hardly bearable for the average uninformed viewer. Nevertheless, he/or she may notice that – despite the fact that he/she is watching a television show –

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the reality within Native communities can be exactly like that or even worse; a fact the Canadian government and public generally tend to ignore.

Yet, although the viewers never have to see sex scenes within this brutal, inhuman realm of hooking, they are constantly presented the daily routine of pimping, which is characterized by the mack destabilizing and objectifying 'his girls' emotionally, and intentionally selling them as forbidden fatal Squawish attraction to the wannabe Omnipotent Administrator (cf. Churchill 194, Cleaver 155) while he himself uses them for sexual pleasure, too, but at the same time stays physically detached. Regardless of that, his sex-trade workers are in love with him and adore him deeply. The documentary *American Pimp* tries to illuminate this dependence of the prostitute concerning her pimp whom she concedes her body to in order to gain him money while only receiving a doubtful form of protection and guidance as a return. In this documentary the pimp's justification for "earning a rich life from guilt" sounds like the following: "If the bitches get no instruction, they are heading for self-destruction! Only the pimp knows how to play the game, he has to teach her." This teaching is shaped by manipulation, lying and violence ("Anybody can control a woman's body, but the key is to control her mind!" (*American Pimp*). Committing on the contrary would appear as a sign of weakness: "one of the hallmark characteristics of a thug is his desensitization ... the thug does not feel, except when his territory is ... threatened" (Jackson II 112).

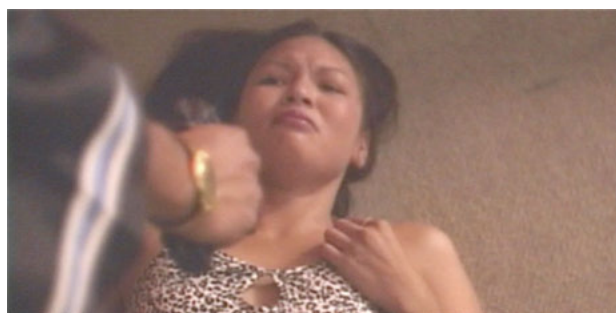


Fig. 6.28. *Moccasin Flats*: Jon threatening ...

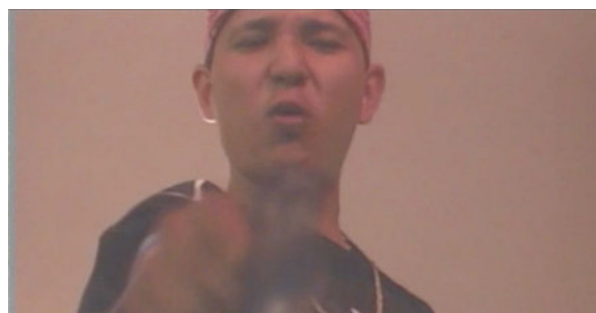


Fig. 6.29. *Moccasin Flats*: ... his 'new girl'

Consequently, in stressing the gender roles within this small posse, the employment of extreme camera angles indicating proportions of power is continued here insofar as women have a value as high as any other commodity in the house. In fact, mostly seeming to rank beneath drugs and guns, they are constantly represented in bird's eye positions especially stressing their helplessness when they are beaten up. Jon as would-be 'Ripping Wildman' on the contrary is not only filmed in a higher position in the scenes he is accompanied by his prostitutes, he even appears to be master of sound as the diegetic Hip Hop Music playing in the background is turning down when he

screams at one girl, and after him having finished, turns up from non-diegetic to diegetic again. Thereby it underlines a threatening statement: he even is the master of the 'soundtrack of their lives.'

As K. Keiko Nitta states in her essay concerning gender and Hip Hop Culture: men are experienced as "sexist and hostile, women as absent" (41), which seems to be even more alarming having in mind that First Nations in Canada permanently have to deal with their invisibility in society in general. The sex-trade workers in *Moccasin Flats* have an intensive presence at first sight for some of them are main cast. Nonetheless, this presence is basically shaped by a characterization of 'self-slaughtering:' Their role can be described as an exotic hybrid of the modern Lolita who is exceedingly sexualized on her own behalf, yet victim of a popular culture, "primarily interested in making profits by gambling with our subliminal sexual fantasies and reinforcing male notions of rape" (Zipes 356), and the classical female nude being depicted as passive and reduced to the body (cf. Mc Geough 64). If one adds the seemingly archetypical 'original people' wantonness to this representation, one may finally get to the 'Voluptuous Squaw' stereotype, who is said to find her main goal in life in objectifying herself. Notwithstanding, although, the viewer is presented this prototypical stereotype, it is not supported as the audience can hardly ignore the barely endurable pain, inhuman enforcement, aching loss and fatal desperation shaping this form of living.

For this woman wholesomeness of the body has been nipped in the bud, the gate to the 'liberating realm of lust' seems to have been closed forever and the mere notion of Akiwenzie-Damm's sensual experience of "until rising and falling, she became the sun and he became a tree straining upward, reaching for her. Until she vanished into clouds. And he melted into the earth" (120) appears to be restricted to the realm of fairy tales. Instead, the young woman is bound to voyeuristic primary functions, namely "to embody the apparatus of sexual pleasure, to fuel the fantasies and imaginations about her innately lascivious nature, and to serve as instruments controlled by the thug" (Jackson II 111). In order to bear this fate of being the 'bitch,' the female dog, of her 'owner,' she may make use of diverse strategies. One will be the employment of the self-defence tactic that in exchange for allocating her body, she obtains 'guidance and security' in the chaotic world she was born into, in fact, being a superficial belief, which is constantly unmasked by the extreme camera angles in this drama. The second one will rather be comprised of the survival strategy of being absent, of disconnecting body and mind, preferably of numbing the mind (and the body) with the drugs available.

At the end of his essay "If It Feels This Good Gettin' Used," Jackson II states: "There is no salvation in losing connection to one's cultural self" (126), and despite the fact that he talks about the Afro American community here, *Moccasin Flats* reveals that this statement may be seen like a cenotaph for many Canadian Native communities.

### **THE LOSS OF THE SEASON TICKET TO THE GARDEN**

Altering Hip Hop style according to Native needs should be promoted as it proves Native's decampment towards a postmodern world, albeit – as seen before – it may also support a gender theory having fatal effects on Aboriginal identity building. It passes the ball to the traumas of Native history in a shockingly psychologically logical way.

As the social fabric of Native dealings with sexuality had been destroyed in the previous centuries, the bodily connection of the Native human to his or her natural surroundings had in many cases been disconnected as well. The 'garden' that Natives had a season ticket to before had been closed, the leased line to an easily achievable emotional well being had been cut, and the eating of the juicy fruits had changed into a constant feeling of regurgitation. The sense of erotica as not being something 'other' or something 'outside' of who we are, had been turned around. Being passive and absent has become a way to somehow protect the inner self for a lot of women (cf. Akiwenzie-Damm 119 ff. and Highway, Taylor, *Me Sexy* and *Me Funny*) as it is shown in *Moccasin Flats*. Thereby broken and misled Native male characters like Jon have jumped on a bandwagon of Western uptight subliminal fear (their culture has never been driving on in the first place) carelessly fighting the heated battle of using the power of the female body (cf. Saxton xxi). Being naturally caught within the same circumstances of oppression, they frequently support these female developments of 'bodily indifference' by taking sexual control of the only ones even weaker than themselves: their women who they – in a perverse twist – sell to repressed and perverse White punters.

In this show we get to know the immanent desire of the broken Native male to be the game master, the king of his imbalanced street life, as he tries to gain subjectivity and presence to feed his self-conscious, destroyed self while he in the same instance forces 'his women' to objectification and absence. Jon needs to destabilize his girls

emotionally. Except that he has never experienced a different dealing with women; this has become one of the major ingredients of the fuel he stimulates his hypermasculinity engine with. What *Moccasin Flats* paints at this point of the show, therefore is the abysses of Canada's saddest nation fitting many alarming statistics concerning Canadian Natives with respect to HIV, delinquency, sexual abuse, drug use or broken families: Native people seem to be utterly and painfully lost in the wild round dance of gender identity rioting in today's Western societies. We observe the violent destruction of any characteristic keeping a healthy family together here: Jon as being a pimp appears to be in an artificial providing role, which can be described as a deeply exploiting and inhuman one; Candy suddenly pregnant and becoming a mother seems to be devoid of nurturing traits or compassion.

Notwithstanding, since the show is bound to a representation in favor of the Aboriginal community, it follows a number of different tactics to fulfill the demand of authenticity and an absence of a form of palliation on the one hand, but also the duty to convey Natives as likeable and loveable on the other. Hence, counter-characters and counter family constellations are employed mirroring healthy protagonists, who withstand temptations and follow strongly morally based behavior patterns.

Furthermore, we find 'bildungsroman' approaches since – as the seasons proceed – Jon and Candy both gain more and more three-dimensional characteristics leading to strong personal developments towards integration into the 'normal' community of their neighborhood. In the course of this Candy has the worse conditions by far for (at the beginning of the second season) she is broke, HIV positive, homeless, unemployed and in desperate need of getting back the little baby girl she gave away before. Jon on the contrary, has become the most promising part of a 'reintegration project.' He lives in a nice home with his child and his girlfriend and runs his own business.

Within this season, however, he will get caught in a downward spiral of drug dealing again, separating his mind from his body by creating an alter Ego and finally going to jail. Candy on the contrary, arises as the most shatter-proofed character within the whole show, who – by finding her traditional roots and therefore, connecting her body and mind again – will resist drug use, lead a healthy sex life, fight for her daughter (thereby regaining the ancient respect for obtaining the gift of being chosen as a parental guardian (cf. Swampy 11)) and who will position herself as a reliable social worker in her community in the end. Hereby, she arises as a new and turned-around prototype of the classical teen show 'All Canadian Girl,' who – after having struggled for personal

fulfillment – will "prove to be a salvation of her community [not as] the domestic angel, the dutiful daughter or the helpless romantic heroine" (Bavidge 44 -45) but as a realistic, headstrong character who has seen the worst and employs her experience for the better.

What we find here are personal evolutions, which are illustrated by the subtle help of altered stereotypes. Jon as 'Ultramasculine Manual' reminds of the image of 'the Horny, Bloodthirsty One,' who has metamorphosed into the 'Gangsta Pimp' in today's world. Yet, he dabbles in the 'Noble Savage' one for some time but fails all along the line. Candy on the contrary, as having abandoned the 'Voluptuous Squaw' from the beginning, finally revives as cinematic hero, acting bravely, "independent, dedicated, just and always dependable" (Abelman 407), being in line with Amanda, Sadie, Nicole and Robin for she becomes a tough 'Pocahontian Warrior.'<sup>80</sup>

## THE 'PUPPY-EYED INDIANS'

Today's 'Native Noble Savages' are said to be

thoughtful young men, aware of their masculine and feminine sides – and comfortable with both. They choose as their friends and lovers smart self-confident girls, and they look up to their companions with an affection bordering on reverence. In addition, they are respectful of their gentle supportive male guardians.... However, the strong female role models who raised this new style of young man – namely the biological mothers – are missing. The erasure of the self-sacrificing mother figure forces a dynamic change and, in this iteration, inscribes the teen male as the suffering martyr within the text. This new hero, who at the same time can be unabashedly emotional and decidedly masculine, offers himself up each week for physical as well as emotional torture. (Banks 20)

The 'New Noble One's' skin has a darker shade, yet, he does fulfill all of the characteristics represented above and he even possesses the additional requirements of "long on head hair but sparse body hair ... [being] male but not [scary] phallically male" (Sweeney 51) almost naturally. The two drama shows *Moccasin Flats* and *renegadepress.com* also employ next to the mostly harsh characters traditional teen idols, who should respond to teenage girls' rather innocent objects of desire, as well as they match the mechanism of creating trustworthy and lovably role model antagonists to the terrifying figures dominating the simulacrum of often brutal Native reality in Canada.

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<sup>80</sup> cf. chapter 'Pulling Out The Knife From The Wound Or Twisting it.'



Matt of *Moccasin Flats* and Jack of *renegadepress.com* correspond to the classical male teen age image, having been shaped by characters like Dylan (*Beverly Hills 90210*) Max (*Roswell*) or Pacy (*Dawson's Creek*): they not only fit them according to their outward appearance but also to their emotional qualities of being good listeners and good articulators of feelings. Also the social aspects match as they grew up without mothers, too, in this case revealing a socio-cultural critique. For the absence of motherhood sublimely hints at Canadian regulations of Native family destruction again.

Matt for instance evolves into a mutable character as he accommodates to the respective overall topics of *Moccasin Flats'* three seasons: in the first one, concerned with gang and street life, he is the nice guy rather bound to a supporting actor function since his emotional and morally driven character can hardly be applied to the temptations of a criminal world. Yet, in season two, mainly concentrating on the developments of characters and their dealings with family issues, Matt soars to become a major protagonist and is set in sharp contrast to Jon's lapses while he is falling in love with Jon's girlfriend Tara. In the third season shaped by a more humorous note since the series has been switching from an inward pimp and drug life point of view, to a much more outward one, Matt even forms a queue with the overcharged boys of the comedies from above, as he – the object of desire within a three-some – may remind a fourteen year old in the heights of his puberty. Notwithstanding, especially in season two we become acquainted with a character, who is emotionally (many close-ups) and physically confident for he supports Jon's girlfriend Tara in successfully and steadily coping with her brutal boyfriend. Thereby he presents himself as a respectful contemporary. He is constantly on eye level with Tara, which is underlined by regular scenes showing them sitting next to each other in an American shot on the porch talking while Jon's interference with Tara ends in pushing her off of it. Furthermore, except for his cuddle factor being in line with the 'Noble Savage' of the 90s, Matt also reveals fatherly capabilities. In contrast to Ethan's real father Jon, he is present when needed (for instance on Ethan's birthday party) and able to make appropriate gifts as he gives him traditional drumsticks (Ethan has been drumming before). On the contrary, Jon in order to balance out his absences bribes him with an enormous water gun (Tara: "We said no guns in the house!"). These props indicate two contrary inner worlds, morals and ideologies, and therefore foreshadow the events to come since villain Jon is going back to jail in the end while teen idol Matt gets the girl.

In *renegadepress.com*, Jack stays the major character throughout the show's five seasons and he, additionally, will be the most stable one. While other figures keep getting lost in the quarrels of finding themselves (Indian Sandi undergoes a geek and an Emo-Punk phase; Zoey, struggles with alcohol; Crystal turns from a child to an adolescent), Jack keeps representing the perfect male role model



Fig. 6.30.  
*renegadepress.com*: Jack  
(copyrighted materials,  
used with permission from  
Vérité Films Inc.)

as solid as a rock. His masculine and feminine sides of being emotional and rational serve him well. Permanently learning about problems and injustices in his environment (like drug abuse, molestation, violence, etc.) with the help of his counselor-website, Jack never hesitates to be a man of action and intervene, thereby portraying a selfless Native modern times super hero up close and personal. Additionally, in a *Dawson's Creek* manner wise beyond his years,<sup>81</sup> he concurrently leads sophisticated, psychologically exemplary dialogs with friends and foes and, while supporting the weak, is able to formulate a universally valid moral at the end of every episode he plays the major 'life saving' role in.

Matt as well as Jack are protagonists being brought to life to fulfil functions of counterbalancing any kind of stereotyping created concerning Natives in the previous centuries. Within the shows, they are the only male figures (except for supporting actors, mainly wise father figures), whose characters are reassuringly stable insofar as they – guaranteed by their teen idol image – will never give up their moralities (at least with respect to the major topics), are always pure at heart, and will be trustworthy friends forever. Consequently, as "heterosexual but not overtly masculine or sexually threatening" (Sweeney 51), puppy eyed and naturally hairless on their chests (cf. van Lent 217-218), they are far away from the 'Horny Indian' depiction (body hair = primitive and wild). Since they are young, agile and fighting for justice they only laugh at the 'Stoic/Lazy Indian,' while their ability to cope efficiently with the innovations of the modern world (Jack runs the counselor-ezine for adolescents; Matt owns a Hip Hop Music label) keeps them from a comparison to a historical 'Noble Savage' of former times.

<sup>81</sup> cf. chapter '... And The Cute.'



Fig. 6.31. *Moccasin Flats*: Matt being a sympathetic comforter



Fig. 6.32. *renegadeexpress.com*: Jack being a sympathetic comforter

Yet, they tap the positive connotations Taylor already finds in romance fiction "of being caring, sensitive and interesting partners, far superior to all those abusive or non-existent-husbands. Not to mention fabulous lovers" (*Me Sexy* 31). After all they are "über-Indians" (Taylor, "Indian" 27-28). So taking the image of the typical male teen idol can be considered as a simple but subtle as well as effective device. It becomes a promising move, as it may appeal to the average Canadian adolescent (especially the girls) and brings out the lustre of today's young male Native at the same time, thereby liberating him from the unpleasant realm of classical Native television icons.

## 6.8 THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

I have responsibilities to truth – both cerebral and bodily – and to understand how those truths can serve our dignity and survival in respectful, affirming and constructive ways. To ignore sex and embodied pleasure in the cause of Indigenous liberation is to ignore one of our greatest resources. It is to deny us one of our most precious gifts.

Every orgasm can be an act of decolonization. (Justice 106)

Taking this statement as a guiding principle concerning the dealings with sexuality and gender identity along with it within the different shows on Natives discussed before, we, first and foremost, can notice that Justice – knowing about the qualities of Native naturalness in questions of lovemaking – has recognized the chances these qualities create. Notwithstanding, this erotic liberation is as indispensable as it is barely manageable since Native sexuality nowadays often seems to be bound to feelings of pain, violence, defeat and disparagement much more than to beatitude, fusion, acknowledgment and liberation.

All these different television series show that Native people on the small screen have stood up and are on their way to or already on the battleground. But the war has been raging from the outside and the inside for generations leaving the fighting youth rather unskilled to themselves, whereby features like insolence, creativity, strong will and single-mindedness manifest themselves, but also fear and disorientation resulting in violence, cold-bloodedness and the belief in the wrong gods. We know the saying: In love and war there are no rules! Here in these Native communities we often find a complete absence of rules, but also 'love' and 'war' appear to be concepts, which can be replaced by the other almost arbitrarily. Just like many binary oppositions in Native societies they have lost their definition as radically as the Natives have lost their ability to steady identity building.

Apart from the trustworthy, morally-dependable, good, 'chest-hairless' friend and sensitive lover personified in Matt (*Moccasin Flats*) and Jack (*renegadepress.com*) who – taking a look at the entire spectrum of all series – rather have to be considered as a 'minor counterbalance' to fulfil socio-cultural obligations of political correctness, young male leading actors can be divided into 'Ultramasculine Warriors' and 'Childlike Mollycoddles.' Both wander the 'realm of lust' on quite insecure feet, though.

Jon and his gang live in a war zone constantly pretending to stamp their feet aggressively, where their

contemptuous disengagement serves a highly utilitarian function in an increasingly uncontrollable urban environment where chaos breeds fantasies of exaggerated self-possession. Coolness is an aesthetic of the streets, a style of deportment specifically designed to alert potential predators of one's impregnability to assault. Far from reflecting confidence, such coolness grows out of a sense of threat of the strain of living in metropolitan war zones, where one's equanimity is constantly being challenged, giving rise to a hypermasculine folk religion that fetishizes poise and impassivity. (Harris 40)

Thus living a Gangsta life means keeping or even better rising the amount of presence on the vertical axis and therefore pushing the amount of power on the horizontal one. This will mostly be achieved by the maximum utilization of bodily features resulting in a sustainable performance with the help of a form of physical violence, which is objectifying enemies and women in order to stabilize oneself. Thereby, childishness or the ancestral right of youth to search and find oneself falls by the wayside. Harris states that this way of living dedicated to coolness "represents the final collapse of the romantic movement's fetishization of the child, the demise of the religion of innocence," (44) which is accompanied by an

extreme humourlessness and its empathic rejection of the smile of 'niceness'.... The typical cool facial expression is not an actual expression so much as a categorical refusal to betray even a hint of a smile, of a desire to please, and the substitution of a mask of characterless nullity – as in the gangsta rapper Ice Cube's signature snarl ... [it is] showing that far from being cherubs, they are ghouls, decades older than their years. (44)

Within the realm of Canadian First Nations communities, this collapse of childhood and the "demise of the religion of innocence" (44) naturally gets a depth and grievousness reaching far beyond the ordinary struggles of an average teenager in the accelerated Western world of modern communication, for this abandonment of purity and virginity has literally been evoked by cultural as well as social and physical rape. Because of this the smile of the ghetto youth of Northern Regina may never be a wholehearted one. These characters represent the 'ghoul attitude' of not only being older than their age according to a very high amount of strokes in their young lives, but they do also remind of gargoyles, whose bodies are transformed to dead-hearted stones in order to protect their insides.

A sharp contrast to this gargoyle mentality would then be the 'Comical Dumb One' being in alignment with a goblin, which constantly plays tricks on the people in its surroundings, yet, never malicious ones, and whose smile is candid and loveable, just like the Cheshire Cat smile of Huey, and the delivering fits of laughter of Frank and Silas, or the winning grin of George.

Nonetheless, although Jon fights in a war zone while the other characters play in a sand pit, and although Jon may be a ghoulish while the others may be goblins, they may convey the same basic statement in the end, acting from counter positions, though, as their historical background does not allow them a form of natural mediocrity, balance, tranquility or a walk through a 'realm of wholesome gender identities' without inhibition. Both 'poles' are rather bound to the body than to the mind. One needs its mere physical potentials to establish an identity; the other one conveys a child-like, defiant egoism of bodily basic desires to be fulfilled. While the characteristics are contrary, we nevertheless can notice that their bodies are the main source the boys are able to respond to as the emotional source of mind (or soul and heart) has either become desolate or appears to be stuck in a rather rudimentary state. Consequently, the boys are not able to act as sufficient providers or take honest responsibility, for instance, since according to their living circumstances and personal developments, they either overdo, which then ends in violent subordination of women as well as the community in general, or underdo in ending in the constant call for being 'caught, whenever they fall' by the mostly female adults they are encircled by. There appears to be a picture of a 'modern Western man frequently floating above the boys' heads but it is either interpreted in the wrong way or utterly ignored.

Especially the First Nations Canadian boys then (far away from being scoured out and having become 'easy-to-manage-Diet Coke versions of Indians' reveal, when taking a closer look, the devastating effects on a Nation, which has been facing identity loss for centuries. Deprived of a capacity of finding one's uniqueness in times most teenagers search desperately for his- or herself, self-hatred and extreme actions may not come as a surprise. As Taylor says: "in nature, vacuums have to be filled somehow" (*Funny* 32). Tool kits to top up have to be found and they will eventually arise in the shape of drugs, simulacrum role models from the mediascape (like *Beavis and Butt-Head*) or from the ones in musical genres (like Gangsta pimps). Like numerous young people in today's societies, the televised Native youth also attempts to fill the hole with music for many genres promise a form of identity and affiliation, a place in society; as well their universal

statements tend to include a declaration of war on the 'scorned society in general.' As Native adolescents mostly live in an unlikely harsher war zone, and as they have been deprived almost of all meta-narratives in the first place, different musical genres therefore provide a tool kit for the respective youth within the respective show.

The Native young women in these shows give the impression of being far less effected by the identity music offers than their male counterparts. Music is a part of their lives as well. Sometimes they make use of its features conceding it a relevance comparable to a minor film prop, but it is not awarded the impact of an 'identity-building device.' Moreover, they are quite stable concerning their egohood without it. The Pocahontian depiction is modified. The winners of the battle have been determined. Native girls correspond to a romantic 'Noble Savage'-hero- image (of today) much better than the men in their surroundings keeping in mind its positive connotations like the ability to provide, protect, take care and act in a well-grounded way to expedite the personal development as well as the improvement of the whole community. The comedy female leading roles Sadie, Nicole and Robin fit this picture but also the leading roles of *Moccasin Flats* stand in line. Thereby, especially profession supports this engagement since Amanda is the arm of the law in her community while Candy in later seasons will be a committed social worker serving it well.

Yet, what may become obvious comparing all of the women in these shows, is that the Native female body has become 'a rewarded price, which had been hunted for' in the previous centuries. And it has been maltreated. As a result, the female protagonists have adopted an indifferent attitude towards it or they subliminally separate mind from body in order to protect it. While even Native men in this situation due to patriarchal expectations rather bet on the forces of their body or if they cannot, just refuse to grow up, women direct their efforts to the training of their intellect. Thereby they often outshine their male counterparts as in these shows all the Native female protagonists do in the end. They are eager, willing to change the world, able to make mistakes, stand up and learn from them. The downgrading of the body that has evolved from historical maltreatment may be the price to pay.

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Now that we have observed the re-definition of gender identities and the filmic 'down-sexualization' of Canadian Aboriginals, we will take a look at settings, namely 'the bush' and the Canadian metropolises, to find out in how far Natives manage to reconquer formerly lost territories on the grounds of Canada's mediascape in order to 're-map' themselves in the real world.



# **PART SEVEN: RE-MAPPING THE CANADIAN NATIVES – A HOME FOR THE FUZZY MUSKRAT**

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The Aboriginal Community saw itself, and arguably still sees itself, as a part of the land not apart from it. That many Aboriginal societies were mobile and trod lightly upon it encouraged Europeans to overlook the long direct connection that the indigenous peoples enjoyed with the land and their spiritual relationship with space and place. (Lehr 80)

In a last attempt, Wee-sa-kay-jac sent Wa-jusk, the muskrat, into the ocean. The vine went down and down. When he finally pulled the muskrat up, he discovered that Wa-jusk had drowned, but in his tiny paws was a pease of clay.... [Wee-sa-kay-jac] then put the clay in a pot and boiled it. The clay expanded over the sides of the pot falling into the great sea until land was reformed. (Stevens 2)

As Native Peoples' inner self possesses a reciprocal connectedness to the outer world, it is only logical that First Nations television shows strongly emphasize the setting. It serves as an identity de-terminator, a remedy for the broken soul of a Nation as well as a subtle vehicle for a resistance culture, which is predicated upon the recovery of land. And behind all of these efforts a lost fuzzy muskrat peeks up occasionally, keenly looking for a new dam it can call a home of its own (cf. Stevens 20-25)). Thus merely taking a look at the settings of the shows' introductory scenes and opening credits we already smell the odour of how the different series' characters are built up and how each show in general draws attention to Canada's crime of territory theft whereby genre specific mechanisms also take their toll.

## **7.1 HITTING THE WAR PATH – OPENING CREDITS**

### **PICTURE POSTCARDS FROM THE BUSH – THE SITCOMS**

The sitcoms' classical Canadian small town locations are "principally [used] as ... generic Prairie setting[s] [and in doing so] relying on well-known tropes" (McCullough 230). Here, the region plays out as exotica that can be capitalized as an international commodity. Corresponding well with latecomer obligations of "(Recreational) Cultural Appropriation" (Taylor, Futile 19) and Canadian celebration of its national symbol (cf. Kilpatrick 5), 'the great outdoors,' McCullough describes this trend in Canadian television as "exoticising regionalism" (230) while the contrasting show format is set in large urban centres. Both formats offer their Native inhabitants identification opportunities en masse, yet, indicating different ideologies.

While *The Rez* in this case draws attention to nature already in the opening credits admittedly since most of the scenes introducing the main cast are shot outside, it nevertheless appears to not pay too much attention to the setting in general. This becomes evident when considering that the opening credits have been edited in a rather surrealistic way as the natural colors have been painted over by un-naturalistic ones and the background is kept in a rather scattered, artificial blue light. Furthermore, the screenwriters tend to throw the viewer into the series' plot lines. They barely make use of establishing shots or extreme long shots, not even at the beginning of the very first episode where we get to see a footbridge and boats but are then directly taken to Frank and Silas, who will be introduced in medium shots. Even later, when we enter the reserve, the audience will not be allowed an initial phase of orientation concerning the show's main setting, but it is again directly inserted into the action by medium shots on characters (REZ 1/1).

*Moose TV* as well as *Hank Williams First Nation* walk a divergent path, though, for both shows emphasize impressive introductory shots in the first place. *Moose TV* establishes the setting in presenting a scene in a picture postcard-like manner by putting on view very green grass growing on the banks of a very blue river, the background filled with a very green forest and the sky shining in blue (MT 1/1). Beginning with this shot's nearly surreal beauty, it then builds the bridge to 'reality' by cutting to a tarred highway, which is apparently spotted from out of a windshield, relating the postcard-like atmosphere to the modern world and thereby introducing the main character George

being on his way to his small hometown. Talking arrogantly to the girl driving the truck about the high life of Champagne, caviar and fast cars, it becomes clear he has been living in the big city. We then get to know the village of Moose by the view out of the slowly moving car, which – fulfilling sitcom binary opposition needs<sup>82</sup> – represents the opposite of what George raves about: the houses are not dirty but there is plenty of stuff in the front yards, there is a car with an open hood, a dog barks, later we see children playing around a teepee while George says disappointedly: "There is not much going on here!" (MT 1/1). However, when taking a look at the following opening credits we may notice that – although all of the main cast is portrayed singularly – these credits, are nevertheless framed by 'the town.' Right at the beginning we again spot a part of the 'out of the car-view' from above, and at the end we are presented a great number of the locals sitting in a cafe. This already foreshadows that 'the soul of this village,' what is keeping the place together like a strong, wooden frame, is the community, something conceited George will have to learn within the plot of the show.

*Hank Williams First Nation* puts forward an even more bombastic setting introduction as we are offered a high number of high-flown extreme long shots of the Canadian prairie looking as if it has been filmed out of a glider. First of all, different perspectives on lakes and forests are displayed whereby the land appears to be in a pristine state. Finally, we reach a special lake, though, with some houses at its banks, probably the town our characters live in, which – having experienced the beautiful landscape before – seems to be a place in paradise, ergo the New Garden of Eden the Canadian Adam believed to have found in the first place.<sup>83</sup> It is able to stand up to an Canadian tourist brochure (HW 1/1).

Notwithstanding, at a later point, the setting becomes more and more earthly as we catch sight of a montage of actions the Native people living there perform on a daily basis (ergo the Garden of Eden still cannot be considered as empty (Francis 222, Wilson 30): little children playing with little dogs, excited boys riding their bikes on the highway holding hockey sticks, chatting mothers at a picnic table, an eager man with a scythe, smiling children on a trampoline and in a hammock, adolescents flirting at a white fence, a fluttering Canadian flag (HW 1/1, 1/5, etc.). Hence, we are presented a nostalgically shaped series of images of the lifestyle of a typical Canadian small town. Hereby the

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<sup>82</sup> cf. chapter 'The Good.'

<sup>83</sup> cf. chapter 3.3.

## 7. RE-MAPPING: HITTING THE WAR PATH

show stresses that Natives share the 'all-Canadian' lifestyle the same as the average Canadian small-towner (ergo paradise needs to be shared), which in this special case is an idealized version of the overall Aboriginal situation in Canada. It reminds of the euphemistic 'Home is where the heart is' -Country Music mentality which Blair describes (69 ff.) already indicated by the Country background music.



Fig. 7.1. *Hank Williams First Nation*: picture postcard preparation

In general the Native sitcoms demand cozy, loveable homes according to their generic "'from our family to yours'"-mentality (Feuer 69) on the one hand and the advantages of "exoticising regionalism" (McCullough 230), namely a fairly good number of quirky characters, on the other (see *Uncle Martin*). Therefore, they find their ideal settings in small town atmospheres just as likely as the 'average Canadian sitcom' – for instance the popular *Corner Gas*<sup>84</sup> – does. In doing so, the shows on Native daily life are not only reaching for a Native audience but also for mainstream viewers, who are invited to experience Aboriginal communities just like any other sitcom community, and who – in the best case scenario – in a nostalgic twist should long for the peaceful kind of living a Native neighborhood leads. Thereby, those communities virtually occupy the most beautiful places in Canada naturally without the public noticing their filmic regaining of

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<sup>84</sup> This is one of Canada's own most popular shows as it takes up the typical prejudices of Canadian small town communities in this case represented by the inhabitants of Dog River, Saskatchewan, whose whole cosmos revolves around the 'only gas station within 60 kilometres.'

the land. The dramas and especially *Moccasin Flats*, though, are occupying the most horrible place in Canada naturally, thereby showing the public the wasted land they regained.

## SHOTS FROM THE HOOD – THE DRAMAS

*renegadepress.com* but much more *Moccasin Flats* speak a very different language than the sitcoms as these two shows are situated in more or less chaotic urban environments reminding rather of rough Hip Hop rhymes than of a nostalgic summoning of 'home' performed by cowboys. While *renegadepress.com* is very little concerned with the wider surroundings of its protagonists (the location shootings are kept in a videoclip-aesthetic black-and-white documentary style, yet rather concentrating on the high school setting (RP.C 1/1)), *Moccasin Flats* presents up a metropolitan jungle-like atmosphere quite from the beginning (MF 1/1), thus reminding of drama milieus like *Night Heat*<sup>85</sup> (cf. McCullough 230).



Fig. 7.2. *Moccasin Flats*: Regina's 'tent-line'

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<sup>85</sup> This is a Canadian police drama series.

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The very first extreme long shot of the series already represents the whole show's local color as it unveils the characters' inner conflicts in the face of a history of destruction leading to a tightrope walk between the modern Western world and a disarrayed traditionalism. In the immediate foreground we can spot some morbid looking trees, on the left side just behind them, the mere scaffold of a teepee without any fabric around it, in the middle ground some yellow fields while the skyline of the Canadian metropolis Regina towers above against a blue sky in the backdrop (MF 1/1). That being so the urban world of today's Canadian Natives becomes the attempt at a balancing act between the foreground and the background, so to speak, whereby the background – meaning the upper class society of bankers and entrepreneurs living and working in the skyscrapers – appears to overshadow Native existence as well as the background is, first and foremost, out of reach. What is left to Canada's Aboriginal society is in the foreground, consisting of spoilt nature left overs (the trees) and a seemingly useless culture and tradition. These are not able to fulfil their main functions of protecting the soul of the individual and giving a cosy home anymore, just like a teepee without a shielding blanket seems to be bare of its purpose. Yet, there is hope since the teepee's scaffold remains standing tall: it is not broken and lying on the ground meaning that there is still (or again) a framework, which could be covered one day again.

Notwithstanding, the location shots introducing the setting can be considered as the complete opposite of the postcard nostalgia of the comparable sitcom sequence of happily playing children, etc. While the first shot is an immobile one, the next scenes being intercut – concerning the movement alone – already foreshadow the chaotic, unpredictable world Country Music and domcom romanticism normally run from: the second shot has a vertical movement crossing the picture from down to up by presenting cars driving on an overcrowded highway; the third one shows a gang of boys running in from the left side to the right capturing another boy and thrashing him; the fourth one has two fierce dogs moving downwards behind a barb wire fence; the fifth one reveals kids playing in a down at heel neighborhood while the sixth shows the meeting of a dealing couple one coming from the left side of the frame moving towards the centre; and the last one has two prostitutes moving in from the right towards a john's car (MF 1/1). Hereby, the show does not only cover some of the tragedies of daily routine ghetto life, it also unveils – by switching positions and direction of movement within the scenes constantly – a disruptive basic atmosphere conveying a feeling of chaos, instability and the acknowledgement of the fact that the locals keep living with the fear of not knowing from which direction the next catastrophe may run them over.

The opening credits do, additionally, fit to this feeling of helplessness, which in the same instance also demonstrates predominance (at least in the first season), as we – like in *Moose TV* – are introduced to the neighborhood by accompanying the driver(s) of a car patrolling the urban streets. We do not get to see very much of the surroundings, though. The colors are held in an artificial yellow blinding light while the entire taped material is kept in a blurred state as if the one filming had forgotten to angle the cam.



Fig, 7.3. *Moccasin Flats*: opening credits in drug use aesthetics

Consequently, the viewer may feel disoriented and the uneasy emotion of having lost one's self-control may creep up as well. Since the show refuses to give the audience a clear view, it may make it feel as if it were on a bad drug trip in an expressionistic kind of way, therefore knowingly taking the viewers' natural supremacy out of his/her hands, only for a short period of time but nevertheless at an essential point of 'orientation'.<sup>86</sup> That being so the viewer is left unprotected in a ghetto metropolitan jungle while the show gives the impression that it presents hard, unadorned facts, thus counteracting the whitewashing atmosphere prevailing in sitcoms.

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<sup>86</sup> The second and third season's opening credits mirror the general development of the show, though/the second season keeps to this blurred filming but intercuts it with scenes of children playing in the streets while the third season credits consist of a hybrid of these three: the car drive, the kids in the background, the the faces of the main cast in the foreground, indicating the shows alteration from the harsh portrayal of the ghetto life in general to more family affine and therefore character-bound plots.



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Hence, the opening credits and the first scenes of the shows already tell about the paths the shows' navigation systems have been directing as well as they set the series' paces for the future. In *The Rez* the navigation system is not working properly as the main characters are lost and in need to find their orientation throughout the different seasons already indicated by the absence of place-defining opening shots. *Moose TV's* opening sequences hint at a substantial location shaped by a strong community and at a main character who has to learn throughout the show that he needs to turn off his navigation system although it promises him a million places much more interesting than this one, for he has already found his 'home.' *Hank Williams First Nation*, on the contrary, has gotten rid of a navigation system leaving the viewer with the recommendation of 'lean back and enjoy!' because who would ever want to depart from the Garden of Eden? Thereby, all the sitcoms set a slow pace mapping an unwinding and relaxing 'standard tourist way' of experiencing Native life while *Moccasin Flats'* navigation system not only goes haywire but also exposes the often helpless feeling audience to the chaos of an urban ghetto jungle by employing agitating video clip aesthetics.



## 7.2 AIMLESS TRAVELS TOWARDS THE SUNSET – MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION

Nature in general appears to be a rather contradictory topic in all of the series as the adolescent Native characters have lost the ability to lead a successful dialog with nature. Yet, they hear it whispering but according to their cultural disruption they cannot enter into a proper dialog. In this state of mind they seem to lapse into 'latecomers' mechanisms of 'Cultural Appropriation' (cf. Taylor, *Futile* 19) searching for an access to the Canadian land and consequently themselves with the help of automatic means of transportation.

Deloria states that Whites recognize 'Indians' as constant images of "rebellion and creation" as Natives are the only race spreading the feeling of being "ultimately free," since they represent an independence beyond 'the system' and therefore reject everything: politics, meaning itself and society (184 ff.). This long lost emotion of absolute freedom – almost buried in today's accelerating; insisting Western world – might again be captured by rafting down a wild river (cf. Taylor, *Futile* 19-21), or being less life threatening, by imitating the 'Jack Kerouac way' he describes in *On the road*, which is also promoted by the movie *Easy Rider*<sup>87</sup> (cf. Deloria 132). To Deloria these White seekers longing for a meaning and finding themselves have simulated and refined the 'typical Plains Indians' way of life of freely roaming the land rather unintentionally by pimping up and adjusting the means of transportation to today's standards meaning from mustang to motorbike and Chevrolet and from canoe to motorboat. In his essay about 'coolness,' Harris as well comments on White people's

obsession with aimless travel, with the picaresque journeys of rambling vagabonds constantly on the move, goaded on not by curiosity but by their own internal demons. Directionless spiritual odysseys are basic to the narrative of cool art and advertisements, which celebrate the freedom of the open highway, a life without responsibilities, the unambiguous insouciance of the corporate hobo.... These myths of existential tourism, of the wanderlust of rambling itinerants who have rejected the tedium of a settled domestic life and embraced instead the nomadic existence of motorized gypsies, have proven especially important for the automobile industry [where cars according to coolness standards of] ... dropping everything, turning one's back on the little cottage with the white picket fence, and speeding away ... [have been named] ... Mustangs, Wranglers, Renegades ... [giving the impression of]

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<sup>87</sup> This is a road movie, in which Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda roam the USA on their motorbikes to smell to odor of perfect freedom, the skin of beautiful women and the taste Marihuana at Mardi Gras in New Orleans/always in search for themselves their way of living became a justification for a whole generation of Westerners in need for aims in life to outgrow their mid-life crises (remedy = riding a bike on the Road 66)).

getaway vehicles that enable ... [the driver] ... to break loose and roar off into the sunset. (43)

### **IF WE ONLY HAD A SAILBOAT ... – THE REZ**

Silas and Frank of *The Rez* are never able to experience a feeling of roaming the Prairie as free as an 'Indian' since they are devoid of any imperialistic hardware (cf. Neu 42) and technological systems (cf. Manore 5) allowing them to do so. Cars they drive are borrowed and have to be taken back by the end of the day while especially Silas is dependent on his old mountain bike and the back seat of his girlfriend's motorbike. Hence he has been deprived of the opportunity of experiencing 'Re-Cultural Appropriation': "the presence or lack of a vehicle is a constant source of both humor and pathos" (Tharp 80). They are bound to the place they live in, surrounded by a wilderness they fear, far from movie stereotyped mysterious instincts that might let them recognize sounds much earlier than any white ear is able to. Yet, they longing for this appropriation even in the very first dialog of the entire series:

Silas: I'd like a sail boat, Don!

Don: Sailboat? They are useless! That's for tourists!

Frank: Right, you gonna go hunting in a sail boat?

Silas: Frank, you have no imagination.

Frank: Yeah, oh, say we jack a moose...

Silas: You can't see yourself skimming over the water. Lucy is beside you ... her hair blowing back, she is thinking...

Don: ... how the hell is he gonna go hunting in this stupid sail boat!

Frank: Yeah, I want a sail boat, too. (REZ 1/1)

Here, as in 'Cultural Appropriation' in general, it is not about the use, but about the fun, the entertainment factor, being the basis for the misinterpretation of Western Occidental dropouts, who would desperately like to follow the 'Delorian-liberating path' of Native people. Nonetheless, they tend to forget that Native cultures and traditions are rather free, at the same time also free of hedonism, though. Otherwise they could not have existed for thousands of years.

## AMERICA'S DEAREST TREASURE – THE CAR

Apart from this special sail boat the car plays a very important part in today's Native world. Especially in the urban surroundings where identity determination always seems to be a little more urgent than in the small town, the car serves as a promising alternative to do so. "[F]or the average American, the car is inseparable from individual freedom, an icon of social, sexual, and geographical mobility. Mainstream society weds personal aspirations to car ownership. Put simply, you are what you drive " (Tharp 78). Flink adds: "The main things that automobility symbolized were material prosperity through a higher standard of living, individual mobility, and an improvement in the quality of life through a fusing of rural and urban advantages" (161). Nevertheless, it also comes with the side effect of "undermining community and family, and it invited anonymity and anomie" (161), all them features of great importance in our TV shows.

## PIMPED UP WANDERLUST – MOCCASIN FLATS

The dealings with the car in *Moccasin Flats* can serve as an example for the classic characteristics bound to the image of the car. For sure, in a big country like Canada the car has to be of great significance due to the mere fact that it masters great distances relatively cheaply and easily.



Fig. 7.4. *Moccasin Flats*: Jon

The ghetto kings in the show drive big, pimped up trucks and Chevrolets and are therefore quite mobile. But being chained to the ghetto prison and having their the shaky status only in their block, they have nowhere else to go. With their vehicles, they propagate the image of 'the freedom of cool aimless travels' leaving everything behind. Yet, taking a closer look,

this becomes a farce, only 'Schein not Sein' while the 'pimping up' turns out to be a mere desperate means to hide the truth of being captured in one's block. As a result, apart from the fact that an expensive car is in alignment with archetypical Hip Hop standards of

## 7. RE-MAPPING: AIMLESS TRAVEL TOWARDS THE SUNSET

showing off as much wealth as possible, Jon's Chevy for instance rather fulfils the duties of an armour than the ones of a mustang galloping its rider towards the sunset.

Besides, in *Moccasin Flats* Jon uses his car for patrolling 'his' streets in the first place, just like it is presented in the blurred opening credits. In doing so, he adopts and converts a postmodern form of "subduing the earth" (Genesis 1:26-28) which means, he overmasters his surroundings with technical advantages for his personal profits (the prostitutes he controls do not own a car). Thereby, he initiates the "loss of [his] territories" and consequently "the loss of self-determination" (Poirier 138). Next to his weapons and his intimidating behavior of aggression, the car serves as vehicle to identity finding and as declaration of war: the justifications of the 'dominant race' having the right to occupy the land according to 'Social Darwinism' are obsolete, as the Natives have taken over 'imperialistic technical hardware' like cars and firearms (cf. Miller 21-22, Neu 42, Harrison 101).

A flaw in the plan comes with it, though, also becoming evident in the introductory scene of *Moose TV* (MT 1/1) where George comments negatively on his apparently died out home town. For driving down a street judging it from behind the side and front window, leaves you just the way that many scared Occidental people were left when entering the new country and trying to subjugate it: out there.<sup>88</sup> When he finally steps out of the car and walks down the street, George suddenly experiences his village's lively atmosphere as children are frolicking around him. Jon on the contrary, constantly makes use of the mobility and solitude of his car to stay untouchable (according to Hip Hop video aesthetics and police/action drama plots it even saves his life in car chases). Nevertheless, patrolling and as a result staying outside and unaffected naturally provokes a feeling of not belonging, loneliness, "anonymity and anomie" (Flink 161), which in the end then will not support a true formation of identity as the merging with the surroundings can be considered as a fake one shaped by ill-treated Western domination tactics.

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<sup>88</sup> cf. chapter 3.3.

## OF MATRONLY TRUCKS AND CHUGGING SPEED BOATS – HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION

As already seen before on various occasions *Hank Williams First Nation* tends to hide some subtle but humorous criticism, and there is no exception made concerning the topic of cars, mobility and means of transportation; again confirming that this show makes use prejudices, stereotyping and 'dropping bricks' in Natives' daily lives and that it is constantly "promoting open convictions in the most democratic way" (Wells 199). In contrast to the other shows, *Hank Williams First Nation* often speaks against technological hardware subliminally, which has a negative impact on the land and consequently on the people bound to it as well.



Fig. 7.5. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Huey pets his matron ice cream truck

As the show's major motorized vehicle is the Pippi Longstocking-colored ice-cream truck, we can immediately recognize that classical standards associated with cars are infiltrated, as it exposes itself as fairly respectable representative of imperialistic hardware (cf. Neu 42) or promising explorer of the Canadian wilderness.<sup>89</sup> This ice-cream truck can be considered as less an example of mobility as it is one of sexual power or freedom. Rather it becomes a symbol for female matron characteristics as it presents itself as playful but cumbersome, frugal but motley, painted in pastel colors, and

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<sup>89</sup> cf. chapter 3.3.

## 7. RE-MAPPING: AIMLESS TRAVEL TOWARDS THE SUNSET

responds to far more home-bound 'nurturing' aspects (selling ice cream) than to the ones of wanderlust and adventure. Broken down in one episode and therefore keeping Huey and Jacob imprisoned in the matronly truck while it is shaken by the angry local baseball team (HW 1/2), it displays the opposite pole of celebrating "the freedom of the open highway" (Harris 43) in a Prairie Indian remembrance. As well, it fails to fulfill demands of Country Music's current lonesome wolf: the 'Robust Truck Driver' – with his infernal machine. Here the major vehicle is rather in line with the classic 'reservation car' of many movies and novels, often broken but idiosyncratic and 'die hard,' thereby representing Native current living standards on the reserve. As a 'modified-reservation-car-girl-cousin,' the ice cream truck mirrors its owners' way of life as well: two boys who live in their juvenile book world happily tied to the community's apron strings while refusing to grow up.

*Hank Williams First Nation* in general settles its accounts with 'Cultural Appropriation' and the road movie theme of freedom, irresponsibility and hedonism Harris describes (cf. 43): the show's main vehicle, the mustang, so to speak, has been built to stand still (and sell ice-cream) and not to drive around. Consequently, for Huey, there is no artificial life-changing adventure on the road ahead, no nostalgic; romantic driving towards the sunset, no self-discovering renegade action to be seen.

Furthermore, we are also presented a very small scene, rather modest in appearance, in which stoic, old Uncle Martin walks by a group of Harley Davidson riders in classic rocker outfits (HW 1/2). Especially Harley Davidson can be considered as the prototype of this postmodern motorized nomadic culture, as its slogan tells us dreamily 'all we know for sure, is the road is infinite.' In this Harris finds that "they have turned gas-guzzling into a Zen-like meditative state, preaching the therapy of the speedometer and promoting mindless locomotion as a sedative for bourgeois restlessness and dissatisfaction" (43). When the group of bikers then passes Martin, he keeps looking at them but not with a drivelling mouth or admiration for their lifestyle but with a stoic lack of understanding on his weather-beaten face. 'Route 66-like' nostalgia seems to be foreign to this 'original inhabitant of America.'

On top of that we may have to take into consideration that the entire show is based on the movie *Hank Williams First Nation* (2006), which is praised on its DVD cover with the statement: "A road-trip movie – told through the eyes of those who stayed home" (AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival). Because of that we can notice that this series "exploits ... [these kinds of stylish means of production] ... for its humorous, ironic, and at times tragic potential, in the manner that Coyote's foibles are exploited for

both comic relief and cultural commentary. Writers and filmmakers firmly grounded in Native traditions apply those ways to the dilemmas of modernity" (Tharp 78).

This technique also becomes obvious when switching the element from earth to water. In the episode "Boat Race Fever" the community holds a speed boat races on its local river. While the White participants start with the most expensive, aerodynamical boats, the only Native participant attends the race with the most wrecked boat capable of going half the speed of the other boats, and – to make matters even worse – it is called Relic. Yet, in the end he and Relic chug over the finishing line first because all the competing racing boats have been overcharged and broken down due to their drivers' doggedness, need for speed and arrogance (HW 1/3).

Hence, *Hank Williams First Nation* tells of the foolishness of 'Cultural Appropriation' in making use of technical means. It promotes the notion that 'finding home' and therefore finding a connection to the land cannot be grounded in a hedonistic attempt to feel freedom on the open highway. Those means of production copying the 'seemingly Native Prairie roaming lifestyle' prove as fake as they are irrelevant. For the 'finding of territory, ergo the discovery of self-determination' has to be based on the community that the seeking one lives in since a true pure balance of the corporate lebensraum, of land, people, animals, etc. can only be accomplished if all of those different factors are present. Due to that, travelling the endless road to find oneself becomes an as useless venture as experiencing or patrolling the home town's streets without stopping, getting out and joining the people, who live there amicably. Cruising the urban lanes in a circle of daily routine thus has to be as unsatisfactory for the inner self as driving into the sunset all alone.

### **7.3 LIVE AND LET DIE – THE EXPERIENCE OF HOME IN THE DRAMAS**

The two Native dramas tend to make use of Hip Hop ideologies as a trope for a divergent number of reasons: first of all, a proper soundtrack for a television show strongly appealing to adolescents is prerequisite to success; secondly Hip Hop has been one of the most popular musical genre in the last two decade; third, Hip Hop thought systems are deeply based on "in-betweenness" (Ullestad 64) corresponding with the classic "teenage inbetweenness" (Creeber (2001), 41-43) in universal terms but also indicating similar Native and Afro-American experiences of cultural disruption. Those features – one could argue – remind of a postmodern Janus figure, who looks back and ahead at the same time while his eyes turning behind spot traditionalism, natural rootedness and a feeling of 'being in there,' yet, looking forward he catches sight of postmodernism, periphery and a feeling of being 'left out there.' This dichotomy has developed to an aggressive representation of a postmodern 'outlaw image' – which a great number of today's well-situated Western youth are striving for in an ironic twist – as it promises the person representing it to be 'in' in the most authentic way.

Hip Hop culture is very dependent on space and place, on the definition of where one stands personally and in society in general. Such being the case, "the inbetween' of these musicians, chosen for personal or commercial reasons, is complicated by social and cultural struggles over location and displacement in both physical places and discursive spaces" (Ullestad 65). Consequently, for a culture which has been living in a natural symbiosis with its surroundings for a very long time, postmodern Hip Hop ideologies of the local are very likely to serve as an elixir.



## **NORTH OF DECENT – CARDINAL POINT TERMINOLOGY IN MOCCASIN FLATS**

*Moccasin Flats* reveals a setting appearing to be predestined for the unconditional realization of privileges and duties Hip Hop Music requires from its 'true' followers. In his essay on Rap Music and place Decker quotes rapper Daddy-O who says if you do not watch out properly, "you get mapped, or should I say [taken] off the map, like a laundry stain in a laundromat" (Eure 242), These are conditions the screenwriters of *Moccasin Flats* defy permanently. As McCullough points out in one of the few essays ever written on this show, Regina has to be considered as a "train town in the most unforgiving manner – the tracks divide the city into a variety of sections, all of which function to remind the residents that there is a 'right' and 'wrong' side of the tracks" (233). Therefore Regina is in line with other Canadian cities like

Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Edmonton as a site of social crisis featuring racism, poverty, crime, violence, addiction, and regional underdevelopment.... The theme of underdevelopment haunts these cities, providing proof of capitalism's indifference to and exploitation of uneven development. In these cities, evidence of 'progress' and 'civilization' exist alongside underdevelopment and devolution: here, the possibility presented by wired virtual business sits next to dustbowl and apartheid standards of poverty, disease, and hopelessness. According to this evidence, the only democratization to have happened on late capitalism is the democratization of poverty, leaving us with a world that one observer describes as a 'planet of slums.' (McCullough 229)

Such being the case, the show's basic underlying topic can be identified as the constant locating of the immediate personal spot on this map, the place to go to next and in the further future, and the habitats one has been at with all its consequences. To cross borders can benefit the healing process of the inner self here but it can likewise manifest itself as a personal demise. Ranging over the railroad tracks for instance then "play[s] a significant role in themes as diverse as personal identity, community solidarity, urban planning, and policing" are unveiled as well as the fact that those tracks have been and still are "legitimat[ing] colonialism to the present day" (McCullough 234). The North thus represents various negative features talked about above while moving southward means leaving more and more of those characteristics behind the farther you go. The higher the street address and the more the show's characters' homes are situated South, the better off they are and the more they are morally obliged. This is proven by Jon's move from his gang bunker in the far North end to a family life in a nice house in the heart of North

Central in the second season while Amanda's house for instance is situated in the South end (cf. McCullough 235-236).

Having the dreariness McCullough draws his map of North Central Regina with in mind, we nevertheless have to consider that situations of despair frequently create an attitude of defiance and a sullen turning to bad living circumstances, which materialize as triggers of identity-building the aggrieved party feels proud of then. "Rap is from the streets, the music of the underclass essentially opposed to those enjoying a bourgeois suburban life" (Armstrong 338). As a result the 'suburban *Desperate Housewives*<sup>90</sup> lifestyle gets proscribed, for true authenticity can only be found when living the harsh street life whereby Rap lifestyle "takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production. In the music and lyrics, the city is an audible presence, explicitly cited and digitally sampled in the reproduction of the aural textures of the urban environment" (Forman 68) while, additionally, being followed like a dogma on the streets.

Thereby, Hip Hop proclaims the reclamation of place, playing directly into the hands of current Native demands. Canada's Aboriginal peoples were considered as stateless (cf. Neu 12) while their connections to nature have been destroyed or ignored; yet "the fundamental relationship between Indigenous people and their land base is irrevocable: Tradition is Place, and sovereignty over place is the basis for a sustainable future. The tight interweaving of existence, self-definition and territory is the essence of Indigenous identity" (Neu 9). That being so especially the music genre of Hip Hop provides the Native youth with the opportunity to 'feel an alliance with land' again and to gain some of it back: "[a] process of identification through geographical sites allows the rapper to be an authority of a specific locale. Hence, ... set locations allow visual physicality to link a rapper with specific race and class politics while creating an aura of authenticity" (Shelton 108). The term 'authenticity' plays a major role here for Hip Hop's powerful nexus between place and identity fosters the detection of a lost ego-hood since it is the "powerful ties to place that both anchor rap acts to their immediate environments and set them apart from other environments" (Forman 68).

Therefore, selfhood is shaped as well as incorporation into a group or posse within the personal realm. A declaration of war is spoken (or rapped) out, grounded in the occupation of public territory, and an apparent inferior lifestyle having been ignored for decades is put on the public agenda, the new map, so to speak, promising fame and wealth in today's society. Thus just like some Black people in the USA, Natives in the

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<sup>90</sup> This is a television show (2004-2012) on postmodern housewives living in typical Western American middle class suburban surroundings.

Canadian ghettos like Jon own special streets and blocks of metropolitan cities, which appear to be lost to the public, as police sanctions in many cases seem to be a drop into the ocean while only crossing this territory could be extremely dangerous. Here, the unwelcome consequences of drawing boundaries around the 'stateless' become obvious.<sup>91</sup> For especially this television show unveils that if "the outsider is found within the borders and is perceived neither as a patriot nor as a citizen of another country, fear of the other can easily be encouraged by the politically ambitious frightful pitch" (Neu 12), which can eventually lead to turning the 'outsider' exhaustedly adrift, in the course of this creating a ticking time bomb right in the direct neighborhood. As we especially see in the first season, Jon and his gang control the streets, reminding of metropolitan jungles where 'survival of the fittest' is the general order of the day. The viewer may get the feeling of a postmodern form of the scary wilderness Whites were frightened off when they first came to America, where the evil lurks (cf. Manore 3) while especially Jon is eager to keep up to the image of the 'Bloodthirsty Indian,' roaming the land only to do harm.

### **'YOU'RE INCREDIBLY INCREDIBLE' – HIP HOP AESTHETICS OF PLACE IN MOCCASIN FLATS AND RENEGADEPRESS.COM**

Rap music and Hip Hop possess various opportunities for cultures robbed of their land and oppressed by the Western ones since this genre's connection to place seems to be beneficial for these dis-rooted nations as far as the praise to 'home turf' lets these peoples' psyches come into bloom again. Notwithstanding, especially this kind of music represents a constant dilemma demanding the need for differentiation permanently. On the one side there are positive connotations passing the ball to the broken Native self-esteem like the tutor teaching tennis passes the ball to a rookie on the first day. *Moccasin Flat's* Matt for instance who owns a little Hip Hop record label tells his freshly signed artist Red that his (Red's) "lyrics come from a place where the spirit lives" (cf. MF 2/1). Also Jack of *renegadepress.com* who is a Native rapper finds that Hip Hop and Native Music both have a mighty power and that they "come from the same place" ( for

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<sup>91</sup> cf. chapter 'Chaining The Canoe For Good.'

this music represents "change and oppression," something the "Native youth is strongly into" (RP.C 2/8).

Nonetheless, Hip Hop is generally dependent on authenticity whereby

three kinds of authenticity are initially evident. First, there's a concern with being true to oneself. Rap illustrates self-creation and individuality, as a value. Next, there is a question of location or place. Rap prioritizes artists' local allegiances and territorial identities. Finally the question becomes whether a performer has the requisite relation and proximity to an original source of rap. (Armstrong 336)

Jon possesses all of these characteristics without even rapping, meaning in a Hip Hop sense, he is 'real,' Matt probably responds to the majority of those demands as well, Jack to practically none. Hence, his credibility as a rapper with his conservative urban background is put to the test recurrently.

Within the first seasons, Jack has to find the 'true' approaches to his musical roots whereby he frequently fails in doing so, by letting himself get intimidated by a Gangsta rapper from the rez (RP.C 1/5), by occasionally giving up to a White manager who tries to dress him up like a West Coast Gangsta rapper in order to increase his marketability, or by promoting a rez life in the background of his first video shot in a warehouse (sublimely indicating Western methods of capitalism and disturbance of the country's resources). Yet, this is a lifestyle his 'rez girl' girlfriend accuses him of having never truly led and therefore only romanticizing it (RP.C .4/8)

Matt, on the contrary, is presented as a 'real' music manager who comes from the 'Flats' and knows the milieu by personal experience when he initiates a 'Canadian Idol'<sup>92</sup> look-alike and gets maltreated by pseudo-Native Hip Hoppers, who are only copying the US Gangsta Rap credos. As a logical consequence and 'matter of the heart,' he refuses to sign any of those, for his intention lies in promoting the Native lifestyle authentically. This prayer is finally vociferously answered in the form of Red, who just emerged from prison and is able to write and rap lyrics telling about "bad life, running free and shitty jobs" (cf. MF 2/1) on a political level.

On a technical basis both of these shows also reveal how far Hip Hop Music is perceived as a medium for credibility. While *renegade press.com* rather sticks to Rock songs when non-diegetic music is employed, underlining the classic feelings of teenager-inbetweenness, and only uses Hip Hop diegetically whenever Jack performs it, *Moccasin*

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<sup>92</sup> This is a world wide casting show, where unknown singers get a chance to become 'pop stars.'

*Flats'* soundtrack is mainly composed of Rap Music serving as the show's constant background sound (except for some special exceptions mostly linked to topics regarding traditionalism). Thus it indicates that this genre tells of the characters' inner feelings and their strong relationship to their surroundings, thereby displaying the show's authenticity all over the place: the music only comments on occurrences in the 'Flats' properly because that is 'just how life is' there.

So what these two series reveal concerning their employment of Hip Hop and consequently the importance of place within the respective show is that it is all about credibility. *Moccasin Flats* just possesses the latter: youth living in this ghetto does not have to search for it desperately, for the mere setting McCullough describes, used as "geography in a materialistic fashion to describe how in capitalism, underdevelopment creates a series of contradictions that the characters have to work through" (233), guarantees it. While Jack then just strives for stardom at first, Matt proves his personal authenticity by expressing that he only wants to be an artistic producer, thereby naturally responding to his calling by finding a proper way to be part of postmodern art and entertainment, which in the end means being part of today's modern world. Music tends to have the ability to put minorities about to be washed away from the cultural map back in the limelight whereby it addresses their problems and even gives them the appearance of being 'chic:'

Rappers' emphasis on posses and neighborhoods has brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness. It satisfies poor young ... people's profound need to have their territories acknowledged, recognized and celebrated. These are the street corners and neighborhoods that usually serve as lurid backdrops for street crimes on the nightly news. Few local people are given the opportunity to speak.... (Rose 11)

In *renegadepress.com* Hip Hop is produced by Whites and performed by an urban 'Indian.' Consequently, different forms of a potential credibility have to be tested and deleted in order to find a true uniqueness, which will take place in the show's final episode when Jack moves back to the rez to support the local youth there, giving them among other activities a voice and hope with his music (RP.C 5/8). Matt of *Moccasin Flats*, though, as a Native manager – producing in his own little studio – can be considered as safe, at least to the point he falls prey to the R'n'B tunes of his secret lover Melissa. He temporarily gives up on his mission then (booting out Red) and will later in the series' final episode be punished for the denial of his community's 'true soundtrack' as he has to bear his aunt's fury and a painful kick in his testicles (MF 3/1-3/8).

## TENDER FLOWERS OF AFFECTION – LOVE AND SPACE IN MOCCASIN FLATS

Generally identification with place embodies a double-edged sword: Hip Hop offers a tough identity, a lot of ruptured people all that willingly make use of, yet if we look beyond Matt's appeal 'to make the world only realize,' we again have to notice as in Hip Hop gender studies (and maybe in all musical ideologies) that beneath this surface of propagated territorial identification often lies loss and disorientation whereby Hip Hop lifestyle becomes a welcome lifeline. So, if we compare Jon and his MTV Gangsta video clip lifestyle to the one of Dylan, (being on the verge of going to university with a basketball scholarship) and the prostitute Sarah, we detect that Hip Hop reality is often determined by being caged and losing freedom while the softly flowering love relationship between Dylan and Sarah is characterized by the attempt to free oneself, which seems to be only manageable by leaving the 'Flats' and visiting the promising South end of Regina in this case (MF 1/4).

Sarah and Dylan meet on the

shore of Wascana Lake, which lies south of downtown, ... the South shore is always present in the background as a horizon. The profound meaning of these sequences lies in the additional fact that this background includes the legislative buildings on the South shore, suggesting that the character's dreams of success are intertwined with the colonial history that those buildings ultimately represent. These shots imply that the characters are to colonial history what figure is to ground. Though the dialogue never comments on this relationship, the *mise en scène* consistently uses the legislative buildings as background. (McCullough 236)

Notwithstanding, apart from the direct link to the colonial history the legislature building represents, the characters within the show seem to be able to breathe for the first time as the devastating ghetto suddenly gives way to the reassuring nature of open space. Being out of the chaotic, constricting, harshly supervised blocks controlled by Sarah's pimp Jon, the young couple is able to 'open up' to one another as they, being in the cozy atmosphere of the lake watching the sun go down, begin to become acquainted with the other by talking about their past and their dreams in life. They even discuss "the feeling of freedom," Dylan experiences when playing basketball while Sarah states that she is aware of people "who would commit suicide for that kind of feeling" (MF 1/4). Here, nature becomes a hideaway symbolizing happiness, purity, freedom, stillness, silence and the ability to listen and is therefore put in sharp contrast to the oppressing, obsolete, chaotic, violent world looming at the North end in their backs. Staying there in order to

"just to get to know each other" as Dylan explains to the girl leaves both of them in the comfortable position of feeling at home for the first time in years.

Watching this innocent relationship appearing to be supported by nature itself as the sun going down and the upcoming dawn warmly wraps around both of their bodies when they kiss for the first time, the screenwriters at least for some time convey a true feeling of authenticity. Thereby they silently respond to Natives' original connection to nature, the latter seemingly still snoozing in the Native youth. In believing that this is the case the 'tender flower of love' seems to only have a chance to burgeon in the open space and not at a curb stone.



Fig. 7.6. *Moccasin Flats*: Dylan and Sarah

In contrast to Dylan's ability to feel pure emotions and his natural turning to the reassuring 'mode of nature' when needed, the allegedly almighty Jon stays caged permanently for he is only able to rule a kingdom he never feels free to leave in the first place. Despite that, whenever Jon is outside in the first season he tends to be in danger and is mostly on the run. Furthermore since there is always an enemy threatening to kill him, he even has to barricade himself in his bunker, the door permanently shut with at least five locks. Every time Jon manages to free himself from some demons of his current Gangsta life, he then becomes able 'to open up a door' (MF 1/6): the viewer may notice that his lungs do actually long for the clean air outside not polluted by the smoke of cigarettes and marijuana while his eyes long for pure sunlight and not for the artificial blue one characterizing his home. Whenever Jon gets overtaken anew by these demons, he begins to lock himself up again. This is evident in the second season as he – falling

back to patterns of delinquent behavior – starts to buy security systems for his nice suburban house, and as a last climax – worthy a MTV Gangsta lifestyle – ends up behind bars for good (MF 2/1-2/8).

Comparing these two dealings with open space, one could be reminded of Jackson II who says that there is "no salvation in losing connection with one's cultural self" (126). In *Moccasin Flats*, Hip Hop promises the discovery of authenticity in localizing oneself, in detecting a "testing ground to hone skills and to gain local reputation" (Forman 72) to create a proper 'personal equation.' Ironically this 'gaining of reputation' in the 'real Gangsta world' Jon lives in, is permanently intertwined with delinquency, which – as being adored – is also an identification attribute for the 'credible Hip Hopper.' This 'crush on the forbidden' may frequently end up in jail time, though, therefore keeping the Hip Hopper from the home territory he needs in order to calibrate him/herself.

In this microcosm of Hip Hop ghetto life in the 'Flats,' the supposed weakest link of the chain, the fuzzy muskrat (cf. Stevens 20-25), thus constantly falls along the wayside indicating that the balance of power employed to serve the world beyond "the temporal frame of individual human life reaching far out to the seventh generation ahead" (Feit 106) has been lost; leaving a society, which has adopted the Western elbow mentality of capitalism. However, if we consider Neu's Native 'tradition is place' philosophy (cf. 9), based on the tight interconnectedness of people and land in a pure, selfless way, we may acknowledge that this show sees Hip Hop Music for Natives as a vehicle to reconnect to territory and to move into the limelight. Notwithstanding, it rather gives the impression of a placebo than a remedy to heal from within.



## **7.4 LIVE AND LET LIVE – THE EXPERIENCE OF HOME IN THE SITCOMS**

Native dramas mostly according to filmic thematic plots regularly introduce the metropolis as a setting while it can be considered as one of the sitcoms' main features that small towns serve as a productive tool to trigger off binary oppositions usually based in the interaction of traditionalism and exoticism that these locations provide. For shows on Native communities living somewhere in the prairie, these places, additionally, offer the opportunity to present Aboriginals' current relationship to the nature surrounding them, which nowadays frequently includes a kind of exoticism, yet, rather not fitting the stereotype of the 'Greening Indian.'

### **HOME, SCARY HOME... – SMALL TOWN VS. BIG CITY IN THE REZ**

In *The Rez*, Frank and Silas can be spotted as having quite an ambivalent relationship to the environs they are living in. As described above, they acknowledge and take advantage of small town community cohesion; the wide prairie and the forests enclosing the community keep scaring them, though. Miles away from the benefits of "Tipahiskan" (the knowledge of the interaction and interplay of animals, weather, plants, gods and humans) (Poirier 145)), they are not able to understand, control or influence what takes place around them, which is constantly (non-)diegetically underlined by a flute melody as one of the main indicators when something 'mystical' is in the air.

Even at the beginning of the very first episode when the town's community member Don suddenly dies of a heart attack (REZ 1/1), the viewer can notice that the Native youth of this reserve are not only not equipped with the right number of traditional tool kits anymore but that employing an ancestral correspondence with nature, implying "listening to, reading, and interpreting the different languages within the forest and responding to them appropriately" (Poirier 144-145) works coincidentally. When Don is



Fig. 7.7. *The Rez*: Frank is shocked by his mystical faculties (he has called thunder) while Etta appears in the background

lying next to Frank a sudden idea of having to sing something traditional pops up in his mind, and as he finally starts to hum some improvised Cree lyrics insecurely, the sky darkens abruptly and a loud thunder clap can be heard (REZ 1/1), letting Frank look up delightfully screaming out "cool" full of surprise in a *Beavis and Butt-Head* imitation.<sup>93</sup> From the beginning we already realize that a policy of constant dialog between nature's macro- and microcosm has been cut off as knowledge

of the Old Ways is lost having created a vacancy, which has been filled with modern and pop culture attributes.

Throughout the show Frank and Silas are confronted with this disappearance of reciprocal ideologies in most cases when they deal with the rez's medicine woman Etta. She is not only a very practical person in the modern world but also still believes in and practises 'old traditions' quite successfully, thereby keeping the balance of the community by paying perpetually attention to the state of the land as a naturally whole. Furthermore, Etta attempts to give her knowledge to the next generation persistently (impersonated by Silas who only understands his role of being her replacement in the last episodes) so that it will somehow get the chance of reaching the 'seventh generation' from now.<sup>94</sup> Notwithstanding, stressing the queasy attitude the two boys have towards the Old Ways, Etta appears to be a respected, yet deeply frightening person to them. This perceptual experience becomes one of the show's running gags as the medicine woman keeps foreseeing their arrival ("She has eyes in the back of her head!" (REZ 1/4)) and makes them jump whenever she suddenly turns up behind them in the bush.

This not only provokes laughter according to classic sitcom binary oppositions of bright-eyed exoticism and 'blind-eyed' Western lifestyle but also social-critically hints at Silas' and Frank's inability to use all of their senses meaning to listen well and 'read tracks,' etc. The senses of the two boys being home in the middle of nowhere appear to be numb leading to emotions of insecurity, helplessness and a feeling of being unprotected in the open rather reminding of Western city dwellers, who may experience

<sup>93</sup> cf. chapter 'A Universe Without Women.'

<sup>94</sup> cf. chapter 3.

nature as breathtakingly uncomfortable and a place where the 'evil lurks' (cf. REZ 2/10). Silas and Frank, cut from the feeling of being a part of the surroundings and the belief of being protected by them, hence, have in an ironic twist taken over the Western invader's fear of the 'boogeyman' or the 'wild bushman'<sup>95</sup> subtly projecting it onto Etta.

After all, this feeling of uneasiness, indifference and clumsiness concerning the natural world is fuelled throughout the entire show: Frank for instance needs to prepare a feast for some 'German Indian Wannabes' in the bush but, being unable to hunt, he fetches frozen moose meat from the home fridge and then by trying to barbecue it with a Bunsen burner burns the teepees of the Germans (REZ 2/10). On top of that Silas and Frank even help White workers to do road construction by clearing the 'scary jungle,' thereby supporting White needs of taming the 'empty Garden of Eden' (Francis 8) and cash in on it (REZ 2/9).

This unsound attitude takes a turn, though, when Silas and Frank are confronted with a 'real jungle,' namely the city of Toronto (REZ 2/12, 2/13), as in this metropolis a true forlornness becomes apparent making them realize that they are more emotionally bound to their small town in the back of beyond than they had ever imagined. Both of them have never really considered leaving the reserve in contrast to the girls since they have never longed for the opportunities of being successful and having the fame (Sadie as a politician and Lucy as a singer and actress) that big towns offer in general and rather cling to the steady life the rez provides them with. When they finally visit it in the show's great finale they therefore do so for a limited period of time: Frank with tourist (hedonistic) aims of seeing the Hockey Hall of Fame and "getting some chicks to party," Silas with educational ones for he attends a creative writing workshop, and both of them with the secret goal of winning back love, as both ex-girlfriends are to be found there.

However, Toronto becomes a nightmare to them, even to Sadie, (who went there to finally 'change the world' and becomes a Native youth delegate with the prospect of going to Ottawa). For the three country bumpkins are on the one hand emotionally challenged by thematic issues like seeing Native prostitution, alcohol and drug abuse, they have to experience in Toronto. On the other hand they are also alienated by the general metropolitan atmosphere which is underlined by film means.

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<sup>95</sup> cf. chapter 3.3.



Fig 7.8: *The Rez*: Sadie in Toronto's coldness



Fig. 7.9: *The Rez*: Simone in the reserve's warmth

Toronto is presented as crowded, busy, loud boulevards illuminated by artificial neon light alternating with dark, scary street canyons. Most of the extreme long shots and long shots are kept in bird's eye views superficially indicating the magnitude of the city not being able to be captured by other shots than the latter, but giving the impression of 'being out there, above everything.' This becomes most obvious when we see a metaphorical intercut between Sadie and Silas' mom Simone. Sadie is dressed in a beautiful expensive gown (one of the two occasions she is dressed in a feminine way) standing in front of a big skyscraper window with a cell phone on her ear having an amazing view over the city. For most of the time, we only see her back, though, while Simone is shown from the front with a lumberjack shirt and an old earpiece in her hand. She is placed in the cozy atmosphere of her home, a green wall with pictures and flowers in the backdrop, the whole setting bathed in warm, brown and orange light, while Sadie stays in the dark and her surroundings are lit by muddy violet light framed by black and grey surfaces. Furthermore, all of the skyscrapers in front of her window – cutting the picture vertically – indicate the feeling of bars, of being caught, of not being able to see the horizon while they, additionally, represent with all their straightness sticking up into the air a rather pushy, male attitude (on the left side of the binary opposition scale). On the contrary, the seemingly curved furniture of Simone's home mirrors feminine attributes of nurturing. Sadie, while looking out of the window of a skyscraper with the great city of Toronto below her feet, suddenly begins to feel uneasy with this situation of being 'above everything' in a Genesis-like subduing position. On the rez, she constantly tried to get to the top to fulfil her goals, but suddenly looking down on the town of her dreams, having the feeling of home and normalcy on the other end of the wire, she appears to notice that

a) home is not to be found here in this place and she needs to be 'rooted again' first in order to campaign for her Nation and against Canadian administration; b) that its artificiality changes her to a person she does not want to become; and c) that compared to the 'down-to-earthness' of the rez Simone represents, being on the top – above everything – feels very lonely, which is actually an emotion creep up Silas as well.

At one point in time even the hedonistic Frank finally gets enraged by the big city as He and Silas lie in bed not able to sleep because of all the sirens and other noises outside ("How do people sleep down here?" (REZ 2/12)). Meanwhile, Silas realizes the irony in being around three million people, feeling more lonely than ever before ( cf. REZ 2/13).

While only Lucy stays as she "feels alive here" (REZ 2/13), Frank, Sadie and Silas, return home to the reserve. Here Silas and Sadie are shown sitting at the lake while the sun is going down in the very last scene of the show (REZ 2/13). There are no extreme angles to be seen as both of them are together in a medium shot at last, bathed



Fig. 7.10. *The Rez*: Toronto – into the neon



Fig. 7.11. *The Rez*: Sadie and Silas at home – into the brown

in the cozy, warm brown and orange light of the sunset. Many small surfaces, characteristic for metropolises, which may indicate instability and chaos, are abandoned, leaving only them and the few large surfaces of the sky and the lake connoting quietude and balance. Sadie and Silas have found their place in acknowledging the advantages of it (stressed by filmic means of warm light and open frames). Notwithstanding, Sadie – re-grounded on her home turf now and having found her 'true military base,' will never give up fighting for her Nation's/community's well-being in the political arena. Besides, 'Stoic Sidekick Tonto' Silas finally (in the last episode) seems to have recognized his responsibilities

towards the reserve for he now is becoming his community' s storyteller and therefore its link to the surrounding world.<sup>96</sup> He will then eventually be able to fulfill the meaning of his name as 'Silas' comes from the Latin Silvanus who is said to be the old roman 'God of the Forests.'

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While a positive connotation concerning the reserve has to emerge in *The Rez* as the majority of the youthful protagonists move to a metropolis in a filmic climax only in the show's finale just to be disabused and come back in the end, *Moose TV* tells the story of a man who went to the big city before, failed and now as homecomer has to submit to classic small town life even if it is in a grudging manner. *Hank Williams First Nation* being on the opposite end of these 'poles of location' decides to keep its setting to its small town surroundings almost exclusively (except for short excursions to Edmonton Mall and another village).

### **'MOTORMOUTHING' IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS – NATURE IN MOOSE TV**

*Moose TV* – although mostly bound to the indoors as TV studios tend to prefer the latter kind of setting in order to lower expenses, and watching TV is almost exclusively practised in the interior – is nevertheless frequently 'pitching its tent' in the great outdoors. Whenever important, interpersonal topics have to be discussed and relationships have to be illuminated and analysed, this will occur in the seclusion of the natural surroundings: George and Clifford open to each other 'hanging out' at a lake (the local's 'Sacred Spot') (MT 1/7), Alice and Major Gerry discuss their relationship at the banks of a river (MT 1/7), as Alice and Robin do in the woods (MT 1/5), while the traditional drum Ernie built in the TV studio finally in a complex and dynamic transcendental dialog with nature (cf. Poirier 145) leads the town members through the bush to George who has been kidnapped by a criminal.<sup>97</sup> Hence, the great outdoors are not a place of fear where evil lurks but a place of recreation and feeling free to find and reveal one's true self.

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<sup>96</sup> cf. chapter 8.2.

<sup>97</sup> cf. chapter 'Scar Tissue That I Wish You Saw.'

## **A LITTLE BITTY OF EVERYTHING – COUNTRY AESTHETICS OF PLACE IN HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION**

As *Hank Williams First Nation* is named after the popular Country musician Hank Williams, it should come as no surprise that one of the overall themes of Country Music, namely the 'home;' plays an essential role in the show (cf. Blair 68). Since especially 'small town home' is "safe, simple and pure" (Jensen, "Honky" 126), the kind of "deterioration " (86) Harrison describes is mentioned in Country Music perpetually, mostly connected with restlessness, separation and loneliness (cf. Horstman 352). Williams for instance points out a nostalgic perception of small town life in his song "The Honky Tonk Blues," in which the singer after having expressed the "rotten and depressed life in the city ... decides to go back to his father's farm. Perhaps life is more monotonous there than in the city, but it is certainly better" (Edmonds 68-69).

This preferential treatment of "little bitty"<sup>98</sup> (Jackson, A.) small town life is practised in *Hank Williams First Nation* as the village in the bush is comparable to a place from a juvenile book. Just like the ice cream truck<sup>99</sup> the location itself looks like it has been painted by Pippi Longstocking. The houses are kept in bright pastel colors, the fences are white, there is a beautiful riverside and a beach at a brilliant lake, and the sun always shines letting the town itself sparkle. Already having spotted this picture postcard-location from the bird's eye view out of a plane at the beginning (HW 1/1), the viewer thus should be able to understand old Uncle Martin, who begins his day by taking a folding chair to the wild meadow at the banks of the riverside, sits down, takes out a cup of yogurt and a spoon and then starts to eat it as if he was resting on his couch in the living room watching TV (HW 1/2): the natural setting of the little commune appears to be so beautiful that its inhabitants do not even seem to need a television to entertain themselves.

The employment of Country Music and its ideologies subtly underline the atmosphere of a cozy home that the screenwriters convey, thereby making use of well

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<sup>98</sup> The lyrics of the song go as follows: A little bitty house and a little bitty yard/A little bitty dog and a little bitty car/You know you got a job and a little bitty check/Six pack of beer and a television set/Little bitty world goes around and around/Little bit of silence and little bit of sound, etc.

<sup>99</sup> cf. chapters 'Noble Savages on Multi-Colored Ice Cream Trucks' and 'Of Matronly Trucks And Chugging Speedboats.'



## 7. RE-MAPPING: LIVE AND LET LIVE – THE EXPERIENCE OF HOME IN SITCOMS

known genre specific thought pattern analysed by Mackay in his essay on "Populist Ideology in Country Music:"

the metropolis runs the political and economic show, but spiritual power, quaintness, friendly people, good music and tourist meccas are found at the periphery.... Economic success was to obtain a steady job in such a centre, be it ... Toronto ... Calgary.... But the success included the bitter compromise, a cultural and personal one. Such immigrants become "marginal persons." (291)

As a logical consequence those principles of peripheral rural life became more and more romanticized. "The very name Country suggests a preference for the rural and small town way of life: simplicity, self-reliance, trustworthy family, friends and neighbors in a viable community network. As a genre, Country Music paints the idealized life as uncomplicated, humane, rural and natural" (Mackay 292).



Fig. 7.12. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Uncle Martin eats a yoghurt in the wilderness

Furthermore "[a]s with the rural-based adherents of populist movements, concern for the land is emphasized: its integrity, usefulness and beauty to the people who work and live on it. Human beings are seen as guardians, rather than exploiters of the earth" (Mackay 294), which then takes us back to anthropomorphic ideologies, at this point revealing an sudden interconnectedness between the ostensibly counteracting principles of 'Cowboy' music and 'Indian' ideologies, concepts usually appearing to keep fighting the other as in Western movies Cowboys have been fighting Indians for many decades. Yet, here we



find the common sympathy of moaning for a way of living of "little bittyness" (Jackson, A.), which can be translated into the demand for a lifestyle of balance and the reassuring interaction of micro- and macrocosms, small town life often promises while stirring up hatred against the capitalistic, elbow society of metropolitan cities. But taking a closer look at Country Music, it may become obvious that it always has been "the music of a marginalized and powerless group whose very existence was threatened by an increasingly urbanized and industrial world" (Jensen, *Creating* quoted in Blair 69).

Additionally, 'home' is always attached to personal family and community and as 'home is where the heart is,' Country employs it as a universal trope symbolizing

family and love relationships. A related theme ... [is] that home will always be there, it is the one stable thing that a person can always come back to, no matter how far he or she has strayed. Another important theme is the disavowal of the materialistic qualities of the home. Fancy homes with expensive furnishings are depicted as being cold and lonely, whereas love is much more likely to be present in more modest quarters.... [H]ome is portrayed as a place where people can seek refuge and be forgiven ... [and] it is a common assumption in country music that love is more important than material possessions. [Home] is the one thing we would all like to go back to, somehow, expecting that it will still be there, just as we remember it. (Blair 69 ff.)

Hence, 'home' in Country is profoundly shaped by romanticism. However, it has to be considered as a longing to be found in the hearts of a lot of average Western men or women more or less subtly. Consequently, this desire addresses a high number of people beyond religious, gender or social boundaries.

The community in *Hank Williams First Nations* with its candy-like atmosphere responds to all of these needs. Homes are not expensive and luxurious but dearly decorated, full of love while well-meant advice float all around, and although none of the Wapahoo locals is likely to fall out with somebody else or commit crimes somewhere in the world out there to be forgiven, watching the show makes the viewers believe that – in a mere hypothetical way – the fallen person could always come back to this community, which will welcome him/her with open arms. Generally, *Hank Williams First Nation* manages to do a major tightrope walk at this point. First of all, in presenting this extremely healthy community, it states – in a typical 'ideal world' sitcom exaggeration – that Native societies do not consist of broken homes of pain, humiliation and loss exclusively, and not only have to be experienced as any other Canadian community, but as even more likeable, more protective, more colorful and more shining. Thereby having

the pictures of the "internal colonies" (Wilson, C. 35) in the daily news in mind, this euphemism can be considered as a necessity to get these bitter, negative depictions out of the public's heads. Thus the show makes use of McCullough "well-worn sitcom tropes ... [where] the 'region' plays out as exotica that can be capitalized as an international commodity ... [called] ... exotic realism" (230), and which the Canadian watching public is likely to identify with as it automatically gives the opportunity to resist the overmastering US programming from the South. Here a unique Canadian identity is acknowledged. *Hank Williams First Nation* jumps on this bandwagon, as this train drives the small Native community in the bush away from the margins of being 'somewhere out there' into the centre without any character ever having to leave the location, thereby employing the popularity as well as the ideologies of overall beloved Country Music and sitcom to underline its topic of 'national equality.'

In a press kit the screenwriter Aaron James Sorensen, who had been living in a small 95% Cree community in Northern Alberta explains how impressed he was by the "sleepy remote charm" (canada.com) of that place reminding him that there were stories in his town that just had not been told yet: "[e]verything that goes right has been under-represented. I wanted to focus on things that we have to celebrate" (canada.com).

## 7.5 ... JUST TAKE GARY FARMER – CAPITALISM AND PLACE

There do not seem to be too many Native actors in today's media landscape. This can be proven by the two sitcoms *The Rez* and *Moose TV* amongst others, in which the popular actor Gary Farmer practically plays the same role and consequently can be considered as the prototype of the "Greedy Chief." Due to their egocentrism and 'wheeling and dealing,' Chief Tom (*The Rez*) and Major Gerry (*Moose TV*) remind of a the stereotype of a cocky bishop of the Middle Ages clasping his white, stubby fingers together rather than of a classic 'Indian Chief' who with wise black eyes, small-boned hand and deliberate actions selflessly safeguards the balance of the band. Both majors/chiefs therefore correspond to the image of a selfish Western sovereign who "erodes communal ties" in order to gain personal prosperity<sup>100</sup> and within the shows they keep acting accordingly.

Major Gerry for instance not only switches into different roles representing absolute authority – he dresses up as GI, prison guard, marshal, etc. – thus insisting on a kind of hierarchy in his little village far from reciprocal; he continuously tries to sell land for his personal benefits as well. On the one hand he takes advantage of Western beliefs in Indian connectedness to the land (surrounding the village) by attempting to collect a high grant in claiming that the territory to be rented is sacred (MT 1/6), and on the other



he follows the devilish plan of turning the community's true 'Sacred Spot' into a commercial fishing camp for tourists. Thereby he keeps revealing himself as a 'Native Anti-Grey Owl' – rather in line with Noah and the Canadian Adam – in refusing to play the stereotypical 'environmentalist card' and by corresponding with Enlightenment implications of authoritatively taming and exploiting the environment out of capitalistic motives of acquisition and investment at the expense of the homeland (cf. Miller 16-17, 22).

Fig. 7.13. *Moose TV*: Major Gary

Chief Tom of *The Rez* on the contrary does not strive for personal profit by selling land. Nevertheless, he strives for personal profit whenever there is a chance to get some grant money for instance to build himself a new porch, and

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<sup>100</sup> cf. chapter 3.3.

"since everybody always comes and sits on it anyway," (REZ 2/5) it would be justified as it is beneficial for the community.

Furthermore, Chief Tom is not only keen on accepting the profits from being the band's Chief but running away from his duties (Tom [before an election]: "Just get out there and remind everyone what I have done for this reservation! Sadie [rolling her eyes]: "And that is ...?!" Tom: "You're a clever girl. Make something up!" (REZ 2/1)), he is also portrayed as a passionate golfer, revealing the game of golf as another running gag throughout the whole series. Not only that, Tom spends more time on exercising with an indoor golf equipment than taking care of his community's matters; he ironically is also attending a golf tournament when the issue of land claims comes up in the rez. Therefore Sadie has to take over the action, leaving her and Lucy playing miniature golf in one scene. This episode is called "Golf and Politics" (REZ 1/2) and even Silas and Frank spot the satirical note accompanying it as the girls refuse to let them play along:

Frank: Come on, guys! We're adults here! We can separate golf from politics!  
Sadie: Look all you guys do ... is go with the flow. I think it's time you took a stand. This is no little issue! [fidgeting with the golf club]  
...  
Silas: What did chief Tom say?  
Sadie: We couldn't reach him. He is organizing a golf tournament.  
Silas: Je..., is there something about golf and politics I don't know? I mean here you are young activists playing mini golf, the chief plays real golf and the premier is a golf pro.... (REZ 1/2)

Golf in general could be considered as a sport of clichés for it usually is a very expensive hobby, which tends to be played by the elite and has in many cases to be acknowledged as a sport attaching great value to its exclusiveness. Moreover, it is sometimes said to be a pseudo-sport as it does not require physical strength meaning that everybody can play it if the person is wealthy enough or possesses lucrative connections. After all, one could argue that playing golf is the logical continuance of the customs of the old European aristocracy as the golf club seems to be the place where the moguls meet, a modern form of playing Croquet in the royal garden, so to speak, while doing business and regulating the world's concerns. Hence, we can find a connotation of elevation in this sport, a position of being 'above' everything, yet, arrogantly controlling the interests of the public without paying real attention to its needs. On top of that golf is a 'lone-fighter sport' being in line with Noah's politics of saving the world as an individual and being the opposite of the team-like relationship a Native band would probably prefer. Thus playing

golf shares attributes like the prevention of "communitarian and consensual" and a turning to "authoritarian and coercive" (Miller 22), features common in today's politics often ruled by mere capitalist ideals. Notwithstanding, golf in Canadian society has another connotation in terms of Native issues as it – since the early nineties – is associated with the Oka crisis, where Native



Fig. 7.14. *The Rez*: Chief Tom

resistance against the expansion of a golf course on sacred burial ground was generating a lot of media attention worldwide.<sup>101</sup> Chief Tom, in organizing golf tournaments and playing golf rather than engaging in politics (REZ 1/2, 2/1, 2/11, etc) is consequently exposed as a traitor to Canadian Native's most important resistance.<sup>102</sup> Hereby, he falls prey to Native well-balanced teasing tactics of "Don't make yourself bigger than you are" (Graveline 214) as well as the employment of subversive humor, which is

drawing attention to a range of serious issues, from the perpetuation of stereotypes to land claims, residential schools, forced integration, foster parenthood, benighted government policy, environmental destruction and attempted annihilation. With the help of the strong forces of humour, Native[s] challenge given power systems ... [and] subvert the processes of domination, (Hirsch 104)

After all, the giving up of traditional values and the turning to Western politics is criticized in these two shows. For Western courses of action – represented by traditional Western elite sports and by the bartering away of common grounds – hint at the abandonment of values serving the little fuzzy muskrat as the weakest link of the chain and thereby the reciprocal community, giving way to the preference of the elbow society of mavericks striving for individual success. These shows convey that Natives, feeling

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<sup>101</sup> cf. chapter 'Muskrat's Biting Back.'

<sup>102</sup> This can be considered as a filmic means. There may be various Native Canadians playing golf today without feeling treacherousness.

## 7. RE-MAPPING: JUST TAKE GARY FARMER – CAPITALISM AND PLACE

quite comfortable in classical capitalistic Western politics take the wrong path leading to a road of egoism, the loss of objectivity and arrogance, which unveils in an ironical way that Natives with a golf club in their hand are just as dangerous as it is to leave a young Native person with a 'real living' animal as it is shown in the following chapter.

## **7.6 'OH, MY GOD! IT'S ALIVE!' – ANIMALS**

The depiction of Native youth's relationship in television series towards traditionalism and the Old Ways can be illuminated by taking a close look at its ties to animals which were essential helpers, role models and companions in former times. Notwithstanding, in most of the shows the constant dialog with beasts (or the whole corporate lebensraum) seems to be shot down as the takeover of the 'Noah society' of individualism and its dogmatic belief in land property has left Native societies in search of new meta-narratives since – after the complex, dynamic and intelligent order (cf. Feit 103) had been destroyed – it literally set the Native world on fire thereby outpacing its disoriented inhabitants. Native television shows often intend to blow away some of the ashes covering these ancient ideologies, acknowledging the "tight interweaving of existence, self-definition and territory [as] the essence of Indigenous identity (Neu 9). For all of the series analysed here realize that regaining some of the old values could help healing the shaken Native soul. Yet, the different shows convey various 'states of mind' of their protagonists hinting at the level of destruction of traditions on the one hand but also presenting the mostly creative and humorous postmodern counter measures the persons affected take in order to 'fill the vacuum,' and those are – according to family friendly sitcom standards – not filled with alcohol and drugs.

### **THE ONLY GOOD ANIMAL IS A DEAD ANIMAL – THE REZ**

*The Rez*, mirrors the animal topic rather subtly as the viewer may realize that apart from a dog occurring in one episode (REZ 2/7), all animals in the show are dead (thereby far from being worshipped as spiritual guardians and usually recruited as mere vital nourishment). Taking a closer look, this emerges as a circumstance pregnant with meaning. For Silas and Frank live in the bush surrounded by thousands of beasts crossing their path constantly corresponded with again and to be liberated from the separate boxes they were banned to when Native anthropomorphic doctrines went astray.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> cf. chapter 3.2.

## 7. RE-MAPPING: OH MY GOD, IT'S ALIVE! – ANIMALS

Nevertheless, the only living animal they are confronted with (apart from the dog) is immediately killed in a car accident as a crow hits their front grille (REZ 1/2), an occurrence unveiling their complete absence of the Native meaning of "power ... [as] ... a social process, a relationship in thoughts and actions among many beings, whereby potentiality becomes actuality" (Feit 104): the boys are helpless and overwhelmed by the carcass, clueless of its potential mystical relevance and scared of the traditional measures of sacrificing to be taken now. Furthermore hunting is a foreign option to them. Not knowing about a hunter's and receiver's reciprocal relationship not to say about any mere practical hunting skills or Disney's make-belief doctrines of the "deeply spiritual Indian, [whose] culture was based on strong appreciation and respect for nature and their environment" (*Disney's Pocahontas*), Frank needs to get moose meat out of the fridge, when the organization of a Native feast is expected of him (REZ 2/10).<sup>104</sup>



Fig. 7.15. *The Rez*: crush of crow and front grille

Attributed to that, Silas and Frank have as underdeveloped a relationship to living animals as the protagonists of the urban and metropolitan towns of *renegadepress.com* (no beasts at all) and *Moccasin Flats* (a bear claw amulet (MF 1/1-1/6)) have, in contrast

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<sup>104</sup> The third incident with a dead animal occurs in the episode "The Lark" (REZ 1/5), in which the lark is a padded bird in a glass box mainly mirroring Silas' retarded brother Joe's feeling of being caged in his own body.



to the most vital animals of *Hank Williams First Nation* (a bear in a supermarket (HW 1/2)) and *Moose TV* (not a moose, but a lively beaver puppet (MT 1/1-1/8)).

## UNCLE MARTIN MEETS A BEAR – HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION

A very interconnected relationship being reciprocal as well as emotionally tied becomes the encounter of the stoic Uncle Martin and a bear in episode two of *Hank Williams First Nation* (HW 1/2). They meet in a supermarket where Martin has just started working as a cleaner while the bear is in search of food. The two are in the same initial situation of having become stranded in the wrong place. Still, the screenwriters supply this episode with some amount of 'extra-teasing' as we have spotted Martin before, needing three attempts until he finally manages to figure out the trick of opening an automatic supermarket door



Fig. 7.16. *Hank Williams First Nation*: the bear refuses meat ...

while the plodding bear is able to make the same doors slide apart at the first effort.

Nevertheless, the location in which they come across each other could not be further away from what one would expect when hearing of a bear/human chance meeting, namely the bush with the danger of being killed on both sides. But stoic Martin and stoic bear wander the hallways of a classic temple of commercialism, a place, which is (although empty this time as it is night) jammed with products of consumerism in every color and style. Consequently, both are overcharged and lost in this situation of excess: the new stand-in, Martin is driven around by the cleaning machine he should control, knocking down food pyramids and shelves while the bear, seemingly irritated by the great number of goods alien to forest residents, trots past the deep-frozen meat and rather sticks to cake, which is all over his fur when Martin – apparently not at all surprised by this sight – finally detects him.

As in no other show we now see the 'natural perfect understanding' between the animal and the Aboriginal as well as the absence of Genesis-like subordination. Both of them are alike, together stranded in the wrong place, behaving in a way which does not

## 7. RE-MAPPING: OH MY GOD, IT'S ALIVE! – ANIMALS

correspond to their nature. In a reciprocal twist linked to the dialog they speak, they get each other out of this unhealthy situation as Martin smuggles the bear out of the supermarket (realizing that it is unwholesome place for him as well), directly past the gum-chewing White cashier, who in a characteristic of a general 'nevermind attitude' and a current one of inattention, does not even notice what is going on right next to her. Outside of the building Martin gives directions to where the bear should be heading while it says good bye by setting itself upright and then leaves. Later another Native having watched the scene outside in disbelief meets Martin and asks him in Cree:



Fig. 7.17. *Hank Williams First Nation*: ... as it is favoring cake

Man: What did you say to him?

Martin (in Cree): I told him: My brother, I don't want to hurt you. If you are hungry ... go eat a white guy! (HW1/2)

So, apart from the fact that the viewer observes that the bear and Martin act clumsily, interacting among the innovations of the modern Western world in a rather

wonky way, we can discern the deeper interconnection of the two, both aware of the secret agreement that they will not hurt each other. Made evident by the talk the bear and Martin have, we furthermore may realize that they are even in these times still able to 'lead a proper dialog,' in which Martin – experiencing this weird situation as normal – keeps the bear from adapting to inappropriate nourishment as well as from captivity or death in general and in a subtle, sarcastic manner recommends him to devour something a little more 'appropriate.'

## BEAVER KNOWS BEST – MOOSE TV

Joan [at the first *Moose TV* casting]: Hi, I'm Joan, Joan Whitney and I've adopted the Indian name of Little Bear, so it's Joan Little Bear Whitney, no hyphen 'cause that would be pretentious. I'd like to do a show called 'Me and my Beaver.' And that's a show for kids!

[getting out the hand puppet of a cute beaver with big glued-on eyes and teeth and talking to it]

Joan: Hi beaver! [looking at the puppet on her hand]

Beaver [Joan with disguised voice]: Hi Joan! [looking at Joan]

Joan: Beaver, how are you?

Beaver: I'm great, just great!

Joan: It's a nice day, isn't it?

Beaver: Yes, yes it is!

Joan: And we are lucky to live in such a beautiful place like Moose!

Beaver: Yeah, it's wonderful to live in such a lovely town ... it's just that...

[hemming and hawing while Joan gets a fierce look on her face]

Joan: Well, what is it, Beaver?

Beaver: I just get soooo maaad sometimes at Major Keeshig's usury and maleficence.

Joan: Well, I don't think that the children at home know what usury and maleficence is...

Beaver: Ok, that is why I wrote a little song about it.

[both starting to dance]

Beaver [singing out of tune]: Maleficence, maleficence, when a public elected official gets really greedy and smells really odd... (MT 1/1)

Getting on air in the first episode of *Moose TV* the beaver becomes more and more like a regular cast member of the show. Although Joan disguises her voice quite badly to make it speak, as she has never learned to ventriloquise and therefore not only constantly moves her mouth whenever Beaver speaks but also does his facial expressions with her own face as the puppets' is only made of irremovable eyes, teeth and a mouth, Beaver is immediately accepted as a full member of the town's community: quite quickly everybody starts talking to him directly (George even begins to call him "Beav" in a pally manner after having given up on the attempt to persuade Joan to do some counselling). Throughout the different episodes he gets fired or beaten up by Alice on TV (which then seriously horrifies the audience of Moose (MT 1/6)) and has to wear an eye patch and a bandage the next episode (he does not talk anymore at the beginning, presumably still in a state of shock after the sneaky attack on him). Moreover, Beaver is consulted whenever somebody needs advice in matters of love thereby reminding of his traditional role as spiritual guardian (cf. MT 1/5); as well he continues to 'speak the truth' about Major Gerry's manipulations and intrigues. This finally climaxes in a spin off of 'Me and the Beaver' called 'The Beaver – Exposed' (MT 1/7). Becoming an investigative journalist, Beaver bravely leaves the toy dam from which he was operating until that point

and starts to wear sunglasses and a long grey coat in order to spy on Gary like a 'real' detective (Joan adjusts to Beaver's outfit and behavior). In their new show of hard journalism then, Beaver reveals that Gerry is on the one hand having an affair with Alice (he (and Joan) have been spying by looking through Gerry's living room window) and on the other that Gerry plans to turn the town's 'Sacred Spot' into a commercial fishing ground (MT 1/7).

*Moose TV* mirrors the idea of the classic, long lost interconnectedness between human and beast but in a postmodern and ironic way, as the Beaver is directed and spoken by a White person, who desperately wants to turn Native, and unintentionally rekindles skills associated with animals, especially sacred ones, which the beaver was in former times. Joan and her obsessive behavior concerning "Native fetishization" (Aldred 329) resemble the stereotype of the hysterical Wannabe-White woman.<sup>105</sup> She also personifies the contemporary movie stereotype of 'The Better Indian' since she psychically vampirizes Indian ways to become a better Aboriginal than her Native neighbors are.<sup>106</sup> This is not too difficult since they are 'not very Indian' anymore nowadays. Furthermore, she has been renaming herself to reveal her true identity ("I've adopted the Indian name of Little Bear, so it's Joan Little Bear Whitney, no hyphen 'cause that would be pretentious!" (MT 1/1)) while she becomes a cultural mediator as well (cf. Stromberg 39), yet, ironically not for the Non-Native audience 'to make them understand' (like John Dunbar of *Dances with Wolves*) but for the Native locals as she possesses the spiritual connection to Beaver.

So, apart from the fact that in a mocking twist this former spiritual dialog is not only presented by a White person but also very dilettantishly, Beaver, of all the animals ever appearing on one of these shows, resembles the following the most: "Animals, for example, are endowed with intentionality. They have purposes, identities, and points of view so that they experience the world from their own perspective and act accordingly" (Poirier 144). Hereby, it becomes symptomatic that Beaver speaks the 'truth,' a delicate truth that on the one hand Joan does not dare to speak out (she hides behind Beaver), and on the other hand a truth the other inhabitants of the town ignore or do not know about in the first place. This cannot only be ascribed to matters of love then but, first and foremost, to the 'investigative journalism' Beaver practises. This does not only remind of the reciprocal relationship and the concept of well-balanced social life

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<sup>105</sup> cf. chapter 'Gimme Some Overprized Indian Name.'

<sup>106</sup> cf. chapter 'My Parents Have Been To The World ....'

within a community without having any capitalistic motives (which is something that was lost in Major Gerry's world of governing), but it also mirrors – in a media-oriented way – the abilities animals had in former times as essential helpers and role models. In the same way as the animal helpers of the 'old traditions' were disclosing in dreams to answer questions, lead the way or get somebody back on the straight and narrow, the beaver hand puppet now confronts the people of Moose with traditional principles. He for instance reveals that "[p]ower is not an individual possession, it is a gift, and a person cannot on this view bring thought to actuality by individually manipulating the world to conform to personal desires" (Feit 104). Additionally, Beaver sublimely stresses that some more Tipahiskan (cf. Poirier 135), and a revival of "relationships dynamically unfold[ing] in time and space through the interactions between interconnected constituents, whether these are human or non-human" (Poirier 144) will not do any harm as well.<sup>107</sup> In acknowledging Beaver as a 'real' spokesperson, although he is a little puppet as fuzzy as the muskrat must have been when emerging from the bottom of the ocean, and although he is amateurishly featured by a Wannabe, the inhabitants of Moose therefore at least to some extent have been giving in to the traditional role of beasts again.

So in a postmodern twist the artificial beaver reminds of the classic children's shows like Sesame Street where little puppets explain the world by singing a catchy song about it. Yet, here the Beaver keeps leaving his refuge to practice investigative journalism.

In doing so, he obtains a proper place of acceptance in the Native society in the end. He is experienced as trustworthy as well as equal, which reminds of mutual ideologies of former times. Notwithstanding, this occurs in a postmodern twist shaped by self-ironic Native humor: The beaver is a hand puppet spoken by a White person, which reminds of the Canadian national hero Grey Owl who as a fake Indian absorbed and then spread Native thought systems so convincingly that they suddenly became universally valid for many Canadians, confronting his fellow citizens with the fact that Native traditionalism can make the world a better place.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> cf. chapter 3.2.

<sup>108</sup> cf. chapter 'Aboriginal Deception Packages.'

## 7. RE-MAPPING: OH MY GOD, IT'S ALIVE! – ANIMALS

Taking a look at the employment of animals in Native shows in general, we may notice that in most cases they have vanished from the face of the 'active' earth as much as a former Native lifestyle did due to a lack of communication with the surroundings (Poirier 144-145, Feit 104). *The Rez* only deals with dead animals, *renegadepress.com* and *Moccasin Flats* with none, *Hank Williams First Nation* has a bear/human confrontation in a supermarket and *Moose TV* no moose but a beaver hand puppet. Notwithstanding, the mere absence of 'proper' animals unveils very much about the Natives' changed living circumstances in these series. They speak of the absence of old meta-narratives and values and of a form of helplessness evolving from that since creational mythology serves as the basis: for a religion shapes the minds and thus the interaction of religious people with their surroundings to a great extent and likewise influences the human construction of the natural world. But it also speaks of the ability to fill gaps with humorous occurrences determined by self-mockery and the candid creation of postmodern animal hybrids giving way to "visual space that not only helps to overcome earlier processes of cultural subordination but offers persuasive means for fostering alternative images and identities of modern Aboriginality" (Norris Nicholson 1).



Fig. 7.18. *Moose TV*: the beaver taking his toll

## **7.7 OF BUBBLE BATHS AND SHARK TANKS – PUTTING CANADIAN NATIVES' PLACE ON THE MAP**

Nature does not exist as neutral reality. It is always the milieu and background of a scene while it is its main function to bear its mood, stress and accompany it. Nature is not only a place of action or background but also a metaphor indicating human relationships and moods (cf. Hickethier 74-75). Taking a look at the settings of the different shows on Natives and the characters' dealings and relationships to their environs, we can underline Hickethier's statement. These shows have the ability to serve as 'identity de-terminer,' a remedy for the broken soul of a Nation. As well, they are a subtle means for a resistance culture, which is predicated upon the recoument of land, whereby plot structures, character buildings and mere filmic means like choice of setting as well as specific genre demands form the cardinal points of the 'media map of Native Canada' here. Thereby this map has been crumpled and erased during the previous centuries leaving Canada's Aboriginal community 'being cheated of a state' (cf. Neu 9) in need of taking a marker pen to draw some new spots.

In doing so, sitcoms and dramas followed two different paths – according to plot lines – revealing attitudes concerning Natives' 'place to be.' It becomes apparent for instance that in Native sitcoms' small towns correspond to Country Music nostalgia of 'home is where the heart is' as well as to the longing for the small town as a place of love, forgiveness and protection – a home that one can always come back to. Therefore, the sitcoms' reserves cannot be compared to any kind of Brazilian standards like agglomerations of shabby huts in the middle of nowhere (cf. Miller, J.R. 364), but they are beautiful, colorful and lively locales embedded in the most impressive Canadian landscapes, painfully reminding of the ersatz-Garden of Eden the colonists came looking for in the first place. Furthermore, while the *The Rez* in 1996 still emphasizes that life on a reserve is shown, the sitcoms of the next millennium, *Hank Williams First Nations* and *Moose TV*, do not even mention this term anymore as their setting is simply described as 'small town.'

Moreover, these shows do not to present depressive, brutalized Natives breaking from the inside, which can be traced back to the hopeless desolation the Canadian public often lets them stay in. Hereby, these (family friendly) shows form a counter point to the dramas on Native life. *Moccasin Flats* especially appears to feel the need to fire a broadside in order to make the public realize how deeply torn apart and wounded



## 7. RE-MAPPING: OF BUBBLE BATHS AND SHARK TANKS – PUTTING CANADIAN NATIVES' PLACE ON THE MAP

Canada's Aboriginals are by shocking the average viewer with the documentary-like shots of harsh Aboriginal ghetto life filled with the sound of raw and powerful Hip Hop beats. Consequently, we are confronted with two opposite lifestyles as well as strongly diverse morals and ethics.



Fig. 7.19. *Moccasin Flats*: child playing caged like a watchdog



Fig. 7.20. *Hank Williams First Nation*: children playing free like birds

The sitcoms mediate freedom, solitude and community basics, conveying the impression of a cozy, warm bubbling bath tub at room temperature every little fuzzy muskrat would be happy to be paddling in while the dramas unveil a world of captivity, chaos and egoism, having put up an ice cold shark tank a fuzzy muskrat would probably have been mauled in instantly. Having these two contrasting milieus as cornerstones, sitcoms reveal an atmosphere in which the one that fails will be bolstered and additionally has the opportunity to make the same mistake over and over again (fitting genre classic principles of "familiar status quo, ritual error made, ritual lesson learned, familiar status quo" (Marc 190-191)). The small town offers its people the possibility to learn, and it guarantees that its inhabitants will catch you if you fall corresponding to the ideology of 'live and let live' and the belief in community balance. In comedies the metropolis on the contrary will let people hit the ground hard for it promotes the idea that it will break them if they are not strong enough and makes them pay if they do not act according to its merciless rules representing the principle of 'live and let die.' Hence, big towns provide the opportunity of quick fame and easy money, but in these shows Natives appear to be on 'foreign ground' there, naturally feeling uneasy in these urban surroundings shaped by capitalistic elbow societies.<sup>109</sup> Even *Moccasin Flats* gives the



impression that First Nations are much more likely to exhale being surrounded by open space, freeing themselves from the demons of egoism and acceleration.

This immediate need for breathing out, for calming down, is also to be found in the employment of the mode of transportation. In dramas pimped-up cars, being the new Native hardware of domination, are constantly on the move, reminding of the saying: 'To walk is a lack of place' which indicates that sublimely solid roots are achingly missed and secretly searched for. Whereas cars in sitcoms are absent or bound to be standing demonstrating that the small town settings provide their characters with a strong feeling of home and belonging.

In line with their genre demands, dramas and comedies on Natives therefore follow two juxtaposing intentions. The sitcom on the one hand wants to integrate Native societies in the mainstream to free Canada's Aboriginals from the "safe, exotic, somewhere else"-myth (Switzer 21-22). Yet, in order to do so successfully, settings like those in *Moose TV* and especially in *Hank Williams First Nation* will be introduced in a very exaggerated manner of presenting pastel colored ideal worlds usually occurring in Disney Christmas movies, giving way to easily accessible televised "Recreational Cultural Appropriation" (Taylor, *Futile* 19) while sublimely reminding the White latecomer viewer of his/her hunger for connecting with the land in the first place (cf. Francis 222). Nonetheless, these fairy-tale-like means of production seem to be indispensable. For if the 'average Canadian citizen' associates the 'average Native community' with impoverishment, crime and disastrous living conditions and television counter-presents it as a pastel-colored Garden of Eden, the public might also get to the point, where it is able to identify with this Aboriginal community. As well, it may feel the immediate nostalgic Country Music longing to spend some time in such a beautiful place, where everybody is welcome and loved for what he/she is, putting Native locations as places to be visited, adored, – part of – on the national map again.

Dramas on the contrary (with *Moccasin Flats* leading the way) rather stick to the sledgehammer method of portraying the harsh reality 'Social Darwinism' has evoked. Hereby, especially *Moccasin Flats* forces public visibility. Yet, it does not do so by means of universal identification made possible by drawing a magnificently colored landscape on the broad Canadian map and accompanying that with a soft and simple Country Music tune, but by spraying bright neon-colored graffiti on this map. This 'writing on the wall' – with all its intensity – ought to captivate the public blind eye as well. For it may

affront the 'dominant race,' since graffiti art symbolizes anarchy and the declaration of the taking over of urban third party property.

Proceeding in a thoroughly divergent way these two genres are nevertheless striving for the same goal, namely the broad acknowledgement of First Nations in the Canadian mediascape of entertainment.<sup>110</sup> Thereby they force the recognition of the Native Nation on the National Canadian map as – according to today's cultural agenda of mass communication – the one that is steadily visible on the television screen becomes sustainably visible in society in general, too. In doing so, these shows simultaneously respond to Canadian mediascape's dilemma of having to distinguish Canadian TV from the overgrown broadcasting force of the South called 'US television' permanently threatening Mediacentric independence<sup>111</sup> as Beaty says (20). Hence, presenting Canadian Aboriginals' lifestyle not only fulfils Canadian television's dogmas of honoring Canada's policy of "freedom, tolerance, and respect for individual differences" (Fleras, *Media* 13) but it also has the side effect of conveying something original Canadian. Thereby, it automatically develops a national mythology of historical origin breaking down the "separation between public and private, local and national" (Kilpatrick 5), ergo building bridges and giving way to a Canadian map granting everybody their individual spot while – with its own unique Aboriginal exoticism – holding out the prospect of establishing a border on the map of the American continent.

After all, the definition of location in Native television shows works on different levels. First of all, the shows support character evaluation within the plots relating traditional ideologies of place to current pop cultural ones in giving their characters personal soundtracks and employing musical genres pregnant with meaning concerning space, which is passing the ball to the second level. In making Canada's Aboriginals not only visible but unveiling them as masters of postmodern intertextuality, these shows give the impression that they declare a spot for Natives on Canada's current map of media landscape as well as on Canada's national map in general. As a last point and welcome side effect could the 'rocks' of Canadian First Inhabitants' unique postmodern exoticism' furthermore not only build new bridges within the Canadian borders but also

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<sup>110</sup> The Informative one (News, etc.) seems to have given up on them.

<sup>111</sup> The most popular entertainment programs on Canadian television in 2006 were: *CSI*, *American Idol*, *CSI: Miami*, *Survivor*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *The Amazing Race*, *House* and *Criminal Minds* – *Corner Gas* on place 13 in the list was the only Canadian one in the top twenty (Beaty 68).

serve as additional stones in the media slingshot Canadian David constantly needs to fight US Goliath with.

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Having dealt with new media gender identities in 'Down-Sexualizing Canadian Natives,' and having observed the Aboriginal declaration of (media) space in 'Re-Mapping Canadian Natives,' we will now – in the last part of the analysis, 'Re-Teaching The World,' – concentrate on First Nations filmic re-building of healthy societies, their filmic regaining of authorship, and in the end their filmic mechanisms of healing from cultural mutilation.

## **PART EIGHT: RE-TEACHING THE WORLD – FOR TELEVISION IS WRITTEN BY THE VICTORIOUS**

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After the Native world had been destroyed as far as gender and sexuality ideologies were molested until mostly only clichéd husks and broken bodies were left and after the lost Aboriginals had been deprived of their lands and kept at Canadian wastelands, their story was falsified and told by the 'dominant race' and the one who wins earns the privilege by history to write the latter. The Natives, often dismissed as dumb, unteachable stepchildren, thereby became paler and paler and even more transparent as the painted-on white color would not stick. Yet, to brighten up and turn into a visible member of society, the castigating hand of the stepfathers needs to be petted in order to obtain some benefits by fraud. Or it needs to be knocked off as a whole. In doing so, the patronized child can grow up, which can then lead to a loud, insistent voice to be heard, telling little stories but meaning universal themes to be acknowledged. This could in the end break the vicious circle of oppression, pain, invisibility and silence, creating an atmosphere and a personal, individual condition most suitable to heal the old wounds as well as the newly added ones.

Television as naturally being the media executive arm of Western paternalism, thus gets infiltrated as the shows on First Nations apparently pet it, in so far as they correspond to a great number of classic filmic character building and plot line techniques. Notwithstanding, those are constantly altered and adjusted to Native needs, thereby creating a unique platform in Canada, staging First Nation characters who publicly (and without being sentenced for it) con and accuse the legislation of the state, who take over media and plot line authorship (without being muzzled), and who openly present useful remedies for healing whereby television series as a means of communication is one of them.

## **8.1 THE AGE OF THE REBELLING STEPCHILDREN – BREAKING THE JAWS OF PATERNALISM**

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### **A KANGAROO COURT IN CANADA – ADOPTION AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLING**

To the bright Canadian public, Native communities appear to be portrayed as islands of free-floating ghettos, in which a circle of violence keeps rotating permanently. This often results in broken 'ersatz families,' who cannot even be considered as nuclear anymore and whose members have given in to depression and indifference to the extent that the vision of classic family life seems to drift somewhere above in the spheres of television sitcoms and Country Music lyrics. Due to that development, Canadian administration may occasionally find itself listening up and hearing a call, which is caught in its ear-drum like a bad dream is caught in a dream catcher. In terms of the Native televisions shows discussed here, the sun will not rise to burn it, though.

### **THE CASE OF THE REZ**

#### **PARROTS V. LARKS**

This topic of painful official interference can be noted as a recurring theme of television shows on Natives as it promises a high amount of conflict potential as well as it may cut to the audience's bone. The people of *The Rez* for instance – healthy according to domcom standards – become a victim of this random governmental benevolence on the morning officials attempt to take the 'communities sunshine' away. Therefore, the show introduces us to a particularly extreme character quite at the beginning who with and because of his unique personality will manifest archetypal Native thought patterns concerning Aboriginal ideologies of cohabitation effectively. Joseph is Silas' retarded elder brother who despite his mental handicap ("he came out bum first, with the chord around his neck, face all blue..." (REZ 1/5) immediately turns out to be his mother's sunshine: "When they finally gave him to me his eyes were open. Joseph's eyes ... looked straight into my eyes already something wild and funny about him. I could see how he needed me ... he was so beautiful. I just held him and I never let go!" (REZ 1/5).

According to the constantly propagated balancing and nurturing nature of small town life, which successfully works against "the individualization of poverty" (Asch 190) and against the Western doctrines of supporting individualistic ambition to fortify capitalism, Joseph is portrayed as an allegory of Native resistance culture as well as a living proof of First Nations' experience of the world as a "web of multidimensional interacting relationships that inevitably affect each other .... No one acts in isolation" (Goulet, "The Dene" 167). As Joseph is not only guarded by his mother tenderly but also by the whole community, the viewer is presented a familial microcosm, which not only wraps up the alleged fragile person but also lets him run free according to Native principles of autonomy over subordination, assistance over interference and observation over instruction (cf. Goulet, "The Dene" 167).

Thereby, we find out that the community does not only love and except Joseph for what he is without discriminating against him as "the weakest link of the chain" (like the fuzzy muskrat), but we spot a natural and deeply relaxed acceptance of his disability as well. This total affirmation frequently climaxes in locals' encouraging him to do amusing interpretations of popular mentally retarded people for instance. Frank eggs him at one point: "Do Helen Keller<sup>112</sup>!" or "Do Nell<sup>113</sup>!" (REZ 1/1), which then leads to a mimicry everybody considers hilarious without thinking of a hulking political correctness concerning people who are mentally challenged. Furthermore, Joseph is 'used as a babysitter' as far as he is ordered by his mother to accompany Frank and Silas to town. In doing so, his 'stigma of disability' is employed naturally to keep the two friends from spending all their money at bars for they will not be let in with a handicapped Native. Here again we can detect Natives' rather uncomplicated dealings with topics considered as delicate in the Western world in general to this day, grounded in their teasing humor of permitted disrespect.<sup>114</sup>

In this show, the uninhibited interaction with Joseph subtly reflects the protection of former Native thought patterns of accepting the person as a whole and allowing him or her a proper (and honest) place in society as well as giving him or her the wings of autonomy to experience who he or she really is and where he or she wants to stand. The person will logically be indulged in the daily life without raising the question of how he or

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<sup>112</sup> Helen Keller was a deaf and blind American author.

<sup>113</sup> This from the movie *Nell*, in which Jodie Foster plays a girl having been growing up all alone in the bush. Then she is found by 'civilization' appearing to be in a 'rather retarded' state of mind to the Westerners.

<sup>114</sup> cf. chapter 'Staging Native Comedy.'

she will be profitable for it, as he or she is experienced as a necessary element of the microcosm needed to make it not only run but to make it whole.

When the Canadian government in episode five "The Lark" (REZ 1/5) finally tries to rip off this unique facet of the rez's cosmos, the viewer experiences its mighty powers as at this point in time even the self-imposed outsider Eleanor joins in and helps save Joseph.



Fig. 8.1. *The Rez*: Silas persuading Eleanor of Joseph's entertainment value

After having lived his entire life in his community free as a bird, the Canadian administration tracks Joseph down and tries to 'take the unsophisticated, puerile Indian' by the hand and lead him/her into the well ordered terrain of control and assimilation. Therefore, it indicates that Canadian First Nations are still recognized as illiterate stepchildren who are not able to raise a mentally challenged person like Joseph all by themselves. This hubristic underestimation becomes evident when two young women enter the reserve and, sitting at the Crow's dinner table, attempt to persuade Simone and Silas to let them take Joseph to a home for retarded people in town:

One woman [looking weightily]: We just feel it would be best for Joseph if he were in a supervised setting.

Silas [talking to Simone and translating into Cree] [subtitle English]: They're probably talking about that group home in Parry Sound.

## 8. RE-TEACHING: THE AGE OF THE REBELLING STEPCHILDREN – PATERNALISM

Simone [in Cree] [subtitles]: Poor girls are very nervous here.

Silas [in Cree] [subtitles]: What?

Simone [in Cree] [subtitles]; Their blouses are polyester. Doesn't breathe. Terrible sweat smell. Like wet wool or hot dog water [friendly smiling at the women].

Silas [towards the women]: Ma thinks, Joseph gets enough supervision here. We'll keep him out of town.

One woman: Well, perhaps this is a decision that would benefit from some outside help ... experts, psychologists....

Other woman: He'd be happy with us at Sunny Bay. That is not the first time Joseph has been brought to our attention. So?

Silas [in Cree] [subtitles]: They'll probably want a Commitment Hearing.

Simone [in Cree] [subtitles]: We'll do what we did last time. Just get a date ... and we'll let Joseph stay with Etta back in the bush awhile till it blows off. They are forgetful.

Silas [in Cree] [subtitles]: He could stay with Eleanor. He'd like that.

Silas to the women [looking very interested]: What would you suggest?

One woman: Well, we intend to hold what's called a Commitment Hearing. Do you know, what a Commitment hearing is?

Simone [in Cree] [subtitles]: Ever since the cutbacks, the government sends out these poor girls with only two years of community college. Terrible!

Silas to the women: Ma thinks, this is good. You give really solid advice. [women look at each other infatuatedly]

Simone [in Cree] [subtitles]: These two poor girls smelling so bad. Terrible!  
[Everybody laughing insincerely] (REZ 1/5)

This whole dialog appears like a scene in a play where the two Natives Simone and Silas, not only know which role they have to play but are also aware of the fact that the two White persons sitting in front of them are being miscast in their roles. The entire scene turns out to be a farce, in which the two groups of protagonists are portrayed very contradictorily concerning their character traits, their insights into the action as well as their outward appearance. In this case and in contrast to the predominant climate in Canadian society the Native figures dominate the action over the full length of its playing period and are strongly supported by different 'character signs.'

First of all, the social workers from the Canadian government – together on the opposite side of the table – are from the beginning exposed as 'the enemy on the other side of the line.' Furthermore, they are displayed as a blurring bunch for the individual persons are too weak and just too irrelevant to be filmed in single close-ups. Additionally, their uniform-like outward appearance does not only make them seem faceless but also plastic and like caricatures of themselves.

Both women look like parrot-like novice twins, their hands folded on the desk in graceful unity, their heads moving simultaneously, their rose and mint woman's suits matching with their blouses and with each other, both wearing a silk scarf in a neat big bow around their necks as if they were indicating in an ironic twist that their visit shall be understood



as a present to everyone they may put their hands on. Additionally, their voices are as calm and soft as if they were talking to a four-year-old.

On the opposite side we have Silas and Simone, who play their game of fooling their opposites professionally. Firstly, both of them are experienced as individuals for they are filmed in single close-ups revealing their independence and fortitude, and secondly, Silas and his mother are portrayed like every other human being since they wear ordinary daily life clothes.



Fig. 8.2. *The Rez*: wrapped up parrots on duty

Consequently, the non-natural appearance of the two ladies serves the average viewer's identification with the Native cast. Another important prop at this point would be the cigarette, Simone smokes self-composedly as if she was 'marking her territory,' making the objective correlative her very own, and reminding the two conservative, likely 'anti-smoker outsiders' of the fact that they happen to be on her terrain. She is demonstrating that she makes the rules and determines 'the setting.'

Apart from the props in this scene, taking a closer look at the dialog these four people speak, we are reminded again how the proportion of powers are clearly distributed here. By using the Native language (although Simone speaks English perfectly), mother and son diminish the two social workers quite from the beginning for they provoke a classical situation everybody can relate to: two people speak in a language one does not understand and therefore is not able to rate what is going on while feelings of helplessness and excessive demands are creeping up the spine. Additionally, the biased opinion of "gibberish" or the 'Francis Parkman style'<sup>115</sup> is ratified as Silas in an innocent manner forms the 'classic Western movie most simple sentence structures with the most simple vocabularies he can find,' like "Ma thinks, this is good!" Moreover, as Simone speaks English perfectly the two social workers become doubly fooled since she takes advantage of their arrogant ignorance to offend the two women in

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<sup>115</sup> cf. chapter 'For Ugh! Seems To Be The Hardest Word.'

one of the harshest ways imaginable: By referring to their terrible smell, (cf. REZ 1/5) she does not only make use of one of the main prejudices Aboriginal people have to face in the Western world and turns it around, we also notice that she – opposed to the simplicity often ascribed to Native People – manages to analyse the psyche and inner feelings of a person precisely (they are self-conscious and scared). That being so, she naturally gets the upper hand again.

Furthermore, by employing the strategy of revealing in subtitles to the audience what both of them really talk about, we learn that Simone is not only secretly ridiculing the two White women in their own presence but also that the 'infantile' Native characters are in reality ahead of the two 'sophisticated' White ladies permanently. For they generally discuss the topics before the two social workers even have mentioned them but then – in a flight of cynicism – formally ask the bureaucrats (from "community college" (REZ1/5)) what they would suggest. In doing so, they make use of White's typical behavior of derogative appreciation connected to Western cliches of the 'Stoic (Dumb) Indian' and the 'mindless children in need of governmental protection'<sup>116</sup> ("You really give solid advice!" (short sentence structure)). Thereby, they apply White prejudices for their own requirements by inter alia disproving the old movie myth of the 'Good Indian vs. the Bad One,' as to the prejudiced White mind the 'Good one' is appraisable by this feature among others: the more fluent in English, the more morally capable.<sup>117</sup> Yet, here, this reassuring valuation system becomes obsolete and deceptive as the two White women are wickedly outsmarted by the simplicity of it for the seemingly most unsophisticated, wordless Indian is the most capable and 'Seeing Through One' in the end.

Within this dialog, we can detect universal Western manners of dealing with the 'Native ignoramus' as well. By believing that it would be in the best interest for Joseph to leave his community and stay in a well-ordered, governmentally supervised home for retarded people, the two social workers not only intent to take the boy out of the 'erratic hands of the Savage' and put him into the 'bridling ones' of an official institution, they also ride over the opportunities the Native community offers Joseph. Yet, we know better as subjectively trained audience (Native and White), for we have experienced the heartwarming love and acceptance he is embraced with throughout the whole show.

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<sup>116</sup> cf. chapter 'The Age Of The Wicked Steppathers.'

<sup>117</sup> cf. chapter 'My Parents Have Been To The World....'

After all, the interaction with Jacob reveals a great number of classic Native child rearing practices the viewer may already have internalized sublimely and determined as fond and good being put in sharp contrast to the White ideologies presented here. In employing this topic quite seriously, the show pays attention to the fact that the Canadian government keeps conducting a cumbersome apparatus. In this case, it prefers to send Joseph to a supervised group home, which in a strongly Aboriginal sense is as logical as selling land since residential homes for the elderly or any other form of eliminating special persons from the mass to put them together in a different place contradicts their entire ethos of life: the significance and high-ranking role of the Elder for instance proves the belief in cyclic patterns to the same as extent as it serves a natural warranty for a balanced community, in which the supposedly physically weaker member is not excluded but respected for his wisdom in life. Every member of the community is acknowledged as role model to some extent and therefore, why should people appearing the same, having similar problems and similar competences, be forced to live together? Isolated and kept next to each other they cannot be supported properly and will not be offered the natural opportunities to learn an average society provides them with on a daily basis, and, moreover, they – as valuable individuals – will not get the chance to enrich a society and make it whole.<sup>118</sup>

Simone feels if Joseph went to such a group home of equalization, this would be another form of the kind of assimilation her people had to face for the previous centuries. Her son would be restricted to stiff norms and rules. He would not have the personal freedom to grow, he would be officially protected but unofficially absorbed. They would give in to another "forced to" (Taylor, *Funny* 48), and another Native family would be destroyed for no apparent reason. This group home with all its White psychologists and experts could not give Joseph what his community gives him naturally, and again – as history frequently seems to repeat itself in a loop – 'the Other, the Less Ordinary One' would have to give up his self-determination and live under subordination, instead of assistance. There would be constant interference in his life and instead of observing there would be instructions.

These contrasting strategies and principles and the complete covering up of one of them, the Native one, cannot only be applied to Joseph but to the dealings of the Canadian civil service with the whole community. This monstrous sense of responsibility

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<sup>118</sup> cf. chapter 4.1.

## 8. RE-TEACHING: THE AGE OF THE REBELLING STEPCHILDREN – PATERNALISM

seems to emerge from the grounds of bureaucracy rather coincidentally as we learn that the government appears to arise from time to time but after having roared a bit tends to fall back to sleep (cf. REZ 1/5), which again is not supporting a Canadian reliable 'political assistance' concerning their First Inhabitants. Hence, this show displays that some things never change at least in terms of the Western paternalistic thought and behavior patterns. Notwithstanding, the Native manners change as Simone and her son have seen through the administrative jungle and know how to cope with it in order to outwit it.

Finally, Joseph is still brought to the group home as the police take him while the community is already searching for an opportunity to get him home again (Frank: "So ... we are storming!"). Before, Joseph had freed a stuffed lark from a glass cage, for he could not bear it to be captured inside and now he is caught himself behind the windows of the supervised home. But then Etta turns up, dances and invokes the mystical power of the birds, as Joseph, the boy who can sing like a lark (cf. REZ 1/5), has to be freed from the cage of Western bureaucracy. In the end Joseph comes back, as Native mysticism (neither known to the audience, nor to the characters within the show) has defeated governmental misunderstood dictates.

*renegadepress.com*, on the contrary, has to handle administrative protocol without the assistance of greater spirits but only with the help of familial love.

## **THE CASE OF RENEGADEPRESS.COM**

### **NATIVE GIRLS V. NATURAL FAMILY**

Over the last several decades times have changed in Canada as the 'savage unwelcome stepchild' has become a deeply welcome child to be adopted by barren White families as the statistics prove: "the number of adoptions of Indian children has grown by a factor of five while the proportion adopted by Non-Indians has grown from 50 per cent to about 80 per cent; put in another way, eight times as many Indian children are

now lost to the Indian community as formerly" (Wilson, C. 454). Opinions may differ concerning the rightness of this social development as many Native children are taken away from broken families and sad homes getting a new chance in rather steady (caring) environments. Yet, on the other hand, they often feel displaced as they tend to be deprived of their cultural heritage and frequently suffer from identity irritation. Notwithstanding, Canadian politics have provoked this painful dilemma in the first place, a reality which is very likely to be ignored in Canadian society to this day. Canadian television has a teenage series, though, making it its business to uncover cultural crimes like this one. Especially by employing a Native main cast it is therefore able to draw on jurisdictional problems Canadian Natives have to face on a regular basis: Next to the bitter topic of residential schools, which we will discuss later, the episode "Union" (2/5) deals with this problem of adoption, albeit in a different way.

In this episode, Jack's girlfriend Tina and her little sister Stephanie, who have been taken out of their community on a reserve because of "problems" (2/5), have been living quite happily with the White family Horton for some years. Nevertheless, the two girls are suddenly confronted with the fact that their Native family is blocking the adoption and wants them to return. Later, we are presented a court hearing which attentive viewers may not be too sure of how they want it to end. Because, although we are shown that the two girls seem to be deeply loved by the Hortons, we – as well as Jack – cannot ignore the feeling that Mr. Horton has a skeleton in his closet in so far as filmic means like close-ups, etc, make us suspect that their stepfather abuses the girls. Nonetheless, in the end, when both girls are made to go back to the reserve we may realize that the show has led us up the garden path as far as we are told that Native Uncle Doug has been abusing children before, leaving us and Jack behind in shock as we notice that Tina and Stephanie have been sent into a dangerous, uncertain future – again by the ignorant, yet constantly intervening Canadian administration.

*RenegadePress.com* makes a political statement as it condemns the Canadian government for its continuing 'unprofessional' interfering into Native issues' still hidden behind seemingly well-meant intentions. Thereby it exhibits an unenthusiastic as well as arrogant form of paternalism which damages the psyche of its First Peoples to the present day. Although we are also presented the other side (Wayne tells Jack about an adopted cousin who kept suffering from an identity crisis and finally committed suicide), the audience here is set against the authorities' decision throughout the show by filmic means and by the surprising story line. This fortifies the injustice done to the two girls in

the end as the bomb explodes and the reason why we may have wanted the girls to leave – Mr. Hortons abuse – suddenly blows up in the air and is passed on to the Native uncle.

Here, in this case, the conceited directorate again wrenches the 'Uncivilized Savage' by the arm and pushes him/her to wherever it feels it would be best for him/her. When Tina and Stephanie are taken to the court, we already can tell from the filmic means, how much the ministry would rather serve as a 'detached decision maker' than as an 'attentive friend.' The grey halls the two girls have to wait in are bathed in cold artificial light indicating mercilessness. The judge they have to talk to is sitting at the far end of the room, constantly presented in worm's eye perspective while Tina is shown in a bird's eye view revealing clearly distributed power relations and distance. The judge seems remote, far from comprehending anything that weighs on the two girls. When Tina breaks down outside in the hall, all alone, hearing her little sister cry and scream inside, the show unveils to us in an uncomfortable way that little seems to have changed: to this day Native children often are randomly pushed around like wooden chess pieces. According to whatever political climate dominates the current debates, the Canadian government mostly still follows its principles of subordination and infantilization as it tends to refuse to exercise equality concerning its First Nations. It rather keeps reminding of an imperious father, who – barely at home – from time to time quite randomly needs to discipline offspring he hardly knows in the first place, just in order to confirm the patriarchal position in his family.

### **'NATIVE CHILDREN' V. ABUSIVE 'FATHER'**

*RenegadePress.com* is the only show of these five ones daring to address the problem of residential schools in a quite aggressive and forceful way, compared to the other series, which either ignore the topic (*Hank Williams First Nation*, *Moose TV*) or only hint at the disasters they brought to Canada's First Nations (*The Rez* and *Moccasin Flats*<sup>119</sup>). Thereby, *renegadePress.com* portrays itself as ambitious in terms of the national clarification on this delicate topic. It devotes three episodes to it, in which the

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<sup>119</sup> Whereby *Moccasin Flats* – though not addressing it directly – shows its devastating consequences to the fullest extent.

consequences of residential schooling become an ongoing strand. Apart from the typical romantic relationship-, friendship-, continuing plot lines this is one of the few running for more than one episode and in doing so, it is shown how much this issue must lie at the heart of the show's creators. Season four is dedicated to the topic of residential schools as the series has now already established itself and can therefore more easily move on to pastures anew, which may challenge the minds of ignorant White viewers while acknowledging the souls of the Native ones.

Episode 4/3 "Slow Burn," 4/4 "Smoke Screen" and 4/6 "Legacies" take this problem into the Sinclair family as Jack's and Crystal's father Wayne, normally a perfect father figure, is suddenly confronted with a horrible trauma of his past. The latter surfaces again when his sister Lydia comes to town for a Compensation Hearing, which as we learn will take place in order to indemnify former students of residential school who have been sexually, physically, spiritually and psychologically abused (cf. Llewellyn 257).

While Wayne encapsulates himself more and more, suddenly turns out to be strangely aggressive, and refuses to talk about his time spent at such a school, Jack and Crystal are occupying the roles of historical investigators as they question their aunt concerning her experiences and, additionally, 'google' the topic online. Although this plot line of unawareness appears to be quite unrealistic, this can be considered as a logical screenwriting move for the average (non-Native) viewer can breathe a

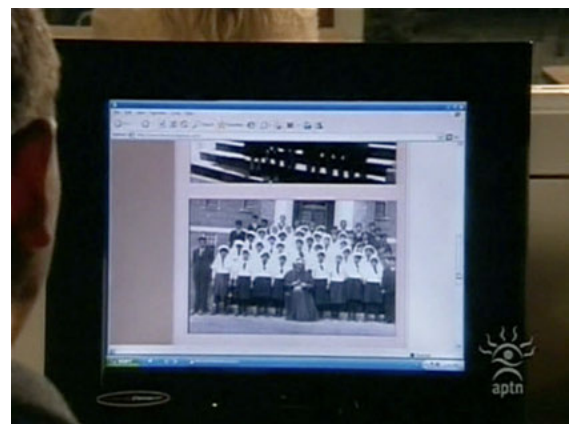


Fig. 8.3. *renegadepress.com*: Jack googling 'residential schools' (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

sigh of relief because if even the Native youth has to inform itself about the dreadful past of their descendants on the www., White viewers do not have to feel accused of having been ignorant concerning this Canadian stigma. So, with the information New Media will provide (and everybody has access to) being underlined and confirmed by aunt Lydia's 'personal experience' and recurring incubi Wayne has to face at night, the viewers as well as the characters get a quite burdensome but realistic impression of incidents having been kept under wraps for a long time.

Corresponding with this ultimate question of uncovering, are the personal dealings in regard to the question of 'telling a (the) story' (the show in general and aunt Lydia in particular) or 'remaining silent' (Canadian public in general and Wayne in specific). Within

the development of this plot line, we may notice that by talking about the abuses Lydia had to bear she has been able to recover in Native healing circles and is now finding the strength to tell her story even in court in order to demand compensations. Thereby, she not only reveals the "imposed conditions of disconnection, degradation and powerlessness" (Llewellyn 257), but also addresses the devastating consequences evolving from that by admitting that she was not able to be a good mother as she did not experience sustainable parenting since an institution was her only 'parent' (cf. 4/4). Consequently, she affirms the theory that the destruction of family safety nets has left First Nations people without a<sup>120</sup> 'parental survival kit.'

Wayne on the contrary acts according to the experiences Tungilik describes: "[a]s we got older the issue became too shameful and too complicated to even begin to talk about. However, because it was an unresolved child trauma, many of us coped with it in many dysfunctional ways" (51). Because Wayne stays still and keeps his memories secret, he keeps his family outside at the same time while he is 'eaten up inside' as his girlfriend tells him outright (4/4). Since *renegadepress.com* is defined as a show of enlightenment, the plot as well as the filmic means underline that this strategy Wayne follows bears unhealthy consequences leading to a stage of deep loneliness and agony. As we find out later Wayne has not been abused but suffers deeply from the fact that he as a child was not able to rescue his little sister Lydia when she was molested by a man called Father Brandt. Keeping this to himself and suffering from it deeply, he not only scares off his girlfriend but also torpedoed the romantic relationship his daughter has just started with Michael, her new boyfriend, while cocooning himself until he is finally caught in his bed in the darkness being prey to nightmares about the abuse of his sister. Additionally, this isolation, evolving from his inability to open up to others is stressed by camera angles, frames and lighting. Wayne is more and more filmed in worm's eye positions underlining his helplessness and left all alone in the picture in medium close-ups while the other communicating family members appear together in frames. Furthermore, the lighting is kept dark as most scenes play at night with him being lost in the gloominess of his memories.

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<sup>120</sup> cf. chapter 'The Saddest Nation.'





Fig. 8.4: *renegadepress.com*: Fade out of... (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)



Fig. 8.5. *renegadepress.com*: ... Wayne's and Lydia's bitter past (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

It is in the end when Wayne manages to tell his story to his loved ones, to free himself from the burden of keeping this weighty secret, that he finally swims to the surface again. This is supported by fading and filming the whole family hugging each other in one frame again, by lifting the worm's eye position and by the final cut: when Wayne calls his ex-girlfriend to join a healing circle and build their romantic relationship again, the camera pans to the window finally, which keeps glowing as the sun shines through it.

While Wayne is fighting his demons, Jack meanwhile traces Father Brandt and detects a bitter, undiscerning old man in a home for the elderly who unaffectedly continues to spread his racist slogans like: "If I still could, I would knock the Indian out of you! You bastard!"(4/6). Yet, regardless of the fact that the Father sits in a nice garden we nevertheless may notice that he is all alone as nobody seems to speak with him in there, very sick and deeply at fault. Nonetheless, in a retreat *renegadepress.com* backs off from the delicate topic of accusing the 'entire Canadian government' as the guilt in this episode is only personified in one person, namely Father Brandt (and we actually do not learn if he is convicted).

Despite this, one may give this show's screenwriters credit for addressing sexual abuse at all since for instance "many therapists and counselors did more harm than good because they refused to believe that members of the church would actually be involved in abusing small children sexually and had no idea how to deal with the issue" (51) as Tungilik states. Additionally, we have to be aware of the fact that today's common Canadian history school books still whitewash Canada's history of colonization, ignoring the reality of residential schooling altogether.

After all, although Wayne went through a very harsh phase of aggression, torture and depression, *renegadepress.com* nevertheless places great value on the fact that First Nations families can be the healthiest ones of all – even if they have had the worst initial situations before and even if they have to face severe traumas. As this show generally tends to work against any kind of ethnic stereotyping, we can also or especially spot this in the episodes about residential schools and the devastating consequences they had on Native communities. Despite the fact that the biological weapon of segregation has broken the Indian community, the Sinclairs are presented as a healthy, loving unit (even without a permanent mother). In order to strengthen this impression, we can link this plot line to a second one occurring in this triangle of shows: Zoey, the beautiful, doll-like, upper-class All-Canadian girl starts drinking and will in the end join the AA. This intermingling of strands can hardly be considered as coincidence as it tells us: the 'Indian' has been living and experiencing a very harsh past full of pain, violence and fear and he is mostly described as an alcohol addict in the public nowadays. Nonetheless, even in his darkest hour – in this show – he does not start drinking or abusing any other form of drugs. He rather drives around at night, paying young Aboriginal prostitutes for not going into bed with a john like Wayne does. The White privileged girl on the contrary, having 'typical teenage' problems, gets addicted.

## **POURING 'POCKET MONEY' DOWN THE DRAIN – GRANTS**

According to today's wide-spread public opinions, Indians are either

(1) pure, innocent, mindlessly ecological, vulnerable, and like children in need of government protection, (2) violent threatening savages and in need of government control, (3) hapless victims with problems that require government assistance, (4) whooping and silly one-dimensional warriors and independent nations outside of government jurisdiction (Mihehuah quoted in Fleras, Mass 285).

or "freeloading 'others' in contrast with hardworking and law-abiding white Canadians" (Fleras, *Media* 44), "getting something for nothing" (Francis 216-217). The different comedies discussed here, indeed, reinforce all of these opinions (even if they contradict one another) with a sardonic attitude, as superficially acknowledging these stereotypes means personal advantages concerning their protagonists daily lives.

## **'MATTER OF FIRST NATION(AL) CONCERN': GET A NEW PORCH – THE REZ**

Apart from the fact that it appears as if the habitants of *The Rez* are mostly ignored by the Canadian institutions, we nevertheless<sup>121</sup> are presented with the confusions of accepting governmental funding in the episode "Granted" (2/5). Thereby, the question of taking the Canadian tax money is not raised at all but rather the decision of how to use it in the most profitable way becomes a 'matter of First National concern' on an overall basis and how to cope without it on a personal one. Additionally, we learn that according to rampant accusations 'living as a parasite' is far from being frowned upon.

Frank for instance, in living up to his ultimate 'comical dumb friend'-attitude ('rather sit and lie than stand and move') and having perfected the classic 'Indian stoicism' for years, happily gives up his independence, self-respect and pride for the benefits of "immediate well-being" (Asch 187) by grinningly obtaining his welfare cheques on so called "Welfare Wednesday" (REZ 2/5). Because this day is named with such alliteration, the viewer may already notice the lightness and impudence with which Frank accepts administrative support – just like a duck takes the water. Yet, we learn in this episode that

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<sup>121</sup> This has to be considered next to the episode "The Lark."

Frank has been taken off the governmental payroll, as a civil servant caught him working on the side. Consequently, an alternative has to be found, immediately arriving when Sadie finds out that \$5530 'Youth Initiative Grants' have been rotting unseen on a band ledger and need to be spent as soon as possible. Within this episode then, a rather unorthodox and, first and foremost, dirty quarrel flares up over this money, leaving honest (female) people on the one side who want to support a 'Day Care Centre for Young Mothers' and an egoistic (male) party on the other intending to use the money for personal demands: Frank needs the money as "Welfare Wednesday" has been cancelled ("Culture is smulture!") and Chief Tom finds that he deserves a new porch for free ("The Native youth could build it!") (REZ 2/5).

Generally, we can recognize that the inhabitants of *The Rez* take the money without a bad conscience, keeping the government believing in its assumption of 'having to push the unwelcome adoptees' by the carrot and stick approach in order to point them the right way to modernity.<sup>122</sup> Yet, in keeping the authorities in their safe haven of conceited paternalism and by intentionally affirming all of the stereotypes, the rez inhabitants arrange their daily life according to their own terms – far away from the eye of the law – and in doing so, they give the impression that they beat the 'officials in the far away metropolises' at their own game.

Furthermore, the ideal world of domcoms provides them with the benefits of not having to feel the 'ordinary devastation' occurring from the common "'individualization of poverty" (Asch 190) since the characters of *The Rez* prove that "giving in to self-sufficient economic units" (Asch 186) is not destroying the balance of the band. *The Rez* community is presented as a 'home is, where the heart is' and healthy one throughout the whole show – just as *Hank Williams First Nation's* citizenship is, as it is able to curb the French ricochet in a sympathetic way.

## **'MATTER OF FIRST NATION(AL) CONCERN': KNOW YOUR SHORTCUTS – HANK WILLIAMS**

### **FIRST NATION**

Huey [in his radio studio]: We need to talk about our Middle Aged Recreation Centre. The CBEC [Community Betterment and Enhancement Comity] as you know is still raising money to put a new roof on the MARC, so when it rains it does not drip on

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<sup>122</sup> cf. chapter 'The Age Of The Wicked Stepfathers.'

your middle aged heads.... [phone ringing] Oh, looks like we have a caller! It's 'Happy Hour with Huey,' you're on the air!

Monique [sitting behind her desk in her office speaking with a French accent]: Is this (H)uey?

Huey [full of vigor]: Yes, indeed!

Monique: What did you mean with: I'm on the air?

Huey [laughing waggishly]: Eh, what can I do for you?

Monique: This in Monique Savoir from the Provincial Offices and I'm calling you to inform you that the Cultural Diversity Grant that the Community Development and Enhancement Committee applied for has been approved. You can pick up your cheque at any time.

Huey: That's great news, Miss Savoir.... Thank you! By bye! ... You just heard it first, folks. We just got 1500 bucks nearer to put a new roof on the MARC.... Just for that, let's send out a song over to our friend Miss Savoir over at the Cultural ... whatever Office. And I just happen to have the perfect title. Here is some Willie Nelson with a little number called "If you got the money, honey, I got the time."

[at the town's diner some days later]

Huey: It was a good day at the CBEC!

Jacob: I think every day is a good day at the CBEC!

[Tasha and Monique enter staying by the table Huey and Jacob are sitting at eating burgers and fries]

Monique [leaning over like a wildcat preparing to jump]: You know, Huey, it just occurred to me that I haven't seen much advertising for the Cultural Classic Jamboree. Supposed to be happening this weekend, no? Just so you know if this thing does not happen for whatever reason, your CBEC will have to give the grant money back!

Huey [slumping down as if he was attacked, looking shocked, then stuttering]: No, worries, our marketing campaign starts ... [long pause] tomorrow!

[Monique laughing nastily, women off]

Huey: I applied for this silly Cultural Diversity Grant. Found it on the internet for the CBEC to put a new roof on the MARC

Jacob: MARC????

Huey: MARC: Middle Aged Recreation Centre.

Jacob: I worry about you sometimes, Huey! What does money for a roof have to do with cultural diversity?

Huey: That's it! To qualify we have to put on some kind of cultural event. So I came up with the idea for a Classic Country Jamboree. Once we got the money, the plan was to cancel the jamboree and buy some shingles.

Jacob: So, you put on a Classic Country Jamboree this weekend?

Huey: How hard can it be? (HW 1/5)

The episode "Tyson Saves the Day" (1/5) of *Hank Williams First Nation* confronts us with typical problems occurring when the government acts according to its paternalistic ambitions concerning Canada's First Nations. Huey – the 'big hitter' of the community – tries to raise money to improve the infrastructure of his home town. He has to face and bend around classic bureaucratic obstacles, though, archetypical for the ongoing often dysfunctional communication between Canada's Aboriginals and Canada's

officials. Following its path of addressing problems by getting "the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny" (Atwood 244), *Hank Williams First Nation* reviews a complex old case of cultural misunderstanding and mistreatment within two scenes.

What becomes obvious first, taking a look at these two dialogs, is the constant juggling with abbreviations hardly nobody knows the meaning of in the first place (Huey: "Over at the cultural ... whatever Office"; Jacob: "MARC???"). Secondly, these abbreviations can be considered as naming rather useless 'terms.' Therefore – bearing in mind the Middle Aged Recreation Centre – we could ask ourselves, how much do middle aged people (contradicting 'underprivileged' children and elders) need any form of special care? Consequently, especially the MARC emerges as an ironically shaped representative of the uselessness of Canadian administrative bureaucracy, which half-heartedly attempts to support 'special segments' of the Native population without noting that Aboriginal system of thought and community well-being depend on the interaction of a microcosm every 'living being' is part of while a separation of elders, children, single mothers, etc. comes to light as deeply counterproductive.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, shortcuts nobody can relate to address the senselessness of too much administration and officialese in general, which, like the abbreviations, can be considered as not understandable, impersonal, complicatedly long, useless and full of misunderstandings for the Native people, who nevertheless have to put their necks on the line for being degraded to passive recipients of consequences of actions others take, yet, leaving them in need of a protocol not tailored to their needs.

This can especially be detected when taking a closer look at the character of Monique, who again fulfills the role of the 'great and robust colonizer' here. First and foremost, we come to know that the 'Ouvé Siren' is not only the social worker of the reserve (cf. HW 1/3), but she happens to be the 'Head of the Department of Cultural Diversity' as well. In being so, she is evidently miscast as Monique not only hates the traditions surrounding her<sup>124</sup> but also mediates the impression that she would rather pull out her manicured fingernails all by herself than accepting, merging and living within this kind of 'inferior cultural diversity.'

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<sup>123</sup> cf. chapter 4.1.

<sup>124</sup> cf. chapter 'The Pocahontian Cinderella vs. The Ouvé Siren.'

Additionally, she is treating Huey like a child, especially in the restaurant where she stands next to him. She is impressively filmed from a worm's eye position, leaning over like to a brattish, dumb kid, giving the collapsing boy who is nervously nibbling a fry, a forceful and merciless warning full of gratification in her eyes. Hereby, Monique represents a kind of paternalistic governmental protection, which is a form of guidance and support much more directed by the oppressive forces of a conservative patriarch than the one of a supportive godfather (cf. Queen Mother's Indian children). This kind of authority mirrors a special kind of ignorance concerning the demands of the one to foster. As well as it shows the inability to put oneself in the shoes of the one to guide. As one of the doctrines has always been 'civilization' (cf. Wilson, C. 36), a 'cultural happening' (Jamboree) is the one thing, the Natives will obtain cash for.

Apart from the fact that the head of the Cultural Diversity Office (living in this community) does not even know about one of the major cultural communication systems (namely the exceptionally popular radio station ("What do you mean with I'm on the air?")), this department's main goal and therefore Monique's as well for she represents it, appears to be the promotion of 'tolerance and acceptance' in this community. Yet, this Provincial Office seems less informed about the 'true' needs of its community since it does not even realize that practical measures like buying shingles for a new roof would serve the town much more efficiently than a pseudo cultural union with audience appeal.

So consequently, *Hank Williams First Nation* performs a sitcom-like 'criticism in disguise' here again as these two scenes reveal an entire world of misled administrative paternalistic ambitions. According to the burned-in role of a dumb stepchild, who is "too ignorant, too indolent, too tradition-bound to make the leap into the modern world" (Francis 216-217), Monique – being in the seemingly superior position – treats Huey like a first grade loser in modern life. Furthermore, she reminds him of his seemingly dependence on her and her benevolence. Notwithstanding, being devoid of child-like naivety, the Natives here are not only aware of the meanings of administrative abbreviations, they also control them, meaning that they manage to ride Canada's erratic wave of bureaucracy: 'We require a new roof. Yet, the so called protective Canadian government will not give it to us, so we have to make use of our artful dodger abilities, exploit back, fake a bit, turn a bit, make use of confusing political decisions as well as classic public stereotyping and in the end we will get what we need!'

Thereby, *Hank Williams First Nation* again not only tries to honor Native humor and Native's savvy of the modern world but also secretly accuses the Canadian

institutions of promoting populist measurements just taken to reflect well on their efforts of tolerance and compensations, albeit only mirroring the lack of a true interest. There are nevertheless no concrete accusations made as it is all fought out on the bony back of a misplaced French 'Outré Siren.' The word 'Canada' is never mentioned in this circumstance. Nevertheless, accusations are made subtly and Aboriginal concerns are appreciated. Thereby, Taylor's thesis concerning the nature of minority humor springs to mind as *Hank Williams First Nation* shows that invisible observation from the periphery of a culture may serve as an effective means to unveil its mechanisms and automatisms.<sup>125</sup>

In the case of *Moose TV*, these exact automatisms of administrative ignorance concerning Canada's Natives mirror themselves on the floors of the empty halls of a shut down television station.

### **'MATTER OF FIRST NATION(AL) CONCERN:' LEARN YOUR TV-ABC – MOOSE TV**

Although there cannot be found too many examples of Canadian political interference, the whole plot line of *Moose TV* does evolve from one, as the television station and its equipment was first sponsored by the government and then forgotten, lying idle for quite a long time. The political decision-making did not involve the use of the station nor did it provide Native residents with the necessary know how. Notwithstanding, when George arrives he – with his naive mischief as well as his imminent need for self-dramatization – causes the "Birth of a Station" (1/1), and despite the fact he himself starts to run it for personal egoistic reasons, the station begins to transform itself into a 'Native cultural communicator,' conveying "general knowledge and facts about the [community's little] world.... Teaching different segments of the population how others look, live, speak, behave, relate, dispute, dance, sing, vote, decide tolerate, complain, television is a major source of 'people watching' for comparison and possible emulation" (Hickethier 50).

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<sup>125</sup> cf. chapter 'The Audience Responses.'



Even in the first episode (1/1) we may already detect the educational role this



Fig. 8.6. *Moose TV*: Native community taking over

channel will be evaluating throughout the entire season as the members of the small community – assembled in the town's only cafe – are all sitting at their diner tables, heads turned towards the big screen hanging on a wall. They remind of a class attentively watching the teacher in front of the blackboard or a group of children waiting for *Sesame Street*. As has been stated before, even

though George is portrayed at the show's beginning in the role of an arrogant and ignorant White media paternalist, he will eventually give in to the needs of his community which more and more starts to make use of its easily accessible educator to teach it its own culture. As politics in general has been corrupting the Native Canadian for centuries TV also creates pulling stereotypes of him to respond to its Western obligations of capitalism. Yet, now this small community somewhere in the bush exploits back: the undesired adoptee occupies Westerns' favorite child television and raises it according to its own desires. Hereby the inhabitants of Moose peculate television's holy codes of traditional Western virtues serving the bright majority and its consumer requirements. Thereby, they gain a kind of self-government by illuminating their own holy codes and their own consumer demands on a small scale basis.

## BELATED HAPPY BIRTHDAY – BEING OF AGE

### THE 'STOIC AND THE HISTORICAL INDIAN 2.0'

In today's modern world, the 'Canadian Indian' still tends to be experienced as a greedy parasite (the 'Stoic One'), who blatantly sucks the capital surpluses off the 'Canadian Nation.' Optionally he can be recognized as an underage infant (the 'Historical One'), who has been left behind in the whirlwinds of twenty-first century times not only unprotected but also flatfooted. Yet, all the different shows discussed never fully give up to these stereotypes when it comes to paternalism as the characters permanently refuse to bathe in the comforts of irresponsibility and inaction they naturally offer. The figures follow two well-conceived strategies both of them – though poles apart – leaving the Native not only holding the upper hand in the end but also supporting and preserving his/her self-chosen way of living. One tactic, especially employed when governmental grants determine the plot, becomes the factoid conformation of these two stereotypes exploiting the Western prejudices for personal gain and its patronizing attitude of superiority. Thereby, we are confronted with a new, optimized version of the 'Stoic One,' the 'Stoic Indian 2.0,' so to speak, namely the 'Feet On The Desk Indian,' who will not go down in history as a mere moron vacantly staring at the sundown of a long lost past, but who – though being in charge somehow – prefers to stretch out like a jellyfish at his generously relinquished place of theurgy never able to move an inch again.



Fig. 8.7. *The Rez*: The old 'Feet On The Desk Indian'

In the case of grants and the usually half-hearted administrative support, the shows, hence, take a swipe at Canadian administration going the whole nine yards. Yet, they are doing so in such an ironic and comical manner that the average (White) viewer may not merely acknowledge the courage in applying this kind of politically incorrect humor<sup>126</sup> but may rather get the impression of being in the same boat as the Natives since – although they have to fight slightly different uphill battles concerning executive officialdom – 'bureaucracy generally is the enemy of every citizen' and that being so an

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<sup>126</sup> Taylor's 'graph of political incorrectness' takes its turn here (cf. chapter 'The Audience Responses.')

appreciative stumbling block to unite the diverse groups of a nation. Furthermore, the



Fig. 8.8. *Moose TV*: The young 'Feet On The Desk Indian

seemingly impudent dealing with initiative grants is – in spite of the 'Feet On the Desk Indian' and in spite of apparently unjust personal enrichment – used to serve the well-being of the community as a whole leading us to the second strategy employed against governmental dictation as well as to the role Canada itself plays in this case.

In fact, the second tactic strongly works against the stereotypes dominant behavior patterns provoke until this day. While bureaucracy in terms of governmental financial aid seems to be a grateful victim in the case of self-ironic humor and sitcom archetypical "political and ideological smuggling" (Wells 181), adoption and family splitting may be considered as such a serious topic lying so intensely at the Native Nations' broken hearts that it seems even the sitcom loses its laughter as we find many more dramatic elements in the episode "The Lark" (REZ 1/5) than in any other one of the *The Rez* for instance. Here as bureaucracy evolves to become a life-threatening foe, special emphasis is put on communities and families being as thick as thieves. Whereby the shows prove public opinion to be wrong, as formerly ill-treated bodies having amputated limbs (like disappeared fathers and mothers) do not act in gross motor skills movements but still work together in a fine motor skill manner (*The Rez's* community; the Sinclair family). Consequently, the shows proclaim that Canadian misunderstood paternalism could not destroy natural Native communal balance to the fullest extent in the end: for in these series the more or less intentionally kicked off vicious circle of depression and emptiness is constantly slowed down or even stopped for good.

## CURFEW TIMES ARE OVER

Television in its archetypical form naturally supports Western thought systems of patriarchal societies, often paternalizing the one-dimensional – ergo dumb – Aboriginal. Hereby the "transmodern teacher" (Hartley, "Democratainment" 525) fulfils the role of an obstinate and not criticizable father, who with his "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55), watches over his naive children, squeezing them into "short cut computer screen icon[s]" (Wilson, C. 45) easy to manage and easy to manipulate. Small screen strategies of stereotyping therefore are and have always been playing into the hands of government and public propaganda, for TV may have been serving as an administrative extenuation since television history began. Hence, television was 'exploited' to reinforce the typical and preferable Western lifestyle visually and to lead 'the Indian' to the path of virtue on the one hand. On the other – rather counter-productive – hand to keep the 'alien forces' within their media periphery by permanently and sustainably stressing their 'one-dimensional otherness' (invisibilizing, stereotyping, problematizing, ornamentalizing, whitewashing (cf. Fleras, *Media* 142-148). This was supporting not only the public in its unrealistic images of the 'Native' but also the 'Native' himself as constantly inculcated clichés at some point have to start dictating real life.

Notwithstanding, the shows we discussed before do generally not underline the principle of presenting the Canadian 'Indian' as "safe, exotic, somewhere else" (Switzer 21-22) as for instance *Dances With Wolves* with its nineteenth century charm and setting did, but they transport the 'Stoic/Historical Indian' directly into the present, which to some viewers may occur like a quantum leap. While television tends to have been lusting after the old familiar stereotypes for a long time, shows on Native Canadians now turn the Western civilization's favorite 'teaching methods' around by changing the curriculum and by using the mechanism for an altered, updated version of the media representation of the 'Indian.' As knowledge means empowerment, generic strategies for instance are employed and cut to Native needs, freeing them from their "psychic prisons" (Fleras, *Mass* 307). Sitcoms may become very useful at this point: they are not only playing into Native hands by naturally celebrating dysfunctionality as Aboriginal reality tends to be dominated by chaos nowadays, they also fit Native thought systems of observation over instruction (cf. Goulet, "The Dene" 166-168) or the interchangeability of role models since every member of a society should have the privilege to count as an individual to be taught by. Hereby, domcom's centering on domestic life is not dependent on an actual

nuclear family as protagonists but rather on a manageable number of people with funny, family-like dynamics, who only need to "imply family roles and relations" (Abelman 327).

As a result, in beginning to 'ride the former monster of Western one-dimensional mediascape,' the shows try to liberate Canada's Aboriginals from their peripheries of inferiority reminiscent of children, who are not recognized as high value members of the community. That being so, they are bound to rules and regulations like curfews or house arrests appearing random and unjust to them. Here, a new cultural identity through a high visibility is constructed far from tactics like the exclusion a child has to face when it is sent to bed early and cut off from too-sophisticated adult topics. Thereby, these shows give up on the classic Native roles of defiant, underage children while self-assuredly putting themselves in one of a decision maker and, as an end result, this supports Natives' attempt to dictate real life all by themselves again, including the authorship of the stories to tell.

## **8.2 HOW TO SQUEEZE THE 'RED BARD' INTO THE BOX – MEDIA PIDGIN**

First and foremost, Native oral history has formerly been devalued by Western societies and Aboriginal stories have not been put on the public agenda at all.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, although modern media have done at least as much harm to First Nations as religion and Western administration did,<sup>128</sup> the shows we are discussing here may prove that especially Canada's First Inhabitants try to employ the 'democratic' cultural transmitter, the "principal storyteller in contemporary American society" (Kotzloff 67), the New Bard according to their own terms and by doing so may manage to construct a new common cultural memory one including First Nations vocabulary as well. Attributed to this attempt of translating Native narratives into Canadian media pidgin, we will take a closer look at how far television series' techniques and storyline are able to walk this tightrope of apparent counter poles: to operate in and mirror archetypical Aboriginal storytelling principles to pay tribute to the ancient culture, yet making excessive use of postmodern resources in order to strengthen the position on the Canadian mediascape map.

### **TARANTINO WOULD BE PROUD OF YOU – STORYTELLING IN THE REZ**

Silas Crow of *The Rez* is a storyteller in a pure sense as well as in a progressive one. This could be considered as a contradictory statement, but in this case it is not: the screenwriters manage to frame a character, who comments on himself probably from a future point in time, while we watch him grow up and learn within the action of the entire show. Thereby, Silas does not only mature on a personal level as a boyfriend, son, friend, etc. and as a narrator, but his figure is also employed to explain the Canadian Native psyche and the importance of Indigenous culture not only to himself (within the action) but also to the public viewing (on the basis of an outside uptake) while building a bridge to postmodern principles. First and foremost, Silas evolves from a 'Comical Dumb Friend' into a Native pop culture storyteller in this show, a storyteller who practises his

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<sup>127</sup> cf. chapter 4.2.

<sup>128</sup> cf. chapter 5.3.

skills on various action-based and film-technical stages, combining cultural macro- and microcosms. Since he is a teller of the tales as well as a book author-to-be within the plot and, additionally, a voice-over serving classic small screen strategies, the screenwriters not only create a protagonist whose different abilities correspond to each other (teller being also voice-over seems to be a logical step), they furthermore give the character the opportunity to rise above the restrictions of the show's plot and be one of the first modern television role models for Native youth in real life.

### **THE FALL OF THE SILENT 'STOIC INDIAN' – SILAS AS INTERNAL STORYTELLER**

Within the action of the show, we experience Silas on several levels: the first one is the role of a young man who is helplessly overcharged in life but who has a lot of imagination and who feels called upon to become an author: "There is a story I try to figure out but every time I start to write nothing happens. If I had cash, I'd rent a hotel room, smoke cigarettes ... sometimes you just need that romantic fantasy..." (REZ 2/1).

As we later find out, though, Silas will only be able to run this blockade, to escape his stoicism, by letting in the vocation his community has determined for him, which is a calling he is not prepared for from the beginning, a fact medicine woman Etta notices more than once. When Silas and Frank are confronted with the mystic figure of the Windigo<sup>129</sup> in the bush, for instance, Etta rebukes him harshly when he 'misinterprets' the monster's footprints on the ground as "rotten wood:"

Etta: You're blind! Don't you remember the old stories?

Silas [irritated]: Yeah, they were told to kids to keep them from wandering off in the woods and getting lost.... And they kept us from eating each other when we were starving...

Etta: They are true, you know! (REZ 2/7)

Here in this case, Silas follows the classic scientific White thought pattern concerning the meaning of these old stories: "In a social network, which is shaped by storytelling via voice, pictorial mechanisms and patterns are likely explaining the opaque behavior of

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<sup>129</sup> cf. chapter 'The Lust For Human Flesh.'



## 8. RE-TEACHING: HOW TO SQUEEZE THE 'RED BARD' INTO THE BOX

people. Thus the self-evident, metaphorical 'hunger for people,' evolving from the communal exclusion, is performed literally by eating human flesh (cf. Norman 4), and



Fig. 8.9. *The Rez*: Windigo and baseballs seem to have far more similarities than imagined

Etta is pegged as a scary but outmoded, crotchety medicine woman. After all, Silas does not only present himself as a disbeliever and ignoramus of the Old Ways in this case, giving the attentive viewer hints at the reasons why he appears to live persistently the life of an 'Infantile Sidekick Duo Tonto,' without goals and a mind not thinking further than twenty four hours ahead: the vacuum Drew Hayden Taylor describes (cf. *Funny* 32) still riots within him and he needs an insight into the traditional ways in order to replenish his slightly filled-up vessel.



Fig. 8.10. *The Rez*: Silas *The X-Files* experience: the 'Indian Mulder'

Notwithstanding, when Silas and Frank meet Windigo in the great finale of the show, they naturally and immediately turn back to the ancient beliefs, and while they are fighting a monster – whose media representation is deeply reminiscent of classical *The X-Files*<sup>130</sup> aesthetics – with baseball bats they finally defeat the creature by remembering the old story of a mystical dog vanquishing it. As they start praying for his help a real stray dog enters the scene and frightens Windigo away

in the end. At this point in time Silas does not truly understand the broad hint, though.

In a later episode he is forced into the role of a traditional storyteller for commercial reasons by Frank, who has brought a crew of German 'Indian-lovers' to the reserve to present them the traditional Cree way of living:

Frank: All we got to do is take a bunch of tourists out in the bush, make a camp and tell them stuff! You know, stories and legends... They are from Germany. They are crazy about us down there. I need this job!

Silas: Why do you need me?

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<sup>130</sup> *The X-Files* is an American science-fiction show which ran from 1993-2002.



Frank: He [Leicester the tour operator] knows your reputation! Well, to seal the deal I told Leicester that I was a tourist guide and you were a storyteller and writer! Which you are!

Silas [peeved]: Sounds like you're pretty good at stories yourself! (REZ 2/10)

So, when Silas then retreats and takes the job, we begin to see him as usual: deeply lost, helpless and overchallenged. He cannot remember any of the old stories (and Etta refuses to tell them again) and therefore starts reading in commercial books on Native tales. He constantly flounders, whenever the Germans beg him to tell some and finally gets uncovered as a "phony baloney" [faker] (cf. REZ 2/10) since in an ironic twist the professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Munich appears to know more about the traditional stories than Silas ever did. Still, in the end, Silas' incapability leads to a personal enlightenment, surprising himself to a greater extent than most of the viewers, as Etta reveals a taken for granted destiny already existing for years to him: [to the Germans while Silas looks deeply puzzled] "He's been chosen to tell the stories to the next generation!" (REZ 2/10). This can be considered as the moment Silas finally hears the starting shot, wakes up from his stoicism and begins to grow up to a postmodern Native storyteller, an author and a role model, leaving the role of a scallywag without ambition in life, he performed so defiantly until the second to last episode, to Frank.

The ultimate breaking point arrives when 'The Sidekick Tonto' after having lost Sadie visits Toronto to attend a writing course, in which his professor forces him to write and rewrite one of his stories to overcome his fears and find out what he really desires in life. In the great finale, Silas then intrudes in a Native ball event for political activists Sadie attends (with her new boyfriend) as she has been chosen to go to Ottawa as a youth delegate. He enters the stage with a mic, telling Sadie and the entire room that he loves her while we hear the last words of his finally rewritten and therefore truly authentic story as a voice over:

[Native drumming] "He knew she'd be there with the man he'd seen in her bed. And he knew that if he wanted her he'd have to enter another world. A world filled with a new nation. A nation, he knew he one day would belong to. The nation she had already joined while he was looking the other way. And then he saw her. In the spotlight she looked like magic. He knew right then that he had a choice: let her walk out of his life or fight. All he had to do was open his mouth. He was standing on the stage with hundreds of eyes staring at him.... And they were one. (REZ 2/13)

## 8. RE-TEACHING: HOW TO SQUEEZE THE 'RED BARD' INTO THE BOX

This last inside look into Silas' mind on the foreign grounds of Toronto illuminates the boy's function in this show on two different levels. First of all, on a plot-restricted internal one as Silas' and Sadie's roles within their love life suddenly switch dramatically, letting both of them and especially Silas grow up within their relationship while putting it on a new more mature level. In contrast to their 'Pocahontian Warrior' and 'Infantile Sidekick Duo Tonto' images, Silas is able to not only leave Frank behind (as he enters the stage all by himself), but he suddenly starts to talk openly about his feelings, revealing depths, as well as he is not only talking but also and much more importantly – far from being the 'Stoic Indian' – standing up, acting out and fighting. In the same instance, Sadie is speechless for the first (and a short) time while giving up her role as a constantly battling Indian activist with bared teeth in order to surrender to her inner feelings,<sup>131</sup> leaving herself extremely vulnerable. Thereby, the screenwriters add a great amount of three-dimensionality to the characters. Yet, reversed gender roles will stay the same in the end: Silas grows up but he will still be the emotional artist with a rather feminine side to him while Sadie will still possess classic masculine attributes as she keeps representing the aggressive doer, the political animal getting into the trenches to fight for her people.<sup>132</sup> On a second level Silas finally realizes the opportunities the new nation she has already joined will provide for him (cf. REZ 2/13). In line with the archetypal Native thought pattern of 'being given the chance to grow in a life-long process autonomously' (cf. Wheeler, W. 198) and the domcom strategy of character development, he does not belong to the nation yet. But he knows that one day he will be part of a First Nation, which is taking its concerns in its own hands, and which has risen above the unwritten law that "history is written by the victorious" (Furniss 199).

The series states sublimely: if Silas is able to rewrite his own story of failure (presented to this point) and thereby manages to realize the demands and dreams of his personal life, he will manage to do so on a communal level as well, as he will rewrite the failed, inauthentic and shopworn stories of his people while putting them into a modern context. This is already confirmed in the show's last scenes (REZ 2/13). We learn that Silas' story "Smoke" has been published as the only work ever published within the seminar he had joined before. Hence, he becomes a serious storyteller and author distributing his stories not alone to a Native circle but to a bright Canadian public, too.

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<sup>131</sup> cf. chapter 'Pocahontian Warrior' vs. 'Trailer Park Tramp.'

<sup>132</sup> cf. Part Six.

## **THE RISE OF THE PERKY 'FILM-ROUGE TELLER' – SILAS AS EXTERNAL VOICE OVER**

On a more general level the strand of Silas becoming a storyteller outgrows the plot line within the action, though, as Silas' voice-over has to be considered as a filmic device of multi-dimensional meaning. Throughout his voice-over commentary, only employed in the second season, we may realize that this film technique serves multiple functions. It can be used as simple mechanism to introduce the reader to the action: "My girlfriend Sadie is a political animal. Our Chief Tom Brightstar is not. So when election time moved around, Sadie appreciated tradition ..." (REZ 2/1); it can stress Silas' personal experiences: "I was twelve, when I had my first wet dream. I was sixteen, when I had my last" (REZ 2/6); it can explain community principles: "Aunt Bertha had a picture of Elvis on her wall. And every time it fell off someone in the family died. It meant that no death ever took us by surprise. The King had divined it. Some people found it a little weird. But on our rez everyone believed it!" (REZ 2/7); it can reveal Silas' emotions: "Sometimes I get the feeling that I don't have the slightest experience how my brain works. I mean, it had been a long time since I saw my old man.... I don't know, it's weird. You'd think, I'd be happy or angry or something. But there is nothing." (REZ 2/4); or it can distribute philosophical ideas: "Frank wanted Lucy from the first grade. It's one of those constants we all take for granted. But want is a tricky thing. It usually gets you in trouble and by the time you get what you asked for you may be looking the other way." (REZ 2/2).

Consequently, Silas' narration exceeds the one of a mere "adding information, which is not provided visually" (Allrath 14) as he not only introduces the setting but gives insight into his own sometimes complicated mind, too, as he shares profound observations of other people and events with the audience, already revealing to the attentive viewer that there are more potential slumbers in him than the mere character within the storyline reveals at first. Yet, according to Native thought patterns of "true knowledge is personal knowledge" (Goulet, "The Dene" 169), the screenwriters do not confront the audience with an overall moral spread by the shaken protagonist at the end, as the voice-over is almost exclusively restricted to the beginning of the respective episode and free of a general, but full of a private lesson at the season's final. So, although, we are presented the classic sitcom "familiar status quo, ritual error made, ritual lesson learned, familiar status quo"-strategy (Marc 190-191) no wagging finger is raised. Talking about voice-over this form of narration provides the narrator with a special

superiority as he/she like the seemingly broken detectives in film noir tells the story (proving femme fatale supremacy a myth). In this line, we frequently had representations of Native communities, albeit through seemingly infallible, familiar and trustworthy' White pale male eyes, like for instance in *Little Big Man* and *Dances With Wolves* where White dropouts introduced us to Native life in an 'end-user friendly' way.<sup>133</sup> Here, on the contrary, we are presented with the commentator of a modern 'film rouge,' so to speak, as we are guided by someone from the people, who tells us the tales from his (Native) point of view and who every viewer (no matter if White or Indigenous) may find a trustworthy and reliable narrator in.

### **JUMPING DOWN THROATS – SILAS' FINAL CALL**

On an overall level Silas' character has to be understood as rising above the average protagonist since he is shaped by internal (within the plot) developments as well as external (filmic and cultural) ones, all together forming an image which is able to fuse macrocosms and microcosms on a compound basis. That being so, Silas as the classic 'experienced' Native narrator finally rises to become the transmitter between ancient and modern culture, between plot and filmic means, and between past, present and future. Postmodernism can be considered as quite a useful tool here, as it – being grounded in its nature – pulls together all kinds of genres, ages and cultural specifications.

Therefore, Silas, his stories, his life and his reputation become a complex hybrid. As a traditional Native storyteller he has the ability to draw a link between past, present and future, and only when he finally acknowledges his role (the Native community gave him the autonomy to grow to this recognition by himself as it always has been its educational manner), is he able to write the kind of tales which will serve and support "his nation" (REZ 2/13). Thereby, these stories will do so in a very modern way as Silas' tales and the series' plot lines employ a postmodern approach of uniting old and new, traditional and pop culture. Here, Silas' true qualities and competencies shine through as – an 'Infantile Sidekick Tonto,' but at the same time a master of pop modern culture – he first needed to find his ancient roots to fill up his inner vacancy, in order to become a traditional, yet hybrid teller who is able to re-formulate his Nation's zeitgeist.

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<sup>133</sup> cf. chapter 'Look Whose Talking.'

In fact, the plot line itself has sometimes been influenced by Silas' writing as we learn in a late episode that he wrote a story called "The Lark" dealing with the events that took place when Joseph was taken away from them.<sup>134</sup> But it is only in the end when we finally spot Silas' book "Smoke" that we may begin to realize that all the different stories we have watched until this point in time (nineteen episodes) could be a filmic adaptation of Silas' work with Silas' writings as voice-overs in the background. Thereby, *The Rez* not only creates little interacting microcosms within the macrocosm of the show, it also blurs reality and fiction to some extent by building offscreen spaces through filmic production techniques, and in doing so, it copies Native thought patterns of "blending together" (Eigenbrod 98); as well as this strategy also fosters authenticity beyond the realm of the show's plot.



Fig. 8.11. *The Rez*: Silas trying to impress the German Professor for Indigenous Studies and his kin

Furthermore, we are again presented with the fact that a Native character becomes master of the action: he tells the story in a voice-over and thus determines the plot and the reception of the viewer. But a Native person is not only presented as the master of White's cultural transmitter, normally "reinforcing standards of whiteness" (Fleras, Media 1-2), namely the TV, but his powers are also extended to the literary landscape within the plot being an offscreen space, though, as Silas' voice will be heard on the Canadian book market as well.

Consequently, the show created one of his main protagonists as a role model whom the viewer accompanies while he detects hybrid abilities allowing him to playfully connect traditionalism, Native issues of the present, postmodernism and the media world. Thereby, Silas outgrows the stereotypically indifferent Native adolescent he was representing throughout the series, revealing an exemplary development already hinted at within the show by external filmic techniques (voice-over), yet, 'blossoming' to the fullest extent only in the end. It becomes quite obvious at this point that the screenwriters equipped their leading character with a high number of storytelling levels (main

<sup>134</sup> cf. chapter 'The Case of The Rez.'

protagonist, Native oral storyteller and book author within the plot, voice-over) in order to generate a strong form of media narrator, who is able to jump down throats. In the course of this, they may give the silenced Canadian oral culture a voice again, at the same time acknowledging its ancient traditional thought patterns and leading it into the media present. A spectacular jump into this media present, actually reminding of blackening an eye, is performed by George of *Moose TV* then.

## **SURVIVING GEORGE – STORYTELLING IN MOOSE TV**

George [into his hand cam]: Four city lawyers! Lost in the bush! Hundreds of miles from nowhere! They compete against each other for the grand prize of living to tell the tale! Some will make it, some will wish they hadn't! Tonight on *Surviving Moose!* (MT 1/3)

The episode "Surviving Moose" (1/3) of *Moose TV* can especially be experienced as a paragon of the take-over of First Nations media storytelling whereby we are in this case not presented the attempt to correspond to Native thought patterns of finding connective links between all kinds of different spheres – be it past present and future or surroundings, gods, animals and humans (cf. Wheeler 198), but rather encounter the focus on the establishment of a media shaped resistance culture. In employing some exceptionally one-dimensional White characters, who are "totally down with the plight of the First People" (MT 1/3) and who are "hoping to ascend to a spiritual level and fly like an eagle" (MT 1/3) as one of the four lawyers states enthusiastically, and in letting George control this episode's action on filmic as well as plot line levels, "Surviving Moose" creates a setting, in which the 'Indian' is the superior one from the first to the last scene.

When four Canadian attorneys arrive in Moose having paid to find some purchased peace and rest in Moose's great outdoors, George immediately converts their "nostalgic longings for an authentic spirituality" (Aldred 343) for his personal requirements and exposes them to silly games in order to satisfy typical television strategies of indulging audience curiosity, lust for disgust and vicarious embarrassment. Naively believing in the extraordinariness and foreignness of Aboriginal traditionalism and corresponding to Western capitalistic principles of answering the needs for permanent progress, rushing somewhere, never standing still to breathe at the same

time,<sup>135</sup> the lawyers therefore follow George's instructions of splitting up into two groups "The Invaders" and the "White Devils" (MT 1/3). In doing so, they give the starting shot for competing in contests like 'running through the forest with blindfolds' or eating 'fish bowels' without ever asking for the benefit, yet constantly filmed by George's 'investigative' hand camera. In copying this form of one of today's worldwide major TV formats worldwide as "Survivor"<sup>136</sup> and "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me out of Here!"<sup>137</sup> have been successfully adopted in almost every Western country, George consequently represents the prototype of a First Nation television guy occupying Western's "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55) communicator,' making it his own and therewith taking "charge as subjects of the world rather than objects for manipulation or amusement" (Hanamoto, 1995 in Fleras *Mass* 307).

### **HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT THE FOUR ATTORNEYS IN THE BUSH?**

First of all, the four Native attorneys are at least as harshly screen-iconized (cf. Wilson, C. 45) as 'Indians' have been for centuries as the overly competitive desk jockey in desperate need for purchasable relaxation and inner balance matches the superficiality of, for instance, the 'Stoic Indian.' Here four remarkably unbalanced and overcharged White city dwellers who keep stating that they "love the great outdoors" (cf. Taylor and his "Recreational Cultural Appropriation" (*Futile* 19)) run through the bush. They are panic stricken: one of them is allergic to bees and therefore constantly wearing a hat – reminding beekeeper' s headpiece – always in anticipation of sudden death as she might get bitten anyway. Another one persistently answers his cell phone, as the third one rather appears to be interested in the sexual abilities of the 'Wild Savage' (George) while the fourth has already played the classic 'I'm Indian as well'-card ("See, my great grandfather was part Chippewa!" (MT 1/3)) at the beginning. Thus the main characteristics of White Westerners are covered. In wanting to experience the

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<sup>135</sup> cf. chapter: 'Blame It On Phil Collins Tapes.'

<sup>136</sup> This is a reality television game show format. In the show contestants are isolated in the wilderness and compete for cash and other prizes. The show uses a system of progressive elimination, allowing the contestants to vote off other tribe members until only one final contestant remains and wins the title of "Sole Survivor."/thereby every minute is filmed.

<sup>137</sup> This is the same as *Survivor* only with celebrities, who are wheel-barrowed into the Australian bush (mostly C- to D-list stars).

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advantages of nature, yet according to one's own conditions ("Sweat Lounge? I didn't come 500 miles to sweat!" (MT 1/3)), those four people represent the classic White attitudes concerning Native thought patterns as well as the drawbacks of their own principles.

In making use of these rather flat television formats, *Moose TV* sublimely reveals the dilemmas Western cultures have to

face as media obsession with shows on 'going back to an original lifestyle' uncover Non-Native Peoples' deep desire and longing for a different – more personal – dealing with the past. For centuries, Western history has been "speaking to the past while Aboriginal history is speaking to the present" (Dickason, "The Many" 118-120). 'Historical' has been defined



Fig. 8.12. *Moose TV*: mosquito lawyer running for her life

as: "1 *historical evidence* DOCUMENTED, recorded, chronicled, archival, authentic, factual, actual, true. ANTONYM mythical, legendary." (*Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*), meaning that it has to be objective, impersonal and static while Native history is built on cyclic, subjective and communal concepts. In broadcasting these shows of White people (medialy) finding themselves within the conditions of past times, we may realize that many Westerners apparently search for ways to not only link a past to their personal presence in order to give their future a meaning but also to eliminate methods of defining oneself over time (time is money), as in these natural surroundings time plays a tangential role in contrast to the place they live in and are heavily dependent on.<sup>138</sup>

Furthermore, the Whites in this show as well as many Whites seeking for a meaning in their life, strive to turn the past to a personal experience they can draw on, as a "factual, actual, objective" (*Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*) past keeps withholding a trustworthy and strong basis from them while Native historicism has all along been defined as sentimental, identifiable and collaborative. By letting the green White attorneys enter the bush then, this episode not only reveals a deep Western longing for an abolition of the feeling of being uprooted from cultural traditions,

<sup>138</sup> This reminds of the latecomer inferiority complex Francis describes (cf. chapter 'Aboriginal Deception Packages').



community belonging, and spiritual meaning (cf. Aldred 329), it also uncovers the flaws in the plan as some Whites seem to believe that a personal and meaningful experience of the past is buyable, as well as they cannot resist their desire for action, for getting something for the money. Consequently, the benefits of silence for instance might not be considered as popular.<sup>139</sup>

### **BLACKENING EYES – GEORGE'S VOCATION**

Generally George is eager to give action and a fetishized spirituality to consume to the four attorneys in the bush. Thereby, he does not only become a contemporary storyteller, he is also a game master as well as a conquerer of today's mediascape. In contrast to the 'average Indian,' who is not only living at the periphery of society but also at the periphery of media representation, George turns Westocentric-based substructures into his own, therefore structuring the daily life of his Western visitors according to his wishes whereby they have to act out in a natural centre he has drawn the boundaries around. As a result, he can not be considered as a Native who is outside modern culture, but the centre of a universe the White's have to orbit while he is not only in control of the technology surrounding them (camera), but also of their actions and thought patterns ("Whoever wins the challenge, gets an air mattress!" (2/3)) as well as their psyche and individual well-being. Their potential purification and centeredness are dependent on his instructions and good will.

Being superior and in charge of the action, George is then mirrored by numerous contrasting facets, most of them evolving from his use of a small hand camera as a prop guaranteeing him the role of a game master. Apart from the fact that he is as much judgmentally commenting on the actions taking place as he is creating them, George is given a kind of subjective point of view hardly employed in television. Since he is in possession and filming with his own little hand camera, the audience is frequently liberated from the natural point of view the average television show usually attempts to make us believe in. This camera is never neutral, yet gives the impression that it functions as our personal eye. The 'media tool camera' is virtually never to be seen in the picture as we see numerous cuts seemingly shot by George directly (REC sign

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<sup>139</sup> cf. chapter 4.2.

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appearing, different lighting). Hence, the show refuses the feeling of a reliable reality to us as the camera eye is not to be put on a level with the viewer's eyes while the creativity of the "creative camera" (Balázs 37) is handed over to George on numerous occasions, thus depriving the viewer of the "subjective omniscience" (Hickethier 53) he is generally used to.<sup>140</sup> Even the normal creative cam tends to be in line with the attitudes George's cam promulgates when filming the kooky Whites since the official camera seems to support his ridiculing comments as it captures their helplessness, mental overload and typical city dwellers behaviors (zooming in on them desperately using insect repellent or trying to erect a tent, etc.). George is additionally able to employ a voyeuristic 'red

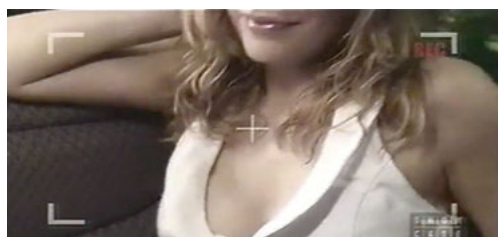


Fig. 8.13.: *Moose TV*: cleavage

male' (instead of "pale male) gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55) quite scot-free. He obviously zooms in on the breast and thighs of the lecherous White lawyer while cutting off the parts of her that are needless to him (as shoulders, lower legs or the face).

The prop of the hand cam left to George's hands gives him a very high amount of superiority. He not only determines the action and comments on it, he also writes his story/screenplay as if he were an author and the cam were his pen (or his weapon). Furthermore, he is not only in charge but also on a visual basis creating the "window to the world" (Hickethier 50) the viewer is bound to look through. He decides on the frames (lecherous lawyer) and due to that on the importance of objects and people as well as their representation: every single picture conveys a framework of persons and objects. As Hickethier states, the presentation of these defies us to spot relationships, hierarchies and meanings between them. We ought to observe social distances, constellations of conflict, social classifications, etc. (cf. 53), and hereby, we are strongly dependent on exactly the picture within the frame that the camera captures.

Consequently, he is not only stressing special characteristics of the Whites and fostering their one-dimensionality, he keeps himself in the epicentre by being the creator of the action in the background – holding the cam or occasionally turning it around, thereby filming himself as the focused pike of a spear in the foreground while the others are relegated to a diffused blurred backdrop. On the one hand George's behavior fits his media capitalistic-stop-at-nothing ambitions and his impish playground charm here<sup>141</sup> but

<sup>140</sup> cf. chapter: 'The Takeover Of The Mechanical Eye.'

<sup>141</sup> cf. chapter: 'Noble? Not at all...'

on the other – in this special episode – his main characteristics are refined to make a strong point concerning the loud Native voice in the action of (t)his plot line. Apart from that we can spot him doing the editing and cutting of "Surviving Moose" in the end, indicating that George is the overall master of the action, its message and its effects on his audience.

So what this show tells us here is: before "history [has been] written by the victorious Whites" (Furniss 122) and as we know, it has been altered and re-written in order to serve Western ideologies which keep influencing society in general and the Western mediascape to this very day. Yet, on the smaller scale screen of *Moose TV* Natives have started to re-



Fig. 8.14. *Moose TV*: George and his hand cam filmed by the 'cam cam'

write or better re-film history, changing it and taking it to a much bigger scale screen – beyond the plot line into reality – as the show can be watched by the bright Canadian public. While George seems to have subtly given the average Canadian viewers a black eye, *Hank Williams First Nation* works its way out of the faces giving them a thick ear.

## **GIVING THICK EARS – STORYTELLING IN HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION**

Within a different media sector, *Hank Williams First Nation* also introduces a postmodern storyteller who has – as the local station's DJ – story telling and community building powers, too. Stranded somewhere in the Canadian bush with *Hank Williams First Nation* we may immediately realize that – as in so many Canadian small towns – local radio broadcasting is known as one of the most important linking elements within the community. For it not only serves as an easily accessible source of information ("You may know, it's prom night tonight!" (HW 1/1)), but it becomes – in being personal and a rather independent island in the vast ocean of general Canadian broadcasting – the acknowledged voice of the people living there, too. Here in this special case we are introduced to two radio DJs (both homodietic ones) as they "remain restricted to the

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discourse level" (Allrath 14), yet diverse, for we are presented a rather old and wise sounding Country Music DJ, who is a 'flesh and blood' member of the village (we never see him in person, though) and his part-time substitute Huey who is part of the main cast.

Employing a DJ and his radio broadcasting as a frequent voice-over has to be considered as a move with big subliminal effects since it secretly reveals the same Aboriginal take over with the help of modern media we already could detect in the two shows we discussed before. Internally the DJ gives the community he broadcasts in a voice while keeping it together and connecting its members at the same time, as listening to the station is a part of every day life for most of the people there. Thereby, the DJ is close to the community. He is a major component of it and that being so able to represent it properly, allowing his listeners the feeling of being heard and respected for what they are. This can especially be spotted in episode five when the outsider Monique calls Huey not knowing about the radio program at all.<sup>142</sup> For decades these kind of local radio stations have been considered as the secure haven from stereotyping or being forced off the map for Native people, since they are cheap enough to be kept running, as well as too small and insignificant enough to be invaded by the Western public. Consequently, they were and still are (also in this show) representing a form of self-government and the ability to criticize on a broader scale than at the level of community councils.

In *Hank Williams First Nation*, the Native DJ never avoids accusations concerning Canadian administration or Western philosophies. He for example makes sarcastic comments on the speedboat car race on the nearby river with almost exclusively White participants: "Gonna keep you updated on these jokers in their overpriced boats. I tell you some people need to get a hobby!" (HW 1/3) or "Election Day is coming up. I don't know ... this business is a White man's thing. Before we were giving the role of the chief to the best hunter ... now we give it to the one with the most cousins" (HW 1/6).

Additionally, since music has proved to be so important in television series nowadays, as it has "become an increasing part of the 'feel' or mood of ... a series in a world where all human life seems to be played out to a soundtrack" (Creeber, *Tele-Visions* 84), DJing gives the show's Natives the ability to determine the community's soundtrack on a daily basis. At the same time, DJs are able to influence the atmosphere

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<sup>142</sup> cf. chapter: 'Matter Of First Nation(al) Concern: Know Your Shortcuts!'

of the living conditions they are momentarily in. Huey for instance is hosting the prom night, but passes "things back to good old Hank Williams ...." (HW 1/1) as there is



Fig. 8.15. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Huey waiting for Hank Williams – Mexican style

something he just has to do, that is asking Sarah to dance to a romantic Williams' song.

All these divergent statements and realities within the series' actions are also supported by the filmic opportunities this kind of voice-over creates as it maintains "the television flow and the continuity within scenes, as fade-outs, fade-ins and cross meaning sounds, which jut out of one scene and also acoustically continue at the beginning of the next, link the different segments of the plot lines and soften disruptions" (Butler 180-181). Yet, this form of narration not only combines scenes comfortably – for instance opening shots (outside) with homey ones (inside) where the radio is playing, it also mirrors the community's linkage and coherence within the action on a microcosmic level. By its constant diegetic mechanisms, it produces airwave-like mobility and fidelity at the same time while it, additionally, gives rise to offscreen space needed to support the three-dimensionality of the characters and the community in general. Covering the categories of sound, namely speech, sound effects and music, it therefore provides the show with a kind of thickness and authenticity, making it quite easy for the audience to identify with the community and take it into one's heart.

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While all of the sitcoms here approach the question of spreading morals quite lightly as far as their filmic genre allows jumping down throats, blackening eyes and

giving thick ears rather scot-free and in doing so, letting the shows appear innocent, dramas – generally having a more serious requirement for conveying ethical values – have to find alternative ways to hit the viewer's mind and heart.

## **'THE PALACE OF WISDOM LIES ON THE ROAD OF EXCESS' – MORALS SPREAD IN MOCCASIN FLATS**

*Moccasin Flats* can be considered as a drama series, in which classic drama aesthetics of "pollution, guilt, redemption and purification" (Abelman 406) are acknowledged, far from being practised within only one episode, or even season, though, as they determine the character building and storyline of the entire show. Thereby, the series works against television shows' typical static nature of binaries easily understandable to in- and out-floating audience streams but attaches great importance to process and development of its characters. According to Native beliefs in "a life-long process that emphasizes the whole person, ... striv[ing] for spiritual, mental, and physical balance, and the emotional well-being within the context of family and community" (Wheeler, W. 198), and according to Native's guaranteed degree of self-determination "[t]he ... emphasis on experiential learning through observation and imitation is closely associated with their value of autonomy. People's ability to realize their goals on their own, including acquisition of personal knowledge, is highly respected. This respect for autonomy is experienced throughout life" (Goulet, "The Dene" 167). Here we will find more than one character who searches for a new life. Thereby, they play the different stages of "pollution, guilt, redemption and purification" (Abelman 406) rather chaotically.

On the one hand we have a protagonist like Dylan who is – in a strict sense – created to play the 'Harry Potter card,' yet, in an attenuated way by taking the part of an outsider (as Harry Potter does when entering the wizard world), who needs the practises of the alien universe to be explained in order to make the audience/reader understand how the rules and legislation in this foreign society work. Dylan, being in this naive position, for instance tries to figure out, why he is not able to get the girl he loves away from the streets, and we have Elder characters like Betty and Joe, who serve as enlighteners. On the other hand, *Moccasin Flats* presents us with protagonists, too, who

approach a three-dimensionality, in many cases unusual in drama television shows, for they are not easy to relate to because they switch between hero and villain, good and bad. The viewers are not only prevented from learning back in their easy chairs at home, watching a world built on strongly ordered pillars of character identification, but they get the chance to spot and witness developments and setbacks, giving the characters not only a greater depth than usual but also letting the show appear more realistic than the average television drama. As in real life: first there are always two sides to a person and second not everybody will be saved in the end.

Dana's story for instance starts off with her being an innocent big-eyed newcomer to the harsh ghetto life, who will be molested, betrayed and taken advantage of right from the beginning. In watching her development from a guileless skinny girl to a sex-trade worker in the first season (first hooking, first drug experience, first lashing, etc.), the (inexperienced) audience will be incorporated and, so to speak, 'brought into the loop.' Nevertheless, it will be left in shock at the end of season three when realizing that the anonymous, extremely violent pimp sending twelve and thirteen-year-old girls on the street is Dana herself, having been cut off from any form of respect and mercy by the razor-sharp universe, she has been thrown into. Yet, since she is a minor character, we do not follow her entire development, as she gets lost to us in the second and beginning of the third season, suddenly jumping into the light again with unforgiving eyes, a heart of stone and a sharp knife in her hands. Hereby, she is presented in contradistinction to Jon and Candy, who are bound to each other throughout the first two seasons, walking opposed paths, though.

While Dana's story leads her from innocent to guilty, Candy, a callous prostitute in the first season (actually seducing Dana to 'live the ghetto lifestyle'), turns into a social worker in the third one (she convicts Dana in the end), thereby changing from guilty to innocent. On the contrary, Jon, on a parallel road with the same initial situation of having been caught for his delinquencies but given a chance to recover, wanders through stages of pollution (pimp), to guilt (being caught), redemption (starting a decent life in the second season) and then – not purification – but back to pollution as he does not manage to keep his fingers out of drug dealing and easy money making.

In this initial situation (redemption) of season two, both protagonists in typical Native manner supported by the storyline of providing them with the chance to recover according to Aboriginal initiatives of re-socialization fostered by the government<sup>143</sup>, are

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<sup>143</sup> This means that Amanda as First Nation social service member is responsible while Canadian administration remains on the sidelines.

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given the opportunity to rather autonomously find their own way, to experience themselves, to gain true knowledge from direct experience.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, the viewer is also included in this principle from the outside. He or she will be able to spot developments, setbacks, etc. by merely watching and he or she will be given the chance to understand these evolutions by listening to the people's stories while universal morals and wagging fingers are steadfastly omitted. In doing so, shout-out platitudes and overall shallow codes of ethics are avoided.

Comparing Jon and Candy, we learn that both of them seemingly have the same basic situation as far as they are given the chance to start their messed up lives all over. Both are offered a journal with erased, blank pages and pens to rewrite their personal histories. Yet, it may not only occur to the viewer but to Candy as well that her pen is nearly used up and much harder to write with, as her starting point is screwed up to a much greater extent than Jon's: he is clean and healthy, ironically starting a new job as a respected salesman in the organic product business while Candy loses her low wage job at a fast food restaurant quite quickly and learns that she is H.I.V. positive. Jon has a family, a decent girlfriend and a cute little son who are willing to reboot their relationship in a pretty new house while Candy had to give her little baby girl away to the social service and has lost her home. In the end, however, everything turns out differently than one may have expected as Jon falls prey to cooking meth and dealing again, loses his girlfriend and his son to his archenemy Michael over it, and disappears behind bars in the finale of season two never to be seen again while Candy succeeds in leading a meaningful life.

This development can be ascribed to the decisions they made, according to their communally given abilities "to realize their goals on their own, including acquisition of personal knowledge" (Goulet, "The Dene" 167). Before Jon had been trying to steady himself with the assistance of a 'Native-Better Life-DVD,' thereby creating an alter ego, which is following and seducing him constantly in real life.<sup>145</sup> Candy, on the contrary, meets people who introduce her to her Native roots, teaching her traditions like singing, drumming and smudging. As Candy supports the balance of her community (in the end of season three she will even unite it) while Jon wilfully pollutes and destroys it (by selling deadly drugs to his community's children), Candy will be given television purification. This will take place in the form of traditional purification in the end, letting her rather

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<sup>144</sup> cf. chapter 4.1.

<sup>145</sup> cf. chapter: 'Pulling Out The Knife From The Wound.'



secretly but naturally and without any use of wagging fingers materialize as a rounded character to not only easily identify with by an average viewer, but to look up to as a role model as well. Music (Jon with harsh and confusing Rap songs, Candy with Native sounds), props (Jon with water- but also real guns, drugs, etc., Candy with dolls, drum, etc.), light (Jon is illuminated artificially while Candy has switched into the faction of the orange and brown colors) and camera angles (Jon is shown in extreme bird's and worm's eye positions while Candy's filming becomes a lot more balanced and steady over time), strongly support their switching images without obtruding themselves upon the audience. In the end the average viewer may find him- or herself in a quite realistic and substantial but also entertaining 'Canadian Educational TV Program' without having noticed really.

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On the contrary, *renegadepress.com*'s main intention is not based on showing the long hard road a changing person has to walk, by slowly experiencing, digesting and then applying the lessons of life. It rather adjusts to today's accelerating world by presenting 'life's moral of the week' on an interactive, worldwide networked silvery tablet.

## **UPLOADING A Poured HEART – MORALS SPREAD IN RENEGADEPRESS.COM**

As *renegadepress.com* is clearly a teen show different standards have to be applied than in a drama like *Moccasin Flats*. Learning by mere watching may be an unobtrusive way of spreading a sociologically as well as culturally essential message rather secretly but substantially. Yet, teen shows in general tend to live up to their role as a "transmodern teacher" (Hartley, "Democratainment" 525) far more eagerly than average television series, as the 'inbetween' adolescent not only has to be entertained but also pithily educated and made a morally reliable member of society. So, concerning the analysis of *renegadepress.com* there is an apparent demand for indoctrination to be implemented as well as an obligation to display the show as an authentic, understanding media counselor to the teenagers who are watching it.

Hence, *renegadepress.com* employs several media instruments and techniques in order to fulfil its highest goal: to reach the Canadian adolescents on a credible and trustworthy basis by – naturally in line with folk culture – providing "a common symbolic

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experience and a common discourse, a set of shared formal conventions and ... reading relations" (Fiske, *Television* 80) and by acknowledging "a minimal differentiation between performer and audience or producer and consumer" (Fiske, *Television* 80). This also includes the fact that the counsellor has to be constantly accessible, which according to today's media resources can be guaranteed. So apart from broadcasting a lesson in life on a weekly basis on TV, the show therefore also operates with an exceptionally interactive website conveying the feeling of intimacy as well as permanent attainability and the recognition of the current adolescent zeitgeist.

With regards to the audience to be reached, *renegade*press.com leaves behind former Westcentric notions of favoring the White middle/upper class (*Beverly Hills 90210*, *The O.C.*) as multiculturalism is promoted profoundly in the show. The reinforcement of "standards of whiteness" (Fleras, *Media* 1-2) while spreading the "discourse of 'mainstream' as normal" (Fleras, *Media* 1-2) is ignored. The messages of Mediacentrism: "(a) cultural diversity is forced into a single paradigm of acceptability; (b) the West is assumed to be the pinnacle of evolution and progress; (c) as a centre of civilization and rightness, the West has the right to do as it pleases; and (d) the West is sanitized of all wrongdoings while 'others' are blamed" (Fleras, *Media* 55), are abandoned. Many different ethnological and religious groups are involved in the action, as we have Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Native and Atheist doctrines represented as well as First Nations, Spanish, Swedish, Indian, Polish, Black, Chinese, etc. protagonists. They interact



Fig. 8.16.: *renegade*press.com: the official website (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

naturally and face general problems (pregnancy, anorexia, break up, generation gap, etc.) and difficulties 'typical' for their background (Jack and the residential school) but also cope with obstacles 'seemingly archetypical' for other rather 'minor' groupings: a White Christian gets addicted to Crystal Meth, Zoey's upper class neighbor dies from sniffing and so on – addictions, which are usually ascribed to 'underprivileged' youth in Canada.

Consequently, this show conveys the impression that everybody has the same right to tell his/her story. With all their teenage angst and insecurities grounded in 'teen inbetweenness,' they are facing the same issues and responding to equal, universal solutions while their postmodern mediator *renegadepress.com* bundles and unites them in a common experience. Thereby, not only the teenagers within the show are linked and standing up as a community within the plot lines but also the teenage audience ones outside are integrated and embraced to such a great extent that reality and fiction are constantly on the verge of blurring together.

Within the world of *renegadepress.com*, the main cast assembles itself around a fictional website, which has been created by the main cast of Jack and Zoey. Both of them have been friends (sometimes lovers) for years now while sharing their main interest in running 'renegadepress.com,' which is evolving as the central social and interacting platform in their high school. An ongoing number of cast members researches, writes articles and



Fig. 8.17. *renegadepress.com*: fictional website within the show's action (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

uploads videos on this platform which are a mixture of mere facts and personal experiences, feelings and insights gained after having dealt with topics from plastic surgery to drug or internet abuse to love relationships, sex or violence.

At the end of almost every one of the 52 episodes one of the main protagonists then is shown in a self-directed video diary, which has been put on the website and becomes visible as well as audible to the students of the school (and practically everybody in their fictional world who can use the internet) and the audience (of the real world) via television. Those diary videos link the different strands of the action conveying a universal moral or realization such as Jack's statement in "Some of my best friends are Indian" (RP.C 1/7):

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I had a friend once, my best friend.... He died from sniffing on the reserve. The whole community knew about it, the whole country knew about it, 'cuz of the news. I knew this White kid who died from sniffing. Community kept it a secret. Maybe I'm crazy but I don't see the difference between a White kid and a Native kid sniffing, except for the treatment of the media. And whether you're White or Native: it sucks to lose your best friend!

Therefore, this documentary camera style not only becomes a filmic linkage between the different scenes and plot lines but also serves as a catalyst or rather editor slowing down and puzzling together the endless information, experiences and feelings of today's accelerating world, thereby finding a lowest common denominator. In doing so, it establishes a reassuring order and creates a universal stable ground for information storm-tossed teenagers to stand on.

We may notice that in the end the adolescents are put exclusively into teaching functions. They describe their own most recent experiences and the morals they draw from them<sup>146</sup> (also answering to typical television series' doctrines naturally putting experience and emotion over print's "insight and reason" (Fleras *Mass* 139-142)), consequently corresponding with First Nations' belief in giving everybody the autonomy to experience the lessons of life on his/her own. Parents and teachers are left out in the cold, whereas also in this series as well as for example in *Dawson's Creek*, insight and language appear to be "too sophisticated for the ages of the characters; [as they reveal] frequent intertextual references, ... and a blunt somewhat melodramatic use of emotion and aphoristic psychological reasoning" (Davis 1). Thereby, adolescents with grown-up mind structures are left to illuminate first and then resolve teenage traumas; as Williamson, creator of *Dawson's Creek* states: "It's my childhood comes to life, but now I get to go to the places and create these situations where I can change the ending and have it turned out like I wish it would have" (Birchall 185). Hence, adult attitudes and understandings have jumped over a generation and hide in the sheepskin of the youth. Thus leaving us with the recognition that the morals distributed nevertheless spread from the hearts and minds of the generation the watching one tends to deeply condemn at the current point in time.

Notwithstanding, in this show – in contrast to *Moccasin Flats* – the morals and ethics are kindly presented on a silvery tablet whereby the real viewer is as directly

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<sup>146</sup> Although situated in a school setting, there are for instance no counselling teachers/Jack's father Wayne is one of the very few reliable grown-up advisers, yet he is also kept at the side lines, in a minor role/position never allowed to spread final morals, etc.

addressed as the fictional members of the community. This filmic tactic can be considered as a quite useful one for the documentary style breaks with typical TV series' features of the fourth wall, yet not only produces authenticity and the feeling of truthfulness but also affinity: as this 'one-person-telling-his/her-feelings-directly-to-the-camera' can be considered as the visualized form of reading a personal journal. In really watching the facial expressions (tears, laughing) and emotions of the person in typical melodramatic (extreme) close-ups while listening to his/her voice, the highest amount of intimacy (what television series tend to long for) can be accomplished.



Fig. 8.18. and 8.19.: *renegadepress.com*: Zoey and Jack pouring out their hearts to the public (copyrighted materials, used with permission from Vérité Films Inc.)

Furthermore, in speaking directly 'to you' the public diary not only becomes an illustrative blueprint of finding oneself seemingly reflecting the reality of many viewers in this way, but the small screen also rises to a new level. It is not only the "window to the world" (Hickethier 50) anymore, but it is – in the form of some protagonist – looking back at you directly, talking to you.

Apart from the mere television level, which seems to be edging into reality from time to time, we are, additionally, presented a real website called 'renegadepress.com' ([http://www.renegadepress.com/rp\\_index.php?broadcaster=8](http://www.renegadepress.com/rp_index.php?broadcaster=8)). Here the climax of blurring is finally reached. On this site in the www the viewers not only find actor biographies, an episode guide, interviews with cast and crew, etc. but also chat rooms, in which they can interact with other viewers (Underground Forum<sup>147</sup>), chat rooms in which the protagonists seemingly answer viewers' questions (Truth 'n' Rumours<sup>148</sup>), and an ongoing diary<sup>149</sup> (sometimes even with additional videos) of the show's characters, establishing again what happened in the recent episode, explaining Canadian cultural habits, or giving make-up tips.

<sup>147</sup> <http://www.renegadepress.com/forum.php>.

<sup>148</sup> [http://www.renegadepress.com/rp\\_tnr.php?archive=1&PHPSESSID=4dafddc0f7c354a7d94f932037378e4a](http://www.renegadepress.com/rp_tnr.php?archive=1&PHPSESSID=4dafddc0f7c354a7d94f932037378e4a).

<sup>149</sup> [http://www.renegadepress.com/rp\\_crew.php](http://www.renegadepress.com/rp_crew.php).

## 8. RE-TEACHING: HOW TO SQUEEZE THE 'RED BARD' INTO THE BOX

In his diary,<sup>150</sup> Jack for instance keeps informing about 'sick sports' like "Snowboarding/Board A beginner should have a board that has a bevelled edge, a little flexibility and an hourglass shape so it's easier to turn" (ezine 8) but also about his ancestry in 'My culture:'

What is an Elder?

An Elder is someone who is a respected leader because they provide:

Life experience

Strong spirituality

Community spirit

Culturally relevant psychological and spiritual counsel and support

Knowledge of traditional concepts and beliefs, spirituality, ceremonies and other practices

Traditional spiritual ceremonies as needed

Accurate information about Aboriginal heritage (ezine 4)

Thirdly he tells us about his deep feelings: "So this makes what, the third time Zoey and I have broken up? I thought that by now it wouldn't hurt so much but it does. I've lost the battle on trying to convince her that our cultural differences don't matter. I think our differences compliment each other but I guess at times, they've divided us too and she's just sick of fighting that fight" (ezine 33). In addition he gives general advice and reveals realizations:

It's hard for anyone who is not a self-harmer to understand why people would do this to themselves. I've learned that most people do it to cope with the emotional stress in their life. The physical pain gives them a sense of relief from the emotional pain.... I don't have all the answers, but I know that I'm going to pay more attention to the signs. Hiding under long sleeve shirts or making excuses about scratches or injuries is going to have a whole new meaning for me. Watch out for yourselves and your friends.

Be safe and be healthy,

Jack (ezine 24)

In using the fictional TV website and transporting it into the reality of the world wide web while conceding it not only an informing but also a counselling function, *renegadepress.com* therefore not just gives credit to the fast exploring New Media so very essential to many of its adolescent viewers, it also oversteps boundaries. The natural amalgamation of reality and fiction may leave the grown up spectator swallowing hard from time to time.

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<sup>150</sup> [http://www.renegadepress.com/rp\\_character.php?character\\_name=jack](http://www.renegadepress.com/rp_character.php?character_name=jack).

Notwithstanding, *renegadepress.com* is able to employ its real website for its television demands, at the same time making use of the advantages the internet provides, which are corresponding quite well with Native principles of storytelling and communication. Having in mind that Western teenagers tend to feel that their stories are not listened to enough and are frequently dismissed as strenuous facets of the teenage phase, *renegadepress.com*'s ezine not only tells and lets them tell their stories, it also acknowledges that "subjective experience is an integral part of the story" (Dickason, "The Many" 119). A personal diary style defined by close-ups on highly emotional faces that illuminate the difficulties and dilemmas in today's world could not be further away from "detachment and objectivity" (Dickason, "The Many" 119).

In the course of this, some internet strategies and characteristics correspond with Native storytelling features. First of all, one of the least attributes one can describe the internet with is 'static' since in chat rooms every written down word can be commented upon for instance, which then creates a constantly developing information stream everybody has access to and is able participate in. This free authorship may be considered as one of the main new features of the internet. In contrast to television, which only claims to be democratic the www truly is. Anybody and everybody can spread his/her feelings in blogs, create personal home pages, etc., without having to belong to a media elite (journalists, filmmakers, book authors), and without having to spend money for it. In doing so, the internet is far from being objective, in so far as it generally refuses to rate its contributions. Everything is allowed and woven into its worldwide web (except for forbidden contents but even those will be found somewhere), without questioning its worth, its hybrid cross-linkages or its reality appeal. Consequently, a self-drawn picture by a New Orleans football player may as well be seen and acknowledged, as the little short story of a nerdy Ginger from New Jersey will be read, and the self-composed song of a Caribbean physics teacher will be heard while the answered question on 'cutting oneself' in a chat room may change a Vancouver upper class girl's life.

In line with this general cultural development and supporting and saluting it, *renegadepress.com* thus not only 'tells its stories to all the people' (cf. APTN's slogan), but it also lets 'its' people tell their stories to the world. Thereby it blurs television and internet, actor and character, author and recipient, protagonist and viewer, reality and fiction. Everything becomes a net, in which everyone is interwoven. How much people



are really caught up in this net when they fall, may be a different question, though, as this one definitively misses the warmth and reliability a non-fictional community can offer.<sup>151</sup>

After all, we can have the most controversial opinions on the use and misuse of the internet but taking this system of thought onto another level, beyond the level of Canadian teenagers and a series they watch, we may realize that in its social and cultural extensiveness, the www has become today's simplest warranty that 'History is not [exclusively] written by the victorious' (cf. Furniss 199) anymore since it naturally uploads the weak voices of the one's done injustice and makes them heard and seen. One just has to take a look at the altering sources of news broadcasting for instance where youtube<sup>152</sup> and twitter<sup>153</sup> are becoming rather reliable information providers concerning regions, in which that official reporting is regulated by interest groups.

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This voice given to the underdog by the opportunities of the modern means of cultural trends can easily be spotted in today's music business as well, for Hip Hop has become the fresh soil authentic new poets grow out of. *renegadepress.com* as well as *Moccasin Flats*, in recognizing this development therefore create a meaningful link between the Hip Hop world and its protagonists, giving Native youth the chance to perform their upgraded form of traditional storytelling.

## **THE SOUNDTRACK OF THE PIMPING POET – STORYTELLING AND HIP HOP MUSIC**

The three primary modes of Rap: 1) exhortation to dance or to get active; 2) boasts about the rapper's facility with words, sexual prowess, money-making ability or "badness" in general; and 3) reports or laments of life in the ghetto. Each of the three modes operates by attempting to persuade the listener in some way: to dance, to get off drugs, to fight the power, or simply that the rapper is everything he/she says he/she is and that the scene that he/she describes is legitimate and not merely hype. The most important question to ask about a rap is whether it convinces its audience. In this sense of "rhetoric" as "persuasion." Rap is clearly the most popular rhetorical poetic form in use today. (Wood n.p.)

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<sup>151</sup> cf. chapter 4.2.

<sup>152</sup> [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

<sup>153</sup> [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com).



This statement may give Hip Hop artists the legitimization of being one of the most promising postmodern young authors and poets today's Western world has to offer. Taking a closer look at Hip Hop aesthetics, one may realize that parallels between Native culture and Hip Hop ethos concerning the role of the pimp, authorship in general and Hip Hop's natural employment of Aboriginal musical and storytelling standards are quite obvious. We have been talking about the role of 'pimps' in Native ghettos before, which can partly be ascribed to 'mack' qualities of sexual prowess and a high amount of physicality associated with the strong belief in supremacy.<sup>154</sup>

Notwithstanding, the pimp is not merely an invincible hero but rather a storytelling trickster, who is defined by his "persuasive power, verbal skill, and emphasis on stimulation which link the two" (Quinn 118). Furthermore, he is a cunning figure, a swindler and impostor. He lives from "wit, guile and dextrous language" (Quinn 118), and so it appears to be only logical that within the realm of contemporary culture, he sneaks in from behind, yet – as an enemy of boundaries – takes the stage with 'the beat of the drum' then, probably leaving some deeply shocked as well as deeply affectionate audience facial expressions behind. Fallible, a victim of his appetites and a master of transgression, he still has put himself into the position of telling his story to the world out there and being the 'prototype of a survivor'.<sup>155</sup> In fact, this trend of 'underdog take over' has been shown for years now in today's Western music business as Hip Hoppers crossed the boundaries of their ghetto world and suddenly ended up – telling their personal stories of the places they come from and the lives they have lived – from the Mount Olympus of the 'Top Ten Singles' and 'Top Ten Album' charts. One only has to retrace the development of popular Rappers Snoop Dogg, P. Diddy or 50 Cent, for instance, to discover this. On a smaller scale *Moccasin Flats* and *renegadepress.com* make use of this modern form of storytelling as well since it appears quite natural to connect this postmodern genre to Aboriginal traditionalism with the effect of transporting current Native lifestyle into today's society.

In *renegadepress.com*'s episode on Jack's discovery of the inherent link between Native music and Hip Hop (they "come from the same place" (R.P.C 2/8)), and much more so within *Moccasin Flats* first season's finale (MF 1/6), we experience not only the mere technical connection enabling the traditional ways to easily and almost naturally

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<sup>154</sup> cf. chapter: 'The 'Indian Pimp ....'

<sup>155</sup> cf. chapter: 'Let Chaos Ring.'

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melt with modern Hip Hop culture but also the spiritual connection. Within this final episode we get to see a perfect symbiosis, the uniting of what belongs together, as Dylan



Fig. 8.20: *Moccasin Flats*: Dylan finding his spirit

cheerfully dances a traditional choreography in the circle of a Native audience during a Hip Hop contest while musically accompanied by a Rap song Michael has been remixing before: the ancient dancing and the contemporary Hip Hop music fit together, creating a flow everybody in the audience is

affected by. In this case, the screenwriters decided to show a postmodern powwow at the end of the first season and

a pervasive characteristic of powwow is ritual music. I contend that part of the power of ritual music derives from its repetitive nature. ... As I have tried to show, ritual music obtains its authority and power through sheer repetition. Religious music, and music which is contexted in ritual, frequently are highly formalized ... – wherein lies its poetics ... this is a ritual that sacralized time and space conditions have been created in which extraordinary power exists. Repetition if you like, symbolizes religion, and in such a context, native concerns about their identity find an answer. (Whidden 8)

Here, we have the traditional clothing the protagonist is wearing while honoring his Native ancestry by performing a grass dance, yet – to the sounds of Hip Hop, which in its roots resembles quite the same religious and accompanying technical modes of cycles that the Powwow does, thereby illustrating and reinforcing Dylan's new found identity.

Classical Western music puts its emphasis on linearity, namely "an aid in the construction of a sense of progression to a harmonic cadence (and) repetitions have been suppressed in favor of the fulfillment of the goal of harmonic resolution" (Snead 48), but as Aboriginal music follows a different path: "formulation, repetition and rupture work within and against each other, building multiple circular musical lines that are broken and then absorbed or managed in the reestablishment of rhythmic lines" (Snead 49). Hence, it can be considered as quite natural that ancient musical formats will play an important part in making Hip Hoppers' strategies of "using samples as a point of reference, as a means by which the process of repetition and recontextualization" (Rose 73) an elementary principle. Thus we see that traditionalism does not only resemble the

same thought system as Hip Hop Music on an ideological basis to a great part but it also mirrors thought patterns on a practical one:

The music and vocal rapping in rap music also privileges flow, layering, and ruptures in line.... The flow and motion of the initial bass or drum line in rap music is abruptly ruptured by scratching ... or rhythmic is interrupted by other musical passages. Rappers stutter and alternatively race through passages, always moving within the beat or in response to it, often using the music as a partner in rhyme.... Interpreting these concepts theoretically, one can argue that they create and sustain rhythmic motion, continuity, and circularity via flow.... These effects at the level of style and aesthetics suggest affirmative ways in which profound social dislocation and rupture can be managed and perhaps contested in the cultural arena. Let us imagine these hip hop principles as a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation: create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them. However, be also prepared for rupture, find pleasure in it, in fact, plan on social rupture. When these ruptures occur use them in creative ways that will prepare you for a future in which survival will demand a sudden shift in ground tactics. (Rose 39)

This is what *Moccasin Flats* accomplishes in this scene (MF 1/6). It not only shows the natural bounding of ancient and modern ways by mixing it, putting it into a new 'fresh context' supporting the rolling of a cultural and social cycle that way, it also accumulates, layers, embellishes, and transforms (cf. Rose 39) the story it tells on a visual basis according to the genre it acts in. The music is accompanied by these telling lyrics:

On the flats  
On the Great Plains where the land is flat  
When the wind gains speed down the winding bag  
When you might get stabbed and fall off the back  
It's destiny you know, when you're on the Flats

The Flats – you got no time to think  
The Flats – where you're bound to sink  
The Flats – you know your living from its destiny  
The Flats – you know when you're living on the Flats (1/6)

With them, all of the first season's contrasting strands become intertwined, divided again and finished off, representing most of the repertoire and most of the different feelings, stories, dreams and disappointments the 'Flats' have to offer: Dylan has finally found his true spirit and dances freely, Michael supports him eagerly while in the next cut Jon is shown drugging in order to forget, as Sarah is leaving town to start a new life, and Candy is breaking down and passing out on the streets. In this shot, we even hear sirens and dog barking and – for Hip Hop Music naturally integrates the sounds of the street into its songs as a rhythmic amplifier – we cannot locate whether the sound is real within the action or belonging to the music, which again constantly switches between diegetic and

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non-diegetic. As we can especially detect in this scene, everything is interwoven, the music responds to the action and the other way around, the music tells the story of the people it accompanies while the people it accompanies and the surroundings they live in have created its lyrics and its sound in the first place. To some the music is freedom and success, to others it is their personal soundtrack of demise: "[w]hen these ruptures occur, use them in creative ways that will prepare you for a future, in which survival will demand a sudden shift in ground tactics" (Rose 39).

Within the second and the third season, this topic of linking Hip Hop to traditionalism is brought onto another level then for it becomes personified in one character named Red, who is portrayed as an exceptionally talented Rapper just out of jail, coming as a real bombshell into Michael's life, who immediately signs him for his record label. Ron Harris (playing Red) is also a Rapper in real life called OSTWELVE who says about himself:

Hip hop has helped to shape my life, my career and my worldview. It has been present in the majority of my life and I don't really see it going anywhere. Hip hop has had many faces and phases, and I'm lucky to have been able to witness some of those. They have taught me more about the world and about myself. In the chase for hip hop stardom, I have come across both adversity and victory, but in the grand scheme of it all, hip hop has shaped me into the man I am today .



Fig. 8.21.: Ostwelve promoting Native Hip Hop

([beatnation.org](http://beatnation.org))

This image spreads an amount of authenticity; quite useful for the show's credibility, which then becomes fuelled by the fact that OSTWELVE wrote the soundtrack's major songs, namely the atmospheric drug song on Crystal Meth called "Methodology" and another title track with following lyrics:

Keep it the red, just like the bloodshed  
They once fed to a people who once bled  
Once fled, twice bitten by the streets  
Now its pure energy written upon these beats

Ain't no need to compete just survive the night  
Make my way to bigger cities, rock to brighter lights

...  
So ignite these nights  
They are pumped with gas  
Not sure if I escaped these Moccasin Flats

Might die trying  
But I might die staying  
Cuz of these kids outside  
That are dying when they are playing

In being so highly political, Red immediately fills the role of the trickster, who steps over boundaries and is able to gain authorship on quite a public level (he is about to have his breakthrough at the end of the second season as one of Canada's most popular music channels is broadcasting a live gig of his). He becomes a modern popular poet of today who is dedicated to "the three primary modes of Rap: 1) exhortation to dance or to get active; 2) boasts about the rapper's facility with words, sexual prowess, money-making

ability or 'badness' in general; and 3) reports or laments of life in the ghetto" (Wood n.p.).

(Michael: "Man, where did you learn to write lyrics like that?"  
Red: "You got to be on the streets to write about the streets!" (MF 2/2)). Thereby, he speaks "with the voice of personal experience, taking on the identity of the observer or



Fig. 8.22.: *Moccasin Flats*: Red in National Music TV

narrator" (Rose 2) while fusing "literate concepts of authorship with orally based constructions of thought, expression and performance" (Rose 87). Hip Hop therefore stands in line with oral traditions as

the lyrical and musical texts in rap are a dynamic hybrid of oral traditions, postliterate orality, and advanced technology. Rap lyrics are a critical part of a rapper's identity, strongly suggesting the importance of authorship and individuality in rap music. Yet, sampling as it is used by rap artists to indicate the importance of collective identities and group histories... The music is a completely cultural reformulation of the community's knowledge and memory of itself. Rap lyrics and the sampled sounds that accompany them are highly literate and technological, yet articulate a distinct oral past. (Rose 86)

Hence, the Rapper does not only tell authentic stories, but also addresses the collective memory of his Nation as he naturally arises as a communal author, who recognizes the concerns of his people and relates them to the public world self-confidently, becoming a "verbally gifted storyteller and cultural historian" (Smitherin 4). He is expected to be "lyrically fluent, to testify, to tell the truth, to come with it in no uncertain terms" (Smitherin 4). Besides, "redefining the constitution of narrative originality, composition and collective memory, rap artists challenge institutional apparatuses that define property, technological innovation and authorship" (Rose 65). Consequently, when Red finally starts to write songs about his relationship with and love for Candy he is already beginning 'to fall apart. This actually manifests itself in him when he starts cooking meth with Jon and taking drugs again. Thus when Red gives up on preparing the community he lives in with the proper soundtrack, when he gives up on challenging the public by raising his voice, he also not only gives up on his communal authorship and the preservation of the collective memory of his people, but also on himself and the role he is chosen to play in his community.

In the end, Hip Hop music appears to be a natural ground for Native artists as it supports Native principles of storytelling and pays tribute to abilities a traditional narrator was also praised for. Furthermore, the Native Hip Hopper, like Red, occupies a communal authorship position not only administering collective memory but also putting it on a new, (post)modern level with the help of special musical techniques, which at the same time correspond to Native thought patterns of a cyclic experience of the world.

## POSTINDIAN WARRIORS OR OF HOW TO PERFORM MEDIA CANNONBALL DIVES

The "postindian warriors must embrace the complexities of postmodern culture to help indigenous peoples to survive" (Aldred 343), and this motto appears to be one of the main features every of the shows to be analysed has taken up the cause of. Considering storytelling on an overall basis, we can detect that Native TV series stress the topic of storytelling in their plot lines as it becomes a main characterizing feature of protagonists like *renegadepress.com*'s Jack (hosting the internet website), *Moose TV*'s George (being a game master as well as a personified camera eye), *Hank Williams First Nation*'s Huey (as linking radio DJ) and *The Rez*'s Silas (acting out the 'bildungsroman' of becoming the storyteller of his band). Therefore, these shows fulfil "a primary function which is to develop a national mythology of historical origin" (Kilpatrick 5), thereby automatically achieving the overall Canadian television goal of "sufficiently distinguish[ing] Canada from ... the USA" (Beaty 20) on an educational basis. Yet, first and foremost – far from being caught in the "Beethoven vs. Aaron Spelling dilemma" (Beaty 18) – they are giving Canadian Natives a voice that allows them to comment on Canadian culture in general and Native participation in it in specific.<sup>156</sup>

As a side effect, the series offer to foster most aspects the Canadian media constantly searches for naturally since dealing with Native lifestyle not only creates an authentic "production of national symbols" (Kilpatrick 5) but also works against the featureless mediocrity Canadian broadcasting has come to fear: as the interaction with the periphery (First Nations in this case) not only keeps excluding mediocrity but also supports the common "values of multiculturalism" (Beaty 20) in a self-evident way.

Being "postindian warrior[s]" (Aldred 343) is, additionally, not only grounded in the triggering of the weapons of filmic production techniques, but also in a strong self-government evolving from a warrior's self-assurance, belligerence and steadfastness. Due to that, the fighting protagonists of these shows withstand the third force American Natives in general are oppressed by ("government, religion and Hollywood" (Miller, M.J. *Outside* 15)), using TV formats to break with "short cut computer icon[ing]" (Wilson, C. 45). Thereby they apparently refuse to accept the media strategies of the Western's "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55) as well as Media- and Westcentrism in order to be able to be in control of their own identity (cf. Fleras *Mass* 307). In telling their personal "touchstone stories of our time" (Fleras, *Mass Media* 135), they fulfil the bardic function

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<sup>156</sup> cf. chapter 5.2.

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of mimicking the surrounding world and construct a common cultural memory based on archetypical Native features of storytelling like a "collective voice" (Marchessault 188) and "subjective experience" (Dickason, "The Many" 119) alike, albeit playing into the hands of the small screen's doctrines, too: for those doctrines reinforce "communal sense" (Ong 136) by creating common knowledge and selling it as the heart and soul of the anti-elite.

Here in this special case, though, the 'anti-elite' is led by Vizenor's "postindian warriors," (1 ff.) whose crusade is shaped by a Native archetypical storyteller quest, namely to spread overall histories as well as personally lived experiences, which are interconnecting and overlapping, infusing the individual and common daily lives that way (cf. Wheeler 196). Yet – according to Aboriginal adaptability – this symbiosis has to be accommodated to current desires and measurements. Hence, the various shows' protagonists serve as a new form of counselors rather reminding of combative mediators, who apparently link traditionalism and pop culture naturally. Hereby, the possibility of amalgamating the Old and the New Ways seems to be dependent on the authenticity with which the persons practice the vestige of traditional Native belief.

Thus Dylan, Candy, Red, Silas, Jack and George get to know the powers Native history offers comparatively similarly to inexperienced White viewers: in other words, Harry Potter-like, all of them are quite clueless at first, taught together, devoid of any racial or ethnical issues. In following this 'bildungsroman'-like pattern supporting television's true nature of "flow not show, process not conclusion" (Fleras, *Mass* 140) in this way, the shows respond to observation over instruction (cf. Goulet, "The Dene" 166-168) obligations in the same sense as to television series' strategies of being "participatory and active" [while] recogniz[ing] only minimal differentiation between performer and audience or producer and consumer (Fiske, *Television* 80).

Due to the amount of intimacy the shows consequently create in "emphasizing experience" (Fleras, *Mass* 139) and responding to the emotional appeal of visuality, we are provided with a modern bard then, only this time in form of a Native person, who nevertheless still mirrors a culture's dominant morals, beliefs and longings (cf. Fiske, *Reading* 85-100). In doing so, and in letting the viewer identify with his/her struggles, hopes, success and pain, the Native protagonist thus will be accompanied on his way to let the archetypical holy codes into his/her life, like the "persistence of the family, or the 'adherence to traditional virtues'" (Fleras, *Mass* 91). Notwithstanding, as Aboriginal beliefs also interfere, the desirable common middle ground turns out to work on a slightly different level, nevertheless responding to filmic principles of "(1) reflecting rather than



educating viewers, (2) stimulating rather than elevating them, (3) presenting images rather than arguments, (4) addressing the general public rather than an educated elite" (Fleras, *Mass* 140). These strategies are followed casually, though, sometimes more faithfully, sometimes less, depending on the ethics and moral code of the genre the respective show operates in.

Generally, it can be stated that Natives are given the upper hand: being "postindian warrior[s]" (Aldred 343), they know how to use the media weapons, so to speak. Silas, Huey and George, for instance, are given 'voice-overs.' Therefore, they are able to establish the scene, linking/influencing the action, making the soundtrack or commenting on the plot emotionally (fostering intimacy) as well as sarcastically and naughtily. In being child-like and rather rascally at the same time, these protagonists are thereby employed to maintain a balance, as these character traits may keep them from being experienced as too overpowering for the average viewer.

Furthermore, they work as mediators between reality and fiction. Many features of the diverse shows try to distribute a kind of credibility beyond the scope of the respective show's plot, which is achieved by making use of classical postmodern intertextual references: like the mentioning of real cultural artifacts (Silas [peeved]: "I don't have time! I have to go home, watch *North of 60!*" (REZ 2/4), the employment of universal Hip Hop aesthetics straight out of today's musical business (Red/OSTWELVE in *Moccasin Flats*), the adaptation of current Western television formats (*Survivor* in "Surviving Moose" (1/3)) or the uploading of a fictional website in the real internet (*renegadepress.com*). In doing so, offscreen space is produced giving the shows depth and authenticity supporting the effort to be taken seriously.

Yet, seriousness will be defined differently in the respective shows, ergo individualizing the contrasting storytelling modes. While the sitcoms according to their genre enjoy a carnival license (sublimely jumping down throats, giving thick ears, blackening eyes), the dramas are committed to seriousness to a much greater extent. *Moccasin Flats* follows the sledgehammer method in this case demonstrating violence constantly. Thus it may hit the audience straight in the face, leaving it with a feeling of shock, but also a lot of insights – painful but nevertheless rousing ones. *renegadepress.com* on the contrary needs to respond to an educational mission. That being so it will raise its wagging finger much higher than *Moccasin Flats*.

After all, every one of these shows is corresponding to a singularly interpreted educational mission which is generally based on the hope to inform the bright Canadian

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public in an entertaining way while acknowledging the daily routines of its Natives in its entire spectrum. In doing so, all of these series seem to act intelligently and boldly enough to perform cannonball dives right into the shark tank of the Canadian public without being punished, and while the ignoramus may be getting soaking wet, the First Inhabitant may be hailing the grace of the jump.

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In having adjusted the media image of Native gender according to a public perception which Natives are able to live with in a satisfying way, in having drawn a water-resistant borderline on the Canadian mediascape map, in having presented a media finessing concerning Canadian paternalistic institutions, and in having overtaken filmic authorship, First Nations television series have put emphasis on promoting oppositions on major cultural as well as social levels. Yet, in order to close the circle, to acknowledge pluralism and to make the fragments a whole, softer tunes have to be played as well, and these can be achieved by addressing the topic of healing.

### **8.3 'SCAR TALES' – THE ACT OF HEALING IN CANADIAN NATIVE TV SERIES**

The Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples “maintains that the history of Indian-European relationship is understandable in four essential stages: (1) separate worlds; (2) contact and cooperation; (3) displacement and assimilation; (4) negotiation and renewal” (Hele 151). All these shows discussed propagate that the mighty border between "displacement and assimilation" and "negotiation and renewal" has finally been attacked, yet not without claiming its victims and drawing blood from them. In having created formats on Natives in Canada which have been broadcast on public and popular private channels, frontiers may have been conquered, as First Nations' lifestyle has been put on the public media agenda, emphasizing their identity building in a postmodern world.

Therefore, in concentrating on a hurt and broken people all of the shows are more or less secretly based on the overall topic of healing, whereby recovery has to be measured against the surrounding contemporary circumstances as well as the assimilation with the latter at the same time. To Welsch an identity which has been deliberately split by exterior forces, on the one hand almost automatically fits in with the postmodern principles of adoration of inconstant, ruptured alterable individuality (cf. 41); on the other hand it will be exposed to various dangers and possibilities of aberrations and temptations. Because of this these television shows attempt to not only staunch the deep wounds Native Canadian peoples suffer from, they also cauterize and bandage them. Furthermore, they hand out plasters, recognize raw skin and marvel at scars. Consequently, the shows try to provide the Native viewer with master plans to a life worth living with all the dangers of broken limbs evolving from a differentiated world's pitfalls in the background, as well as they explain the split Native psyche to the White audience. The shows' characters are accompanied while finding their presumable healing processes to be able to operate within the difference (cf. Welsch 41). Hereby band-aids like postmodernism and traditionalism become the two poles of a cultural pendulum swaying.

### ... WHEN IT DOESN'T HURT – THE FAILING ON AILING ON RENEGADEPRESS.COM AND THE REZ

As all of the shows have deliberately placed their stories in the present moment breaking free from the crux of the Western Westerns banning Native inhabitants to the nineteenth century Great Plains,<sup>157</sup> thereby fostering "imperialistic nostalgia" (Buscombe 78), a discussion of current living conditions naturally has to follow. While *renegadepress.com* – to strengthen its topic of the sameness of teenagers in a multicultural society – rather puts less emphasis on Native traditional healing strategies, but decides on providing the viewer with universally valid cultural strategies to develop one's personal equation, the other shows tend to illuminate the interaction between Western standards and Native traditionalism. In doing so, they constantly plumb and evaluate the collaboration of Old and New ways. Since a complete return to First Nations traditions in today's world has to be considered as a physical and mental impossibility, a proper symbiosis of the two seems to be the only alternative. Notwithstanding, in most cases the rediscovery of Aboriginal virtues appears to be the most radical medicine for a proper ego-hood or the remedy to lead a fulfilled life.

After all, we could already spot this recollection and procession of traditionalism on some occasions, especially obvious in Silas' development from a talented blighter to an universal postmodern storyteller, for he needed to find his ancient roots in order to understand his traditional calling to postmodernism.<sup>158</sup> *The Rez* especially lives from the constant interaction between ancient and New Ways and the positioning between these two poles the different characters frequently perform. Thereby, this positioning can never be considered as stable and steadfast, but rather as shaky and flighty as a young bird's movements having left his nest for the first time and being eager but also scared to find his home tree again. In this way the freedom such a trip bestows is clearly taken advantage of.

Consequently, traditionalism is called on whenever the characters feel the imminent demand for it (cf. "Windigo" (REZ 2/7)). At the same time, it is ignored or carelessly modified according to individual conditions (cf. "Der Deutsche Indianer" (REZ 2/10)). It is commercialized for personal gain and it is an object of fear when performed

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<sup>157</sup> cf. chapter: 'Defrosting The 'Plains Indian.'

<sup>158</sup> cf. chapter: 'Tarantino would be proud of you.'

by top-notchers (cf. Etta). After all, it is never really tangible as it dilly-dallies between a mystical, not allegeable truth having effects on the community's daily life, on its problems and solutions (cf. Etta rescuing Joseph with her bird dance (REZ 1/5)), but it is amateurishly adaptable with impunity, too (cf. Frank in general). Due to this almost everybody employs traditionalism egoistically and politically (in)correct from time to time, not only abusing the Old Ways but also bluntly conveying disabilities, unawareness and ignorance.

Frank for instance as an entrepreneur (and postmodern trickster) tries to sell overpriced "Aboriginal hand-crafted knives" to White visitors on the reserve (REZ 2/3) or Taiwan-made 'Indian dolls' in Eleanor's bar, which then brings 'Pocahontian Warrior' Sadie into the arena again. She fervently condemns Frank for his disrespectful dealings with Native heritage ergo the fostering of the consuming of Native traditionalism:

Sadie: Frank, that stuff is embarrassing! It's not even made by our people!

Frank: Yeah, but it is being sold by one of us. So you should be proud of me! I am an entrepreneur, an Indian entrepreneur. I should write a letter to Ottawa! Maybe I could get a grant or something! (REZ 2/4)



Fig. 8.23. *The Rez*: Frank's idea of a shelter in the woods



Fig. 8.24. *The Rez*: 'German Indians' idea of a shelter in the woods

He, moreover, fakes traditional ways to impress the German Professor for Indigenous Studies at the University of Munich (REZ 2/10). According to classical trickster manners, he concurrently never falls prey to any kind of guilt, realizes misbehavior or feels ashamed because of his wide-eyed ignorance.

Especially in this episode about the "Deutsche Indianer" we are presented the all overshadowing lack of knowledge Canadian Native youth tends to possess, as Frank's and Silas' practical incapacity is directly opposed to the scientific awareness of an outsider. Frank is disorganized, clueless but full of spontaneous rescue attempts to save the pretence of his ancient roots in order to sell an 'authentic Native life style' successfully. He for instance builds a pitiful shelter with branches while the Germans have travelled with their own majestic teepees. He tries to cook frozen moose meat with a Bunsen Burner, (and finally burns the teepees) while the Germans make delicious Bannick, etc. Yet, in posing simulation based on theoretical knowledge against zest for action based on practical insouciance, the viewer (and especially the White one) may automatically take the position of the Native boy, for it is not only shaped by authenticity and naturalness, but also presented in a congenial self-deprecating way leaving the Aboriginal person to identify with.

Furthermore, this episode confers the knightly accolade of traditionalism on the 'storyteller-to-be' quite from the beginning. Silas (in a voice-over) explains the role of the trickster in First Nations mythology, ending with the realization that on their "rez we have a trickster called Frank Fencepost ..." (REZ 2/10). This can be understood as an insight already revealing Silas' later fully blossoming ability of being a master of hackneyed ideas, and of being able to connect old and new mindsets in order to capture the current zeitgeist since the well-educated German expert on traditional Native belief systems fails to perceive the postmodern trickster story he is a significant part of. For he is stubbornly fixated on the purity of the Old Ways, ignoring that today's Natives do not live according to eighteenth century standards anymore. In doing so, the German professor – although he is a scientist – reveals himself as a typical German-Winnetou-admirer corresponding with Vizenor's (cf. 1 ff.) and Aldred's accusations (329-352) concerning New Agers, who are fooled by simulations of 'traditional Indian neo-tribe life.' These allow them "to ignore real indigenous peoples and the historical and socio-economic relations that tie them together" (Aldred 343) as well as their current – often disastrous – living conditions.<sup>159</sup>

After all, one aim seems to be – if not the major underlying topic of the series in general – to depict Canadian Natives as a new prototype of "Figuren des Übergangs" [figures of transition] (Welsch 41), who carelessly borrow from whatever cultural habit they feel to identify within the circumstances at that time, without estimating

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<sup>159</sup> cf. chapter: 'Betting On The Red.'

its relevance on the scale of political correctness or outer obligations concerning the preservations of their old belief patterns. They swing between the two poles of traditionalism and postmodernism as airily as a child is see-sawing on a swing, thereby impetuously jumping off the pendulum whenever they feel like it. Nevertheless, the protagonists are still in control and not hopelessly lost whenever they touch ground again but they find themselves by making use of the cultural facets they need in order to form a whole on an individual and a communal basis. In doing so, and in letting the pendulum swing quite free and unattended, it becomes clear that the healing of the wounds and resolving of identity traumas by employing traditionalism can be considered as an option (Silas' story). Nonetheless, evaluating healing processes and finding remedies is not a major topic for all characters since identity floating does not always have to hurt. Fast shape-shifting and adjustment to situations will be acknowledged as well (Frank' story).

### **SCAR TISSUE THAT I WISH YOU SAW – PROCESS IN MOOSE TV**

In the realm of television *Moose TV* has to possess a lot of border crossing between traditional and postmodern tendencies. Television and its "what's next?" (Postman 123) mentality has to be depicted, as well as the crankiness based on the Old Ways characteristic of local stations and the communities they broadcast for. The small screen may be considered as one of the major facets typifying postmodern thought structures. It boosts the accelerating world. It is a master of hybridity. It intermingles high and low brow culture, entertainment and information, comical and serious topics. It lives from nostalgic as well as futuristic approaches. It unites upper and lower classes, different ages and ethnic groups. It forms mythologies and joins a complicity with consumerism. It builds up average people, making them stars and dumbs them down again. After all, it worships fragmentation and ephemerality and in doing so it can be considered as merciless.

In *Moose TV*, George becomes the personification of all of those television characteristics mentioned above: he is volatile, unsettled and impatient, always searching for new more exciting attractions. He presents a 'higher, faster, (better)' attitude, which is based on consumerist motives while he in person is egoistic, superficial and capitalistically oriented. The community – his audience – on the contrary, torpedoes him and his Western shaped ambitions right from the beginning as it demands a

television broadcasting adjusted to the community's demand to heal old sores. Thus while the main protagonist epitomizes and tries to enforce Western philosophies manifested in TV's policies in general, he is slowly – but with irresistible might – overtaken by the community, which imposes its desires and wishes in order to feel represented with the help of traditional virtues.

This overtaking can, first and foremost, be spotted in the broadcasting development of the *Moose TV* show "Ernie Makes A Drum" in which the elder wise Ernie is accompanied in building a traditional Native instrument. He therefore is given a studio with a desk, some furs and some drum making supplies (a boilerplate with two pots on it for smudging among others) while impatiently monitored by director George:

Ernie [in the studio, speaking slowly and reassuringly]: It's Ernie! I am making a drum. It's a very special drum. Perhaps the last one I'll ever make. I been making it with wood from a tree I have been watching grow.... Long ago I saw the tree....

George [feet on the desk, sneering]

Clifford [recording the action, having heard the sneer, going over to George]: Ok, I get it. You think this is dull?

George: It's way beyond dull ...

Ernie [in the studio with a singsong voice]: This wood is not ready to be bent yet, but soon it will!

George [rolling his eyes]: For God's sake! This is the third episode of "Ernie Makes A Drum" and still the wood is not even bent yet.

Clifford: George, the actual drum making isn't the point...

George [on the edge]: Making a drum is not the point of "Ernie makes a Drum"?

Clifford: Not really, it's about the process, the traditions. It's about listening to Ernie. He has interesting things to say....

George: And sometimes he doesn't say anything for like 15 minutes. In the business we call that dead air ... and dead air kills!

...

Clifford: I hate it when you use this show biz talk!

George: Well, we are a television station.... Show biz! (MT 1/4)

Here, as George is talking about "dead air" when there cannot be found any action being an equivalent for no entertainment to him, we learn that television by its very nature is not built for the kind of slow, reassuring process Ernie is representing when performing classic Native traditionalism on screen. It does not fit TV's accelerated thought patterns, its permanent obligation to find the new 'flavor of the week,' its search for a new hot star. Later, in the last episode Ernie's drum is finally ready, surprising George enormously. Ernie enters the studio, disturbs George in his live broadcasting and states that his instrument is finally done:



George [truly surprised]: I thought the wood wasn't ready to be worked with?  
Ernie: It wasn't but then it was. And now I've come to take the drum home! (MT 1/8)

Throughout this episode then, the drum suddenly becomes a universally important means of action as George is kidnapped and taken into the woods. The community finds out and starts a rescue operation with Ernie and his drum in the lead. In the bush, Ernie reads tracks and suggests:

Maybe I should use the drum. That's what our ancestors would have done.  
Gerry [George's father]: We don't have the time, Ernie! (MT 1/8)

Notwithstanding, Ernie begins to sing and play his new drum, which will immediately give him the desired clue so they can find George and save his life.



Fig. 8.25. *Moose TV*: Ernie taking his time

As we see in this episode one of the major topics concerning television, traditionalism and healing becomes time and its perceptions; the other is the use of the senses.

## 8. RE-TEACHING: 'SCAR TALES' – THE ACT OF HEALING IN CANADIAN NATIVE TV SERIES

The Aboriginal conception of time as a web of interacting recurring cycles spanning the present, past, and future, did not give importance to chronology; rather, its mythic thought focused on how people related to the natural world, that sustained them, to the human world that provided social context, and to the spiritual world that gave meaning to it all. (Dickason, "The Many" 118)

So while George tries to promote the station by emphasizing eager "what's next?" (Postman 123) tactics, the result of a long lasting process will finally save his life. Ernie not only connects past (traditionalism) and present (television) in this way, he also becomes a unifier of plot-internal actions as he, by using the product made in an intern *Moose TV* television show, links the series' two realities (for in the 'real life' of the show he manages to find George with it). Therefore, he confirms that the patient process he practised (on TV) is worthwhile and applicable to the 'real world' of the show. By 'bringing the television drum' to reality, Ernie furthermore escapes from television restrictions of

hyperstimulation that cancels unmediated reality by emulating the electronic environment. This preference for replicating hyperreality is, in part, coming to terms with urban reality as a mediated experience in preferential to accepting the sensual experience of experience on its own terms. (Sheridan 25)

Within the show, the drum becomes a symbol of the switching of a "media experience" to an actual one. Ernie also leaves the sensual restrictions of television (hearing and seeing) behind; he did not give himself up to in the first place. For he sometimes "doesn't say anything for like 15 minutes," (MT 2/5) a fact George declares reproachfully as he himself is bound to the television rules claiming that TV sound may be more important than the picture as Western minds are haunted by sayings like: Saying nothing means having nothing to say.<sup>160</sup> So, while Ernie shows respect for classic Native thought systems of believing that "silence is the space between stages of development that keeps the stages from blurring together" (Sheridan 27) even within the realm of sound-maniac television, he takes the employment of senses even further into Moose's reality. After all, we can detect that Ernie is finally successful in finding George by using all of his senses: because of the smell and the taste of some moss on the ground, he knows the direction to take, the sound of the drum leads the way, as well as his eyes, and his fingers palpate the landscape.

Thereby, Ernie livens up "Native oral culture prevent[ing] the cultural mistake that happens when learning occurs under the domination of the eye's appreciation of the visual symbol alone" (Sheridan 32). By employing all the senses, he takes George's

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<sup>160</sup> cf. chapters: 'Blame It On Phil Collins Tapes', 'Listen To Your Heart.'

propagated television two-dimensionality to a three-dimensionality within the plot line, and he expels television's artificiality with traditionalism. In doing so, he reorganizes perception of time, giving his Native community the opportunity to experience the traditional, reassuring time perception again, a new 'Indian time,' so to speak: the one that will sustainably heal the wounds. Even George (formerly having desperately tried to cancel the show) will realize the advantages of a mixture of broadcasting based on Western virtues and traditionalism then, which is already hinted at in an earlier episode as we (and George) learn that George has been loving to play the drum when he was a teenager (a fact George had forgotten (MT 1/4)).

Consequently, in this special case within the last episode, George and his fellow men are in the process of a reassuring healing. The community of Moose has exorcised television of its 'nonsense,' making it its own as well as an instrument of community curing, controlling the pendulum between traditionalism and postmodernism with the steady hand that way. It uses television's platform to not only promote its own culture, thereby stimulating the regeneration of scar tissue but it also has converted TV into a private tutor teaching it traditional roots again, which the Native community often seems to have forgotten in today's world. In having corrupted and altered television strategies and in using them for their own ends and personal information (then also transferred into their real world), the members of Moose town are able to extract purification, centeredness, teaching, the cleaning from a toxic world of capitalism, freedom from hyperstimulating stress and spiritual growth from Western's favorite child, which had been discriminating against them for the previous decades.

*Hank Williams First Nation*, on the contrary, finds its cure in some other popular culture elixirs – (fast) food and music ...

## **FOR SLEEPING AND SINGING IS THE BEST MEDICINE – SUFFERING FROM THE IRONY OF LIFE IN HANK WILLIAMS FIRST NATION**

At first sight the characters of *Hank Williams First Nation* seem less diseased since they do not have a problematic aversion concerning the invasion of contemporary cultural phenomena into their little enclosed world in the middle of the Albertan bush. They rather welcome and appreciate the twisted sense of humor colliding worlds generally can provide if you only have an eye for the ironies of fate coming along with these kinds of clashes: be it unknown raw fish in a dream of vital importance or be it the strangely familiar moaning of a long gone American Country Musician.

### **THE HEALING POWERS OF SCHUSCHI – OR THE PITFALLS OF DREAMING ABOUT RAW FISH**

In former times, dreams have always played an essential role in the organization of Native living as no differentiation between the natural and supernatural world was made. In a society where everything influences and causes everything members have to possess the ability to float between the worlds in order to stick to laws or acknowledge callings. Borders are fluent.<sup>161</sup> In *Hank Williams First Nation*, especially the character of Chief Chicken Wings is confronted with the fact that a traditional dream calling can emerge as quite a confusing topic for pathbreaking nightly vocations may be shaped by postmodern facets not known to the old-fashioned dreamer and therefore hardly translatable.

It is election time in episode six (HW 1/6) and Chief Chicken Wings finds himself faced up not only to a bewildering dream offering him the opportunity to win the election if he follows its path, but also to a strong opponent, who employs mighty dream metaphors in his speech:

I have a dream that the name Wapahoo Cree will be spoken with the highest respect in the highest offices! I have a dream, its time to move forward!  
I have a dream ... it's time to embrace the future, its time to embrace technology! It's time to embrace the modern world! (HW 1/6)

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<sup>161</sup> cf. chapter: 'Feather-Floating Freefloat.'

Being the leisurely counter point of this impressive, impulsive speech, Chicken Wings states some ideas of how the community can give each other a hand and finally ends up mumbling and with a stuck-out tongue says: "I had a dream, too. I had the dream ... if you vote for me, I'll win!" (HW 1/6). This has to be considered a dumb but quite true statement or as Adi puts it after Chicken Wings has won: "No truer election promise has ever been made!" (HW 1/6). Consequently, we may realize that *Hank Williams First Nation* according to its tribute to whimsical small town life will always prefer and let triumph naturalness and authenticity. For Chicken Wings may not be an eloquent politician, but he is not afraid of being the whimsical bumpkin he is. Therefore, he does not need to borrow phrases from one of the most powerful speeches ever been held of one of the most popular resistance fighters of our times, Martin Luther King, as his opponent does, while Chicken Wing's rival delivers an election speech in the school auditorium to about 80 people in the middle of the Canadian bush.

Chicken Wings' dream on the contrary is a real dreamed one and maybe this is the reason why it is so confusing:

Chicken Wings: I've been dreaming about your brother again.

Adi: So, what's my dead brother up to these days?

Chicken Wings: What's schuschi [sushi]? [pronouncing the word wrongly].

Adi: It's raw fish. Ain't it?

Chicken Wings: I had a dream. Your brother Basil appeared to me in a dream, tells me I should give schuschi to all the membership. Told me if I do, I'll win the election.

Adi: My dead brother told you that?

Chicken Wings: He did!

Adi: Must be some funny restaurant he is at.

Chicken Wings: What do you think, I should do?

Adi: Maybe you better call IGA. Get them to cut some fresh fish for you. (HW 1/6)

In letting Chief Chicken Wings dream up this bizarre episode, the screenwriters respond to the tightrope walk of traditionalism and modern world on a quite ironic basis then. While it fulfills its natural function of "predicting future events" (Miller 256-257) and while it serves as visionary adviser, dreaming in today's fast changing, information overloading world becomes a tricky business. Hence, as blasphemous merriment is unknown in Aboriginal religion, even holy traditional mysticism embraces the irony of life with an impish charm. As in old times, nobody doubts the truth of a dream, its recommendations and its ability to correspond with reality issues ("Maybe you better call IGA. Get them to cut some fresh fish for you"). The Natives of this small community in Alberta acknowledge and work with a mystical vision as naturally as with information given in the newspaper, yet never without some irony flashing up occasionally ("So, what's my dead

## 8. RE-TEACHING: SCAR TALES -- THE ACT OF HEALING

brother up to these days?"). Thereby, they are in line with the former lack of differentiation between the natural and supernatural world. Notwithstanding, the Natives (especially Chicken Wings) have to recognize that the world has been changing, that metaphors and symbols beyond bear, sun, beaver, etc. have taken their places due to a worldwide information gain, or saying it in another way: to understand your traditional oracles nowadays, you have to know what sushi is. So consequently, even dreams have adjusted to modern circumstances leading to the possibility that tradition plays a joke on you. Nevertheless, after Chicken Wings (who appears to have gained the new name of Sushi Fish) has given sushi to the members of his community, we see that the Natives nevertheless play according to their own rules. Adi's wife for instance serves her sushi to her family but not in its supposed uncooked state, as fish is just not eaten raw according to Native habits of eating.

As a result, *Hank Williams First Nation* presents the intermingling between traditionalism and postmodernism as not only an inevitable but rather humorous topic. Hereby, it is not showing the Canadian Aboriginals as a people overrun by modernity, but as one acknowledging the amusing ironies these symbioses between Old and New Ways offer. Occurrences with fast food (Chicken Wings) and unknown food from foreign continents (sushi) have naturally taken over the quite mystified tradition of Native name-giving – letting the cultural pendulum swing from left to right and back. Therefore, they are kind of incidentally walking the tightrope in a light-footed manner, liberating themselves from forced and static healing tactics while the general injury having shaped their identity in the first place only virtuously shines through from time to time, namely in the form of an American Country star.

### **WAR WOUNDS OF ALLIES – HANK WILLIAMS' BANDAGING MOANING**

Since *Hank Williams First Nation* is a comedy, which constantly pays attention to Canadian Natives "unique charm and their sense of humor, their sense of family, their sense of faith and their good taste in Country Music" (*Hank Williams First Nation series presskit*), it becomes quite obvious that the stressing of their oddball lightness will be covering the actions and characters constantly. However, the screenwriters also found

their way to integrate a sustainable amount of deeply grounded sadness, hinting at the scars of old war wounds and the survival of traumatic situations (cf. Hirsch 194). As well they employ a secret unmasking of political failure into the action concerning Wapahoo peoples' living circumstances, which does not disturb the show's refreshing easiness, yet gives it a subtle meaning acknowledging the traumas Canadian First Nations had and have to face.

In other shows, such as *Moccasin Flats* and *renegadepress.com*, harsh realities of ghetto life are conveyed or injustices are indicated as in *The Rez*. Here on the contrary, Natives' 'good taste in Country Music' becomes a vehicle to subtly unveil a bruised but at the same time cheerful soul – entering the stage in the shape of the Country musician Hank Williams who all along had a

standpoint as a worker and ordinary citizen [in music]. In an age of resurgent patriarchy, he lamented the schisms between men and women, resisted the dominant oedipal narrative and sought closer connections to women. Finally, he foregrounded existential despair in an age of exuberant and uncritical 'progress,' countering ubiquitous romantic invocations of the superiority of the nuclear family with honest words and deep emotions drawn from the hurts of history and the experiences of daily life. As modern life became increasingly characterized by 'the policing of families' as part of capital's project to colonize the psyche and the body, Williams constituted his own voice and body as sites of resistance. Millions of fans could feel that he 'wrote their lives.' (Lippert 272)

These "places" seems to not only involve White Cowboy locations in the United States but also a small town in the bush of Alberta, Canada in the middle of nowhere inhabited by the Aboriginal Wapahoo Nation, which calls itself "Hank Williams FIRST Nation." This name hints at the fact that in their opinion they are closer to their great Country Music hero than any other 'nation' in the world (first and foremost, the conservative White redneck ones of the United States).

At the beginning of episode four "Duelling Day Hotties" Huey talks about the universality Williams conveys (for this Country musician has to be mentioned sometime since he is the eponym of the whole series):

Huey [dj-aying on the radio]: This was Alberta's own Tim Hoss playing "Everybody likes a Hank Williams Song." Isn't that the truth? Did you ever wonder why us Cree here from the mighty Peace identify with a cowboy from Alabama? Just think about it: songs about headache, lovesickness, thrown in with a little bit of Honky Tonk and 'Praise the Lord.' Sounds like home, doesn't it? (HW 1/4)

"Sounds like home" thereby recalls of Tim Hardin's lyrics "Goodbye Hank Williams, my old friend. I didn't know you, but I've been places you have been,"<sup>162</sup> whereas this is less about locations than about feelings, hopes, desires and experiences here which are quite comparable between the White Cowboy Country star Williams and Aboriginal peoples in general.

First and foremost, Hank Williams, who died in 1953 at the age of thirty years, has always been considered as one of the most influential as well as popular musicians in (Country) music history due to the fact that tragically lived lives tend to give rise to the creation of legends (cf. Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, etc.), and due to the ability to speak the people from the heart. Williams was also called the "hillbilly Shakespeare" (Smith 296), as his special quality could be found in the way of not only "reaching the audience's guts and head at the same time" (Peterson 248) but also by using simple English effectively for profound emotional effects, revealing that the "key to his greatness as a writer was a simplicity and sincerity" (Peterson 249) easy to be touched by.

At the same time – as is often found with great musicians – the disclosure of the individual soul for the benefit of the moaning public does exact its toll as the musician not only captures the festers and aching pains of one generation (or more) but also more or less undeliberately throws his inner turmoil to the wolves. This kind of brokenness along with the repulsion of current (capitalistic) living conditions and the development of the modern world in general appears to be a basic requirement for public admiration after all.

In this special case then, it seems quite logical that Williams speaks to the hearts of Aboriginal people (although he is a seemingly hated cowboy); apart from the fact that "Cowboys and Indians [are] sharing common time and space, suffering the same fate from the encroaching settlers" (13) as Whidden states it in her essay "Cowboys and Indians: putting the Indian into the Country Music," especially the inner conflict and helplessness creeping up the spine while watching an accelerating world, which does not really propose a place for traditional virtues remind of Native dilemmas. Their master narratives seem to have gotten lost in the Age of Westocentric communication overload (cf. Lippert 272) as well. Hank Williams "remains the prototype of the Country artist as tortured genius, a light and darkness, a dream and a nightmare, a shining example and a shame" (Smith 295), having turned from a "heavenly saint, to defiant outlaw to lonely

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<sup>162</sup> This is from the song "Tribute To Hank Williams."



ghost (Metress 14) in the public eye and having never been able to find a constant identity on a personal level. This confused selfhood, additionally, recalls of pimp and trickster characterizations, figures who are also great with words and convictions, yet slithery and not tangible; as well they constantly acknowledge the little vulgarities and ironies daily life offers.

When Uncle Martin for instance, dressed in blue jeans, boots and Cowboy hat, takes on his new job as a 'professional Indian,' he meets another Cowboy Cree, who is sitting in front of some teepees playing a Hank Williams song on his guitar. Thereby the cowboy talks to 'stoic Martin:'

You're the new guy? This is my teepee. Yours is over there. Next tour bus is at four. Do you like Hank Williams? [Martin nodding] People say I sound just like Hank Williams. Guess, I'm fired now that you're here. I was hired here to provide native-culture music. But I guess they are looking for more of the drums and feathers type. I told them Hank Williams is part of our culture. But they are not going for it. You are not talking much? [Martin shrugging] So what is it you are doing? Maybe that's the answer [Martin sitting with arms over his breast]. (HW 1/4)



Fig. 8.26. *Hank Williams First Nation*: Uncle Martin – being stoic, thereby fulfilling his duties as a professional Indian

"I told them Hank Williams is part of our culture" as well as Huey's explanation "Just think about it: songs about headache, lovesickness, thrown in with a little bit of Honky Tonk and 'Praise the Lord.' Sounds like home, doesn't it?" (HW 1/4), reveal the ironic but conspicuous parallels the Canadian Natives are not only aware of but celebrating as another 'irony of fate' among many concerning the intermezzo of traditionalism and modern culture (sushi dream, (HW 1/6) etc.).

A White Hillbilly born into the US conservatism of the first half of the previous century, Williams had to face many obstacles in life, which correspond with the living circumstances 'Indian outsiders' in North America had and still have to deal with. Metress reveals that Williams came from a broken home with an abusive father and an overprotective mother. From an early age his life was dominated by essential insecurities

## 8. RE-TEACHING: SCAR TALES -- THE ACT OF HEALING

and loneliness while his drug career had already started by the age of thirteen when he became a heavy drinker, an addiction he kept his entire life, later on complemented by pill and other drug dependencies. Hence, his life was one of hiding, especially in the conservative apparently spottless Country Music business which generally tends to demonize scandals (cf. 4 ff.). He was admired like a God but at the same time an outsider in a business, which adored and condemned him at the same time for he "never really got it straight in his mind whether he was writing for Saturday night ... or whether he was writing for Sunday morning" (Metress 19). This strife then leads to different effects: first of all, we are presented a man with an apparent physical vulnerability, being touching for refined peoples as for instance Blues singer B. B. King points out: "this guy is hurting. He is hurting from inside ... many things of this sort are just to me another form of blues sung by other people" (Redd 97). Therefore, we can ascribe a "political timbre" (Lippert 270) to Williams, "an acoustic solidarity ... between genders, race, between the poor. Black audiences recognize elements of their own culture in Williams music" (Lippert 270), a fact applicable to Native culture as well. Secondly, carrying these dilemmas forward, Williams used parallel tactics to overcome or cope with this kind of status of being forsaken and this inner disunity. Williams decided to become a "Figur des Übergangs" (Welsch 42), as he was also called the 'Wanderer,' who refused to accept a permanent identity in order to be intangible as Lippert explains. Yet, this rejection of steadiness can also be ascribed to his helplessness concerning the confusing living conditions he was born into and he tried to defeat by a cross current attempt to reconnect to the already broken (cf. 260). Thus he became the contradictory icon of a conservative revolutionary:

Williams's music and lyrics represent a significant refusal to accept dominant cultural narratives, and that they gave voice to potentials for resistance that remain important to this day. People can be imprisoned by cultural stories as easily as by iron bars .... Indeed, the core insight of contemporary cultural studies has been understanding that people are more frequently contained within cultural narratives than within jail cells. In this context, all refusals are important because they represent a challenge to the prisons of mind and spirit that repress emancipatory hopes.... he gave an individual voice to collective fears and hopes about the body, gender roles and family. (Lippert 260)

Williams longed for the Old Way, before

the nuclear family emerged as the primary social unit whose true home was the suburban shopping mall.... In that context, Hank Williams's fatalism and existential despair rebuked dominant social narratives and spoke directly to the internal psychic

wounds generated by the gap between lived experience and an ideology that promised universal bliss through the emerge of romance and the family as unchallenged centres of personal life. (Lippert 266)

Furthermore, in the context of the former, Hank Williams stood for another ideology truly familiar to the Native one. He presented "a masculine voice that longed for reconnection with the feminine that refused the oedipality of the dominant culture in favor of an almost pre-oedipal craving for intimacy, pleasure and the reconnection with women" (Modleski 79). In Williams' case, "resistance to the oedipal narrative reveals structural weaknesses with the idealized nuclear family and its promises of happiness" (Lippert 268).

Consequently, the parallels between Hank Williams' longing for a pre-oedipal world and Aboriginal longing for their intact tribal communities, yet not based on small units of nuclear families but on communal ones, become obvious. Whereby, this need for place-bound-communal-intimacy also recalls ghetto-Hip-Hop-ethics. *Hank Williams First Nation* with its strong female characters already corresponds to these archetypical needs as the Wapahoo Nation is presented as a 'Pippi Longstocking' healthy one without capitalistic nuclear family mall ethics (cf. Lippert 266). Such being the case, it ironically serves as a heaven not to say a 'city upon a hill' for Hank Williams' desired ideals as well as for Country Music's 'ideal little bitty world'- ideologies (cf. Jackson, A.).

Native people in general, as the fictional community of Wapahoo in particular, acknowledge the cultural similarities this kind of Country Music fandom presents since the show recognizes the flair Natives have for this paradoxical symbiosis between Cowboy and Indian concepts. In this case, Williams' overall disunity has a healing and unifying effect. It not only sublimely addresses Natives' burdens in today's world but it also promotes a healing process, whose main drug is made of humor true to the motto: 'Laughing is the best medicine.' Apart from the fact that music in its essence generally tends to have remedial and beneficial effects, Hank Williams as person and his music are not only the aftereffect of a cultural wound, but at the same time the remedy for the maltreated soul. Both embrace Old Ways as well as postmodern ones at the same time. Wapahoo's inhabitants therefore are attentive enough to acknowledge what Williams has to offer them in order to get well in today's world (namely the medicinal effectiveness of moaning for similar wounds), yet, they also realize the irony in it.

Concerning ideologies, place and credibility Country Music and Hip Hop Music may have more in common than generally expected. Taking a look at the use of these seemingly divergent genres' thought systems in those different series on Natives, we can

detect that the Aboriginal gatherings of their principles reveal a similar opportunity to fuel healing processes of suppressed peoples. Hence, Hank Williams could be considered as a universal 'trickster in Country Music:' he not only reminds of a convertible trickster symbolizing chaos, for he is characterized as light and dark, dream and nightmare, example and shame at the same time (cf. Smith 295), he also raises a kind of 'primal' voice understandable to everybody and designating especially the 'underprivileged' audiences, who admire the fact that suddenly their problems and insufficiencies have been put on the public cultural agenda. That being so, Hank Williams' past, his hopes, and his disasters appear to be alike to Canadian Natives' ones for he still represents the resistance against "oedipal narrative[s]" (Lippert 272) while highlighting the imprisonment of minorities by cultural stories (cf. Lippert 260).

Consequently, a self-depriving Native community in the Canadian bush may call itself Hank Williams FIRST Nation, thereby communicating a subtle hidden social criticism built on the musical oeuvre of a White American 'Redneck' musician called Hank Williams while at the same time up-to-datedly acknowledging the coherence and connections a postmodern world submits to them. Healing with a wink of the eyes seems to be quite a promising endeavour – in contrast to the deadly seriousness with which 'getting-better-processes' are watched within *Moccasin Flats*.

### **PULLING OUT THE KNIFE FROM THE WOUND OR TWISTING IT – WRONG AND RIGHT RECOVERY IN MOCCASIN FLATS**

In *Moccasin Flats*, healing plays an important role as we are presented a very high form of Native breakdown while – in order to strengthen the Canadian First Nations' psyche – 'hope' has to be a main factor transmitted to fulfil the series' educational intent. Therefore, counter poles of 'right healing' and 'wrong healing' are constantly juxtaposed, whereas the show continues its general tactic of delivering two extreme opposites; borderlines nevertheless become quite easy to cross. Failure, success, falling down and rising up again can be considered as logical consequences as well as strategies to trigger the plot lines. Turning to traditionalism and dealing with contemporary culture and (artificial) media emerge as reliable indicators here for those who will struggle, yet be saved in the end, and those who will fail.

We have three different measurements, which are defined by two counter poles, all of them delivering the message of how to heal efficiently after all. They are based on the initial terms 'media culture,' 'community' and 'music,' whereas they all intermingle and serve as barometers for the characters' chance and current status of healing.

Jon for instance arises as the prototype of a 'failing figure' in season two. He starts off with the opportunities a decent family life and the entrepreneur-ship of an organic business offer, does take the wrong turn, though, by trying to expedite his personal cure in the form of an artificial 'Native Better Living DVD.' Finally he has to pay the price for not supporting his community (which would have given him not only personal but also communal redemption) but destroying it by cooking and selling the drug Crystal Meth for personal gain. Consequently, he will end up behind bars never to be seen again (MF 2/1-2/8).

Candy on the contrary chooses the right way by gaining pure traditional knowledge giving her the strength as a social worker to unify the community, determining in that way the great hopeful finale of season three (MF 2/1-3/8).

As Jon sees himself confronted with the temptation of making easy cash with one of the most deadly drugs on today's market, he first tries to resist the call of fast money and later attempts to justify his reprehensible actions by creating an alter ego constantly whispering justifications into his ear. While youngsters are dying on the streets with scum dropping from their



Fig. 8.27. *Moccasin Flats*: Jon's alter ego

mouths while Jon's camera angles turn extreme for once more, and while he is illuminated by artificial blue and yellow light again,<sup>163</sup> he more and more loses himself within the DVD, promising to find him "the power from within." (MF 2/1). After a very short period of time the DVD guru even leaves the television screen, becoming Jon's imaginary friend. In doing so, he reflects Jon's personal power from within, albeit still being a selfish and corrupt one. So, while Jon falls prey to 'fake commercial healing,' Candy follows a different path not only closely linked to credible traditionalism in general but especially music in particular.

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<sup>163</sup> cf. chapter 7.3.

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Since music as universal indicator constantly shapes the series' plot, it seems only logical that concerning healing tactics it plays an essential role as well. Apart from Candy and her quest to find her Native roots (to a great extent through music), Red's and Matt's living circumstances and decisions to be made are dependent on their current personal relationship to music.

Matt for instance is characterized as a good and trustworthy person within the show at the beginning of season two, where we learn that according to classic Native teaching methods, he is the good-willed and patient tutor of the community children's drum class, ergo teaching them traditional ways, ergo contributing to the community's health. When Matt then loses his way for a short period of time (MF 3/1-3/8), we can easily verify his lapse by taking a look at his current relationship to music, which mirrors his indiscretion literally as well as figuratively. As he gives up on Red and therefore on his predominant goal of serving his neighborhood by promoting Native artists, in favor for a R'N'B track called "When it's all wrong, then tell me why it feels all right" sung by Melissa, the black woman he is having an affair with, he not only betrays his girlfriend Tara but also his entire community. This ends in a fist fight to be solved by his aunt Betty, who cannot accuses him of his misdeed and reminds him that this kind of music is too sexist and not for the benefits of his 'hood' (cf. MF 3/7).

The shipwreck of Candy's and Red's relationship can be reconstructed by following the notes of their personal soundtracks within the show as well, which started off as a common one but then split up into two divergent melodies whereby those work anti-proportionally (MF 2/1-3/8). As Red gives up on his calling of writing and performing authentic Hip Hop Music representing street life in order to guarantee Candy a safe future with a regular pay cheque by working in a burger restaurant, he concurrently falls back into his old habits of selling and using drugs since he gives up his destiny in life, which is based on his musical compositions. At the same time, Candy walks a thoroughly different path as she – having met her daughter's step mother on a powwow – builds up a relationship to her baby girl and her new family strongly shaped by traditional teachings and music. She for instance learns to play the drum and to dance, thereby having the first shared experience with her child, which is brightening her soul for the first time within the whole series. This creates a gap between herself and her boyfriend Red, though, as he suddenly feels excluded from what is affecting Candy. Later he realizes that, while he quit his music for her, she refuses to integrate him into her new found music and what comes along with it (Candy: "It's kind of private stuff!" (MF 3/4)), as she wants to be alone practising a new drum song, tells him to smudge first when he asks to touch the

instrument, and turns him down when he wants to join her in visiting her daughter. In the middle of season three, we experience his final downward and Candy's ultimate upward spiral. Both of them are intercut by wipes in a comprehensive way (MF 3/4): Candy is sitting alone in a warm, cozy, brown, reassuring environment drumming and smudging devotedly while Red is tempted to enter a wild, edgy party in a drug house. In both scenes we are presented smoking and drumming being juxtaposed as Candy's smoke is the healthy and holy one of smudging while Red's is the one of dope. Additionally, Candy's drumming takes her into a comfortable and relaxing trance state of mind while the drumming in Red's scene is reminiscent of an execution song, metaphorically the first step to his personal demise.

Comparing Candy to Red and Jon and partly to Matt, we therefore may realize that she manages to resist the temptations the hood tries to seduce her with by finding her way to true traditional virtues and values being taught to her by reliable teachers (the step mother of her child and Aunt Betty). The consequence is a pure, lasting development and a strong sense of identity, keeping her on the right path even when setbacks occur in her life (like her daughter leaving Regina with her new family (MF 3/6)). In the end, she will initiate the great finale of the entire series by having been encouraged by the Elder Betty, who gave her some sacred feathers and told her about healing circles she had attended before (Betty: "The creator has something to do about the mess people are in" (MF 3/8)). Thereby, the former but now inspirited ex-prostitute answers to one of the ultimate Native traditional principles of experiencing "the world as a web of multidimensional interacting relationships that inevitably affect each other, rippling across both space and time. No one acts in isolation: everyone is in that web where all things said and done have repercussions. Healing circles instead of focusing on the misdeed itself, are concerned with the disharmony at its roots, and seek to re-establish harmony by encouraging offenders to genuinely acknowledge the harm they have done" (Dickason, "The Many" 131).

Naturally feeling her community's desperate desire to heal as well as having been equipped with the appropriate tools and a solid intuition to do so effectively, Candy thus decides to perform a public vision quest to "find answers" (MF 3/8). This takes place directly in the 'Flats' right next to the tree one of her young prostitute protégés called Alex had hung herself before. In using this public quest as final climax of the series, we are shown the thought patterns and answers traditionalism offers on several stages. Candy smudges, sings and drums on her own in the beginning, yet she already responds to her

final calling of fusing and unifying anything and everything just like Native cyclic traditions demand of her. Primary and most visible, she amalgamates the community. In doing so, she naturally supports Native tribal ideologies of creating a balanced-out community with her '(neighbor)-hood' as she stays alone only for a very short period of time: first of all the sex-trade workers arrive and sit with her, and time after time everybody – even the greatest enemies – join in as the pimps and gang members take part as well as the Elders, Amanda, Matt and in the very end the wasted Red admitting his wrong doings and crying for help. In showing this overall unification, the show perpetuates in the idea that traditional principles like a vision quest – although many of the peoples' souls and hearts seem to have been destroyed by numbing them with drugs in order to escape the debilitating traumas – are so rooted and so strong that they still advance the inner selves of a broken people. After all, they keep having the medicinal properties of spreading soothing peace and giving hope.

At the same time, Candy is not only unifying the community for the first time but also – by following her visions – linking different spheres being a skill the 'hood'-youth seems to have lost. She is not only connecting the diverse strands of the show by bringing together the contrasting characters but the filmic means support her actions as well as the soundtrack accompanying this scene is not only shaped by traditional drumming but also by Hip Hop and guitar music – that way giving a legitimization to all of these genres in a modern Native world. Additionally, the camera angles reveal her attachment to the sacred place where she is doing her quest. For the many bird's-eye perspectives, often wide shots, not only capture the gathering of her people and Regina's skyline but also give the scene an ethereal touch for Candy appears to be directly corresponding with heaven. Furthermore, she employs modern means to do so as she donates photos of Alex and her and Red to get in touch. Later we even get evidence for this universal linkage as casually dressed Candy has a vision of dead Alex, who is wearing a traditional outfit and smiling at her for the first time within the entire series, spreading the feelings of hope, strength and forgiveness. Additionally, Candy's attempt to re-unite with Red also seems to have worked out as he appears to have heard her spiritual call to him.

So generally, Candy in line with Silas has managed to walk the tightrope between traditionalism and postmodernism.<sup>164</sup> Her vision quest is based on the Old Ways. Yet, it is also profoundly shaped by modern means, an intermingling, which finally climaxes in

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<sup>164</sup> cf. chapter 'Tarantino Would Be Proud Of You.'



the fact that her ritual is gaining that much public attention that a camera team arrives



Fig. 8.28 and 8.29. *Moccasin Flats*: Candy finding her people's remedy

reporting from the 'hood.' Thereby it is giving the neighborhood and its problems public attention for the first time (Reporter: "They have been struggling with alcohol and drug addiction for decades!" (MF 3/8)). Therefore, Candy is able to complete a circle, which combines basically all of the diverse aspects mentioned before, giving them the right to blend with each other without judging their particular worth. Transitions are smooth, everything is related to everything, which is stressed by technical means of editing

via wipes, soundtrack, props, etc. Hence, Candy couples the different protagonists of the 'Flats,' she connects diverse musical styles, as well as she includes Regina as a place, the ground her people is living on.<sup>165</sup> Almost incidentally she is getting Old and New Ways on board, enhancing traditionalism to adjust it to today's living circumstances, consequently controlling the cultural pendulum well. Nonetheless, only pure traditionalism (not the one Jon and his DVD present for instance) is able to be efficiently equated with postmodern tendencies and whenever that is possible there is a chance of hope, of making the splintered parts whole and the diseased and crippled roots grow again (cf. Dickason, "The Many" 131).

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<sup>165</sup> cf. chapter 'North Of Decent.'

## POSTMODERN PENDULUM DOWSING – OR ACTIVATE YOUR SELF-HEALING POWERS

In today's Native world, traditionalism and postmodernism seem to be the key values, the cornerstones of creating a life worth living. Whereby those two thought patterns form counter poles connecting an 'imaginary swinging scale,' on which every First Nation person has to level off him or herself in order to find a balance in his/her shaping of identity. After all, there are some components to be considered, which manipulate the 'cultural pendulum' like more or less strongly blowing winds named 'community,' 'attitudes to culture of commodities,' and 'relationship to stereotyping.' All of our television shows propagate different approaches and diverse validations in terms of the divergent healing abilities on various scale locations between these two poles. Notwithstanding, all of them convey the assumption that the extreme deflection to one side can never be beneficial for a stable counselling of the Native soul.

Trying out this pendulum, every show provides the audience with characters gliding along the 'imaginary scale,' changing the space to one or the other pole constantly in this manner. Taking a look at the different tactics of how to deal with Old and New Ways, between traditionalism and postmodernism, in order to find a balance and to heal the broken psyche of a Nation, we may realize that all of the shows lead a rather relaxed relationship with the 'babel of the postmodern world.' Consumerism will not be condemned but it is practised or even celebrated; traditionalism always shines through, though: be it subliminal as a rubber-like object in *The Rez*, reminding the audience of a great cultural loss in a humorous way, be it seemingly frittered away on TV screen but then becoming a life-and-death-issue like in *Moose TV*, be it a beloved ironical complicity with a Cowboy pop culture icon like in *Hank Williams First Nation*, or be it – enhanced – the finale redemption as in *Moccasin Flats*.

Overall, the recognition and the fluent steering towards both of these poles, first and foremost, help not only to cure the psychological wounds but to control a new Native identity as they allow an autonomously-oriented representation of heritage and current living circumstances, proving the ability to act and be part of today's world that way. Hereby, the acknowledgment of postmodern standards and characteristics can serve as a remedy to liberate oneself from the old, rusty historical stereotypes Natives had and have to face to this day. In letting postmodern features enhance traditionalism, these series therefore show Natives in an 'updated 2.0 way,' so to speak, giving them not only a three-dimensionality that movies like *Dances With Wolves*, set in the nineteenth

century, are not able to accomplish, but also an opportunity to walk away from the social periphery of being 'out-of-time-and-out-of-place.' Since their meta-narratives have been destroyed to a much greater and much more definite extent anyway, these shows reveal that under the eyes of Western culture, boasting about their abilities to create complex accelerating worlds of hybridity constantly, First Nations are able to snap up their chance of filling their vacuum with inflammable matter.

As shape shifters and "Figuren des Übergangs" (figures of transition) (Welsch 41) confronted with the burden of involuntarily living in two worlds, Canada's Aboriginals secretly have risen as their own "Meister der Versatzstücke" (masters of pawns) (Felix 154). This can be spotted in these shows, as they manage to create an interaction, a permanently swinging pendulum of flexibility, between traditionalism and postmodernism, whereby meta-narratives are dismantled and compiled again and foreign worlds are linked to make new ones. In this way, Native people become their own apotheosized creators, earning a departure from the shadows of meaninglessness and an arrival in a contemporary culture built up according to their needs, evolving from their historical foundations. Consequently, in combining Old and New Ways, not only a relevance is proven to today's world and a special kind of Native cultural sensitivity is spread but also a promising remedy is presented, whose newly tested ingredients could be able to heal the psychological traumas of a Nation.

# **PART NINE: THE REPERCUSSION – CONCLUSION**

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## **9.1 CUPPING WHAT HAS BEEN DONE**

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There is, Chakotay, from the *Star Trek Voyager* series; but, most would agree he's more of a Latino with a bad tattoo. They never really defined what Nation he comes from.... I love the palm pilot thingee he has that speeds up vision quests. It's a quite remarkable device. Place it in your hand, turn it on, and in a few minutes you're communing with your spirit guide or ancestors. In terms of vision/dream quests, it's quite a little time saver. I want one. Fasting for days can really eat away at your space exploration time. It's a pity there's no such gadget for land claim settlements.

Other than Commander Herrington<sup>166</sup>, the skies and stars are a little lean on Native influences. Perhaps it's because Native people are often thought of as being more historical in reference. When the public thinks of us, it's often in terms of the vanishing Indian. Even today they imagine images of yesteryear: living in teepees, riding horses, chasing buffalos.... When we think of ourselves, it is also in terms of the past and of all the things we've lost in the last five hundred years: land, language, customs, resources. In terms of our future, we always seem to be looking back to the past to recover what we lost. (Taylor, *Furious 27*)

While Drew Hayden Taylor primarily concentrates on the contradictory media representation of a future Native in space, we can detect numerous problems, failures and contradictions concerning the reception of First Nations in Canada but also veracity, acknowledgment, hope and chances with respect to the enhancement of Aboriginal media depiction. Within his columns Taylor keeps reminding us of the long-term disastrous historical developments triggered by a variety of clashes between Canada's First Inhabitants and the White intruders. He furthermore, keeps illuminating the far-reaching consequences, which have been spreading and entrenching themselves in Native life while allying and mutating like a chemical experiment, thereby creating a Hulk-like figure<sup>167</sup> apparently out of everybody's control, be it within the realms of Native personal identity-building, media representation or public observation.

Analysing *Voyager's* Chakotay, we are confronted with a) poorly practised media images ("Latino with a bad tattoo") – which has not even altered beyond painted non-Natives in a far ahead future; b) the refusal to attribute respect to Native cultural heritage in defining it correctly (homogenization = "never really defined what Nation he came

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<sup>166</sup> This is the first Native American who went to space.

<sup>167</sup> This is a comic figure who due to an experiment uncontrollably transforms into a green monster.

from"); but also c) postmodern assimilation of traditions ("palm pilot thingee"); d) the evolutionary adaption of the Western virtues of an accelerating world ("quite a little time saver"); (e) the Native intelligent humor of combining teasing, self-mockery and addressing historical crimes ("I want one;" "It's a pity there's no such gadget for land claim settlements"); yet, additionally, f) historical facts having provoked a negative public image ("Even today they imagine images of yesteryear") as well as a crank self-image ("When we think of ourselves, it is also in terms of the past"); and g) a critical analysis concerning the self-depiction of a potential future of Natives in Canada ("In terms of our future, we always seem to be looking back to the past to recover what we lost").

Taking a look at a science fiction series becomes a delicate and contradictory task, since science fiction in general is mainly built on an image of what a far ahead future may hold while 'future' appears to be a term experienced like an oxymoron concerning Native people.

Notwithstanding, in order to delineate a possible realistic future and in order to close the gap between the apparent contradiction of a meaningful Native future and a fertile, yet deleted Native past, we first had to concentrate on that past (part 2 to 4) in order to analyse and define a Native present (and presence) (part 6 to 8) – being a mere media one – yet, nonetheless able to serve as a remedy for the prospect of a better future. Just as the future is the natural time slot for science fiction shows, the present is therefore naturally employed as the time slot for current Canadian television shows on Aboriginals. For these series have understood the current zeitgeist and the imminent need to liberate Canadian Natives from the demons of a lost past, and in doing so presenting them a steady platform in the contemporary mediascape.

To understand the subliminal statements of our television shows, Native history and culture have to be taken as 'home base of our enterprise' in order to portray the Native psyche and in order to measure what multilayered thought patterns were destroyed, when the White 'dominant race' took over, which led us onto a path through a wasteland of broken peoples and chiselled stereotypes like decayed statues along the wayside. The stereotypes have become so persistent in the Canadian public that they – in a self-repeating loop – have started to dictate the broken people's real life again in the form of shaping their self-portrayal but also overall political decision-making, both then strongly supported by a new force called television.

What these shows on Canadian Natives represent here is the takeover of this new force, resulting in a take over of media self-depiction, which in a counteracting action is

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may be able to seize the stereotypes and unveil them within the realm of television, thereby changing the public- and the self-image in real life. Hereby, television series' strategies and ideologies according to different genres may become as essential helpers to split the wasteland as the employment of typical Native characteristics like attitudes towards cultural habits or the all-overshadowing Native humor. In using television shows as an instrument to expose the roots of contemporary Native culture, our First Nations series thereby try to illuminate the new (sometimes troubled) processes of growth, concerning their formerly clipped Garden of Eden by addressing sexuality and gender issues, concerning their recoupage of Canadian (media) space by dealing with Native's relationship to land, and concerning the healing of their roots by promoting advanced self-governed teaching methods.

### **SHRINKING SEX AND GENDER**

In terms of gender and sexuality, reality paints the harsh picture of a clipped Garden of Eden, which had been kept a strict watch on, and which was besieged with regulations, pedantic ethics and morals and populated with pigeonholed stereotypes like 'Playful Pocahontases,' 'Voluptuous Squaws,' 'Horny Rapists,' or 'Exotic Historical über-Savages.' Hence, the sexually rather free Native body was destroyed: the forced denial of sensuality and erotica in many cases led to a loss of personal identity as natural ties to the surrounding world were devalued as perverse, and therefore the connection of mind and body – the main condition for a balanced dialog with nature – had been disconnected for good, leaving the Native pure sensuality behind. Furthermore, the Native body was also torn apart on a communal basis since well-balanced social fabrics were ruined. What was left in the end and still exists to this day is Canada's 'saddest Nation,' often characterized by harsh gang life, pimping, hooking and drug abuse as a substitute for family bounds.

Contemporary series on Natives reveal the dealings with a lost sexuality and the search for a new one as well as complicated gender issues as one of the main underlying topics. By doing so, a permanent fight can be witnessed on diverse battlegrounds, be it in the sandpits of small town/reserve life or the wasteland of metropolitan ghettos., whereby the Native warriors mostly break out from the fake realm

of lust while the re-entering of the liberating pure garden is targeted but, indeed, hard to accomplish again. Yet, the different shows make it their business – also according to television and genre plot line and character-building requirements – to set the opponents against each other and present a detailed report on military tactics, motives and opponents' war equipment, (subliminally) establishing a socio-cultural critique to unveil why this battle has to be fought in the first place.

Hereby, Amazon-like Native women in comedies have more importance in almost every instance as they pull towards the fulfillment of goals in life beyond their socially imposed limitations, reuniting their community on the side. Furthermore, they become nimble-fingered in defusing the biological weapon and pull towards the acknowledgment of their personal identity, regaining control and bodily autonomy. In doing so, the members of this new generation of young Canadian Aboriginal women become the latest significant role models for Aboriginal resistance, as they – apart from blurred gender boundaries everybody has to cope with nowadays – self-determinedly rise from gender identities and molested individual bodies, which often have literally been raped and left behind traumatized. What comes out in the end are modified 'Pocahontases,' propagating three-dimensionality by adding new attributes and characteristics to this stereotype, fitting current social needs. Therefore, we are presented the 'Anti-/Warrior/ Guerilla/Postmodern/Cam-Shy/Cinderella/Nun/Feminist/Gay-Pocahontas,' who consequently keeps living up to her ideals, combining them with postmodernism to blow off the dust from the shopworn 'Pocahontas'-stereotype and creating her arena in the contemporary world, in which she will be challenging the enemies and fighting them inexhaustibly.

The male counterparts are characterized as warriors as well but only in their little sandpits, fighting with spades while their female opponents go into the bush not to pick up berries but to hunt all by themselves. This development may have occurred due to a hardly bearable identity loss: what all these boys have in common is that they cling to the 'Peter Pan-red-balloon-of-endless-childishness' in perfecting male bonding built on pranks, illusionary sandpit ideas of a brighter future, and the adoration of musical genres or media icons nonviable in 'real life' like Heavy Metal Music or comic and juvenile paragons. Furthermore, they keep experiencing life as a playground of unlimited opportunities, be it the start-up of a TV station (*Moose TV*), or various ventures concerning entrepreneurship like buying a motley old ice-cream truck (*Hank Williams*

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*First Nation*), or organizing a pudding mud-wrestling match (*The Rez*), yet, like children, being able to take only one consequence when failing: running away.

Hence, they enforce the idea of an inability to deal with manliness, not only the one of a classic 'breadwinner' in today's society but also the one of an 'Ultramasculine Menial,' 'Erotic Exotic,' or 'Protective/Committing Noble Savage.' They are apparently more committed to one another than to their scary, imperious (almost/on/off) girlfriends while projecting and perfecting the image of 'dis-virility' by inhabiting weak bodies and failing in male stripping (*The Rez*) or looking like childish Astrid Lindgren characters with Prince Valiant hair cuts and Cheshire cat smiles (*Hank Williams First Nation*). As a result, they contradict the 'horse riding, chiselled nosed, sharp eyed, muscular "über-Indian" (Taylor, "Indian" 27-28) dressed in leather' all along the line. In having arranged themselves in their little sandpit realms, they create a simplified place, in which practically nothing is expected of them – on a sexual as well as an intellectual level. They refuse to grow up and to be dominant or reliable since they feel that in this world of capitalistic expectations they cannot become a valuable member of society due to social limitations resulting from Western take over and cultural destruction.

Far beyond innocence are the drama characters, though. While the 'Postmodern Pocahontases' in the different sitcoms are regularly confronted with 'White Seductresses' and nerve-racking 'Native Comical Dumb Friends' mostly on a genre typical 'binary opposition/outlandish situation' basis, the drama 'Pocahontian Warriors' – according to character development, 'state of normalcy/pollution/guilt/redemption/purification-principles' and action driven plots of villains and heroes – fight temptations of life and serious enemies. Those are mostly ruthless men from their own ranks, being in line with the 'Bloodthirsty-Rapist.' Yet, this occurs in a contemporary adjusted state: the one of the 'Native Pimp.'

On the other side, we are presented the effects of a history of oppression: former patterns of healthy, balanced societies have been painfully replaced by communities held together by domination and subordination, whereby the victimized woman vegetates out at the lowest end. Daily routine is strongly shaped by classical Hip Hop ethics, appearing only logical, since the history of Blacks' and Natives' repression reveals many similarities.

Fighting on the battlefields of the metropolitan jungles becomes a life task. Hereby, masculinity and virility are acknowledged as the most efficient weapons, leading to the acquisition of material capitalistic status symbols while at the same time climbing the community constructed pyramid of dominance, and in doing so leaving weaker



individuals on the way side. In embodying the role of the 'Ultramasculine Savage Warrior' of today, broken Native young are shown who attempt to gain back control, which seems to be easily accessible by occupying the female body and using it as a mere commodity. Thereby, they separate mind and body even more. Consequently, erotica is mostly still experienced as a destructive venture in these societies, this time involuntarily supported by the Natives themselves: the irritated male desperately tries to gain back subjectivity and presence to feed his wasted self. Yet, he does so at the costs of Native women whom he forces to objectification and absence, accelerating the vicious circle of delinquency, sexual and drug abuse and shattered families faster and faster. Concurrently, many characters correspond to former stereotypes in a careless way in proudly impersonating a contemporary image of the 'Horny, Bloodthirsty Rapist,' or giving in to the 'Voluptuous Squaw' (*Moccasin Flats*).

Notwithstanding, we can also detect 'Pocahontian Warriors' and prospective 'Pocahontian Warriors' here, who refuse to give in to the willingness of making bodily sacrifices but live a quite balanced-out eroticism. At the same time, they invade the metropolitan action show environment which tends to be loud, impulsive, contorted and male-oriented. In being goal oriented, rational thinking and physically strong, they represent law and order and are the embodiment of common cultural values, the bearer of actions and the executor of justice, and that being so, they declare war on archetypal Western narratives of patriarchalism.

After all, although most of the male protagonists in all of these series are divided into 'Ultramasculine Warriors,' 'Good-Puppy-Eyed Indians' and 'Childlike Mollycoddles,' (one group trying to stabilize itself by performing violence and objectifying weaker persons due to the absence of morals based on pure sensuality and family bonding, the other refusing to stabilize itself at all in the world of the grown-ups), both seemingly divergent poles are rather bound to the body than to the mind. One group is dependent on physical power to feel the body, the other uses a child-like egoism of basic bodily needs to be fulfilled. Here, in this case, bodies are the main thing the boys are able to respond to as the mind appears to be stuck in a rather rudimentary state (only Silas of *The Rez* grows out of in the very end). As vacuums need to be filled, liquid arrives in the form of media substitutes like comic figures or musical genres.

Women on the contrary, have taken over the role of the responsible provider, the supporter of the community, and as well, they are able to protect themselves and foster their personal development. Thereby, the female protagonists tend to stay marginal to

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their bodies directing their efforts rather to the training of their intellect, thus taking over the roles of their male counterparts.

In presenting these divergent modified, counteracting, three-dimensional characters, who only correspond to classical White stereotyping as a well-placed critique or a 'good laugh,' the goal of **down**-sexualizing today's Canadian Natives from the very heights of the 'realm of lust' to a place where 'Über-Natives' become 'normal every other' Canadian members of society, appears to have been most widely reached.

### MINIATURIZING LAND

Corresponding with a separation of mind and body, are First Nations' interactions with environments in these series, as the enforced disconnection of not only body and mind, but also body, mind and surrounding nature have led to a rather exceptional character experience of the shows' locales. Hereby, the settings serve as indicator for the loss of the ability to achieve a natural symbiosis with nature, as well as the sometimes sad, sometimes humorous efforts to regain it. As land has formerly played such an important role in Native Nations' self-perception and their all-embracing way of living, the setting and the dealings with places in these television series have to be understood as much more essential than only functioning as a 'background image.' Before, the Canadian grounds were perceived as a source of personal and communal equilibrium, as a means to communicate with the different world's spheres, and as an admonisher and guide to live life according to reciprocal ideologies. The connection between land and individuals determined the entire Native cosmos. When the Adam/Noah disciples then arrived with their mighty running, creaking arks loaded with imperialistic hardware (cf. Neu 42) to conquer and trim their ersatz-Garden of Eden due to a belief in capitalism and social Darwinism, the petite Native canoe, floating in a fluid world in motion, became chained and cemented. The Aboriginals were mostly left behind – petrified, banned to rough terrain and finally forgotten while the 'dominant race' in an ironic twist of 're-naturalization' and the worshipping of a color called green, suddenly appeared to begin to feel the persistent desire to re-connect to something they never had a connection to in the first place. Within the shows, 'place' becomes a remedy and a memorial to the same extent: for it either presents a deep, reassuring rootedness fertile home turf can offer, or illuminates what a contaminated wasteland does to 'stateless' people, involuntarily

having had to build their ego-hood on it. Therefore, as the major identity-determiner, it becomes a vehicle for resistance culture. It technically indicates the recovery of land in the hostile mediascape by creating a time slot in the often rather ignorant Canadian broadcasting arena as well as textually permitting the annexation of land within the plot line in order to characterize the protagonists.

Thereby, comedies – according to family friendly genre demands – naturally correspond to a nostalgic 'Country music'-like longing for quirky but stable small town life. Thus, they reveal its cornerstones of protection, communal understanding, forgiveness, familial love and an indelible feeling of a kind of belonging, overshadowed by a colorful bombastic landscape, reminding of the Garden of Eden and proving constantly why Canada's number one sight is its sensational wilderness. This affiliation to a familiar place emerges as dysfunctional as far as, for instance, animals are concerned, for they are either non-existent, dead (*The Rez*), eating cake in supermarkets (*Hank Williams First Nation*) or little fuzzy puppets serving as 'contemporary animal helpers' (*Moose TV*). Nonetheless, the homeland is perceived as so overwhelming that departure, be it the prospects of a metropolitan life style or the mere metaphorical employment of means of transportation (impractical boats/broken ice-cream trucks) appears to be an unnecessary endeavor.

In a harsh documentary style, dramas on the contrary visualize the 'real' Native 'savage' overtaking of metropolitan neighborhoods and districts (*Moccasin Flats*). Yet, they are kept invisible by the public, as these brutalized no-man's-lands have undergone an unwelcome transformation to autonomous, anarchic war zones within the country that complements itself with being reckoned as one of the most tolerant, liveable places in the world. Concurrently, big towns keep being experienced similar to the depiction of the latter in sitcoms except for the fact that the big town inhabitants can barely escape the intoxication of a place shaped by a capitalistic society, constraining and strangling them. Consequently, to numb the pain the up-rooted ones have to find remedies and placebos like the steering towards the musical genre of Hip Hop. This music – in its very nature of 'defining the individual over place' – appears to give them footing, instructions, directions and a justification at the same time, to live the lifestyle of a ghetto outlaw only bound to codes and morals the soundtrack of his/her life imposes on him/her. Additionally, the music promotes the anarchic declaration of re-conquering urban third party property.

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Slumbering deep down, though, seems to be a feeling of entrapment, becoming most obvious in rare moments of a true experience of the 'homelike' outdoors.

Sitcoms naturally tend to convey 'home is where the heart is' and 'live and let live' attitudes, and in doing so try to integrate every audience by making use of hidden desires of attachment and harmonic networks by arousing an overall longing of belonging to a reliable tribal community, be it Native or not. Dramas, however, confront us with 'live and let die' stances, reminding us of a reality based on living on the 'right or wrong side of the tracks,' thereby presenting a hushed up 'Canadian reality of suppression, horror and violence next door' in prime time television. In doing so, they openly confirm First Nations current disastrous daily routines of 'inbetweenness' and cultural as well as local rupture, having been swept under the table for decades while at the same time intending to force White audiences to realize what colonization has done to the Original Inhabitants of Turtle Island. Consequently, police/action dramas paint locations in a harsh light: picture-postcard aesthetics of a Miami crime scene bathed in holiday-like sunlight with the mighty, brilliant blue ocean in the background and delinquencies solved in 42 minutes by beautiful and stylish people are left to *CSI: Miami*:<sup>168</sup> Regina crime scenes are bathed in scorching and boiling painful sun light, the faded houses in the background are rotten, the people are presented as 'realistic' and 'imperfect,' delinquencies will never be fully stopped and go on and on and most culprits will stay unpunished.

Revealing contradictory statements, the dramas and sitcoms nevertheless strive for the same goal, namely the acknowledgement of First Nations in the Canadian mediascape of entertainment since if you are steadily visible on the small screen you are also likely to become visible in the real world. Hereby, sitcoms representing small town life at the Canadian periphery – speaking on a mere local basis – attempt to push a seemingly spaced out minority to the centre of common public attention and attraction, for they invite everyone to dream of role-model-like life of reassurance and balance and incidentally this time it happens to be a Native one. Drama settings, on the contrary, pay tribute to Canadian Natives' reality and may horrify the White audience at the same time by confronting it with its central location usually ignored, as First Nations in general have been banned to the margin in the public mind. At the same time, though, the series offer

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<sup>168</sup> cf. chapter 'The Ugly.'

a means of identification in the form of a Hip Hop music life style. For it is excessively utilized, equipping the show with credibility, as well as a public adolescent appeal since Hip Hop in Western society has been one of the hippest musical genres in the last several years.

Hence, these series' opportunities should not be underestimated. They cannot only serve the Native societies as a media emergency aid for the re-acquisition of self-awareness as well they impersonate a postmodern muskrat's back-biting attempt at resistance, unveiling the modern mediatized form of a 'Radical Guerilla Indian.' They also 'come with' a side effect quite naturally: these shows could be employed as boundaries for they mark a chance for the longed for separation from the overpowering US American television by creating a televised Canadian identity of its own. In acknowledging the unique postmodern Native exoticism created, which is based on First Nations' traditional ideologies of place and on current pop cultural ones, they hold out the prospect of a general compatible Canadian mediascape, idiosyncratic in its charm and at the same time entertaining, innovative, sophisticated, progressive and far from turning a blind eye on its First Inhabitants like the US for instance does. So in terms of 'place and locale,' these shows **re-map** First Nations on the contemporary Canadian landscape. Giving them a spot in the current mediascape can additionally not only make them more visible on screen but, according to TV's public authority, may guarantee them a new, not erasable spot on the Canadian map in general.

## **ABRIDGING TEACHING**

After having been driven into the 'realm of lust' with a creaking ark loaded with weapons, First Nations then had to deal with the historical transmission of this defeat, which was slaughtering the semantics of a culture, even ensouling its syntax. When it comes to the role of teaching and processing history concerning Native and White nations, we again may realize that divergent forces were at work in European and Turtle Island societies. One was, first and foremost concerned with thought patterns of floating free and letting go, meaning giving wings to grow in terms of child-rearing and giving roots grow in terms of historical perception without using elbows; the other was mainly corresponding to ideologies of stanching and caging up, meaning the need to clip wings

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in terms of '(Native) education' and to clip roots in terms of (Native) oral traditions. In giving up to Western paternalistic principles, the conquerers often took over the role of wicked stepfathers in need to paint the faces of their archaic, step children as white as possible by injecting Western morals and ethics into their veins. And in failing to do so, the Natives were finally metaphorically dragged by their arms and thrown into places that they would not disturb.

When television took over the role of the fatherly educator in the previous century then, watching over all of his children with a "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55) and having dollar signs in its eyes, it naturally supported the Western thought systems of patriarchal societies, often reducing the dumb, one-dimensional, historical 'Indian' to an easily manageable screen icon, dug out whenever required. Thereby, television common strategies of stereotyping have always played into the hands of government and public propaganda, for TV – as the postmodern administrative extension – has been caging the 'Indian' in his "psychic prison" many times (Fleras, *Mass* 307) by giving weight to his insurmountable otherness and morphing him permanently, in its persistence leading to an unbelievably unrealistic image.

The Canadian television shows on Natives we discussed, though, refuse to represent Aboriginals as stoic, old-fashioned, clueless stepchildren overstrained with any principles and legislation the modern world has to offer, for they have autonomously and auto-didactically taken over TV stations or the financing of construction projects (*Moose TV* and *Hank Williams First Nation*). Concerning governmental financial help for instance they will be presented as having the upper hand by a) conforming stereotypes superficially to then b) making use of their benefits for their own ends in order to support the community's well-being in the form of re-directing grant money to useful construction zones. In confirming the contemporary 'Stoic Indian 2.0' or the 'Feet on the Desk Indian,' Western prejudices are exploited with a wink of an eye, conveying a subliminal feeling of superiority. Concerning the painful topic of administrative family splitting, even sitcoms become serious and accusatory to some extent. Notwithstanding, they mostly present a picture of split up, yet strong Native families, who have regained their safety nets and parental survival kits.

Consequently, in refusing to ban First Nations to a place that is "safe, exotic somewhere else" (Switzer 21-22) and in letting Canada's unwelcome parasite Native stepchildren rebel against paternalism and deal with current governmental issues in a sophisticated and ironic way, Natives are portrayed as socially acceptable and

independent. They master Western shaped television shows, thus, changing the curriculum. In doing so, they take over the responsibility of a grown up, fully-aged and fully accepted member of modern society, far from being excluded like a kid having to go to bed early, liberated from the role of an underprivileged child, and awarded the position of a self assured decision-maker.

Becoming a self-conscious representative with attitude is strongly connected to the premise of having been given a media voice: oral history has formerly been devaluated by Western societies while modern media – if even – have forced spectacular, yet unrealistic and painful 'truths' upon the Native psyche. Here, sitcoms pay special attention to Native commenting, working on different levels, sometimes on a mere technical basis as filmic voice-overs, sometimes in a more hidden, yet, nevertheless, effective way. Protagonists within the plot line are given tools to personally influence the perception of the story, tools like hand cameras making them directors (*Moose TV*), the authority over airwaves making them radio DJ's (*Hank Williams First Nation*), or the sudden knowledge that their profession has to be the one of a postmodern storyteller (*The Rez*). In being equipped with the power to comment individually as well as universally, these figures are given an independent voice. Additionally, they develop the ability to keep the community together, shape atmospheres on their own while even linking scenes on a filmic basis, and in doing so creating dense off-screen space fostering the show's three-dimensionality. Furthermore, in being rather autarkic, they provide a secure media space from stereotyping and a complementary ticket for socio-cultural criticism as well.

Dramas, in this case, make use of diverse contemporary media tools, too, in order to promote the Native voice to be heard loudly in today's world. Therefore, they employ the postmodern tool of the interactive, democratic world wide web as overall teenager counselor, fostering the free authorship of adolescents and the acknowledgement of their problems, and linking the audience with the protagonists in long lasting effects (*renegadepress.com*). Or they alter the role of the traditional trickster into the Hip Hop pimp, who is writing the soundtrack of the protagonists' lives, claiming authorship, and interweaving the mere filmic actions, the scenes, the figures' stories and the history of his people sustainably (*Moccasin Flats*).

In employing television, the principle storyteller of our times, for their own ends and in staffing the shows with divergent contemporary 'Red Bards,' a new cultural memory is constructed. Furthermore, a media self-government is promoted, thus

translating Native narratives into a postmodern form of Canadian media pidgin and in doing so creating new meta-narratives adjusted to Natives' current needs and desires. Additionally, in mostly circumventing the classic "pale male gaze" (Fleras, *Media* 55), a rather autonomously built media identity can be invented. This serves bildungsroman-aesthetics, as the different shows to a great extent seem to bet on the depiction of modern visual Native bard's subjective experiences, making use of television series' principles of process over conclusion and giving way to its positive abilities of fostering communal sense, spreading intimacy as well as its democratic belief in the competence of addressing everybody.

Hereby, all the series discussed walk a tightrope of apparent counter poles. They lean towards archetypical Aboriginal storytelling principles to honor and remind viewers of the ethics and abilities of their traditional culture, yet, they employ postmodern resources in order to defend the formerly described place on the contemporary Canadian map. They not only tell the stories but tend to use storytelling abilities as plot line to characterize protagonists. Thereby, they are not being caught in the "Aaron Spelling-Beethoven dilemma" (Beaty 18)<sup>169</sup> for they produce authentic national symbols (cf. Kilpatrick 5) while presenting ways to rescue the Canadian media landscape from the ghost of its unsatisfactory middleness in so far as the lively interaction with the exotic periphery fosters multiculturalism naturally.

The cure for the First Nations Peoples' broken souls, resulting from their abduction to a realm of stereotyping by imperialistic hardware (cf. Neu 42) distorted by intoxicated historical transmission, appears to be the main goal of all of those series. Hence, the shows attempt to medicate the broken Nations with diverse drugs: be it the general overtaking of media portrayal, or the offering of viable role models or the mere acknowledgement of today's disastrous daily routines. Consequently, all series are subliminally shaped by the topic of healing and recovery. Since the Native identity has been split (by exterior forces), it naturally fits postmodern principles of the adoration of inconstant, ruptured alterable individuality, indicating that the frozen 'Historical Indian' in reality can be considered as an aspirant concerning the most successful way of operating within differences.

As one of these shows' main functions is to serve as entertaining life aid, healing processes are accompanied, presenting a metaphorical pendulum, which is swinging

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<sup>169</sup> cf. chapter 'The Knotted.'



between postmodernism and traditional culture, balancing the shaping of identity constantly. Whereby, the winds of community support, the attitudes towards stereotyping and the culture of commodities take their toll. In today's world, the extreme deflection to one side will not be beneficial for the healing of the soul, as rather the recognition and fluent steering towards both these poles help to cure but also to control a new identity. It allows an autonomously-oriented declaration of heritage and current living circumstances. Hence, the acknowledgement of contemporary standards frees the media representation of a Canadian Aboriginal from the rusty stereotypes while postmodern features like media performed vision quests (*Moccasin Flats*) or the steering towards common Country music icons (*Hank Williams First Nation*) enhance traditionalism and create an updated 2.0 three-dimensionality. Consequently, the Native protagonists are "Figuren des Übergangs" (Welsch 41). Confronted with the burden of living in two worlds, they see this as a chance, thereby becoming masters of flexibility as meta-narratives are dismantled and compiled again and foreign worlds are linked to create new ones. In the end, they emerge as their own apotheosized creators accomplishing the departure from the periphery of meaninglessness and fostering the arrival in a contemporary culture built up according to their needs. In being postmodern shape shifters, a relevance appears to be proven in today's world. Furthermore, new remedies are presented, which may be able to heal the psychological traumata of a Nation for the tales of the scars have finally undergone healing. As a relieving consequence, Canadian Natives are able to re-teach their history and they do so on broadband basis by making use of the opportunities one of their former greatest enemies, television, (as being the prototype of superficiality and icon-admiration) has to offer, true to the motto: if you cannot defeat your enemy, make him your ally.

## **9.2 ALLYING WITH THE ENEMY**

Television shows are often underestimated, yet constantly present in practically every Western home. They serve as spin doctors for the real world far more intensely and sustainably than commonly acknowledged. Although, we are discussing television series, and – by talking about them – reality and fiction tend to get blurred, we nevertheless may acknowledge that this amalgamation has been a main means of forming culture in the previous century. Notwithstanding, television shows are often still discounted as not representative of a society's matters, let alone a decisive factor concerning the interpretation of current culture or the ponderous vehicle of reflecting history. Taking a look at all of these enforced characteristics, one of the most used media instruments of today (with the exception maybe, of the internet) may keep reminding us of the Western perception of the orality of former times as being too subjective and not factual enough.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, TV series do not seem to be able to represent history properly or even be perceived as valuable enough to interpret and then deduce cultural developments and contemporary ideologies from them.

Yet, by taking a look at Native oral history as well as television history, especially concerning Canadian First Nations on the small screen, we may acknowledge that the characteristic of being entertaining does not presume a kind of simplicity, providing a humanistic elite with the justification of television series as easily ignorable by scientific research. Commercial TV shows tend to be one of the major opinion makers in today's world. They not only address everybody, the non-elite as well as the elite, they are on a mere technical basis permanently interfering into daily life, and in doing so, they are slowly but sustainably changing opinions and attitudes of the people who watch them, even if it is 'just in an incidental way.' Thereby, these shows unveil their widespread potentials of serving as 'postmodern bards' or the 'media grandmothers' of our times as far as filmic storytelling and real life become naturally intertwined, influencing and dependent on each other. Furthermore, like oral history, television series propagate and reflect a modified, adjusted way of living, by acknowledging contemporary media art, tradition and the pop cultural world in general to the same extent.

Therefore, TV series can serve as adjusters, catalysts and counsellors for and within the Canadian Native society, which in this case – since the clash with Western

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<sup>170</sup> cf. chapter 'That Makes Sense.'

culture<sup>171</sup> – has been dealing with the destruction of its way of living constantly. When the White man arrived, the balanced out Native communities – having thought systems based on a belief in the whole – were recurrently confronted with extremes: be it 'over-sexualizing,' 'un-mapping' or 'dis-teaching,' those trends taking them to the far ends of any scale. They were often left behind at a periphery overshadowed by an invisibility covered by a smoke screen. Furthermore, this 'over,' 'un' and 'dis' deprived them of former meta-narratives as White lifestyle, ideologies and political sanctions subtracted Native principles and morals so long from the Native societies that there was only so much left to barely survive. For the Canadian government a genocide was not acceptable, though, but a lowest common denominator was created partly in the form of a manageable number of stereotypes, nourished according to Western well-being.

Although television has been the appreciative friend and reliable amplifier for reinforcing these stereotypes, Canadian television series on Natives have often with the help of the Native network APTN nevertheless been proving that TV shows (apart from their function of serving capitalistic Westocentrism) can be transformed to add again, maybe even to multiply as they provide the ability to in-tegrate on a broadband-basis. This leads to a 'down-sexualization,' a 're-mapping' and a 're-teaching.' Therefore, these shows serve as the evidence for a successful and stable walk on a tightrope, 're-creating' the Canadian Native psyche by maintaining a healthy balance between past, present and future, between invisibility and 'drama queen-potential,' tradition and postmodernism, underdog and 'next hot thing,' and between public depiction and authenticity.

The shows we have discussed address themselves to this task according to television series' means of production, genre basics, and a painful Native Canadian history that became the underlying plot line trigger in every episode of every series. All in all, this reveals Native former cultural life but mostly the recurring theme of destroying it in many socio-cultural spheres: be it sexuality and gender issues, religious themes concerning the relationship to the land, or those dealing with the erasing of First Nations history and the deprivation of their status as Canadian citizens. All of this led to an over-simplification of the 'Indian,' then resulting in maladjusted political regulations, which – together with the upcoming media iconography of the 'Savage' – has given rise to a literal knockout of 'contemporary Native life in equality and happiness.' We needed to find out how far Native television shows are able to break up the vicious circle that has been established over centuries and fuelled by general media portrayal has been rolling

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<sup>171</sup> cf. chapter 'Return Of The Pale and Unhealthy...'

## 9. CONCLUSION: ALLYING WITH THE ENEMY

faster and faster; how they manage to stop it while circumventing classic small screen flooding of Mediacentrism in order to swim in a cross current of authenticity; and in how far they are able to change current Native history for the better.

After all, the 'Historical Indian' frozen in time has realized his chances in the contemporary media world, and in having done so, he may be acknowledged as a fully-arrived member in today's society, who is instinctually able read the zeitgeist and use it on his own terms. Although thereby Westocentric genre requirements have to be incorporated, First Nations' image-building is strongly based on walking the very shaky tightrope between television Western holy codes and Native avoidance of the conclusiveness of the latter, as those codes are often slightly transformed to serve the proper delineation of the contemporary Native.

As First Nations humor is, additionally, of a much higher importance than generally acknowledged in the Western world, be it teasing or as a means of resistance, the employment of well-established stereotyping and clichés is – especially in sitcoms – not even not ignored but intentionally used to address Native self-deprecating humor. Furthermore, it tackles the funny bone in general and subliminally shows the White audience quite plainly, how far their minds have given in to pigeonholing. These shows cannot be held responsible for political incorrectness, for the position on the 'graph of political incorrectness'<sup>172</sup> – as being on the very low end – provides them with a jester's licence to address delicate topic as openly or as secretly as they feel they need to. Hereby, the series work in two ways: they are superficially able to convince White audiences of the fact that their protagonists are not any different from any other community in Canada (they are not the others (cf. Fleras, *Mass* 285)) since they appear to be funny, loveable and refreshing. Dysfunctionalism naturally serves as a source for jokes as Native topics are treated with the same quiriness as any other. At the same time, they answer many First Nations viewers' desire to be acknowledged for what they are with their more or less subliminal pain, hopelessness and identity loss due to a history of oppression. Therefore, hidden politically incorrect accusations will be employed constantly. In working with stereotyping on so many diverse levels, First Nations sitcoms thus unveil the creation of a three-dimensional media image as they play with stereotypes and prejudices in a generic manner – confirming and modifying them and in doing so putting them in a unique Native context. For they are not only aware but not

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<sup>172</sup> cf. chapter 'Staging A Native Comedy.'

even offended by them anymore as they control them, subtly stressing the sense of knowing who they really are. In doing so, they seem to beat the White man at his own game, in presenting a cocktail of see-through superiority and self-ironic mentality, occurring to be a friendly and intelligent way to claim one's place in today's society. These Canadian Aboriginal sitcoms are in line with popular pioneers like *The Bill Cosby Show* or *Roseanne* (as well as many others) which put delicate topics like negrophobia (Cosby), the white underclass and corpulence (Roseanne) on the public agenda. Yet, these shows do so, not by addressing those topics directly but by presenting the 'underprivileged' protagonists' life styles as naturally as any other. This often leads to a cultural development in which former discriminatory attitudes clear space for universal identification and an enhanced acceptance of the respective 'minority.'

Furthermore, opening up to pop culture plays a major role as it tends to be performed naturally while postmodernism in this case is employed quite skilfully. Pop culture artifacts are used to fill vacuums, to stress the ordinariness of a community, to create identity, or to place criticism. After all, First Nations television shows know that traditionalism plays a very important role. Yet, ignoring postmodernism and current culture would be ridiculous as well as absurd. Within the various series, music especially plays an essential role for it not only serves television series' demands of producing current background music, in today's society it also has to be acknowledged as an identity builder. In doing so, it is not only employed as an identification technique but also as a method of revealing that Native youth especially is in need to find any kind of attitude since it has been deprived of most of its ideologies. Finding a place in postmodern art becomes a remedy here as this conveys the feeling of being part of today's world. Furthermore, music always has had the ability to put minorities in the foreground, hereby exposing their social and cultural problems as an en vogue life style.

While Native sitcoms, according to the genre they operate in, will deal with the ridiculing of prejudices and stereotyping in order to foster Canadian Native self-awareness, dramas will naturally rather concentrate their ambitions according to their genres' demands of presenting dramatic action as well as abiding by the bildungsroman format of "pollution, guilt, redemption and purification" (Abelman 406). In doing so, they create an atmosphere shaped by a high number of ugly moments as well as the constantly given opportunity to learn and to become wiser by presenting role models,

## 9. CONCLUSION: ALLYING WITH THE ENEMY

morals and experiences the broken Native may acknowledge as a hard but genuine media representation that he/she can work with on a personal level. However, White audiences who watch these shows may be confronted with a reality they normally tend to ignore.

Thereby sitcoms – as being family friendly with a much more moderate content – may be seen by a brighter public while dramas like *Moccasin Flats* in its shockingly authentic realism may get a higher media attention at first because they are so uncompromisingly progressive. Yet, it will be hard for a show like that to reach a 'guilty Western public.' Especially pertinent to this assumption is the fact that *Moccasin Flats* has become a bit more moderate over its three seasons while *renegadepress.com* first caught the attention of the bright adolescent Canadian public and began addressing more delicate topics on Natives when the audience was already used to the show. The sitcoms – with their easily manageable genre format of having a family friendly and therefore broad appeal but also a secret jester's licence to address serious topics – are rather on the safe side. Dramas, on the contrary, need to create a coalition audience by amalgamating micro-cultural groups who are stratified by age, gender, race and geographic location (cf. Allen, *Channels* 342). *renegadepress.com*, hereby, clearly addresses Canadian teenagers and can therefore stick to typical teen series characteristics, which are frequently given a Native touch. Additionally – by using documentary elements like video diaries, investigative journalism websites, etc. – the show is accompanied by strong contemporary extras, that acknowledge today's youth's inter-active daily routines. *Moccasin Flats* employs a lot of cross genre qualities in making use of action, police and teen (sometimes soap-like) show elements underlined by (Hip Hop) video clip aesthetics. In having one of the major delicate Canadian topics on the agenda, the series thereby takes advantage of its different genres. Consequently, the audience may vary from male adults (police, action), over female adults (soap), to female youth (teen, video clip) and male youth (police, action, video clip). To speak to more than a Native audience, classical ideologies and mechanisms are often superficially approved, like, for instance, – as typical in police shows – the officer will restore social order and harmony in the end. Yet, in *Moccasin Flats* (like in the sitcoms), ethnic guidelines of Westocentrism (e.g., the cop has to represent a 'dominant race') are changed. Therefore, the average viewer is confirmed in his/her usual watching habits, but at the same time the 'whole scene' is given a different shade of color on the side, thereby secretly spreading a new, altered ideology supporting an upgraded portrayal of First Nations to the Canadian public.

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In the end, Natives in Canadian broadcasting execute the delicate walk on the media tightrope concerning their cultures' representation in TV series in many different styles – sometimes in a tiptoeing and sometimes in a stomping manner, sometimes in a leaping run ... but always with a firm belief in reaching the other side.

### **9.3 THE ONLY GOOD 'INDIAN' IS A SCREENED 'INDIAN'!**

After all, apart from a Native appreciation of the shows as one of the major goals of the formats discussed, there are also universal realizations that these series can provide Canada's nation with as a whole. First of all, there may be the realization that First Nations went in the public ether and will stay there, due to their responsibilities concerning their fellow men and women and also due to spreading creativity and the courage to permanently start new enterprises. APTN for instance constantly enriches the variety of its programming by broadcasting in all kinds of formats, such as fresh dramas and domcoms like *Cashing in* (2009-) (a dramatic comedy about a Native run casino) or *Mixed Blessings* (2007-) (a dramatic comedy about an interracial patchwork family). Notwithstanding, apart from APTN having a fully trained sense of sensitive Native topics and the best intentions concerning a Canadian Aboriginal media upheaval, the station nevertheless has to fight to remain in the public eye as the Canadian broadcasting system is contingent upon a permanent clutter of switching program positions and an overwhelming glut of US American channels invading the Canadian market. Yet, it for instance very successfully defended its place in the year 2010 when it co-hosted the Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver. After all, it should be acknowledged that APTN eagerly promotes First Nations participation in the Canadian mediascape by giving Native artists (screenwriters, directors, actors, etc.) as well as common Aboriginal adolescents the chance to take part in the action of creating a new progressive First Nations identity. Watching the shows APTN broadcasts and especially the ones which it is mandating, producing and funding, reveals a great amount of Native talent in the television business. This can be found if it is only given the chance to shine through, maybe by funding, producing and realizing Native artists' visions but also by supporting charitable local media training programs for Aboriginal youth. Therefore concerning Native issues – in working in public and in commercial spheres and not just in the underground – APTN and its television series hold the promise of being some of the most influential media spin doctors of the future.

Secondly there may be the realization of what colonization has caused in order to become more sensitive concerning an ethnicity appearing to be not Western enough to be fully accepted in a modern society like the Canadian one. As a matter of fact, Canada's recognition of its biggest cultural crime could not only be spotted in the political arena in 2008 when the Canadian State publicly apologized to its First Inhabitants, it became apparent when taking a look at one of the most universal media platforms, too:



in 2010 the Winter Olympics in Canada were not only also broadcast by APTN, but its Opening Ceremony for the first time acknowledged First Nations as the original hosts of the Canadian grounds, on which the Games were held. They were represented by four chiefs entering the stadium first and sitting on the VIP stand right next to the Prime Minister while suddenly the stadium found itself drumming in line with Brian Adams and Nelly Furtado to a song called "Bang the Drum." This spectacle was accompanied by a great number of Native dancers, stamping the possession of the land danced on as well as the possessing of a spot in the broad Western mediascape into the ground, a performance watched by billions of people all around the world.

Thirdly, there may be the realization that the traditionalism of the old First Nation bands was accompanied by numerous features that the accelerating world of today seems to long for in secret. Apart from the role model function of the 'Greening Indian' becoming more and more essential in contemporary societies where global warming and water, soil and air pollution are finally big topics as well as the extinction of animal species, a Hollywood film became the most successful movie of all times in the year 2009. *Avatar* may have been successful due to its 3D-effects. Nonetheless, these effects did underline a story in which tribalism and the long lost connection to the environment (even though on another planet) played a major part. Even if White audiences needed an expressive metaphorical device like plugging a pony tail into animals or plants in order to fully identify with the Aboriginals, they finally appeared to comprehend the underlying message of this blockbuster. This message says that the destruction of an alien culture – even if it appears to be primitive – can by no means correspond to the ideology of philanthropy the Western world currently propagates and therefore a forced intervention by outsiders has to be acknowledged as unethical.

Eventually, all five of these shows – sitcoms or dramas – naturally construct common cultural memory. They are equipped with the opportunity of saving the Canadian mediascape from a seemingly unhealthy national media homogenization resulting from the fear of the overpowering South: the United States of America possesses neither a Native American television channel nor any kind of noteworthy regular television show on contemporary Natives in their broadcasting arena. The USA rather shies away from these kinds of challenges.

Furthermore, these series replace master narratives by presenting a self-governing authentic voice. Thus they not only intend to fill a long-existent vacuum, to end self-repeating time loops, and to escape the shadows of invisibility at the border of the Canadian media landscape but they also show a way to control Native identity. In doing

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so, they hold out the prospect of releasing the First Inhabitants from an 'unliveable' past by occupying an instrument of the constant present namely television, hopefully leading them to a 'liveable' future. The statistics of Canadian TV show's on Natives discussed reveal the following: before First Nations were over-sexualized and one-dimensional stereotypes, now they are three-dimensional media counterparts; before they were stateless and un-mapped, now they have gained their spot in the Canadian mediascape; before they were dis-taught and forgotten in the history books, now they teach their reality on the small screen. Thus, they "boldly go where no one has gone before"<sup>173</sup> and keep exploring their potential futures in freshly conglomerate worlds full of new enterprises.

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After all, First Nations culture and its representation in the Canadian public tells us of one of the oldest tales in the world, the one of oppression and resistance, eventually repeating the never-ending story of good versus evil. First the only good 'Indian' was a screened one, insofar as the 'dominant race' pressed him through an ideological sieve until only some predominant chunks were left, fitting the Western notions of how an 'Indian' should be. When later animated pictures came into being, the only good 'Indian' turned out to be a 'screen icon,' who was reduced to a single button on the Western societies' remote control, and now, as the Natives have taken over their media images, the shows discussed above do depict a good 'Indian,' indeed, yet only on the TV screen. Nonetheless, with the help of television series on First Nations, the future may hopefully hold in store the possibility that the 'Indian' will finally be considered as good – only on the basis of who he or she is in real life.

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<sup>173</sup> This is from the show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.



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<[http://www.hwfn.com/photos/the\\_series/press/an\\_unwelcome\\_visitor.jpg](http://www.hwfn.com/photos/the_series/press/an_unwelcome_visitor.jpg)>.

Fig. 8.27. *Moccasin Flats*. Canada: Big Soul Prod., 2003-. 2/2.

Fig. 8.28. *Moccasin Flats*. Canada: Big Soul Prod., 2003-. 2/3.

Fig. 8.29. *Moccasin Flats*. Canada: Big Soul Prod., 2003-. 2/3.

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### *Season 1*

1/1 "Swimming with Dolphins"

1/2 "Bear in my Hair"

1/3 "Boat Race Fever"

1/4 "Duelling Hooties"

1/5 "Tyson Saves the Day"

1/6 "Election Day Sushi"

**Moccasin Flats. Canada: Big Soul Prod., 2003-2006.**

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### *Season 1*

1/1 "Unearthed"

1/2 "Suspicious Love"

1/3 "Pursuit"

1/4 "Deeper"

1/5 "Worlds Collide"

1/6 "Resting Place"

### *Season 2*

2/1 "New Beginnings"

2/2 "The Ties that Bind"

2/3 "In the Mix"

2/4 "Home Security"

2/5 "Signs"

2/6 "Home Invasion"

2/7 "The Party's Over"

2/8 "Taking the Rap"

### *Season 3*

3/1 "Lost and Found"

3/2 "Domestic Bliss"

3/3 "The Package"

3/4 "Smoke Signals"

3/5 "Pay the Piper"

- 3/6 "Whose Team Are You On?"
- 3/7 "Hide and Seek"
- 3/8 "The Other Side"

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*Season 1*

- 1/1 "Birth of a "Station"
- 1/2 "Well, What Do You Know"
- 1/3 " Surviving Moose"
- 1/4 "Technical Difficulties"
- 1/5 "Foreign Film"
- 1/6 "Soap Opera"
- 1/7 "Jack Pratt"
- 1/8 " Ernie Makes a Drum"

***renegadepress.com. Canada: Virginia Thompson and Robert de Lint and Vérité Films, 2004-2008.***

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*Season 1*

- 1/1 "Out in the Open"
- 1/2 "A Real Connection"
- 1/3 "Out on a Limb"
- 1/4 "Skin Deep"
- 1/5 "Too Cool"
- 1/6 "Hard to Hold"
- 1/7 "Some of my Best Friends are Indian"
- 1/8 "A Very Thin Edge"
- 1/9 "Just Cause"
- 1/10 "The Long Way Home"
- 1/11 "Secrets & Lies"
- 1/12 "Body and Soul"
- 1/13 "A Tangled Web"

*Season2*

- 2/1 "The Ride"
- 2/2 "Can You See Me Now"
- 2/3 "How Sweet the Sound"
- 2/4 "Giving Yourself Away"
- 2/5 "Union"
- 2/6 "Power of Love"
- 2/7 "Mano a Mano"

## TELEVISION SHOWS AND FILMS

2/8 "Faith and Friendship"  
2/9 "Dying to Connect"

### *Season 3*

3/1 "Chemical Solutions"  
3/2 "Homeward Bound"  
3/3 "This is your Brain on Love"  
3/4 "The Rez"  
3/5 "Stolen Lives"  
3/6 "The Naked Proof"  
3/7 "Picture This"  
3/8 "The Dance"  
3/9 "Fear"

### *Season 4*

4/0 Retrospective  
4/1 "Rules of Engagement"  
4/2 "Slow Burn"  
4/3 "Smoke Screen"  
4/4 "Civic Pride"  
4/5 "The Real Story"  
4/6 "Legacies"  
4/7 "The Third Wheel"  
4/8 "Alternate Reality"  
4/9 "The Telling"  
4/10 "Breathe"  
4/11 "Sullengirl16"  
4/12 "Getting it Right"

### *Season 5*

5/1 "Life Today"  
5/2 "Cyber Sandbox"  
5/3 "Lost and Found"  
5/4 "Reclamation"  
5/5 "On My Own"  
5/6 "Beautiful Girls"  
5/7 "Reality Rites"  
5/8 "Dancing"

## ***The Rez. Canada: Rez Prod. Limited, 1996-1998.***

### *Season 1*

1/1 "Dressed Like a Fish"  
1/2 "Golf and Politics"  
1/3 "A Little Revealing"  
1/4 "The Longhouse"  
1/5 "The Lark"  
1/6 ""Dirty Girls, Kill Kill!""



### *Season 2*

2/1 "Strange Bedfellows"

2/2 "They Call Her Tanya"

2/3 "Poster Girl"

2/4 "Like Father, Like Son"

2/5 "Granted"

2/6 "Lust"

2/7 "Windigo"

2/8 "No Way to Treat a Lady"

2/9 "A Rock and a Hard Place"

2/10 "Der Deutsche Indianer"

2/11 "Too Many Chiefs"

2/12 "No Reservations 1"

2/13 "No Reservations 2"

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*Beverly Hills 90210*. USA: Darren Star, 1990-2000.

*Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. USA: Joss Whedon, Jane Espenson, David Fury, Marti Boxon and Mutant Enemy Prod., 1997-2003.

*Cashing In*. Canada: Norma Bailey, 2009-.

*Corner Gas*. Canada: CTV/Prairie Pants Prod., 2003-.

*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation: Miami*. USA: Anthony, E. Zuiker, Carol Mendelsohn and Ann Donahue, 2002

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*Cybill*. USA: Chuck Lorre, 1995-1998.

*Dawson's Creek*. USA: Sony Pictures Television, 1998-2003.

*Desperate Housewives*. USA: ABC Studios, 2004-.

*Dr. Quinn – Medicine Woman*. USA: Beth Sullivan, 1993-1998.

*Friends*. USA: Bright/Kauffman/Crane Prod. and Warner Bros., 1994-2004.

*Gilmore Girls*. USA: Amy Sherman Palladino, 2000-2007.

*Heroes*. USA: Tim Kring, 2006-.

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*Home Improvement.* USA: Matt Williams, Carmen Finestra and David MacFadzean, 1991-1999.

*Howdy Doody Show.* USA: E. Roger Muir, 1947-1960.

*I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me out of Here!.* United Kingdom: Granada Productions, 2002-.

*Malcom In The Middle.* USA: Linwood Boomer, 2000-2006.

*Mixed Blessings.* Canada: Ron E. Scott and Drew Hayden Taylor, 2007-.

*Modern Family.* USA: Fox Studios, 2009-.

*Night Heat.* Canada: Grosso Prod., 1985-1989.

*North of 60.* Canada: Wayne Grisby and Barbara Sears, 1992-1997.

*Radisson.* Canada: Jean Yves Bigras, 1957-1958.

*Roseanne.* USA: Roseanne Barr and Matt Williams, 1988-1997.

*Roswell.* USA: Jason Katims, 1998-2000.

*Seinfeld.* USA: Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, 1989-1998.

*Sesame Street.* USA: Sesame Workshop (CTW), 1969-.

*Sex and the City.* USA: Darren Star, 1998-2004.

*Smallville.* USA: Alfred Gough and Miles Milar, 2001-.

*Spirit Bay.* Canada: 1982-1987.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation.* USA: Gene Roddenberry, 1987-1994.

*Star Trek: Voyager.* USA: Rick Berman, Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor, 1995-2001.

*Suddenly Susan.* USA: Clyde Phillips, 1996-2000.

*Survivor.* USA: Charlie Parsons, 2000-.

*The A-Team.* USA: Frank Lupo and Stephen J. Cannell, 1983-1987.

*The Beachcombers.* Canada: Marc Strange and Lynn Susan Strange, 1972-1990.

*The Cosby Show.* USA: Ed Weinberger, Michael J. Leeson and Bill Cosby, 1984-1992.

*The Fresh Prince of Bel Air.* USA: Andy Borowitz and Susan Borowitz, 1990-1996.

*The Muppet Show.* United Kingdom: Jim Henson, 1976-.

*The Nanny*. USA: Sternin & Fraser Ink, Highschools Sweathearts Prod. and TriStar Television, 1993-1999.

*The Partridge Family*. USA: Bernard Slade, 1970-1974.

*The O.C.*. USA: Dave Bartis, Bob Delaurentis, Doug Liman, Stephanie Savage, Josh Schwartz, 2003-2007.

*The X-Files*. Canada/USA: Chris Carter and Mark Snow, 1993-2002.

*Two and a Half Men*. USA: Chuck Lorre and Lee Aronsohn, 2003-.

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*Avatar*. Dir. James Cameron. USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2009.

*Dance Me Outside*. Dir. Bruce McDonald. Canada: A-Pix Entertainment, 1995.

*Dances With Wolves*. Dir. Kevin Costner. USA: Orion Pictures, 1990.

*Disney's Pocahontas*. Dir. Mike Gabriel, and Eric Goldberg. USA: Walt Disney Studios, 1995.

*Easy Rider*. Dir. Dennis Hopper. USA: Sony, 1969.

*Hank Williams First Nation*. Dir. Aaron James Sorensen. Canada: Maple, 2005.

*Little Big Man*. Dir. Arthur Penn. USA: National General Pictures, 1970.

*Nell*. Dir. Michael Apted. USA/Canada: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1994.

*New Moon*. Dir. Chris Weitz. USA: Summit Entertainment, 2009.

*Powwow Highway*. Dir. Jonathon Whacks. USA: Anchor Bay, 1989.

*Seven Seas to Calais*. Dir. Rudolph Maté, Italy: Adelfia Compagnia Cinematografica, 1962.

*Stagecoach*. Dir. John Ford. USA: United Artists, 1939.

*The Karate Kid*. Dir. John G. Avildsen. USA: Columbia, 1984.

*The Name of the Rose*. Dir. Jean-Jaques Annaud. Germany/France/Italy, 1986.

*They Died With Their Boots On*. Dir. Raoul Walsh. USA: Warner Bros., 1942.



# APPENDIX

## SHORT GLOSSARY ON FILMING

establishing shot	long shot that positions characters within their environments, and helps to establish the setting
close-up	framing presenting a close view of an object or person – filling the frame and separating the object or person from the surroundings
medium close-up	showing body from torso upward
head and shoulder close-up	showing head and neck
extreme close-up/detail shot	framing showing only parts of the whole (e.g. eye filling entire screen))
bird's eye view	view showing object from above
worm's eye view	view showing object from below
wipe	device between scenes, in which a line moves across the screen, apparently erasing one shot as the next replaces it

other 'techniques of production' are introduced in part five.

# CHILDREN'S PICTURES FROM THE EXPERIMENT

(cf. 4.3)







APPENDIX











With its contemporary TV series on its Indigenous Inhabitants, called the First Nations, Canada possesses a unique mediascape, especially in the view of the fact that these shows make it their business to propagate a realistic representation of Aboriginal culture. The interaction between First Inhabitants and Western conquerors offers many opportunities to create profound storylines indeed. At the same time commercial mass media like television shows with their penchant for stereotyping – in the case of the American Aboriginals e.g. the 'Stoic Indian,' the 'Noble Savage' or the 'Naive Pocahontas' – do not seem to qualify for a differentiated historical revision of a colonized country with obvious winners and losers. At first glance the wide and very heterogeneous audience of a whole country needs to be entertained. Yet, it is the declared goal of these progressive TV shows to subtly convey a new more positive self- and public image of the Canadian Aboriginals. Hence, the television series constantly have to maintain the balance between presenting enthralling fiction appealing to the masses and sensitively handling the often painful reality of a people at the periphery of society.

To illuminate this walk on a tightrope this study at first concentrates on the socio-cultural history of the First Nations shaped by tribal gender roles, a reciprocal relationship to nature, oral traditions and the final destruction of this cosmos. Based on this historical background as well as ideologies like Westo- and Mediacentrism and TV production techniques, this work then examines how the Canadian First Nations manage to employ seemingly hostile television mechanisms for their own benefit. Therefore, the subtexts of the drama series *Moccasin Flats* (2003-2006) and *renegadepress.com* (2004-2008) as well as the sitcoms *The Rez* (1996-1998), *Hank Williams First Nation* (2006) and *Moose TV* (2007) are analysed.