INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Native Canadian literature theatre has evolved as a potential area of Native creativity. For the Natives of Canada it has become the predominant political tool, a means of raising Native issues of culture and identity and a major site of resistance and self-assertion. As Julie Pearson-Little Thunder describes, "The ability of Native theatre to transmit alternative traditions, histories, and memories, and share different ways of knowing by means of performance, is one of its greatest strengths." Since 1980s Native playwrights, with the use of irony, humour, trickster shift, hybridity, mimicry and self-conscious manipulations of Western theatrical elements, have used theater as a means of self-determination by challenging stereotypical representations of Native identity and culture. What David Krasner in *A Companion to Twentieth Century American Drama* observes about American Native drama is equally true of Canadian Native drama:

Some Native theatre artists resist consciously and overtly in politically charged theatre creations that challenge stereotypical, colonial policies and their aftermath. Other artists, whose work is not overtly political or confrontational, challenge ongoing colonization indirectly – through mimicry and hybridity.

As contemporary Native theatre in Canada has constructed a new space to counter colonial discourses, it can be termed, to some extent, as the theatre of postcolonial resistance. The redefinition and re-imaging of Native identity are certain major aspects of the growing Native theatre. The attempt of decolonization through theatre is an ongoing process. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay in *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance* comment, “. . . post-colonial drama will
continue to find new means of reacting to the containing and constraining borders which attempt to delimit the empire and its constructions of identity and culture.\textsuperscript{3}

The basic elements of a dramatic performance are not new to the Natives as these are well engraved within their culture. Various scholars have acknowledged the levels of theatricality in Native cultures. “Their cultural practices of ceremonies and rituals were mimetic, performative and frequently served a spiritual purpose,”\textsuperscript{4} observes Anton Wagner. L. W. Conolly in \textit{The Canadian Encyclopedia} notes:

Native and Inuit ceremonials and rituals evidenced a highly sophisticated sense of mimetic art, and occupied a central place in the social and religious activities of their peoples. . . . Masks, costumes and properties were used to enhance dialogue, song and chants in performances designed to benefit the community.\textsuperscript{5}

Storytelling, a dominant ingredient of Native culture, has a strong association with contemporary Native theatre. Margo Kane explains that Native writers prefer drama “because drama is most akin to storytelling.”\textsuperscript{6} Agnes Grant underlines the dramatic elements present in Native storytelling traditions: “In traditional times, story was much more than mere words. The facial expressions, the movement of body, production of different sounds and cries etc. were important parts of every storytelling technique.”\textsuperscript{7} By reinterpreting Native oral culture for the modern theatre, the Native people have gained a new spirit and ability to communicate with non-Native cultures and to talk about the compelling issues of Native culture and identity. Even Drew Hayden Taylor admits that he has learned his awareness of the art and construction of stories and storytelling not through western education, but rather through actively participating in his own community’s oral tradition. Taylor regards storytelling as:
The process of taking your audience on a journey, using your voice, and the spoken word. Moving that journey onto the stage is merely the next logical step. With their oral culture, Native people gravitate towards theatre. . . . At its origins, storytelling was a way of relating the history of the community. It was a way of explaining human nature. A single story could have metaphorical, philosophical, psychological implications.8

The decade of 1980s was significant for the growth of Canadian Native literature in general and contemporary Native theatre in particular. It was a period of dramatic festivals, ceremonies and growth of many Native theatres in Canada. The formation of James Buller’s Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts (ANDPVA) in 1974 and the setting up first Native Theatre School (independent from ANDPVA) were the important points in the evolution of Native theatre in Canada. Drew Hayden Taylor reports that Native Theatre School was “the first school of its kind to teach Native people how to act, to teach them theatrical production, and how to write their own stories.”9 With the growth of training opportunities, slowly growing infrastructural facilities, interest of the Natives as well as non-Natives in Native issues, large number of Native actors, directors, playwrights and theatre companies came forward to facilitate the emergence of Contemporary Native Theatre of 1980s and 1990s.

In 1982 the formation of Native Earth Performing Arts (NEPA) can be recognized as one of the foremost agencies of developing Native theatre in Canada. NEPA envisioned a theatre that would relate to the lives of Native people and the emphasis was on social, cultural and identity issues. In the same year Shireley Cheecho, whom Taylor describes as “an amazing painter, actress, model and
playwright,\textsuperscript{10} started a theatre company named De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig (an Ojibway-Cree word for storyteller or teller of tales). It started as “a summer theatre company in the West-Bay Reserve on Manitoulin Island” to “showcase Native legends, both traditional and contemporary.”\textsuperscript{11} In 1986 Tomson Highway took over as the Artistic Director of the NEPA with the following objectives:

1. To provide a base for professional Native performers, writers, technicians and other artists.
2. To encourage the use of theatre as a form of communication within the Native community, including the use of Native language.
3. To communicate to audience the experiences that are unique to Native peoples in contemporary society.
4. To contribute to the further development of theatre in Canada.\textsuperscript{12}

In the decade of 1980s many theatre writers such as Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses, Drew Hayden Taylor, Monique Mojica, Yuette Nolan, Margo Kane, Maria Campbell and many others contributed significantly towards the evolution and success of Native theatre in Canada. Issues of race, class, colonial repression, assimilation, loss of culture and identity are recurrent themes in contemporary Native theatre. Humour, pathos, stark realism, rage and grief are all found in Native drama along with joy, optimism, spirituality, and celebration. Though these issues are recurrent themes of Native theatre yet each playwright’s unique and different treatment of these common themes generates a rich variety of plays.

It was not until 1980s that any ‘good’ plays emerged on the Canadian Native stage. When Tomson Highway in 1986 wrote \textit{The Rez Sisters} and \textit{Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing} (1988), it was felt that a ‘real’ Native theatre had emerged on the stage. Drew Hayden Taylor in “Alive and Well: Native Theatre in Canada” records the success of these plays as:
This was Native theatre written by an aboriginal man, involving a cast of aboriginal actors and chronicling a week in the life of one aboriginal community. *The Rez Sisters* was a breakway hit, mounted success, extensively toured in Canada and it raised public consciousness towards the Natives and their culture and mythology.¹³

*The Rez Sisters* won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for the Best New Play of Toronto’s 1986/87 season and Floyd S. Chalmers Award for Outstanding Canadian Play in 1986. This play, in the real sense, “marked the beginning of Contemporary Native Theatre that’s when people stood up and said, “Hey, what’s this? People are telling their own story and they’re telling it well,”¹⁴ comments Taylor. Jennifer Preston remarks, “Indisputably successful, it was also notably the first play written by a Native Canadian to receive this kind of attention that it succeeded in putting the spotlight on both Tomson Highway, . . . and NEPA.”¹⁵

Drew Hayden Taylor entered theatre at a time (1988) when Native theatre in Canada was in a state of explosive creative action and ready to move forward. Taylor was born on July 1, 1962 on the Ojibway Reserve in Central Ontario and was raised by his Ojibway mother. He has never known his father, who was a White. This upbringing on the Reserve has greatly influenced his creative works and “it sets the stage for some interesting identity issues,” remarks Taylor. In 1982 Taylor graduated from Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology with an honors diploma in Radio and Television Broadcasting. After graduation he worked in media and widely contributed articles on Native issues to various magazines like *Macleans, This Magazine, The Globe and the Mail, Now Magazine, Southern News, Aboriginal Voices, Toronto Star, Windspeaker, The Regina Prairie Dog, The Peterborough Examiner* and several others.

Taylor is a regular column writer in major newspapers of Canada and a recognized expert on Native humour. He is one of the most powerful playwrights in contemporary Native theatre in Canada. Taylor is particularly known for raising Native issues of culture and identity with a touch of humour and minimizing the gap between non-Native and Native people by de-mystifying the aboriginal stereotypes. As Robert Nunn comments, “Humour figures in all Taylor’s works, eliciting laughter edged with disturbing awareness of stereotypes being exploded and bitter truths being given a very thin sugar coating.”

In television Taylor has worked in various capacities such as casting and production assistant on the *Spirit Bay*. He has worked as consultant on *Danger Bay* and *Liberty Street* and as a publicist for the TV movie *Where the Spirit Lives*. During this period Taylor also wrote scripts for television serials like *The Beachcombers, Street Legal* and *North of Sixty, Prairie Berry Pie* and *The Longhouse Tales* and
directed a documentary titled *Redskins, Tricksters and Puppy Stew*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada. *The Strange Case of Bunny Weequod*, a television mystery drama written by Drew, was filmed entirely in Ojibway, and aired on CBC several times in 1999. He also directed *Circle of All Nations*, a documentary about Algonquin elder William Commande and his spiritual conference. Though Drew Hayden Taylor has worked in media in several capacities yet his main activity since 1989 has been playwriting. He learnt the art of playwriting during his two year (from 1989 to 1991) involvement with the Native Theatre Company, the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-jig Theatre Group, on Manitaulin Island, Ontario. When in 1988 Drew joined the Playwright-in-residence programme at Native Earth Performing Arts his career as playwright started and from 1994 to 1997 he also served as Native Earth’s Artistic Director.

and Sweetgrass, concerned with Aboriginal community politics, identity, mythology and intergenerational legacies. Recently, he has published Me Sexy, a collection of essays on Native erotica – a much misrepresented Native issue. The recognition of his dramatic art is evident in the several awards bestowed on him for his dramatic art: Chalmers Canadian Award, The Canadian Author’s Association Literary Award, Native Playwrights Award, James Buller Award, and The Dora Mavor Moore Award.


In addition, he has published Fearless Warriors (1998), a collection of short stories and has compiled and edited (along with Linda Jaine) an anthology of Native stories entitled Voices: Being Native in Canada (1995).

As a result of his success and the accessibility of both the author and his work, Taylor has travelled throughout the world as an unofficial ambassador of Native theatre and as an expert on Native humour. As an award-winning playwright and columnist, Taylor has spent fifteen years writing and researching Aboriginal humour and has compiled and edited a book, Me Funny (2005). He has been at conferences in Mexico, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, India, Australia, New Zealand and Finland, running workshops in Canada and the United States, and reading from his works at authors’ festivals, including the International Festival of Authors, Harbourfront, Toronto. Since 1997 he has organized the Whetung Storyteller’s Festival and the Whetung Music Festival at the Curve Lake First Nation.
In 2004 Taylor was appointed by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Ontario to the Ministry’s Advisory Council for Arts and Culture.

II

The questions of Native culture and identity are central to Taylor’s plays. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider some of the factors and circumstances that have an impact on contemporary Native culture and identity in order to explore some of the intricacies of Native identity formation. The Native culture has suffered enormously due to the impact of white civilization as a result of colonization. The colonizers removed the Natives from their natural habitat and put them into reserves, deprived them of their way of life and of their rights to practice their religion and follow their own cultural traditions. Canada’s Native people have been time and time again ignored or manipulated, depending upon the needs of the colonizers. Despite the shifting attitudes towards Native people, unfortunately, one view regarding the Natives appears to have remained constant: “The Canadian government’s Indian policy based on an image of the Indian as inferior.” The Europeans treated the Natives as savages, uncivilized beings and inferiors. As James S. Frideres points out, “... most Canadians still believe that Natives are biologically and socially inferior; as a result ... there is a sound rational basis for discrimination against Natives at both the individual and institutional level.” Neelima Kanwar in Resistant Voices observes:

The whites considered their own values of individualism, self-centeredness, youth, conquest of nature, and materialism as valuable and the norms and values of the Natives which are group-orientation,
co-operation, age, harmony with nature, sacrifice, spirituality and equality as sub-standard.  

As a result, the whites took upon themselves to 'civilize' the Natives. Penny Petrone describes how "from the mid-nineteenth century onward, Canadian politicians regarded the Indians in the settlement areas as 'foreigners, to be civilized. Civilization was possible only through Christianity and assimilation eventually into the dominant white mainstream." Assimilation, literally the process by which a minority population is absorbed into a prevailing or dominant culture, is a political term used for the Natives. "It implies adopting the cultural, traditional and social values of the whites," "intended to preserve the Indians as individuals by destroying them as people."  

The principles and goals of the colonizers were to change the customs, traditions, values and beliefs of the Native people. To achieve their aims the colonizers employed several negative, paternalistic, marginalizing and racist colonial policies such as 'The Indian Act', 'Reserve System', 'Scoop up' and Residential School System to enslave and colonize the Natives. 'The Indian Act', passed in 1876, was conceived as a political tool for the management of 'Indian' affairs and to encourage the gradual assimilation of the Native people. This 'Act' regulated who is and who is not entitled to government recognition of "Indian Status." It puts forward rather complicated and confusing number of definitions of Native identity. Through the mechanizations of 'The Indian Act' Native people were denied the basic rights and opportunities.

The systematic erosion of Native culture began particularly with the confinement of the Natives onto the reserves, a policy of segregation much like apartheid. Land was the backbone of Native economy, culture and spirituality. The
colonizers dispossessed the Natives of their land through land surrender treaties, through designation of reserves and through expropriations of reserve land. These land treaties badly affected their survival and economic growth, which virtually made them beggars, dependent upon the charity of the white colonizers. The Natives were segregated and isolated into reserves under the pretence of allowing the Natives their land in order to preserve their traditions and ways of life. On the other hand, the reserve system was established as a "social laboratory" to eradicate "the old Indian values through education, religion, new economic and political systems, and new concept of property."^24

After dispossessing the Natives of their land, agriculture and economy the colonizers attempted the destruction of the Native spirituality, which was an integral part of Native culture. The whites deemed the traditional Native religious practices, rituals and ceremonies as inappropriate, primitive and pagan, hence, banned them from public practice. With the result Native culture "that was once open and dynamic became closed and static."^25 A. C. Hamilton and C. M. Sinclair (Commissioners) in a "Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba" observe:

Federal governments and religious organizations in Canada have tried to interfere with, and even destroy, the cultures of Aboriginal people and to supplant them with European cultures and values. . . . At best, this amounts to discrimination. At worst, it is cultural genocide.\textsuperscript{26}

The examples of destructive assimilation are the Residential Schools and 'Scoop Up', a colonial practice of forcibly removing Native babies from their mothers and putting them with the white families. The Native children were forcibly admitted in residential schools, mostly run by European missionaries. The aim of these schools, besides providing minimum education, was to demolish Native culture, spirituality,
language and bonding with Native community. The policies of assimilation along with physical, sexual and mental abuse have caused emotional and psychological trauma among the Natives. This has alienated them not only from their own culture and language but also from within. The erasure of their culture, family, religion, society and spirituality are the most damaging impacts of the white colonialism. J. R. Miller considers that the policy of assimilation was an “insidious goal of negotiated genocide” which eventually “involved land surrender treaties and policies designed to expunge aboriginal identity, aboriginal ways, aboriginal beliefs, and perhaps most important of all, aboriginal techniques for relating to and interacting with the land. The approach was not conquest, a treaty; never actual genocide, but cultural genocide.”

Like federal governments, the European writers have also misrepresented and distorted the Native identity and culture through literature by perpetuating many negative stereotypes about Native people. They presented the Indian in literature as “a wild man that was hairy, naked, a club wielding child of nature who existed half way between humanity and animality,” observes Aditi Vahia. Thomas Cary in his poem “Abram’s Plains” presents “the Indian as the savage inhabitant of a landscape that must be tamed.” Oliver Goldsmith in The Rising Village “identifies the red man with ‘beasts of prey’ . . . and presents them as a gothic extension of the darkest forces of nature.” Joseph Howe’s Acadia “casts the red man as demonic savage when red culture conflicts with that of white man.” Thomas King, in his Introduction to The Native in Literature, refers to three visions of the Indian presented by the Europeans: “The dissipated savage, the barbarous savage, and the heroic savage.”

Tomson Highway believes that “Aboriginal artists have not only a unique role, but also an obligation to reconstruct this suppressed heritage.” Contemporary Native
playwrights are attempting to reclaim and celebrate Native culture by use of their myths, use of Native techniques of storytelling and characters, use of their language. For providing insights into their culture, they often make references to Trickster, vision quests, sweetlodge, dreamcatcher, animal totems, buckskin dresses, jewellery, traditional foods, pow wows, pow wow dancers and music.

The systematic devaluation of Native culture and identity has devastating consequences for the Natives. The most problematic aspect of Native identity is the imposition of definitions and characterization of Nativeness from outside. These stereotypical representations in the Western texts and popular media, till today, continue to determine ideas and assumptions about the Natives to a large extent. In a process analogous to, what Said described in Orientalism, “using British scholarly works . . . works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philosophical studies,” to “construct” the Orient through imaginative representations, through seemingly factual descriptions and through claims to knowledge about Oriental history and culture, these texts by the whites have created the ‘Indian’ that never was. Daniel Francis in The Imaginary Indian comments: “Indians, as we think, we know them, do not exist. In fact, there may well be no such thing as an Indian.” Terry Goldie in Fear and Temptation demonstrates that “the term ‘Indian’ or ‘Aboriginal’ is often one that serves political purpose outside the lived reality of Indigenous people.” Similarly for Said, Orientalism – the Western discourse about the Orient – has traditionally served hegemonic purposes and has created a vast body of popular knowledge about “Indians.” As Vine Deloria sardonically remarks, “There is no subject on earth so easily understood as that of American Indian.” Penny Petrone explains:
Indians were comprehended either in the negative and unflattering image of "sauvage," or in the romanticized image of primeval innocence – the 'bon sauvage' a Rousseau-esque pure being. Both were self-serving images – ideological weapons in the Indians' subjugation that obscured their true identity. 

Such Orientalist assumptions were circulated among the others through texts written by the Europeans. Thus, the "uncivilized ought to be annexed or occupied by advanced people," was the presumption of the colonizers, writes Edward Said. These cliché images of the Natives not only distort their identity but they also relegate the Natives to a long gone past and most forcefully deny Native people contemporary identities, since these do not comply with non-Native misrepresentations of the Natives. An Ojibway writer Kateri Damm observes:

Who we are has been constructed and defined by Others to the extent that at a time we too no longer know who we are. The resulting confusion, uncertainty, low-esteem and / or need to assert control over identity are just some of the damaging effects of colonization.

Stuart Hall argues that "identity is a combination of self-identification and the perceptions of others. When the two are at conflict problem arises." Euro-Canadian notions of Native identity are largely stereotypical based on false assumptions of the past. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* defines stereotype as "a complex, ambivalent and contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive. . . ." Stereotypes, a dominant theme in Taylor's plays, have a powerful influence on Native identity. Stereotypes have spread feelings of self-depreciation and self-hatred among the Natives and they are struggling hard to get rid of this imposed and destructive identity. Today many Natives try to trace their identity through lineage,
ancestry and clan, but stereotypes become hurdles in their quest for identity.

“Stereotyping has left Native youth with a double-edged challenge to redefine
themselves from within or without as integral parts of not only a larger historical
narrative but also a diverse, and increasingly urban, contemporary reality,” comments Dana Claxton in “Face the Nation: Identity Theft.” Native identities were
constructed by the colonizers through the use of ethnic labels. As Drew Hayden
Taylor in his essay “An Indian by Any Other Name” remarks about the politics of
defining and labelling the Natives with his characteristic humour:

In the last couple of years Native people in Canada have gone through
an enormous political metamorphosis, similar to what people of
African descent went through in United States. Years ago they used to
be called Niggers, then Negro, then coloured, then Black, and finally
today, I believe the correct term is African-American or African-
Canadian. Similarly Natives of Canada have various names and
classifications which have nothing to do with any tribal affiliations
either. These are just generic terms used to describe us “Indians.” . . .
Status, Non-Status, Metis, Inuits, Indian, followed by Native,
Aboriginal, Amerindian, Indigenous and First Nations . . . and other
like On-Reserve, Off-Reserve, Urban, Treaty-Indian . . ., enfranchised
Indian, the Bill C-31 or re-instated people, the traditional Indians, the
assimilated Indian. . . . There are the wannabe’s (the White Variety),
the apples (the red variety), the half-breeds, mixed bloods and of
course, the ever popular full-bloods.44

Similarly, Steffi Retzlaff in “What’s in a Name? The Politics of Labelling and
Native Identity Constructions” states that “labelling is a political act since labels
include and exclude people." The label ‘Indian’ has done great damage to the Native self and identity. It has negative connotations and these have shaped both the political policies of federal government and popular assumptions about the Natives. Steffi Retzlaff considers labelling as a means of exercising social control and a political tool to manipulate identities and comments:

The implications of the historically constructed meanings of the label ‘Indian’ need to be examined in terms of the process of identity formation as well as in connection with the names and labels that Aboriginal people in Canada choose to identify themselves in the public sphere today. Collective terms such as ‘First Nations’, ‘Native People’, and ‘Aboriginal people’ are a specific response to historical and contemporary political, economic and social problems and solutions. Overall, the conscious choice of these labels for self-identification and the reflection of imposed terminology are fundamental to the construction and affirmation of political and social identities.

Contemporary Native identity involves complex interactions among tribal traditions, modernity and government policies of recognition. Duane Champagne in *Contemporary Native American Cultural Issues* rightly says that “Native identity is neither homogenous nor taken for granted. Historical and contemporary realities of cultural tradition and colonial domination have made Native identity a complex and fundamental question for the Natives.” Some Native thinkers regard identity as a positioning rather than an essence, a concept also articulated by Stuart Hall in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”: “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact . . . we should think . . . of identity as a ‘production’ which
is never complete always in process. . . ."^48 Drew Hayden Taylor also suggests that "identity is not fixed but rather fluid and multiple and identity markers are context dependent,"^49 as reported by Retzlaff.

In fact, individual identity is a composite of many things such as race, class, education, religion, region and gender and cultural identity is reflected in the values and beliefs of Native people. Dukes in "The Effects of Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity and Gender on Adolescent Well-Being" comments that "cultural identity is not static rather, it progresses through development stages during which an individual has a changed sense of who he or she is, perhaps to a rediscovered sense of being Native."^50 Colonizers regarded all aspects of Native life to be culturally and morally inferior and made attempts to destroy and eliminate their individual and cultural identity. Hence, contemporary Native identity has to deal with the effects of colonization such as stereotypes, authenticity, hybridity and loss of culture.

Charles Taylor in "The Politics of Recognition" says that identity is shaped, in part, by recognition, absence of recognition, or misrecognition by others:

A person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.\(^51\)

The non-Natives' expectations for pre-contact or pure Native culture and identity raises the issue of authenticity. The notion of 'authenticity' or essence of 'Nativeness' has generated a controversial debate between the Natives and the non-Natives. The Western scholars and critics consider pre-colonial traditions and customs as authentically Native and reject the other cultures, influenced by modernity and the
Western culture, as something impure or hybridized. However, the Natives like Taylor regard cultural authenticity as a colonial attempt to restrict Native heritage and identity within unchanging, fixed and essentialist spaces. The unending demand for authenticity is a political issue raising questions such as who decides who is an indigenous person, Natives or non-Natives and how to measure 'Nativeness.' As Terry Goldie explains, it is the whites, not the Indigene, who test indigenous culture for authenticity:

   A corollary of the temporal split between this golden age (pre-contact indigenous culture) and the present degradation is to see indigenous culture as true, pure, and static. Whatever fails this test is not really a part of that culture.  

Cherokee director Elizabeth Theobald regrets such colonialist expectations especially with regard to Native theatre: "Native playwrights are writing about powerful women, family crises, adoption and cultural alienation. The wider public wants Geronimo, Cochise and Black Elk."  

The demand of the Western scholars and critics from Native writers to address only Native issues and stories can be viewed as what Gareth Griffiths terms as "a neo-colonialist restriction on minority rights" and calls this demand "an act of liberal discursive violence, parallel in many ways to the inscription of the 'native' (indigene) under the sign of the savage." Allan Filewood points out that demand for authenticity "exists primarily as nostalgia for a lost innocence in the gaze of Western critics; it is a construct that betrays a reinscription of hegemonic patterns of thought." In other worlds, using authenticity as a standard of evaluation would mean to check any kind of development in Native culture and identity and the pre-contact culture would become a standard that Natives have to conform to. Taylor once voiced
his opposition to the widespread concept that Native plays should necessarily stage a Trickster, claiming the right of Aboriginal writers to freely experiment with dramatic form. It is a 'neocolonial silencing process' as a leading critic Margery Fee suggests:

The demand for 'authenticity' denies Fourth World Writers a living, changing culture. Their culture is deemed to be Other and must avoid crossing those fictional but ideological essential boundaries between Them and Us, the Exotic and the Familiar, the Past and the Future, the 'Dying' and the Living.56

Similarly, Drew Hayden Taylor in his essay “What Colour Is a Rose” says if:

[A] Native writer wants to explore the untrodden world outside the Aboriginal literary ghetto, immediately the fences appear, and the opportunities dry up. Evidently, the Powers That Be out there have very specific ideas of what a Native writer can and can't do. . . . The white world has created the concept of “Native enough” and is determined to present the Native voice as authentically and accurately as possible, and allowing us Native-types the chance to tell our stories our way.57

Demand for authenticity means no future for Native people, other than as “the vanishing Race” says Bonita Lawrence in “Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood to refute the essentialist and constructionist approaches to Native identity:

The choices currently offered for Native people in contemporary academic discourse – between primordialism (the Indigenous identity consisting of unbroken tradition and continuity) and the constructionist approach, which Alfred calls instrumentalism (Indigenous identity
based solely on a conscious manipulation of traditions and cultural interventions as part of the emergence of nationalist ideologies) – are both part of an essentialist (I must add colonialist) fallacy.\textsuperscript{58}

On the other hand, some Native people play the politics of ‘authentic Native’ or ‘real Indian’ for resources, jobs and economic benefits. So, authenticity becomes a means for survival, for reclaiming Native traditions and a tool in struggle for power. Alan Filewood writes: “The essentialism found in the works of aboriginal writers can in these terms be seen as a defensive strategy which implies that ethnicity is a category of power, not biology.”\textsuperscript{59} This is what Gayatri Spivak calls the ‘strategic essentialism.’ Even though Spivak is in general strongly opposed to essentialism, she also sees it as a valid tool for gaining a national, postcolonial identity. She suggests that there is a conscious positioning of a ‘false’ essence by the Natives for their own political ends. In other words, the Natives decide when and where to make particular essentialist claims. Thus, it presents an essence as something that can be manipulated at will. As Spivak notes that ‘strategic essentialism’ is not a theory, rather “strategy that suits a situation.”\textsuperscript{60}

The essentialist view of identity is that it is stable and more or less unchanging. The opponents of essentialism often find this view seriously misleading, since it ignores the possibilities for the hybridized identity. Taylor himself being a hybrid both biologically and in his creativity considers such essentialist articulation of Native identity and culture as “unfortunate” and debunks the idea of those Natives who live on reserves and believe that “you aren’t proper Native person unless you are born, live and die on that little piece of land put aside by the government to contain Indian.”\textsuperscript{61} Hybridity is not acceptable to them in any form. Taylor in his plays
dismantles the concepts of “authenticity” and ‘essentialist notions’ by demonstrating that these are complex notions, often fraught with stereotypical visions of the “Other.”

Hybridity is defined in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* as “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonization,” and most postcolonial writing has focused on the hybridized nature of postcolonial culture as strength rather than a weakness. Hybridity, as opposed to authenticity, can be a positive development for Native children uprooted from their culture and tradition and who are caught between the ancestral culture and dominant mainstream culture. As the postcolonial theorist, Homi K. Bhabha comments, “The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.” He posits hybridity as a social reality with historic specificity and a positive, resisting force to cultural hegemony. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* describes the state of hybridity as “the re-articulation, or the translation, of elements that are neither the One . . . nor the Other . . . but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both.” Most of the postcolonial critics believe that hybrid representation of the culture and identity can destabilize binary modes of thinking. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe how “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the postcolonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing a new antimonolithic model of cultural exchange and growth.” Bhabha’s notion of hybrid identities is that “hybridity . . . unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but re-implicates its identification in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.”
Further, "the colonized subject resorts to mimicry, an effect of hybridity,"\(^7\) to unsettle the domination of the colonizer. Within postcolonial theory mimicry is the central concept because it encourages the colonized subject to copy the norms, values, appearances, politics and psychologies of the colonizer. It can be explained in simple terms as the identity imposed on the colonized, who then reflects back the image of the colonizer, yet, in fractured, imperfect form. The mimicry can be deployed as an effective strategy of colonial discourse and domination and as a "secret art of revenges"\(^8\) against oppression – a tool of resistance. This use of mimicry is "clearly subversive and creates an ambivalent, hybrid "Third space."\(^9\) Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* describes colonial mimicry as:

\[\ldots\text{the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite . . . the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; . . . mimicry emerges as a representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry . . . poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledge and disciplinary powers.}\]\(^70\)

Marc Priewe in his essay "The transnational mimic man: El Vez's (re)appropriation of Elvis Presley" observes:

The menace of colonial mimicry resides in "double visions" that undercuts the authority of colonial rule not necessarily by opposition but rather through its disruption caused by mimicry's proximity to mockery. Indeed, whenever the colonized presents a blurred image of the original, the line between mimicry and mockery, or pastiche and parody, is easily crossed and may serve to subtly undermine the
discourse and thereby the surveillance and control of colonial dominance.\textsuperscript{71}

Hybridity and mimicry in Taylor's plays, especially in his comedies, appear as essential elements of his humour. Entering into the dynamics of representation and identification in postcolonial context, Native humour both reflects and shapes aspects of Native as well as Euro-Canadian life and cultures. Taylor's humour provides the perfect instrument for exploring the differences between the two. As a strategy of representation of Native identity, it demystifies existing stereotypes of 'stoic Indian' or images of 'imaginary Indian.' Taylor humorously transforms the degrading images, colonial paradigms, and essentialist ideas to explore humour as an effective tool for reclaiming Native identity and culture. Some of his humour frequently plays on incongruities between Western and Native cultures and it takes the form of mimicry.

However, to look at Native humour from the perspective of postcolonial literary theories as merely a weapon of subversion will not be justified. Native humour is more than "laughing back." Eva Gruber in her Introduction to Humour in Contemporary Native North American Literature: Reimaging Nativeness observes: "Light-hearted laughter and gallows humour, teasing and acerbic satire, healing and self-deprecatory humour, flat jokes, carnivalesque laughter, and intricate wit all appear in contemporary Native writing."\textsuperscript{72}

III

Drew Hayden Taylor is not only the most vibrant and prolific Native playwright but also one who debates major issues of identity, culture and self-representation through his creative and critical writing. For thematic exploration of
Taylor’s plays, these discussions of identity theories postulated by various Native as well as non-Native critics will be quite helpful. Taylor strives to establish a true picture of Native life in colonial and post-colonial periods by underlying various socio-political Native issues. His theatrical works, taken for critical analysis in the present dissertation, can be divided into three categories: Plays explicitly dealing with socio-political issues; Someday trilogy, where Taylor “learned the power of tears and of darker emotions and sadness” can be referred to as his ‘tragedies’; and his The ‘Blues’ Quartet, a series of plays that “have their roots in the belly laughs of the communities” can be referred to as his ‘laughing comedies’. This thesis in three different chapters will explore various ‘Native issues’ reflected in his different plays which take up political as well as non-political Native issues and where culture and identity remain central.

Chapter One “Political Activism and Issues of Native Identity,” divided into four sections, will focus on Toronto at Dreamer’s Rock and Education is Our Right which explicitly deal with political issues and alterNatives and In a World Created by a Drunken God which are not explicitly political (though they raise similar issues) to explore how Taylor through humour, satire, discussions and open-ended plays deconstructs misrepresentation of the Natives and builds a positive vision of contemporary Native identity and culture. Never undermining the complexities involved in the issues discussed he starts his plays with Native situations and then transcends beyond specifically Native issues to larger universal human, moral and existential issues.

Chapter Two “Scoop Up” and the Crisis of Native Identity” will focus on his poignant Someday trilogy — Someday, Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth, and 400 Kilometres — where Taylor explores the repercussions of the colonial practices of
removing Native children from their mothers and putting them for adoption generally in white families far away from their communities, a practice known as the “scoop up.” Literally thousands of Native adults and families, even today, live with the trauma caused by the removal policies. Many of the mothers whose children were taken away are grief stricken and the adopted children have been traumatized by the thought that they were unwanted. Identity conflicts rage in these children. The Someday trilogy presents a moving story of a Native family’s emotional struggle to reunite with the separated child and the most traumatic and cathartic journey of an adoptee to reclaim her Native identity and culture. This chapter will focus on dire consequences of colonization as presented in a tragic and moving style by Taylor as his effort to make the non-Native audience conscious of the damages done to the Natives and encouraging them to change their preconceived notions.

Chapter Three “Celebrating Native Humour: Re-imaging Nativeness in The ‘Blues’ Quartet” will focus more closely on the different aspects of the Native humour in his four comedies: The Bootlegger Blues, The Baby Blues, The Buz ‘Gem Blues and The Berlin Blues. Here Taylor by representing characters who try to imitate Native or white identities humorously suggests the extent to which identities are “put on,” undermining the notions of authenticity, appropriation and stereotypical academic representations of the Native culture. This chapter also intends to explore Taylor’s aesthetics of generating humour by employing elements as diverse as wordplay, puns, innuendoes, teasing, satire, trickster shift, parody, mimicry and hybridity to depict Native life in its different colours, which need not always be political. The critical evaluation of his comedies will underline that though these hilarious plays indirectly talk about Native issues of identity and culture, these are largely celebrating Native humour to re-image the Nativeness.
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