

"I'm All of Everything That I Am": Constituting the Indigenous Woman, the White Woman, and the Audience in Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*¹

Tara Williamson is an Anishinaabekwe/Nehayowak from Swan Lake, Manitoba and is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. She holds a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Manitoba and is currently in the last year of a concurrent LL.B./M.A. - Indigenous Governance program at the University of Victoria.

Abstract

The author's analysis highlights the reinforcement of stereotypical images of native women in *The Vagina Monologues*. She suggests that alternative performances/performativities of the play would better challenge oppression and would foster a more complex understanding of race, class, and gender.

Résumé

L'analyse de l'auteure souligne le renforcement des images stéréotypes des femmes autochtones dans la pièce intitulée "The Vagina Monologues". Elle suggère que des exécutions /performances alternatives de la pièce seraient mieux utilisés attirer des observations sur l'oppression et pour encourager une compréhension plus complexe sur la race, la classe et le genre.

For the past few years, I participated in a VDay Campaign. VDay has been embraced by women's movements across the world (but, mostly in North America) to focus on the elimination of violence against women. Its most well-known campaign strategy is the staging of *The Vagina Monologues* (VMs) by Eve Ensler. The play is a series of monologues that are based on interviews Ensler conducted with women about their relationships with their vaginas.

As an Indigenous woman (Anishinaabe/Nehayo), I experienced the play with mixed emotion. I felt disconnected from many of the cast members and I disagreed with the image of the Indigenous woman that the play presented. I eventually came to understand that my experience of myself could not be contained within the discourse of the play's white feminism. To better understand my experience, I have scripted a 3-Act play that portrays, from my experience, the role of the Indigenous woman, the White woman, and the Audience in *The Vagina Monologues* production of which I was a part. The analyses that follow the first two Acts demonstrate how the play stabilizes a stereotypical and essentialized image of "Indigenous" and how this image is connected to the maintenance of white privilege. The final analysis attempts to give agency to the constructed Indigenous subject by exploring possible alternative performances of the play and the tropes within it.

ACT I – THE ROLE OF THE INDIGENOUS WOMAN

Scene 1

Scene. Bare stage. Photograph of a dreamcatcher on projection screen. Pow Wow music playing. Dim red lighting. Raise spotlight on stage left while music fades.

[Enter Indigenous Woman #1 – Stage Left.]

Scene II

Indigenous Woman #1: This monologue is based on interviews by Eve Ensler with women from the Oglala Lakota Nation on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Their stories reflect the challenges that Native women face every day living in isolation and without resources. According to the Amnesty International report "Maze of Injustice," the average annual rate of rape and sexual assault among American Indian Women is 2.5 times higher than all other races.

[Exit Indigenous Woman #1]

Scene III

Scene. Same scene as Scene I, except a chair on stage right. Raise spotlight on chair.

[Enter Indigenous Woman #2]

Indigenous Woman #2: I looked up and he slapped me, my husband...He had long black hair, combing his long hair when we made love it got loose before...After 18 years he beat me, in the morning when he was so nice again. I would braid his long hair. I would take my time like I cared so much and I would do it perfectly crooked...Heard that he was out with a woman making love and she was fluffing his hair when he was wild on top of her...He wrapped my long black hair around his hand, jerked my head.

The Role of the Indigenous Woman - Analysis

The setting of, introduction for, and the actual monologue "Crooked Braid" all contain problematic images of the Indigenous woman. By analyzing the intersection of gender and race, these stereotypical and clichéd images acquire a broader context.

As a feminist project, the *Vagina Monologues* is vulnerable to attack on the basis of its narrow perspective of womanhood that is grounded in racist and classist values. Feminism continues to be a largely Western movement that first asserted its power via an essentializing claim that "all women shared some universal characteristics and suffered from universal oppressions which could be understood and described by a group of predominantly white, Western-trained, women academics" (Tuhiwai-Smith 2001, 166). While these premises have been challenged and

deconstructed (primarily) by women of colour and non-Western women, the presence of essentialism in feminism is still felt in both theory and practice. The use of the "vagina" as an interchange for "woman" is a good demonstration of this essentialism.

The VMs present the vagina as a sentient being who is anthropomorphized by her woman. In the monologue "Wear/Say/Smell" (which is actually presented by three speakers), the actors present women's answers to the questions: "What would your vagina wear?," "What would your vagina say?," and "What does your vagina smell like?" While the final question is usually answered in the form of an observation, the former questions involve women reflecting on an imaginary being in a way that might be cloaked in a detached third-person type of inquiry but in reality is inevitably personal, because nobody knows the answer but the woman being interviewed. The voice of the vagina is necessarily the woman speaking. Christine M. Cooper describes this reductionism as a kind of metonymy whereby "a part of the body and a particular subset of experience [stands] in for the whole of female consciousness" (Cooper 2007, 732). The types of responses elicited by the vagina questions are even more provocative in that they can be deconstructed further to better delineate the nature of the woman/vagina voice.

All of the answers to the questions reflect the limiting and static nature of the questions. Women are forced to consider the one thing that their vagina would say or wear or do. Certainly, some women answer with more than one phrase or article of clothing, but, the effect is still the same. Answering the questions involves deciding what thing (or things) essentially defines the vagina, and accordingly, the woman. The answers are not accurate representations of reality - (if you accept that the talking vagina is a literal impossibility) but instead are the well-thought out versions by the woman being questioned. The following responses from cast members are particularly good examples:

"What would your vagina wear?"

"faery wings of course"

"ninjitsu pants and randomly dress in silly costumes"

"a masquerade costume"
"it would probably wear cotton"
"black velvet and a red feather boa"

The question could just as easily have been "What would you, in expressing your womanhood, wear?" The vagina thus becomes an object of desire for the expression of womanhood - a subjective, archetypically-dressed woman. However, everyday life - with its misogyny, social pressures, mainstream boundaries, and practical demands - prevents women from being the women they envision. Instead, women wander through the world always lacking something bigger and better (i.e., feather boas and faery wings). This is the conception of femininity that is espoused by the essential, talking vagina. It fosters a feminism that focuses on lack and valorizes an image of woman as dehistoricized and depoliticized. Because certainly, politics and history must be irrelevant if all you need to access the archetype of woman is a vagina.

Except that if you are a non-white woman in the VMs, you are not allowed to talk about your vagina. Or, at least it's not in your script. In the 2007 VDay Production, there were two monologues that represented non-white women (one of the monologues had a trilogy of speakers). While every other monologue includes either the word "vagina" or "cunt," - and one that instead used the euphemism "down there" - non-white women's monologues did not reference the all-powerful vagina-as-woman at all. Yet, it seems safe to assume that non-white women are still considered women for the purposes of the monologues. After all, the stories are part of a campaign to end violence against women. But, even if "who counts as a woman may seem broadened in *The Vagina Monologues*,...what makes one a woman remains fixed: the vagina, which carries metaphysical significations" (Cooper 2007, 737). It's not that non-white women aren't women *per se*, they're just not complete women. They lack the vagina and so it becomes their object of desire. Or, at least it does under the projected gaze of the Western, white women. And, if you accept the play as accurately representing the experience of

non-white women in contrast with white women, it's easy to understand why non-white women would want to access the white vagina goddess.

The only time violence is directly addressed in the monologues is when the speakers are non-white. The violence that the non-white women experience includes rape, acid burning, civil war, murder, domestic violence, dismemberment, and female genital mutilation. These non-white vaginas are also inanimate - they do not dream or aspire or get dressed up. They are victims. Remember that Indigenous women face challenges as Indigenous women because we live "in isolation and without resources." We are pitifully helpless. The Afghani, Mexican, and Iraqi women *have no voice*. They are so helpless, victimized and silenced that other women must speak for them (the name of the monologue is "The Memory of *Her Face*" [emphasis added]). As Cooper points out, the "gender essentialism...transmutes to cultural essentialism" (2007, 747). This is particularly clear in the image of the Indigenous woman as presented in "Crooked Braid."

Besides being helpless, isolated, and without resources, this Indigenous woman speaks in extremely colloquial English - sometimes inverting sentences and sometimes speaking with phrases that aren't actually sentences. This Indigenous woman has long dark hair and she identifies with pow wow music and dreamcatchers with feathers. Finally, it is hard not to be misled by the title of the monologue. The use of "Crooked Braid" as a title is reminiscent of the English translations of Indian names that transform verbs, adjectives, and adverbs into nouns - Crooked Braid, Sitting Bull, Dances With Wolves. It's a very Indian sounding name. This Indigenous woman fulfills the stereotypical and essentialized image of the Indigenous woman that a white audience would expect. Simultaneously, the *Monologues* also manages to pinpoint an essentialized image of the non-white man.

In all of the monologues with non-white women, the abusers and perpetrators of the violence are non-white men. The abusing Indigenous man in "Crooked Braid" is exotic and savage, with long hair that gets loose while

he makes love. In "The Memory of Her Face," the men are Mexican, Afghani, and Iraqi. Even when there is acknowledgement of white male influence on the abuse of non-white women (the dropping of bombs from planes) the focus is less on the cause of the violence, and more on the abhorrent attitude of the (Iraqi/Afghani) men after the violence has occurred (i.e., that the woman is now worthless, a commodity). The non-white man is essentialized as a misogynist with an interest in women for their sex – be it sexual pleasure or the commodity of procreation.

Race and culture is how difference is performed in this play. Gender and sex are moot points in *The Vagina Monologues* - the vagina presumes sex and is inextricably linked as the sign of a presumed gender. Differing experiences of femininity are not explored as acceptable expressions of self on a gender continuum, but instead are attributed to racial and cultural difference. The 2003 V-Day Campaign was entitled "Afghanistan is Everywhere: A Spotlight on Native American and First Nations Women."

There is white and there is Other. And, while it is true that non-white women do experience gender and race differently than white women, this othered, dehistoricized, and depoliticized over-simplification is dangerous in that it naturalizes the difference instead of challenging it. It is absolutely true that some Indigenous women live on reserves that are isolated and lack resources. But, is this why the Indigenous "race" experiences more sexual assault than other "races"? Were the women who went missing from Vancouver's East Side - an urban area with an extremely high concentration of social services - living in isolation and without resources? Why are they raped and killed? Without filling in the blanks of colonialism and racism, the audience is left only with a pity party for the Indigenous "race" and no context for developing real solutions to the serious questions posed by violence and hate. And, without real possibilities, white audiences are able to relinquish personal responsibility for change. The "Crooked Braid" monologue ends with Indigenous Woman #2 lamenting: "They took our land. They took our ways. They took our men. We want them back." Who? Who

took our land? And, to whom is this woman speaking? The use of "they" relieves the audience of personal implication in colonialism. It lets the audience believe that colonialism is either over or has nothing to do with them. It lets the audience believe in the Indigenous woman as victimized, long-haired, hyper-cultural, and inferior. Consequently, it lets the white audience believe in its own superiority.

Act II – THE ROLE OF THE WHITE WOMAN

Scene I

Scene. Stage at dress rehearsal.

[Indigenous Woman #1 finishes introduction for "Crooked Braid" and exits stage left, she is laughing and shaking her head]

White Woman Director #1: [offstage, to Indigenous Woman #1] Do you think the music is funny?

Indigenous Woman #1: Well, kind of. I think that the image of the Indigenous woman we're portraying is a bit racist.

White Woman Director #1: I want to let you know that the music is authentic from a group in the Prairies.

Indigenous Woman #1: Oh, um, ok. I think that it's too bad that this wasn't a decision made with the only two native women in the cast.

White Woman Director #1: I'm the Director and I can make this decision on my own. Besides, I'm native. I'm Metis.

Scene II

Scene. A rehearsal. Mostly young, white women. Dressed casually, laughing, having a good time.

Indigenous Woman #1: [To a small group of white women] I was thinking of changing the words "living in isolation and without resources" to "living with the effects of colonization and racism." What do you think?

White Woman #1: I don't know. I mean, what about the Highway of Tears? Those women had to hitchhike because they lived in isolation and without resources.

Indigenous Woman #1: That's true. But, is that why they were raped and killed?

White Woman #2: I guess not, but, it seems like the woman in this monologue is in isolation and without resources, so, I think it's like that for a reason.

White Woman #3: Yeah, and I don't think we're allowed to change the script.

Scene III

Scene. Same rehearsal space. In opposite corner of the room, Indigenous Woman #2 is sitting and practising while White Woman Directors #2 and #3 are watching.

White Woman Director #2: [To Indigenous Woman #2] You need to be less angry. Why do you think that this woman stayed with this man?

Indigenous Woman #2: Because he's a native guy with a job? [laughing]

White Woman Director #2: No. She loved him. She must have loved him – why else would she stay?

Indigenous Woman #2: But, I think she is angry. She's telling this story like it's in the past, and she is angry.

White Woman Director #3: Using just one emotion for the whole thing is really not very appealing to the audience. You really need to give them a rollercoaster – help them feel it.

The Role of the White Woman - Analysis

The conversation in Act II highlights how the white woman's role is dependent on the role of the Indigenous woman as a helpless victim who is an actor/subject in need of direction. The interdependence of this relationship reifies the settler/colonized dichotomy and allows for such parasitic practices as cultural appropriation.

In Scene I, the White Woman Director #1 ("WWD1") has chosen, without consultation from the Indigenous members of the cast, a pow wow song for the introductory segment of the monologue. Her justifications for this choice are three-fold: 1) it is an "authentic" song; 2) she is the director; 3) she is Metis. But, these seemingly differing justifications can be deconstructed to reveal their underlying motivation - control of the subject. The roots of cultural appropriation run deep: "Control and manipulation of the discourse about Native cultures was one of the first measures used by anthropologists and ethnologists to replace Indians as the authoritative voices about their own societies" (Browner 2000, 246). When challenged about her potentially inappropriate music, the WWD1 responds with a claim of "authenticity" - "the music is authentic from a

group in the prairies." WWD1 tries to distinguish herself from the inauthentic and insincere, because for her, the issue of cultural property or the appropriateness of a projected image is not about dignity or humanity, it is about whether it is the true, authentic, and correct representation. Her claim to authenticity is "used as a pretext to gain discursive terrain, while evading the question of who controls or is trying to control, the discourse" (Root 1997, 230). The claim to the authentic, coupled with the assertion of power as the director, functions to "remind the Native out loud that [she] alone is master" (Fanon 1961, 53). As the Director of the protesting Indian, WWD1 has the power to make whatever statement she would like about Indigenous people, as long as it is authentic. This is the entitlement of the self-proclaimed non-ethnocentric and sincere settler.

The WWD1's claim to Metis-ness troubles the notion of settler and is deserving of its own analysis. As a preface to this extremely contentious issue, I would like to clarify the purpose of my analysis. I am not attempting to delineate the lines of Metis identity for Metis people. I am only trying to show the philosophical dilemmas that I confronted in a specific situation. I will use generalized theory and statistics, but I recognize that this analysis is not necessarily applicable to or relevant for any other situation.

Between 2001 - 2006, Statistics Canada reported that the Metis population in Canada skyrocketed from 292,000 to 389,780 (in 2001, it was 204, 000) (Statistics Canada 2006). Such an unexpected and substantial increase begs an explanation. Sunera Thobani's observations about Canada's political shift to multiculturalism provides some useful insight. Canada is a nation founded on racism - the myth of *terra nullius* points clearly to that. Citizenship has historically been tied to race - some races were "preferred" for integration into the nation. In the late twentieth century, the Canadian national project, influenced by both the disastrous image of racism propagated by Nazi Germany and by the need for immigration to allay a labour shortage, shifted its political policy from one of overt racism to one of "tolerant" multiculturalism. Multiculturalism made Canada "more adaptable to changing

global conditions" (Thobani 2007, 153) and therefore more cosmopolitan. The distinction between the old racist national and the new multicultural cosmopolitan allowed Canadians to shirk responsibility for their colonial past because it wasn't their colonial past. It belonged to a racist citizen who no longer existed.

The shift to multiculturalism has meant that non-white identities have become reduced to depoliticized, non-raced cultures. And, those cultures, sans politics, are openly welcomed and even celebrated. This is an important factor in understanding the skyrocketing numbers of Metis in Canada. Many "new" Metis tell the story of their ashamed grandparent who never identified as being Indigenous and as a result nobody in the family ever embraced that aspect of their identity. It is a terrible truth that many people coped with internalized hate and racism by passing as white, not speaking their language, and/or never acknowledging their Indigenous relations in public (or even in private). I do not discount this reality or the harm that it has caused. The Canadian explanation for this phenomenon would be that these Indigenous people lived in a time when the racist national was intolerant. Today, in a multicultural society, it is perfectly acceptable to recognize your cultural "heritage." In fact, it's quite hip to do so - cosmopolitan even. However, to identify as Metis solely on the basis of a blood relation naturalizes the notion of depoliticized and dehistoricized race: "the term 'Metis' has been constituted according to racial rather than indigenous national constructions. In such an ordering, any (indigenous) individual who self-identifies as Metis is counted as such, regardless of the terms used by his or her ancestors to collectively self-identify" (Anderson 2008, 348). This definition gives the person claiming Metis status the power to claim entitlement to a Metis voice of her own accord and at her own whim. It does not matter that she was raised as a white woman, can pass as a white woman, and does not disclose her identity among other Indigenous women. It does not matter that the recording of traditional music is a contested issue among different nations and peoples and that it might be considered sacrilegious or that the use of Prairie culture outside of the prairies has been

a touchstone of pan-Indianism. These considerations do not matter if you are a biological Indian. But, this version of Indigeneity is too easy. It demeans the versions of Indigeneity that other Indigenous people - who were raised as Indigenous, who cannot pass as white, and who belong to an Indigenous community - do live everyday - whether or not on any particular day it is beneficial for them. This is the most deceiving form of cultural appropriation, because it takes the guise of being authoritative from within. Ultimately, WWD1 is accessing the same kind of discursive control that she attempted in claiming that her pow wow music choice was authentic; only now, the claim to authenticity is one of identity. Yet still, the new Metis person approaches Indigeneity as a white person trying to identify as Indigenous. Deborah Root explains this desire as a kind of anti-capitalist angst: "White hippies do tend to recognize some of the oppressive aspects of industrial, consumerist society but manifest this by focusing on and identifying with people who seem to be even more oppressed, thus reproducing the 1970s movie version of Indigenous as defeated victims who exist only in the past" (Root 1997, 228). This desire for a more oppressed victim also helps to explain the resistance the white cast members had to replacing the language of "living in isolation and without resources" to "living with the effects of colonization and racism."

The coming together of women for the purposes of helping other women can play an important function in the self-constitution of individual women and gender solidarity. In order to constitute the self as empathetic and compassionate, the helping woman requires an object that needs to be helped. It is not that any women would disagree that isolation and lack of resources are caused by colonization and racism, it's just that, for some reason, it seems more appropriate to describe the Indigenous woman as lonely and lacking. Furthermore, in defining Indigenous men (and thus Indigenousness) as "unfree" (slaves to sexual desire, addictions, and violence) and "intolerant" (misogynistic), whiteness becomes sketched as "virtuous and free" (Brown 2006, 103). Constituting whiteness as tolerant

empowers the white person to control the lives of non-white people in the name of tolerance, as intolerant as that may seem. It is this self-constitution that allows women to feel good about helping - even though the history of helping Indigenous people has included the over-imprisonment of Indigenous men, the apprehending of Indigenous children, and the vilification of Indigenous women as unfit mothers.

Alas, a discussion of self-constitution and whiteness doesn't good theatre make. The show is about acting and communicating with the audience. When the directors suggest ways to perform a character, it is with the audience in mind. When Indigenous Woman #2 wanted to perform "Crooked Braid" with anger, she was coaxed to consider what this woman would have been feeling. At an earlier rehearsal, numerous white women tried to "help" Indigenous Woman #2 to better understand the positioning of her character by explaining oppression and cycles of violence. Given that the character is fictitious, nobody actually knew what this woman would have been feeling. Despite scripted words, the character is nothing more than an interpretive creation that gains meaning from the actor's portrayal and the audience's interpretation. Yet, the white cast and directors were convinced that their interpretation was superior. They expressed concern that the audience wouldn't respond well to an entirely angry monologue. This assertion is in spite of the fact that one of the (white) monologues was premised on anger and called "My Angry Vagina." Given the roles that were assigned to the Indigenous woman and the white woman, perhaps what the directors meant was that the audience wouldn't respond well to an angry Indian. Regardless, these speculations bring us to the final Act starring "The Audience."

Act III – THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Scene I

Stage is set-up like the house of a theatre. Audience is in rows, standing and clapping. Audience wearing all white.

Scene II

Stage is set-up like the house of a theatre. Audience is in rows, seated, grumbling, faint clapping. Audience wearing all brown.

Scene III

Stage is set-up like the house of a theatre. Audience is in rows, standing and clapping. Audience wearing (insert costume here).

The Role of the Audience - Analysis

Art represents life, or so they say. The play, as a work of art, attempts to represent "real" life. At its heart is an attempt to speak to an audience in a way that creates a relationship of sorts so that the audience can identify with, or at least appreciate, the work for its representative message. Judith Butler articulates that the difficulty with representations is that they have the capacity to "produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent" (Butler 2006, 2). I am not suggesting that one staging of the VMs has the effect of solidifying racial difference or the image of the Indigenous woman as a societal norm. But, as part of a larger discourse that privileges whiteness over non-whiteness, the play becomes a "reiterative and citational practice" (Butler 2006, 2) that repeats the representation or performance one more time in a series of other actions and performances in day-to-day life. These representations are productive in that they project not only to white audiences but also Indigenous audiences who come to internalize this racism. Internalized racism "makes us doubt the validity of the existence of our people, and thus ourselves" (Anderson 2000, 106). Indigenous women become constitutive of white women's representations.

In this way, the Indigenous subject that is represented in the play is also constituted by the play. This does not mean that the representation is not real; indeed, the representation is material - the play's the thing! But, what it is representing - the subjectivity of the Indigenous woman - is constructed by the representation itself. And, the representation is dependent upon the interpretation of the audience for meaning. This interpretation is necessarily "imaginary" in the sense that "what is represented...[is] not the system of real

relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (Althusser 1995, 125). The ability to influence the representative subjectivity of the Indigenous woman, in the context of the play, can happen by manipulating the audience or by manipulating the representation. In the production I participated in, the cast was predominantly white. The city it was produced in is notoriously white. This meant that the white cast assumed a white audience and as a result appealed to the representations in the play that naturalized whiteness and reified white privilege. I was startlingly aware of my identity as being constituted both for and by white women. To trouble this experience, all I need to do is recall the first time I saw the *Monologues* with an all-Indigenous cast and an almost all-Indigenous audience. Suddenly, the abused Indigenous woman in the script was not the only Indigenous woman. There were old Indigenous women, angry Indigenous women, funny Indigenous women, and plain Indigenous women (to name just a few). Indigenous euphemisms for vagina were inserted in appropriate places and despite my concern about reductionist gender politics, my experience of the play was empowering and I was not aware of my difference from the actors or audience.

In order to destabilize the subject in the VMs it doesn't matter whether it is the performance or the audience that is manipulated because they are constitutive of each other. Perhaps the script could be changed, the demographic of the audience manipulated, or the cast altered. The goal is to inquire as to the "conditions of [the subject's] emergence and operation" (Butler 1993, 7). What is it about the representation that privileges whiteness and disempowers Indigeneity? If we accept that this is not fixed and a new representation has the power to help change this reiteration, what can we choose to represent instead? Indeed, many Indigenous artists view these kinds of inquiries as necessary to art itself. Gloria Bird reminds us that art, "at its liberating best, it is a political act. Through writing we can undo the damaging stereotypes that are continually perpetuated

about Native peoples. We can rewrite our history, and we can mobilize our future" (Bird 1998, 30).

I acknowledge that it is somewhat problematic to speak of whiteness and Indigeneity in the context of performativity. Certainly, these two constructs are not exempt from the production and representation model. However, Butler contends that "for an identity to be an effect means that is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial or arbitrary" (2006, 201). Indigeneity needn't be discarded as a valid signifier of identity but, in order to maintain the agency that comes with subjectivity-as-an-effect, neither can it be a closed category. Otherwise, the conclusive category of "Indigenous" will stifle and preclude the consideration of shifting subjectivity. Instead of the capacity to manipulate effects (agency), the subject-as-effect that does not fit within the parameters of the category will be discounted, disempowered, and without the agency to ever be included in the discourse.

Performance is important. We perform every day without considering the rationale behind our performance. The arts have a special way of making us aware of the representations we enact. I do not regret my own performance in the VMs. On the night of the performance, I changed the words in the introduction from "living in isolation and without resources" to "living with the effects of colonization and racism." I also refused to perform with pow wow music, so the director cut the music instead of me. It was a stressful experience, to say the least. While other women were receiving flowers backstage and hugging and talking about the solidarity of sisterhood, I was on-stage debating with the director about racism and stereotypes and the image of the Indian. I find solace in knowing that performing with those repetitions - the victimized and "cultural" Indian - would have been just as stressful. The words of *Waziyatawin*, a Dakota scholar, give me strength: "when we challenge those who have disregarded our cultural perspective and attempted to make what is [Indigenous] conform to the colonizer's standards as a means to deny its validity, we are resisting" (Wilson 2005, 47). By not conforming, I was

able to validate my own existence and perform with most of my integrity still intact.

Review/Revue

At the cast party on the last night, as I was leaving with the other Indigenous cast member, we were stopped at the exit by some other cast members who were smoking outside. In a friendly and honest manner, one cast member asked us, "So, uh, my parents were wondering, like, uh, how much native are you?" Taking a deep breath, I replied, "I'm all of everything that I am."

The Vagina Monologues fails to account for whole people. It asks its cast and audience to pick a role – feminist (misogynist), woman (man), vagina (penis), Indian (white), white (Other). Inasmuch, it cannot account for more diverse experiences and it reinscribes the power differentials it claims to be challenging.

I refuse to pick a role. I am not a colonial label. Colonial labels are for colonial people, so that they can claim to know me. Waabishkimakoonse dizhinikaaz. Gaabishkigaamag gaye Opaskwayak nindoonjii. Anything short of that falls short of me.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Cheryl Suzack, Gillian Calder, Rebecca Johnson, and Jason Stabler for their assistance with this paper.

Endnote

1. All quotes from *The Vagina Monologues* can be attributed to Eve Ensler, including the entirety of the "Act I, Scene I" and "Act I, Scene II" sections of this paper. Their wording is from my own personal copy of *The Vagina Monologues* as presented to me by the directors of the VDay production I participated in. The remainder of the mini-plays presented in the paper are my creation (as based on real conversations) and are not from the script of *The Vagina Monologues*. Furthermore, the scripting is from memory and is not intended to be verbatim.

References

Althusser, L. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Mapping Ideology*, S. Zizek, ed. New York: Verso, 1995, pp. 100-40.

Anderson, C. "From Nation to Population: The Racialisation of 'Metis' in the Canadian Census," *Nations and Nationalism* 14.2 (2008): 347-68.

Anderson, K. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2000.

Bird, G. "Breaking the Silence: Writing as 'Witness'," *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing*, S. Ortiz, ed. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998.

Brown, W. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Browner, T. "'They Could Have an Indian Soul': Crow Two and the Processes of Cultural Appropriation," *Journal of Musicological Research* 19 (June 2000): 243-64.

Butler, J. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

_____. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Cooper, C. "Worrying About Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32 (Spring 2007): 727-58.

Ensler, E. *The Vagina Monologues*. New York: Villard, c2001

Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1961.

Root, D. "'White Indians': Appropriation and the Politics of Display," *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, B. Ziff and P. Rao, eds. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Statistics Canada. 2006. *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry accessed at www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/Aboriginal/pages/

Thobani, S. *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007.

Tuhiwai-Smith, L. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books, 2001.

Wilson, W. *Remember This!: Decolonization and The Eli Taylor Narratives*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2005.