

“WE ARE NOT GUILTY!”: THE CREATION OF AN INDIGENOUS THEATRICAL PRAXIS

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THE MID-1960S THROUGH THE late 1970s marked a distinct time of social and political turmoil in the United States. Many minority groups continued the effort spearheaded by the civil rights leaders to end segregation and establish equal rights in America through organization and promotion of cultural pride. Two such activist movements are now known as the Chicano Movement (El Movimiento) and the American Indian Movement (AIM). The sphere of my project explores the intricacies of the performance events and modalities central to this turbulent historical period, so here I only offer reductive explanations of El Movimiento and AIM. The former advanced the vital necessity of forming a union for Chicana/o and immigrant farmworkers and campaigned for the creation of Chicano studies programs, increased political access



(through the Raza Unida Party), and land grant issues, which at times conflicted with the Native American battle for tribal sovereignty and land rights. In addition to fighting for civil rights and economic equality, AIM fought for tribal sovereignty, the recognition of treaties that had been signed by US government officials throughout colonial America but up until that point had been largely ignored by the US government, despite continuous effort by Native peoples.¹ An atmosphere of civil unrest exercised in an effective protest against the Vietnam War led burgeoning minority nationalist movements to use performance as a vital tool for mobilization.

Two foundational works that emerged out of the connected El Movimiento and AIM are *Bernabé* by Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino and *Foghorn* by Hanay Geigomah and the American Indian Theater Ensemble (AITE).² Toured on makeshift stages on Indian reservations, in community centers, and on farms (campesinos), each production aimed to educate and rally the Chicana/o and Native American people rather than focus on mainstream recognition.³ Radically effective in their promotion of the political and social messages of their respective movements, these works also theatrically embodied what Yolanda Broyles-González calls a “culture of orality” that deviated from the hegemonic theatrical method of telling a narrative in a realistic or linear manner.⁴ Both plays were developed and produced through company collaborative efforts, involved elements of the mythic and the spiritual, and posited through form and content an active critique of colonialism and US social and institutionalized racism. I argue that these shows can be seen as paradigms for art as resistance, moving toward a productive and modulating concept of decolonization that I call indigenous theatrical praxis. As Latin American performance theorist Marta Savigliano has written, a project that aims at nothing less than decolonization should employ a “strategy of anti-imperialist, de-centered mobilization” and avoid at all costs using the “tools of the colonizer” within the process.⁵ In this sense, we may examine the production histories, themes, and forms of Teatro’s *Bernabé* and AITE’s *Foghorn* as innovative in their scope, implicit in crafting constructive political identities and coalitions whereby alternative empowerment may emerge.

Both companies had elaborate, collective rehearsal processes that contributed to what we have today as the final scripts. In her important book *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*, Broyles-González



describes in detail the remarkable methodology employed by members of the company in its earlier years. She characterizes the process by which the company created pieces as “Theater of the Sphere,” and explains that plays were developed not as scripts but “in the oral performance mode: through the collective improvisation process.”⁶ Although El Teatro Campesino and AITE have divergent company histories, Geiogamah emphasizes the ensemble aspect of this primary American Indian theater company. AITE was developed amidst the New York City avant-garde theater scene in 1972 and was cosponsored by Ellen Stewart of La MaMa Experimental Theater Club, which had a social and environmental climate vastly different from El Teatro Campesino’s early Delano, California location. Instrumental to AITE’s process and larger artistic mission was the company’s inclusion of actors, directors, playwrights, and musicians who came from different communities throughout the United States. In his article, “The New American Indian Theatre: An Introduction,” Hanay Geiogamah recalls that despite their New York City venue, “acceptance by non-Indian audiences was not a primary consideration.” Although it was largely developed in New York City and premiered in East Berlin, *Foghorn*, like *Bernabé*, was first and foremost created to reach and speak to American Indian audiences. Geiogamah explains, “after two seasons in New York and a European tour, company members felt the need to take their enterprise into Indian country.”⁷ AITE’s and El Teatro Campesino’s social and political goals, intended audiences, as well as the collective energies behind the development processes and performances of *Bernabé* and *Foghorn*, centrally figure into a thorough analysis of the themes and historical positioning of both works.

These two plays—their collaborative genesis, and how they worked in performance—illustrate how indigenous theatrical praxis may foster such alternative modes of empowerment and work to decolonize. I argue that this can be achieved through (1) exposing popularly accepted racial and ethnic stereotypes as identity constructions; (2) rewriting history in a manner that repositions historically marginalized and objectified cultures as active subjects; (3) utilizing residual creative energies that transcend the normative methods for “art making,” thereby exposing an alternative indigenous worldview; and (4) destabilizing historical “facts” that constitute an essence of “timelessness” and edifice of authority for neocolonial and imperialist practices.⁸



The processes and performances of *Bernabé* and *Foghorn* contribute to a discourse on decolonization; however, there are important distinctions between how decolonization operates for the Chicana/o and Native American communities, and even within these categories' identification there are major historical, political, and social differences between groups, tribes, and individuals. Native American people may retain the cultural memory of the invasion (and associated partial destruction) of their homelands, as well as the Removal acts, massacres, biological warfare, and forced migrations brought on by European conquest. By the 1960s, many Native peoples had long given up the idea of achieving a truly *postcolonial* situation but instead fought for independence from the US government, the ability to nurture, protect, and renew traditional ways of life without oppression from the ongoing colonial presence. At this time El Movimiento began to couch its cause in a similar conceptual framework to that of AIM. Although there are significant similarities, I do not mean to conflate the unique historical experiences of all the original inhabitants of the Americas. Many Chicana/o people who immigrated across the US-Mexico border could not claim Aztec ancestry nor was there any significant "proof" that Aztecs were ever the sole inhabitants of much of the land mythologized as Aztlán. However, the borders drawn between Mexico and the United States happened in stages, each stage pushing back certain peoples to make physical space for Euro-American people and culture and to establish white hegemony in the United States. Unfortunately, many *mestizo* Mexican people (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry), including those who lived on the land that is now the US Southwest, did not embrace their indigenous ancestry until the nationalist concept of Aztlán was introduced in the 1960s. As I mentioned earlier, some Native Americans took issue with the Chicano reclamation of Aztlán, which did not negotiate with the non-Aztec tribal people who are largely left out of the Aztlán narrative, as if there were only Aztecs living in the Southwest at the time of colonial contact.

This essay explores how an indigenous worldview may be harnessed for the unification and empowerment of AIM and El Movimiento through a politically motivated and spiritually charged performance. As Chicana scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba points out, Aztlán functions in the Chicana/o imaginary as a kind of utopia and should not be seen as an actual claim to



actual lands based in actual history. She reminds us that in order to “deconstruct the paradoxes of identity” we must be able look “beyond place of origin; but also place must be seen as more than physical location or landscape.”⁹ I draw similarities between the Chicanas/os investment in a notion of a precolonial spiritual and cultural realm, based in a mythic past wherein Mexican people were agents of their own destinies, and the Native American emphasis on cultural and spiritual renewal and sovereignty because both narratives rely on community-based mobilization, disavowal of the Western worldview, and collective agency. Both employ an indigenous worldview and “strategy of anti-imperialist, de-centered mobilization.”¹⁰

Bernabé, which was created through company improvisation, is an early example of a performance piece that draws from elements of Mayan and Aztec spirituality to communicate an indigenous alternative approach to Chicana/o issues contemporary to its time. The play tells the story of a Californian farming community’s unassuming town fool, who can be considered as a kind of Chicano Everyman. *Bernabé* combines the familiar El Teatro Campesino conflict of landowners’ treatment of impoverished farmworkers with metaphysical themes. The work forges a relationship between contemporary Chicanas/os and their indigenous ancestry by double-casting all of the earthly campesino characters with the ancient mythical figures: La Tierra, La Luna, and El Sol. Ambitiously, the play is a mythical exploration of cultural, environmental, spiritual, sexual, economic, and social abuse and resistance, setting a decolonizing indigenous politics and political paradigm for reclaiming erased identity in theatrical motion.

Geiogamah’s *Foghorn* employs humor and irony to express a strong political and cultural statement regarding the gross misconceptions and stereotypes of Native Americans in popular culture. Through its Brechtian presentation of Native American and Caucasian American stereotypes, *Foghorn* critiques the injurious nature of colonization and contemporary US imperialism on both the dominant and marginalized populations. This play is not, however, merely a satirical parade of Native American stereotypes as represented by white hegemony. *Foghorn* works in a highly complex and theatrically rich manner that shows that these culturally implanted images of savage/victimized/colonized versus civilized/dominant/colonial types are unstable and ultimately destructive. Native scholar Jaimes-Guerrero asserts that decolonization for Native Americans must begin by rejecting

accepted colonial narratives that legitimize the “rights of conquest” by Euro-Americans. She expounds,

The manipulation of demographic data to establish the minimum presence of indigenous people prior to Columbus and European conquest, the perpetuation of stereotypes of Indian primitiveness, especially with regard to European standards of civilized agriculture, engineering, metallurgy, and religion, and the marginalization or outright rejection of the Native nations’ contribution to democratic governance . . . all contribute to the legitimacy of the “rights of conquest” by Euro-Americans.¹¹

She advocates rewriting such historical misconceptions and “debunking Indian stereotypes in history and contemporary popular culture” in order to reject the myths defending colonialism.¹²

I analyze these two plays together, recognizing stylistic and contextual differences, which will be discussed below, because each work and its production process, and the political, social, and artistic goals set forth by the plays’ creators, articulate an indigenous theatrical praxis aimed at decolonization. I argue that this praxis, including the collaborative process by which both works developed, their production histories, and the works as representational texts, inform the Chicano Teatro and American Indian Theater genres into the twenty-first century.

Bernabé and *Foghorn*, analyzed as meaningful artistic processes (and not merely as finalized works), illustrate how minority communities may confront, address, and reject dominant power structures. Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci explored the relationship of socioeconomic stratification and power through his concept of “hegemony.” He developed this concept to explain how society preserves a hierarchical structure wherein one economic (or social) class maintains power over the other groups through “‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group,” and, to a lesser extent, “the apparatus of state coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent.’”¹³ The latter, “spontaneous consent,” is as elusive as it is pervasive; as ordinary people go about their ordinary lives, they do not realize that they are contributing to their own domination or the domination of others within the social system. The creation process, themes, and production history of *Bernabé* and *Foghorn* rupture the often-seamless operations of hegemony.



Rather than consenting to the prevalence of existing (and normalized) patterns of social and economic hierarchy, these plays illustrate how the racist and unjust historical and contemporary systems of power maintain control through acts of violence, sociopolitical neglect, and majority consent.

The inclusion of indigenous spirituality within the themes and form of *Bernabé* is a cultural act of decolonization, social resistance, and political unification.¹⁴ I use the term *indigenous spirituality* to include the philosophical and ideational move within El Movimiento to incorporate indigenous (central) American ancestry and worldview as a vital political and cultural asset. This philosophical move greatly informs the structure, content, and development process of the play, which reveals cultural realities of the historical moment in which the work was created and performed. The form and content of this play offers a departure from disempowering hegemonic representations of California's Chicana/o communities by proposing a revolutionary worldview that moves toward decolonization.

BERNABÉ AND EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

Frustrated with horrific working conditions, endless inhumane treatment by the state, racism in the social sphere, and economic oppression, Luis Valdez joined with César and Helen Chávez and Dolores Huerta, and many other dedicated Chicanas/os in the struggle for living wages, equal rights, and Chicana/o cultural pride. El Teatro Campesino was created by and for the oppressed Chicana/o farm workers of California's San Joaquin Valley. The company's first goal was "to educate and entertain the farm workers."¹⁵ As El Movimiento broadened its focus from dealing expressly with labor issues to including other aspects of Chicana/o daily life and consciousness, El Teatro Campesino began to explore Chicana/o indigenous cultural and spiritual roots. Broyles-González writes,

In no way should "cultural practices" here be construed as different from "social practices" but as one kind of constitutive social practice. Culture here is not viewed simply as a way of interpreting the world, but also as a way of living within the world, of creating one's world and altering reality.¹⁶

This essay examines culture as an ideal and tangible manifestation of a group responding, reaffirming, and rejecting structures of power, hegemony, and the naturalizing narratives that place subjects in positions of power or

domination. The plot, the characters, the very form of *Bernabé* responds to structures of domination, reacting to and rejecting colonial ideologies and creating a new reality based on ancient spirituality, ritual, and an “Indio Vision of the Universe. And that vision is religious, as well as political, cultural, social, personal, etc. It is total.”¹⁷

Valdez formed El Teatro Campesino in 1965, an “alternative theater of the proletariat,” which supported the unionization of oppressed farmworkers in the Central Valley of California.¹⁸ El Teatro Campesino was extremely political in its mission; the politics of the Chicano movement were evident in the shows’ themes, content, and forms, as well as in the method in which the dramatic material originated and in the immediate and resourceful manner in which the shows were produced. Many of El Teatro Campesino’s shows were performed in meeting halls, or even on the back of a flatbed truck, and toured to different Chicano farmworking and urban communities. As much of the scholarship on El Teatro Campesino and Luis Valdez illustrates, El Movimiento, and specifically the cause of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW), were deeply affected by and promoted through this sociopolitical, revolutionary theater. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are continually lauded for interrupting the hegemonic American theatrical canon that primarily reflected Anglo middle-class realities and concerns and are generally credited as the harbingers of what is now known as Contemporary Chicano popular theater.¹⁹ Perhaps as a result of their significant cultural, political, and artistic break with the canonical forms of theater, much of the cultural and historical analysis on El Teatro focuses on the group’s earliest pieces usually referred to as “*actos*.” *Actos* were the characteristically short, presentational skits on topics directly related to promoting UFW awareness and other Chicano political themes that became the signature style for El Teatro Campesino.²⁰ Chicano theater history then often leaps ahead to the significant 1978 production of *Zoot Suit*, which was performed by El Teatro Campesino, but written by Luis Valdez and not the collective. Although the genre entitled “*los mitos*” (literally, “the myths”) has been given some critical attention, there is an extraordinary dearth of theoretical, historical analysis on El Teatro Campesino’s *mitos* and the cultural, political, and spiritual mind-set they implicate.²¹

The form, content, and function of El Teatro Campesino’s *mitos* contain tremendous political and social power. Using *Bernabé* as an exemplar



of the form, I seek to explore how *los mitos* reflected the social realities, concerns, and needs of the Chicana/o community in its time period, and how they can be looked at as part and parcel of a move toward an indigenous theatrical praxis, which is identifiable on both the Native American and Chicana/o stage. I will use the available playtext from Luis Valdez's *Early Works: Actos, Bernabé, and Pensamiento Serpentino*, although it is intrinsic to my analysis and any theoretical-historical work on *Bernabé* to recognize that the play was created through an ensemble approach of improvisation and dialogue, and this text version was recorded much later from one of the many performances, which varied from show to show. In some ways, the fact that this text exists is a contradiction of the mind-set and process of the collective that authored *Bernabé* and many *actos* that are singularly credited to Luis Valdez. (There are different critical implications in which *Bernabé* is treated as oral performance or as a text.) The method in which this play was created and performed, as a collective, nonlinear piece of oral culture is as important as the work's embedded themes and form. I will use the published playtext as a reference, so that any reader may follow along with certain aspects of the plot, characterization, stage directions, setting, and dialogue.

Bernabé was first conceived and performed in 1970 in Fresno, California, one of the group's temporary venues before the group secured a permanent theater in San Juan Batista, California.²² *Bernabé* is an early example of a performance piece that fuses elements of indigenous spirituality and performance practices with Chicana/o social, political, and cultural issues evident in the larger "Carpa Rasquachi Aesthetic."²³ Unlike later *mitos*, such as *Pensamiento Serpentino*, which were critiqued for displaying social and metaphysical principles considered "largely foreign to the experience of the working class Chicanos," *Bernabé* is first and foremost the story of a simple unemployed loco in an impoverished farming town.²⁴ The play takes place in Burlap, California, described in the beginning stage setup as "a small squat town not picturesque enough to be called a village, too large to be a labor camp."²⁵ Immediately we are situated in a familiar but bleak setting, the campos in San Joaquin Valley, California, in the early 1960s.

The familiar actual and politically envisaged landscape of the Californian campesino provided a relevant backdrop for Teatro to harness mythologized ideas about Chicana/o Mayan and Aztec ancestry for social and

spiritual empowerment. In a makeshift printed pamphlet, “Notes on Chicano Theatre,” Valdez situates *Bernabé* politically and socially:

Out of political necessity, El Teatro Campesino is turning toward religious theater. During the last seven years we have changed, moved, evolved and changed again in response to reality. Our own evolution has reflected the struggles of La Raza to be free.

Now we know that the colonization of our “pueblo del Sol” runs as deep as the human soul is. We must find our ultimate liberation in the Cosmic Vision of our indio ancestors. In search of that liberation, our Teatro has produced three mitos (myths): BERNABÉ (1970), LA VIRGEN DEL TEPEYAC (71–72) and LA CARPA CATINFLESCA (1972).²⁶

Bernabé is a mentally disabled man (Valdez does not specify a medical diagnosis) regarded by the town as “el loco del pueblo,” which translates as “the village idiot.” Still, the audience can see an innocence and purity in his character that is endearing and childlike. In his stage directions to the printed text version, Valdez writes that Bernabé is “touched with a cosmic madness.” Spirituality and Native ritual mediate one of the major concerns of this piece: the abuse of the earth by landowners. The earthly characters include Bernabé, his cousin Primo, his uncle Tío, his mother Madre, Torres (who owns the local saloon and brothel), and Consuelo, or “Connie,” a prostitute. The play reveals the characters’ specific relationships with an indigenous concept of earth and humanity. The actress who plays Consuelo, also plays La Tierra, who is “Coatlicue, Mother Earth, the Aztec Goddess of life, Death and Rebirth.” The actor who plays Torres plays the God of Moon, La Luna. The actor playing Tío doubles as El Sol, the mighty and powerful Aztec Sun God, “in the guise of Tonatiuh.”²⁷ Such double-casting breaks with canonical Aristotelian theater and the modern theatrical form of realism, which depends on verisimilitude, the realistic portrayal of unified time, space, and believable characters. The duality of the casting is also a break with normative Western, colonial, and neocolonial ordering structures of linear time and finite space. As La Luna enters the stage in a flood of moonlight dressed as a 1942 Pachuco, so does the Native worldview of cyclical time and infinite space.²⁸

However, as Jorge Huerta points out in his book *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society and Myth*, “Valdez creates his own mythology, based loosely on the Aztec pantheon but adjusted to meet his political and



creative needs.”²⁹ Notably, he changes La Luna from a woman to a young Pachuco man and positions El Sol as the father figure of La Luna and La Tierra, which is a departure from the original myth in which Huitzilopochtli (El Sol) is born of a virgin birth by Cóatlícue (Mother Earth or La Tierra). These are significant and timely changes, which illustrate the male-centered focus of El Movimiento in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, as well as the gendered relationship between Chicano nationalism and the concept of Aztlán, “the lost or stolen *motherland*.”³⁰ Certain plot points and characterization choices, such as Bernabé’s description as a heterosexual, male farmworker, partially explains why the genders of the mythological characters were changed within the script. Valdez appropriates Aztlán and its associated spirituality for dramatic and aesthetic impact but also to appeal to El Teatro Campesino’s political audiences, who perhaps would take comfort and feel a sense of cultural pride in the association made between Chicano people and an indigenous, spiritually rich past.

As the play continues, Bernabé reveals that he wants to marry his “*ruca*” (girlfriend), La Tierra, The Earth. To their horror, Madre, Tío, and Primo discover he has dug a hole in the ground, where he rolls in the dirt, in a sexual (physical) and romantic (emotional/psychological) union with his love. Primo tries to cure Bernabé of what they see as his imaginary relationship with the earth by paying Consuelo to have sex with Bernabé. This futile attempt dramatizes the attempted, but always incomplete, Western cultural domination over the indigenous worldview and its relationship to ancestral land. Bernabé realizes their agenda and stops the disgraceful encounter. Although the townspeople and his family members consider Bernabé to be the village idiot, his connection with the earth is so profound that he panics with guilt and revulsion at Connie’s advance. While Connie tried to convince him to touch her, Bernabé imagines he sees his own mother, who chides his conduct as dirty and threatens to beat him: “*soy madre y voy a pegar!*”³¹ The audience sees the encounter through Bernabé’s eyes, who hallucinates that Connie is his Madre. The actress who plays Madre enters the brothel and speaks as if she is Connie. Then, in the same speech, she transforms back to Madre:

MADRE (*As CONSUELO*). *Pero, ¿por qué no, bonito?* [But, why not, handsome?] You know me, que no? [don’t you?] I’m Conseulo, La Connie. . . . Don’t you want me? *Soy tu novia* . . . [I am your sweetheart . . .] (*Back to MADRE*) *¡Y por eso*

*te voy a pegar! Soy tu madre, y tengo derecho de castigarte mientras Dios me preste vida. [I am your mother, and I have the right to punish you as long as I live!].*³²

This moment highlights the uniqueness of Bernabé's mind-set; earlier in the play he boasts publicly about his romantic relations with La Tierra, with whom he lays without guilt or apology. His intense tie to La Tierra, however, includes a conceptualization of the earth as all-providing for mankind; this knowledge brings a feeling of immense pain when he realizes he uses Consuelo the way most men use and abuse the land. Bernabé's dedication to La Tierra conveys the possibility that El Movimiento and Chicanismo (Chicano "nationalist" pride) can overcome Western capitalist concepts of individualism and ownership that keep the Chicano people oppressed and in a cycle of dependency and poverty.³³

The play presents indigenous values as an alternative to Western individualism and capitalism. Indigenous feminist scholar Jaimes-Guerrero articulates the recurring themes that denote an indigenous concept of kinship as instrumental to indigenous life: "egalitarianism; reciprocity with others and with nature; and a complimentary relationship with women and men, with special respect granted to children and elders."³⁴ Bernabé, whose difference as a "loco" prevents him from acting out of his own interest, cannot bear to treat a woman with disrespect. His most intimate romantic love does not separate woman from earth, and to both he gives his ultimate respect, heart and soul. Despite Teatro's dramatization of Bernabé as the most simpleminded of the characters, he is shown to have an advanced sense of spirituality that stresses a feeling of total belonging, respect, and connection with the cosmos. Broyles-González also describes Teatro's work and processes as drawing from the indigenous worldview that moves "in harmony with life, with the people in one's immediate environment, and with the cosmic movement."³⁵ In dramatic opposition to his mother and uncles' attempt to normalize Bernabé through pimping Consuelo, La Tierra forcefully calls Bernabé to become a man by connecting to her, her father the sun, her brother the moon, and all the cosmos:

TIERRA. And how am I yours, Bernabé? Where and when have you stood up for me? All of your life you've worked in the fields like a dog—and for what? So others can get rich on your sweat, while other men lay claim on me? Torres says he owns me, Bernabé—what do you own? Nothing. (*Pause. BERNABÉ's head is*



down.) Look at me hombre! *Soy La Tierra!* [I am the Earth!] Do you love me? Because if your love is true, then I want to be yours. (BERNABÉ reaches out to embrace her.) But not so fast, *pelado!* [sleaze ball!] I'm not Consuelo, *sabes?* [understand?] If you truly love me, you'll have to respect me for what I am, and then fight for me—*¡como los machos!* [Like a real man!] Don't you know anything? Many men have died just to have me. Are you capable of killing those who have me . . . and do not love me, Bernabé?³⁶

La Tierra's words act as an incantation, a call to reject the Euro-American relationship with land and identity in terms of ownership. Exploding the concept of discrete and distinct identity, she asks him to love her, both fully as a woman and fully as the land. It is emotional and political, total, calling forth a philosophic understanding of life and life forces that predate the imperial and colonial concept of "progress." That the character La Tierra can at once represent a human being and the earth embodies opposition to modern capitalism and development, promoting an indigenous environmentalist value system that connects humanity with the planet that supports its life. This calling is indicative of El Movimiento's reclamation of Aztlán, which was an important ideological tool used to harness the community against systems of economic and cultural oppression in the 1970s.³⁷ As articulated by de Alba, the myth of Aztlán, or the lost motherland (thought to include Mexico and the US Southwest), has formed Chicano psychology and cultural production for the past forty years. She writes,

Based on racial pride, historical awareness, brotherhood, cultural unity, and the claim to nativity to the land base of the Southwest, the myth of Aztlán calls for the reclamation of "the land of our birth," a lost or stolen motherland that was taken involuntarily, and that the Chicano "hijos de *Cuauhtémoc*" [children of *Cuauhtémoc*] were destined to redeem through the political as well as the cultural manifestations of El Movimiento.³⁸

El Movimiento's thrust to reclaim Aztlán is dynamically represented toward the end of the play. The mythical characters take the stage and interact with Bernabé, dissolving normative understandings of reality, sanity, and insanity. La Tierra's father, El Sol tests Bernabé's love for his daughter/the earth by demanding that Bernabé literally give his heart in sacrifice to him. Bernabé, *el loco del pueblo*, is suddenly transformed to a courageous cosmic man through this complete surrender to El Sol and indigenous reality. Bernabé is truly transformed; one of his last lines in the play is: "If I once

was a loco, now I am a man—and I belong to La Tierra, as she belongs to me.”³⁹ Bernabé’s death and rebirth as a cosmic human, a Chicano, performs a human-earth relationship that is not shackled by the artificial boundaries installed by liberal modernity; the articulated relationship between human and land is one of reciprocity, unlike the system of ownership established through an ideology of nation-states and capitalism.⁴⁰ He is one with the earth, and not bound by economic and political power structures that oppress Chicanos as a subaltern, immigrant working class.

TOWARD DECOLONIZATION

The form and the content of *Bernabé* diverge from the status quo of American theater and the normalized Judeo-Christian Anglo-Saxon value systems and worldview. The show’s form as a *mito*, primarily based in the indigenous “culture of orality,” deviated from the hegemonic theatrical method that seeks to tell a narrative in a linear manner.⁴¹ The originative, cyclical, myth-laden form speaks through a worldview that is subversive and resistant to the structures of cultural domination, such as certain historical uses of Catholicism, capitalism, expansionist development, which are all systems of power entangled with and grounded in colonialism.

As mentioned above, the enactment of the mythological Aztec gods El Sol, La Tierra, and La Luna breaks Aristotelian dramatic notions of strict chronological time, mutates the concept of individualism, and connects the present lives of Chicanos with their ancestry and the natural and spiritual world anteceding European and American colonization and modernity. In his work, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems, History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry*, José E. Limón quotes Raymond Williams and makes the valuable point that “in contesting cultural, and ultimately, social hegemony, subordinate groups can also turn to ‘new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships that are continually being created.’” Limón looks at Williams work on the “residual” and its relationship to new “emergent” cultural forms in order to see how “the new and the residual work together to respond effectively to domination and its hegemonic assault.”⁴² In the case of the play *Bernabé*, hegemonic assault is Euro-American colonialism/imperialism/racism and its powerful accoutrements.



Bernabé articulates how the residual culture of orality and indigenous spirituality can emerge as a new form within the American theatrical scene and the cultural realm of El Movimiento Chicano. The residual concepts of orality, duality, and spiritual environmentalism (characteristic of the indigenous worldview in which nature and man are inextricably connected) are imbued with new meanings as they enter the stage of a 1960s farming community. The ideas of the play call for and uncover—rediscover—a cultural memory of the pre-Columbian past. The normative realistic form of theater is exploded as the subject matter suddenly includes Chicana/o issues, an indigenous worldview, and multiplicity of characterization. *Bernabé* reconfigures theater as a new cultural form acting as Chicana/o political, spiritual, and social expression. The relationships between the emergent and the residual reclaims Aztlán and, in doing so, makes firm the conviction and sociopolitical statement that physical, mental, and cultural colonialism has not yet ended in the Americas.

Savigliano explores the possibility for representational and original artistic endeavor to combat colonialism in her book *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*:

Colonialism operates through a careful detection and fixation of differences and inoculates the fear, guilt, and anger of not being one and the same—the same as the colonizer. . . .

*A decolonizing project must state that colonization does not end with so-called “independence” and the point should be made obvious. This discourse of decolonization is a strategy of anti-imperialist, decentered mobilization.*⁴³

Cultural expression has the power to decolonize actively. *Bernabé* decenters the Anglo-Saxon majority of the United States completely; not one Anglo character enters the stage throughout the work. It is by, for, and about the Chicana/o experience. Unlike many of El Teatro Campesino's *actos*, which satirically enact resistance against abusive campesino bosses and their sell-out Mexican-American henchmen, the Chicano is the center of the world in *Bernabé*. The work also contains fantastic play between residual and emergent forms of resistance to Western ideology. Because aspects of theater can be read as ritualistic, based on the emotional, psychic, and physical involvement of the performers and sometimes the audience as well, the staged ritual within *Bernabé* decolonizes its performers and audience, blurring the normative barriers between the two entities. As the indigenous



worldview and Bernabé's transformation is dramatized and witnessed, the audience may be transformed as well. Colonial concepts of life ordering, the "formalized institutions" and narratives, whether political, social, "theological, philosophical, or technological," which have been used to justify the oppression of the Chicana/o community, are rejected and replaced with a decolonizing alternative within the world of the play.⁴⁴

The content, form, and ensemble approach involved in the creation of *Bernabé* show a worldview that is resistant to the cultural, mental, and economic oppression of the Chicano community at the time of the play's inception. Comprised of emergent cultural issues contemporary to the Chicano experience of California's Central Valley in the 1960s and 1970s, and of residual forms of ancient spirituality and mythology, this play presents a move toward social, political, and spiritual empowerment. Savigliano's call for "decentered mobilization" is illustrated by Bernabé's death, which at once ends the play but begins a ritualized reclamation of Aztlán and reassertion of Chicano political and spiritual power. *Bernabé* serves as an historical example of an artistic revisioning of the Chicano experience and one that links Chicanismo ideologically to indigenism. In order to deepen this connection, I will next explore *Foghorn*, an American Indian production contemporary to *Bernabé*; together these two pieces put into action a notion of cultural sovereignty through mobilization of tradition and ever-changing contemporary modes of creativity.

FOGHORN AND THE AMERICAN INDIAN THEATER ENSEMBLE

Hanay Geiogamah, Kiowa playwright, professor of theater, and interim director of the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA, has lectured on the important alliance between El Movimiento and AIM in the 1970s and particularly emphasized the matched political and artistic endeavors of El Teatro Campesino and the early work of the AITE.⁴⁵ Drawing in part from Teatro's original *actos* style, Geiogamah worked with AITE's performers to create a script made of eleven discrete scenes. These scenes link thematically through their exploration of issues of power in terms of representation, history writing, and community empowerment. The play was first produced in 1973, at a time when the question of authority over cultural



representation was paramount within AIM.⁴⁶ Although the majority of *Foghorn's* run took place in the United States in spaces ranging from community centers and recreation halls on Indian reservations, to avant-garde off-Broadway playhouses, to university and college theaters, it premiered in East Berlin, an appropriate location for this radical "Brechtian confrontation with Indian stereotypes ranging in time from Columbus to the 1973 incident at Wounded Knee."⁴⁷ The play functions similarly to Brecht's concept of the "Lehrstücke" or learning play, in which aesthetic pleasure or entertainment is combined with "teaching" socioeconomic lessons.⁴⁸ In order to correct popular negative images of Native Americans that have been ingrained in the cultural imaginary of the United States, Geiogamah combines presentational, satirical characters and acting style with serious "real" historical references. The title reminds the audience of the foghorns used to harass the American Indians who occupied Alcatraz Island in 1969; this juxtaposition of "fact" and hyperbolic fiction functions as "the playwright's awakening call to Indian people about the dangers that stereotypes pose. . . . Geiogamah asks first that we [the audience] study and understand ourselves and then make responsible and humane use of that knowledge."⁴⁹

Notably, this script is intended for a pantribal American Indian cast that embodies a broad spectrum of Native peoples oppressed by colonization and US imperialism.⁵⁰ Many scenes end with an act of defiance and strength, as the exaggerated "Indian" stock characters rise up against their oppressors, presenting a rewritten version of American history in which American Indians are active subjects. *Foghorn* in performance is a counter-hegemonic project that works to destabilize accepted past and present colonial efforts by presenting the absurdity of white and Indian stereotypes as they are played out through the reenactment of colonial relations; by empowering a pantribal American Indian cast to play the roles assigned to them by popular culture and to reenact each racist scenario to conclude with the defeat of the oppressors; by using grotesque humor, which implies that the deep underlying insecurity and anxiety over difference is the root of racist, Euro-American-centric practices; and by including an indigenous worldview as evinced by the communal creative energies of its ensemble approach, its cyclical and repetitive organizing structure, and sacred songs. The aforementioned attributes work in tandem, generating a mode of cultural sovereignty through indigenous theatrical praxis. As seminal Native



theorist Vine Deloria Jr. argued throughout the 1970s, there is a direct connection between sovereignty, freedom, and community strengthening for the American Indian community and culture. He writes that sovereignty—cultural, political, and economic—is necessary to achieve freedom. This freedom cannot be defined in Western finite terms but rather must “emerge through the experience of the group to exercise the sovereignty which they recognize in themselves.”⁵¹ Several of *Foghorn’s* production choices indicate AIM’s focus to build cultural sovereignty across the pantribal community.

Although we must be cautious not to homogenize the varying experiences of the hundreds of distinct tribes, one harrowing similarity among them is the “deep cultural freeze” resultant from the Indian policies set forth in the 1800s and 1900s by the American government.⁵² In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act (IRA), which began the thirty-year process of forcibly removing thousands of Indian families from their homes to lands west of present-day Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. The IRA represented the first clear break with the policy of good faith between America and the American Indians. This act created and represented racist attitudes toward the American Indian people and culture, which inevitably resulted in their decimation. As a method of dealing with the “Indian problem” the US government–run Office of Indian Affairs (Bureau of Indian Affairs as of 1947) began to establish an Americanization movement aimed to assimilate American Indians through education and total immersion. Indian boarding schools, which were primarily run by contracted Christian missionaries, forbade Native children and young adults from speaking in their Native languages and practicing their Native religions or traditions including tribal governance, arts, and performance.⁵³ A crucial goal of American Indian theater, as described by Geiogamah, is to reconnect tribal peoples with cultural traditions that have been historically all but razed.

As discussed previously in regards to the distinct theatrical praxis executed in Teatro’s *Bernabé*, the United States in the 1970s served as fertile temporal ground for indigenous theater. In his introduction to *Stories of Our Way: An Anthology of American Indian Plays*, Geiogamah unabashedly states that the most important function of an American Indian dramatist is to connect with his/her community and reestablish, through cultural memory, traditions that have been systematically repressed and forbidden



through colonial practices.⁵⁴ Although *Foghorn* contains aspects of the traditional, such as the Zuñi sunrise chant and cyclical approach to narrative, the work also reflects on specific material realities relevant to the 1970s AIM and its community; the play stages two of the most meaningful and radical American Indian protests: the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island and the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee. The occupation of Alcatraz Island was considered the beginning of “Red Power” public awareness and a symbolic “call for Indian self-determination for their own lives.”⁵⁵ The siege at Wounded Knee is credited with instilling fear in otherwise unmoved US officials and shaping “federal Indian policy by first placing and then keeping Native American concerns on the national agenda.”⁵⁶

The play’s scenes operate in two distinct modalities that converge thematically as a critique of colonialism and an act of decolonization. The play begins and ends in a serious tone, leaving satire to do its work in between the two tied “ends” of this cyclical journey. The occupation of Alcatraz and the siege at Wounded Knee appear within the play’s cycle of scenes, presenting significant current matters as traditionally staged ceremony. The inclusion of these events offers contrast to the play’s ahistorical caricatures of Indian stereotypes; *Foghorn’s* American Indian is not frozen in time but is ever-changing, moving forward, and at the same time deeply in touch with the cycle of life, including the old ways. Indigenous theatrical praxis emerges from many dynamic performance modalities that connect concepts of the traditional with the immediate material. To illustrate these discrete but complementary modalities, I will analyze examples from the satirical scenes as well as the serious scenes that open and close the play.

The opening stage directions read, “*The costumes and movement should suggest a forced journey, such as the Trail of Tears, spanning the centuries from 1492 to the present and stretching geographically from the West Indies to Alcatraz Island.*” The “stylized choreography” occurs over “a background of progressive electric sound, one that evokes a journey through time and space.” This movement begins only after “a large, painted Indian face appears, apparition-like. . . . The electronic music begins.” Various colonizing characters deliver the first six lines of the text over the backdrop of the rest of the ensemble’s “journey.” The Spanish Sailor shouts his reactions to the Native peoples, calling them “hombres, cho-co-la-tes!” and “Los indios.” This is met by the Male Settler’s response “You’re only an



Injun. Don't talk back!" A small cast of settlers fills the stage with racist monikers for the Native people ranging from "Vermin! Varmits" to "Filthy savages. Murderers! Scalpers!" Immediately the audience is brought into the colonists' fragmented, terrified state of mind. Rather than courageous explorers or founding fathers, these "sailors" and "settlers" are depicted as confused, ignorant, and, above all, frightened to the point of violence. The escalation from fear of difference to hatred and destruction is dramatized in the quick progression of the Spanish Sailor's exclamation wrongly naming the American Indians "Indios," to the Angry Male Vigilante's ominous proposal, "Move 'em with force, guns!"⁵⁷

The final voice in this scene acts as a transition into scene 2 and lucidly sets forth the position of the colonizer and the problem of manifest destiny that the rest of the play aims to destroy:

UNITED STATES SENATOR. The Indian problem is a matter for the courts and the Congress to deal with. We've been victorious over them on the battlefield, now they must settle on the reservations we have generously set aside for them. They have stood in the way of our great American Manifest Destiny long enough.

In scene 2 the narrator offers a response to the US senator's "Indian problem":

NARRATOR. We, the Native Americans, reclaim this land, known as America, in the name of all American Indians, by right of discovery. We wish to be fair and honorable with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, who as a majority wrongfully claim it as theirs, and hereby pledge that we shall give to the majority inhabitants of this country a portion of the land for their own, to be held in trust by the American Indian people. . . . We will offer them our religion, our education, our way of life—in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers from their savage and unhappy state.⁵⁸

The narrator's words are in perfect juxtaposition to those of the senator, creating a mimicry and reversal to US colonial policy. His speech turns the logic of colonialism on itself, weakening the rationale of manifest destiny. The narrator invokes colonialism, appropriates its terms, and reverses the position of the colonized to the "Caucasian inhabitants." The content and tone of this speech foreshadows the powerful irony used throughout the play to counter colonialism and its methodologies.



In his article "Of Mimicry and Man," postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha describes how identity has been produced within a colonial society, and how such constructed identities can be renegotiated by the colonized. He argues that mimicry has been one of the most effective, yet elusive, methods for regulating and reinforcing colonial dominance over the colonized; colonization relies on the production of norms within which the colonized can almost, but never completely, fit. Bhabha explains that the colonized are constructed as "almost the same" as the colonizer, but "not quite," which constructs the colonizers as complete subjects and the colonized as partial subjects. However, the identities of those in power require the partial subjectivity of the "inappropriate objects," the colonized. Bhabha then argues that from their "almost the same, but not quite" positions of partial subjectivity, the colonized can reverse the gaze upon the colonizers, exposing hegemony's dependency on their partiality and the ambivalence of colonial identity. He coins this process of the Other gazing back as the "comic turn."⁵⁹

Foghorn exemplifies the process of the comic turn as defined by Bhabha, through the hyperbolic dramatization within scenes 3 through 10. The over-the-top hegemonic representations of Indians played by a specifically Native American cast show the identificatory apparatus at work. The dominant culture has constructed negative, misinformed, or overly simplistic images of Native Americans as Others, which are similar to the whites in power but exotically different at the same time; they are mere mimics of the norm of white culture. By showing the ridiculous nature of these stereotypes the actors offer instances of "counter-mimicry" that can become "the menace of mimicry" in which the colonial desire for and dependency on these representations are articulated.⁶⁰ Following the sardonic sparing of the US senator and the narrator, the play moves into a whirlwind of farcical stereotypes. Scene 3 features a nun's desperate attempt to convert the "poor, miserable, ignorant, uncivilized, NAKED . . . savages" to Christianity. The scene ends with her frantic forewarning, "If we did not find you, your souls would burn! Burn forever, for eternity! In HELL!" At this point, the "*Indians attack them [the Nun and her alter boy] as the church music blasts through the theater. Then a sharp drilling noise is heard, the lights flash, and action visuals of giant chunks of earth flying through space are projected on the playing area.*" This marks the structural pattern of the



rest of the satirical scenes; scene 4 features a teacher who greets her class with “G³ood morning, Savages!” and manically pummels one of her Indian students for attempting to communicate in her own language with another student. She screams, “You Indians are going to become educated! That’s spelled E-D-U-C-A-T-E-D, ed-u-ca-ted! . . . you are going to learn the English language. You are going to learn how to be Christians!” The schoolteacher’s fate is the same as the nun’s: the “*pupils form into a tight group, fists clenched, close in on her, and attack. The lights fade on the drilling sound, earth visuals.*”⁶¹ This cyclical pattern decolonizes; it holds up Christian conversion and Americanization policy as tools of colonialism, deconstructs these practices through hyperbolic representation, and presents a *different version of history* in which this colonial practice is rejected. Difference is exaggerated between the bodies of the American Indian actors and the characters they play, such as the Catholic nun and schoolteacher, who represent (Euro-American) hegemonic power. The effect is what Bhabha would call “the menace of mimicry,” wherein the “double vision” of the colonized and the colonizer discloses “the ambivalence of colonial discourse,” disrupting the unequal power structures normalized through the colonial narrative.⁶²

Scene 5 follows the decolonizing structure of scene 3 but instead of calling upon general representations of “savage” and “pagan” Indian school children, the scene references one specific root of the popular Indian princess stereotype; scene 5 retells the famous Pocahontas/John Smith “love” story. Fully embodying the stereotype of the submissive, virgin Indian princess, Pocahontas gossips with her handmaidens about her encounter with the “big, big captain.” She stutters with naiveté while describing John Smith’s body: “He had such big legs. Such big, uh, arms, such big, uh, uh, chest. Such big, big head. Such big, big hands. Such big, big feet. Such big eyes. Such big mouth . . . Ooooooh, aaahaaa.” The character seems to be exactly that Pocahontas represented in contemporary popular culture; she is bumbling, horny, and enamored of the white man. She describes John Smith’s obsession with her virginity: “I . . . I said to him, ‘Yes, yes, I am a virgin.’ When I said this, he seemed to get kind of nervous, excited.” This can be read by using both postcolonial and feminist narratives; John Smith is Captain Colonizer, the white male looking to conquer virgin land and virgin woman.⁶³ The act of decolonization following their encounter in this scene undermines the racist and sexist stereotypes engendered by colonialism.



After a lengthy account of the foreplay, the disappointing anticlimax with the “big Captain” is described in stage directions:

*The handmaidens huddle closely with Pocahontas for the intimate details. One of them pops up, exclaiming “Pink?” Then Pocahontas rises above them, lifts her arms in a manner to suggest an erect phallus. The handmaidens gasp. Then a kazoo whistle indicates that the erection falls quickly, and the handmaidens explode with laughter.*⁶⁴

After building up the audience expectation to hear that Smith ravished young Pocahontas as the story has always been told, Geiogamah hilariously delivers an entirely different message. The playwright’s use of the word *phallus* rather than *penis* deliberately connects Smith’s hypermasculinity to his power as colonizer. As colonialism positions the white male as the keeper of the phallus, decolonization deflates the power from its erection. This scene removes the sexiness often inscribed in colonial contact (which serves to cloak the actual conqueror-gratifying sexual violence) and replaces the stereotypical sexist Pocahontas myth with colonizer Captain Smith’s inevitable impotence.

The lights fade on the laughing handmaidens, accompanied by “earth visuals” and drilling sounds.⁶⁵ The drilling sounds and earth visuals appear at the end of each satirical scene, demanding attention from the audience. These sounds and projections serve as a metaphorical warning that the earth and the whole of mankind run the risk of total destruction if problems of human and environmental exploitation and disrespect continue.⁶⁶ They connect the separate vignettes and add a somber portent to the hysterical satire of each scene. The destruction of the earth and death of humanity is a problem shared by colonizers and colonized alike; if current forms of colonialism are demolishing the world, every human being must take responsibility in ending these venomous systems.

As in the beginning scenes, *Foghorn* ends with a rich soundscape as the ensemble forms a semicircle around the drummer, who “drums and sings the AIM song, building to a spirited pitch,” against recordings of rifle shots, helicopters, armored cars, and more gunfire. A “sequence of action shots of the siege at Wounded Knee” creates the background for the play’s final scene.⁶⁷

On 27 February 1973 a group of 250 AIM activists began the occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, as an act of protest and remembrance for



the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. Although the US government retaliated by releasing flares to locate activists, enforcing roadblocks in and out of the area, and eventually opening machine gun fire, AIM spiritual leaders continued the siege bolstered by elements of cultural and spiritual resistance. Leonard Crow Dog, the medicine man of the group, led a traditional warrior sweat. According to the memoir recorded by Woody Kipp, who participated in the siege, the men painted their faces in the old way, prepared for battle, “for death if need be.”⁶⁸ By enacting the siege Geiogamah seamlessly illustrates the two connected tragedies, presenting a nonlinear awareness of time. The protest at Wounded Knee was a political and historical performance. When the actual US marshalls opened fire and removed the Indian protesters by force, the systems of dominance, violence, and oppression that historically existed within that space were performed again. The siege brought the bitingly real and continuing colonial power relations into the public eye. *Foghorn* revisits these linked performances of colonial oppression to highlight their political and social importance and to serve as a wake-up call for the Native community to fight actively for decolonization.

The siege at Wounded Knee was fresh in the American cultural imaginary when *Foghorn* debuted later that same year, as was the AIM song that begins the play’s final scene. A single rifle shot suddenly cuts the drummer’s song short, silencing him in death. The ensemble lifts the performer and carries him offstage in procession, as a recording of the marshall’s voice loudly plays:

It is my duty to inform you that you are all under arrest on the charge of unlawfully trespassing on private property. Warrants for your arrest have been issued in federal district court. I must caution all of you not to make any sudden moves. We are armed and are prepared to take any necessary defensive action. . . . Your hands must be held high above your heads until the handcuffs are placed on you.⁶⁹

Despite the cruel, sanctioned actions of the US government, as symbolized by the marshall’s voice, the funeral procession returns to the stage in an act of resistance. An indigenous theatrical praxis, as seen in this final act, requires the active participation of the performers to move through historical and current subjugation and oppression. The cast unites through the meaningful, emotional, and ceremonial process of respectfully sending their fallen *compadre*, a character who symbolizes all Native peoples across time who have fallen whilst fighting to defend their families, tribes,



land, and ways of life. The ensemble's physical procession contrasts with the colonial power represented by the marshall, which has been reduced to a disembodied voice.

Highlighting the irreducible relationship between the spiritual and material that characterizes the Native worldview, the procession is led by a drummer, "*who sounds a single heavy beat.*"⁷⁰ Kipp describes the immense significance and multiple uses of the drum, especially during the siege at Wounded Knee:

About a mile from the hamlet, we heard a big bass Indian drum sending its reverberations into the frosty night air. The music was satisfying to us but probably frightening to the white men in the APCs [Armored Personnel Carriers]. Through their own stories, their own media, they have created an inordinate fear of savages pounding a tom-tom. But in their rush upon the land to claim it, they never took time to find out what things of this land meant. Some, like the drum, have been here a long time and have a very deep metaphysical meaning, not only for Natives but anyone who travels the land. The drum says this: the sound you hear is the sound of the universe, the sound of the heart of God beating, breathing energy into your own heart; it is the sound of the collective heart of all mankind, beating in rhythm, in unison, telling us we all come from the source that created that heartbeat.⁷¹

The use of the sacred drumbeat offers a distinct contrast to the hyperbolic satire of the play's previous scenes, bringing ceremony into the present political, and implicating the audience into a timeless ritual of life, death, war, and unity with the universe. The aspired actual and metaphysical unity can only be reached in a decolonized world, the world which *Bernabé* and *Foghorn* envision, and in which an indigenous theatrical praxis may figure resistance to inequity and the emergence of cultural renewal.

The last lines in *Foghorn* offer a message of hope and continuance, resistance and decolonization. One by one they return to the stage, handcuffed. The narrator steps to the front of the group, and interjects as each actor steps forward, positing their unique and active subjectivity, calling forth the names of their tribes:

NARRATOR. We move on. To a courtroom in Rapid City, South Dakota.
To a courtroom in Sioux Falls, Iowa.

PERFORMER. (*Moving out from the group, he thrusts his hands toward the audience.*) I am Pawnee.

NARRATOR. We move on.

SECOND PERFORMER. I am Creek.

NARRATOR. Back to our homes, our people.

THIRD PERFORMER. I am Winnebago.

NARRATOR. We move on.

PERFORMER. I am Sioux.

NARRATOR. To the land.

PERFORMER. I am Apache.

NARRATOR. To the sky.

PERFORMER. I am Kiowa.

*The lights dim as the apparition of the Indian face again appears on the stage and moves slowly around the playing area.*⁷²

The Indian face brings the action of the play back full circle, reminding the audience that Indian time and space are circular and need not follow Western modes of linearity.⁷³ The performers cry out their tribal heritage, resisting the dehumanizing colonial practice of grouping Native Americans into one race of Others against which whiteness can define itself. As Rudolfo Anaya explains, the “ceremony of naming, or of self-definition, is one of the most important acts a community performs,” and acts as a “fundamental step of awareness.”⁷⁴ In the case of the indigenous peoples of America, as presented in *Bernabé* and *Foghorn*, specifying who one is (“un hombre nuevo” [a new man], “I am Kiowa”) disavows assimilation and colonial cultural erasure. The narrator speaks of a dignified fight against the colonial myth of the vanishing Indian narrative. The colonized move on to battle the ruin of the world and all of its inhabitants legally, culturally, and spiritually.

The final two lines of *Foghorn* address what Jamies-Guerrero calls the “‘both sides were guilty’ rationalization.”⁷⁵ The voice of the Spanish Soldier recalls the notion of the “discovery” of “los indios”: ¡Capitan! ¡Capitan! ¡Dios Mio! . . . ¡Ellos son los indios! [Captain! Captain! My God!. . . They are the Indians!].⁷⁶ His words in and of themselves are incorrect and ignorant but



not evil. This voice establishes the terror of difference that lies at the root of most colonial practices and institutions. The problem to be corrected is not the Spanish Solider, the marshall, nor all Caucasian Americans. *Foghorn* condemns colonialism as a system that denigrates every party into reductions of otherness, stereotypes grounded in hatred, ignorance, and fear. The campy hyperbolic stock characters are shown as inhuman throughout as if to say, it is not humans who are innately at fault but the existing systems of oppression. This piece does not represent the colonized as victims without hope. It critiques colonialism without reinforcing the colonial image of the vanishing Indian.

The last line of the play reminds the audience that Native Americans, and all Others, are not guilty for the crimes of colonialism. The Voice of the Spanish Soldier's words serve as a message of hope and call the audience to demand decolonization. He says, "(*Very compassionately*) I am . . . NOT GUILTY!"⁷⁷ Calling out his innocence, the narrator becomes the voice and embodiment of the Native community. Like El Teatro Campesino's Bernabé, the narrator is an active agent in the cultural renewal of his community, the most elemental aspect of indigenous theatrical praxis.

DECOLONIZATION PERFORMED

The 1960s and 1970s can be seen as a period of social and political unrest and, consequently, mobilization. The American Indian Movement and El Movimiento Chicano, although discrete in their goals, had political platforms built on an ethos of solidarity, cultural pride, and hope for a better life for the members of their respective communities. At this tumultuous time, both grassroots movements utilized theater to promote this ideology of unification, pride, and agency within a majority culture that would otherwise reduce Chicana/os and Native Americans to lesser Others. Significantly, the unification sought for and dramatized by *Bernabé* and *Foghorn* extended beyond the perimeters of their contemporary Chicana/o and Native American audiences, calling upon the ideas of ancestry, spirituality, and time and space before colonial contact.

Bernabé tells a story of a contemporary Chicano farmworker who is acutely connected with the pulse and breath of the timeless cosmos. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino establish the connection between the abuses of the land, the subhuman treatment of the people who work the land, and



the growing disconnect between the Chicana/o people and their spiritual/psychic relationship with precolonial notions of cosmic interrelatedness. *Foghorn*, although stylistically different from *Bernabé*, also conveys a nuanced dualistic awareness of the universe and the role and significance of indigenous peoples' past, present, and future. *Foghorn*'s nonlinear form, which unites seminal moments of colonial contact, indigenous resistance, and timeless tradition and ritual, establishes and promotes Native agency. Geiogamah negotiates reductive and belittling misrepresentations of "Indians" and asserts contemporary, individual life experiences and identity, staging timely political issues of sovereignty and independence. As Bernabé becomes a Chicano in the total sense of the word, "un hombre nuevo," he understands that his strength as an agent of his own destiny comes from his connection to his ancestors, to future generations, and to the Earth (La Tierra), which supports all life. When the actors playing the eleven separate but related scenes that make up *Foghorn* address the audience and claim their tribal affiliation, they assert a concept of indigenous identity that is layered and multidimensional; at once they are individuals, they link their own lived experiences and personal identities to their different tribal histories and cultures, and they stand in solidarity together in a contemporary pantribal alliance. This connects the contemporary indigenous people to their ancestors and calls for a united collective force to secure a future of sovereignty. *Bernabé* and *Foghorn* are plays that incorporate and facilitate indigenous ways of living within and relating to time, space, and the universe beyond systems of domination.

NOTES

1. Chadwick Allen, "Postcolonial Theory and the Discourse of Treaties," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2000): 59–89.

2. Hanay Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, in *New Native American Drama: Three Plays* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980): 45–82. This version of the text includes a cast list from the original performance, photographs from the performance's run, author's note, stage directions, and the script.

3. Hanay Geiogamah, "The New American Indian Theater: An Introduction," in *American Indian Theater in Performance*, ed. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye Darby (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 2000), 159.

4. Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theatre in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 5.
5. Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 21, 233.
6. Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 79. Broyles-González's book aims to recuperate Teatro Campesino's creative process, which she argues has often been overlooked by critics and scholars who concentrate on the group's performance spectacles and plays. She describes Teatro Campesino's project as "consisting of the elaboration of a native Chicana/o performance theory and practice that was at the same time a philosophy of life: the Theater of the Sphere. Very broadly speaking, the Theater of the Sphere is a method for performance and life training developed by the Teatro Campesino ensemble between 1970 and 1980. It seeks to maximize and effectively to deploy a person's performance energies both on and offstage" (80).
7. Geigamah, "The New American Indian Theater," 161.
8. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 251. According to Roach, narratives of "timelessness" are often used to legitimize myths of origins and authenticity. Such narratives are often counterproductive to social or political change.
9. Alicia Gaspar de Alba, "There's No Place Like Aztlan: Embodied Aesthetics in Chicana Art," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 1, no. 2 (2004): 107–8.
10. Savigliano, *Tango*, 21.
11. M. Annette Jaimes-Guerrero, "'Patriarchal Colonialism' and Indigenism: Implications for Native Feminist Spirituality and Native Womanism," *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (2003): 53.
12. Ibid.
13. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 2003), 12.
14. I do not use the term *indigenous spirituality* to signify any one tribal religious-belief system, nor do I use it to homogenize all indigenous peoples' spirituality.
15. Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre Themes and Forms* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982), 1.
16. Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 24.
17. Luis Valdez, "Chicano Theatre One" (primavera 1973), Chicano Studies Center Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles Library, 1.
18. Charles Tatum, *Chicano Popular Culture: Que Hable el Pueblo (The Mexican American Experience)* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 126.
19. Tatum, *Chicano Popular Culture*, 126.
20. Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*, by Luis Valdez (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992), 7–8.
21. One exception to this "dearth" is the critical work of Yolanda Broyles-González. In *El Teatro Campesino* Broyles-González deconstructs what she views as a history of analyzing the company as "chronological, text-centered, and male-centered" (xii). She specifically takes issue with the "history of the company [which] has been constructed

as the life and times of Luis Valdez" (xiii). She unpacks some of the deep problems and contradictions with examining and classifying these works in a linear, hierarchical, male-dominated mode.

22. As Broyles-González points out, the "El Teatro Campesino collective process was irrevocably altered" when the company moved into the space at San Juan Batista, CA (226). Money, notoriety, and a new commitment to "professional" business practices did not afford the same opportunity for the collaborative process. Many members of the original Teatro Campesino have commented that this time marked a shift away from the groups' previous philosophy of producing theater aimed at social-justice and cultural and political independence (Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 165–76, 214–39).

23. For a thorough analysis of the Carpa Rasquachi Aesthetic, see Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 35–58; and Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit*, 7–20.

24. Roy Eric Xavier, *Political and Chicano Culture: A Perspective on El Teatro Campesino* (Berkeley, CA: Chicano Studies Library Publications, 1983), 26.

25. Luis Valdez, *Early Works: Actos, Bernabé, Pesamiento Serpentino* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1990), 134.

26. Valdez, "Chicano Theatre One," 1.

27. Valdez, *Early Works*, 150, 134, 167, 162.

28. James Ruppert, "Mediation in Contemporary Native American Writing," in *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History*, ed. Alan R. Velie (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 10; Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 58–59, 151; Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 95.

29. Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society and Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41. Huerta succinctly outlines the differences between Valdez's version of the Aztec pantheon and the original Mexica (Aztec) myth.

30. De Alba, "There's No Place Like Aztlán," 104.

31. Valdez, *Early Works*, 155. This translates as, "I am your mother and I am going to beat you!"

32. *Ibid.*

33. Beginning in the 1970s the term *Chicanismo* referred to the consciousness of the "shared struggles for human and civil rights." José B. Cuéllar, "Chicanismo/Xicanism@." Paper in progress for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. David Carrasco, <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~josecuel/chicanismo.htm> (accessed 1 June 2007). Also see Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940–1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990) and Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

34. Jaimes, "'Patriarchal Colonialism' and Indigenism," 65.

35. Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 95.

36. Valdez, *Early Works*, 160.

37. For an inclusive and highly influential collection of essays on the concept of Aztlán, see Rudolpho A. Anaya and Francsico A. Lomelí, eds., *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

38. De Alba, "There's No Place Like Aztlán," 104–5. The concept of Aztlán, and the Chicano claim to it, is controversial and has elicited mixed responses from Native peoples who are indigenous to the Southwest.

39. Valdez, *Early Works*, 166.

40. Michael G. Doxtater, "Indigenous Knowledge in the Decolonial Era," *The American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (2004): 619–25.

41. Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino*, 5.

42. José E. Limón, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems, History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 42–43; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122–23, quoted in Limón, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems, History and Influence*, 42–43.

43. Savigliano, *Tango*, 21; emphasis added.

44. Ibid.

45. Hanay Geiogamah, lecture on Native American Theater, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, 30 October 2001.

46. Andrew Paul Vassar, *Hanay Geiogamah, Kiowa-Delaware Playwright: A Critical Biography* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2002), 47.

47. Jeffrey Huntsman, introduction to *New Native American Drama*, by Hanay Geiogamah (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), xvii.

48. Lars Klesberg, *Theatre as Action, Soviet Russian Avant-Garde Aesthetics* (Houndsmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1993), 111.

49. Huntsman, introduction to *New Native American Drama*, xix–xx.

50. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 46.

51. Vine Deloria Jr., *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970), 124.

52. Geiogamah, "The New American Indian Theater," 159. Also see detailed policies documented by the US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Federal Indian Policies: From the Colonial Period through the Early 1970s* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975).

53. Henry E. Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860–1890* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963). Also see the *Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1883): 5–11, <http://ia331316.us.archive.org/3/items/14annualreport00unitrich/14annualreport00unitrich.pdf> (accessed 4 July 2009).

54. Geiogamah, "The New American Indian Theater," 5.

55. Troy Johnson, "The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of American Indian Activism," *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 2 (1994): 67.

56. Dean J. Kotlowski, "Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond: The Nixon and Ford Administrations Respond to Native American Protest," *The Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 2 (2003): 204.
57. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 51–52.
58. *Ibid.*, 52–53, 55.
59. Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125–33.
60. *Ibid.*, 129.
61. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 57–60.
62. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 129.
63. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 63–64. As Rayna Green points out, the Pocahontas myth as it is told and retold, "emerged as controlling metaphor in the American experience." Rayna Green, "Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of the Indian Woman in American Culture," *The Massachusetts Review* 16 (1975): 700.
64. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 64–65.
65. *Ibid.*, 65. For more analysis on the relationship between gender and colonial power, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Jaimes, "'Patriarchal Colonialism' and Indigenism," 58–69.
66. Annamaria Pinazzi, "The Theater of Hanay Geiogamah," in *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader*, ed. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 2000), 185.
67. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 81.
68. Woody Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 129.
69. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 80.
70. *Ibid.*, 81.
71. Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee*, 129.
72. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 81–82.
73. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 54.
74. Rudolfo A. Anaya, "A Homeland Without Boundaries," in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, ed. Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco A. Lomelí (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 230.
75. M. Annette Jaimes-Guerrero, "Academic Apartheid: American Indian Studies and 'Multiculturalism,'" in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 54.
76. Geiogamah, *Foghorn*, 82.
77. *Ibid.*

Not Guilty Lyrics. We are all on trial, believe it or not You will be judged for your sin, whether you leave it or not So keep stacking that paper man, worship it not See if that will be your savior when you stand before God You see He's holy, can't let you slide by homey Don't believe that that's true? I don't think that you really know Him In the beginning God created the earth Adam fell in love with sin now we dating the curse What I'm sayin', is really that none of us can escape it Twisted in our brains so we love it instead of hate it If you're not The terms not guilty and innocent are not uncommon and we are somewhat acquainted with them but, when someone asks what is the difference between not guilty and innocent, it becomes somewhat of a dilemma for many of us. Prima facie, it may appear that the two terms are synonymous and share the same meaning. However, this is a mistake, albeit a fair one. The terms are not uncommon and we are somewhat acquainted with them.â€ Likewise, a person found Not Guilty of a particular offence may not necessarily be Innocent of the crime. It is a verdict that typically suggests that the prosecution failed to prove the case against the defendant beyond reasonable doubt. Images Courtesy: Article 48 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union by Trounce (CC BY 3.0). Quotes â€ Authors â€ G â€ Gordon Clark â€ We are not guilty because we We are not guilty because we are depraved; we are depraved because we are guilty. Gordon Clark. Favorite.