

MOVING TOWARDS “POW WOW-STEP”

MOVING TOWARDS “POW WOW-STEP”: CONSTRUCTIONS OF “THE INDIAN”
IDENTITY AND A TRIBE CALLED RED’S MOBILIZATION OF ART AS RESISTANCE

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TITLE: Moving towards “Pow wow-Step”: Constructions of “the Indian” Identity and A Tribe Called Red’s Mobilization of Art as Resistance

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians is fraught with political and cultural divides. While Idle No More garnered some momentum to raise awareness of the need for political change, there has yet to be an approach that has popularly engaged and compelled response from Canadians. This thesis project navigates the political potential of artists, who can both accumulate cross-cultural audiences through entertainment and incite change through their vocalizations in performance. Offering a case-study approach to the Indigenous music group, A Tribe Called Red, this project considers their compelling Indigenous space-making work through their performance and celebrity. Drawing from this work, this project offers a navigation between the need for respectful cross-cultural dialogue between Indigenous peoples and Canadians and the actionable change that can occur through popular entertainment and its intimate connections.

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A TRIBE CALLED RED'S DISCOGRAPHY

Albums:

A Tribe Called Red (2012)

Nation II Nation (2013)

EPS:

Trapline (2012)

Suplex (2015)

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Introduction

“...the idea of the ethical space, produced by contrasting perspectives of the world, entertains the notion of a meeting place, or initial thinking about a neutral zone between entities or cultures. The space offers a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur. The ethical space offers itself as the theatre for cross-cultural conversation in pursuit of ethically engaging diversity and disperses claims to the human order.”

– Willie Ermine, “The Ethical Space of Engagment” (202)

The “ethical space” exists at the border of conflicting groups. Willie Ermine’s evocation of its “human-to-human dialogue” conjures an image of a conversation between two equal parties and, in doing so, transforms these sites of conflict into engaged meeting grounds of worlds brought together while still maintaining a respectful distance. And so, the ethical space not only facilitates much needed confrontations; it also takes on a creative re-visioning role by reframing epistemological, cultural, and political divides as productive differences between people. However, while Ermine’s space presents an ideal image of transcultural diplomacy, it is difficult to fully ascertain the tangible changes a space like this could offer. How, for instance, are we to move these dialogues outside of the ethical space? How do we make respectful dialogue actionable? Perhaps, it is here that Ermine’s meaningful objective – for Indigenous peoples and Canadians – loses its momentum, as it imaginatively re-revisions the political conditions and laws at the heart of this relationship without necessarily compelling actions that can appeal for more.

Karen T.D. Recollet’s article, “Dancing 'Between the Break Beats’,” suggests that urban Indigenous artists are responding to this need for border-space engagement through urban modes of music and dance.¹ After working through the various modes of resistance and freedom that can emerge from these urban art-forms, she argues, “Through carefully negotiating this terrain and embracing the knowledge and energy of border spaces, contemporary urban artists are beginning

¹ Using Ermine’s work, Recollet explicitly regards the break-beat as an “ethical space” (420).

to shape and express complex/multi-layered identities” (419). Within the context of this passage, layering is a negotiation of identities and worlds that enables the artist to maintain their right to self-determination in a way that is deeply embodied. Extending Recollet's understanding of this layered space, I believe artistic layering can also hold a cross-cultural and even, pedagogical value among cultures in conflict, as it can establish ethical spaces of engagement at the border-space that are lived and felt; however, unlike Ermine's call for cross-cultural dialogue, artistic layering draws from different creative modes, including but not limited to music, dance, performance, video, and even, celebrity branding.

In this thesis project, I – tenuously – navigate what bringing the kernel of these two concepts together can do for Indigenous peoples and Canadians, a relationship that may be best described as a firm, (neo)colonial divide, wherein citizens of the Canadian settler-state have been granted certain rights and privileges at the expense of Indigenous laws, cultures, and peoples. While this relationship continues to be vertical, in that Canadians maintain an asserted control over the outcomes of peoples, we are in a transitional moment, where triumphs for Indigenous peoples are occurring and noticeable. The Idle No More movement is particularly noteworthy, as their protest work intersects legislative issues with cultural education by creating noticeable Indigenous presences at politically charged moments. In the words of Pamela Palmater:

Idle No More is a coordinated, strategic movement, not led by any elected politician, national chief or paid executive director. It is a movement originally led by indigenous women and has been joined by grassroots First Nations leaders, Canadians, and now the world. It originally started as a way to oppose Bill C-45, the omnibus legislation impacting water rights and land rights under the Indian Act; it grew to include all the legislation and the corresponding funding cuts to First Nations political organizations meant to silence the advocacy of our voice. (*The Winter We Danced* 39).

Chief Spence's six-week hunger strike in December 2012 is perhaps the most prominent Idle No More resistance we have seen yet (Barker; *The Winter We Danced* 39-40; Woo).² As Palmater explains, the "strike is symbolic of what is happening to First Nations in Canada. For every day that Spence does not eat, she is slowly dying, and that is exactly what is happening to First Nations, who have lifespans up to 20 years shorter than average Canadians" (*The Winter...* 40). Though initiatives through Idle No More continue to assert resistance (such as through arranged flash-mob round dances and rallies that block roads and bridges), it is important to acknowledge that Prime Minister Stephen Harper did not respond to Chief Spence's call for dialogue. Perhaps, the closest we have come to a discussion is through the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's June 2015 admission that Canada's previous residential school system is responsible for the "cultural genocide" of Indigenous peoples, that is, "the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group" ("Honouring the Truth..." 1). While it is still too soon to tell if change will occur, the first-ever national documentation of "cultural genocide" offers a potential opening for dialogue, where Ermine's desire for ethical spaces that prompt thoughtful confrontations may actually be possible.³

Though I believe the work of the Idle No More has provided a much-needed awareness of the Canadian/Indigenous political climate in Canada's House of Commons, I am particularly interested in the individually sovereign, space-making work of the urban Indigenous music group, A Tribe Called Red (ATCR). This Ottawa-based band consists of three members from different First Nations: Ian "DJ NDN" Campaeu (Nipissing First Nation), Bear "Witness"

² For more information, *The Winter We Danced* collection offers a much more detailed account of Idle No More and what it stands for. This collection also demonstrates the various ways that art can perform resistance.

³ I acknowledge the limitations of this statement, given Canada's neglect of the recommendations put forth through the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* in 1996; however, the TRC reports have garnered incredible political attention, becoming a major topic of conversation for the October 2015 federal election (alongside the problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada).

Thomas (Cayuga, Six Nations of the Grand River), and Tim “Zoolman” Hill (Mohawk, Six Nations of the Grand River), with Tim Hill replacing original deejay member, Dan “DJ Shub” General in July 2014 (APTN National News). Musically, ATCR combines elements of traditional First Nations drumming and singing with urban club-scene music, offering a new kind of art in the urban scene: the “pow wow-step.” As Zach Ruitter states, “[t]he wide and growing appeal of the group’s electric powwow remixes has opened a unique space for intercultural exchange on the dance floor” (Ruitter). While I agree with Ruitter’s observation, I also believe that ATCR facilitates an “intercultural exchange” beyond the performance space. Taking a case-study approach to ATCR’s political, video, performance, and celebrity work, my thesis project examines the various ways in which ATCR interrogates oppressive narratives and works for a productive exchange between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, dialogically and tangibly. In particular, I investigate the ways they approach Canadian/Indigenous conflicts through a process of artistic layering. Differing from the ethical space’s political objectives, ATCR layered art seeks to better cross-cultural relationships by initiating contact through art and culture. By drawing upon and negotiating what is *shared* transculturally – such as art and entertainment – ATCR responds to the narratives of their oppression by culturally filling in the Indigenous knowledge-gaps existing at the border of the Canadian/Indigenous relationship.

For the purposes of my project, I will refer to ATCR’s artistic layering in specific reference to the mixing of genres, media, and exchanges. At no point in this project am I seeking to assert or evaluate a blending of identities. Though Recollet’s analysis of layering within the urban scene considers the space as a negotiation of various identities, at no point does she assert for hyphenation or assimilation. Given the historical and ongoing Canadian/Indigenous divide, it would be problematic to hyphenate these identities outside the context of art or shared spaces.

Moving away from this sort of dialogue, I do believe there is something useful about mobilizing the concept of layering to discuss the bringing together of art among cultures in conflict. ATCR's videography, for instance, (re)uses visual perversions of Indigenous identities in culture and presents them mockingly – and sometimes, humorously – to their cross-cultural audiences. In doing so, they critique and remove the original (neo)colonial holds of the oppressive image and present it on their own terms.

It is important to note that ATCR's artistic layering draws upon various cultures. The genre of "pow wow-step," in particular, layers Indigenous powwow music with African-Caribbean music forms, such as hip-hop, dub, and dance-hall. Those studying ATCR's music and performance have notably situated "pow wow-step" within conversations of the hip-hop genre and space, specifically connecting ATCR's music with Indigenous hip-hop artists, such as Wab Kinew (Anishinaabe), Q-Rock (Anishinaabe), and Lakota Jonez (Cherokee and Mohawk). Laura Amsterdam helpfully articulates this reasons for this connection, suggesting that "hip-hop is a means of challenging the denial of access to public space and contesting economic marginalization" (58). Working within the context of Indigenous hip-hop, Amsterdam asserts that "Native artists are mobilizing hop-hop to reveal their struggles with violence and [to] undertake direct action against loss [...] [that] reclaims heritage and unshackles indigeneity from settler fantasies and hegemonies of trauma" (56). Recollet similarly aligns with this perspective and offers a reading of the ways Indigenous artists have adopted hip-hop's resistive potential to reclaim a sense of self-determination, individually and communally. She writes:

Like rap, breaking in the late 70s and early 80s experienced a cross-cultural sharing within the boroughs of New York. After the breaking of the 70s (which was predominantly picked up by black communities in New York), Puerto Rican youth started to adopt this art form and incorporate acrobatics and gymnastic moves. In this way, black youth passed it on and inspired the next generation of break dancers who were Puerto Rican. Today, its practitioners include an

internationally diverse membership of creative, uniquely styled artists and can be considered a unique expression of Indigenous poetics. (“Breaking...” 416)

In this passage, Recollet examples how cross-cultural sharing – of various art-forms – is not a blending of identities or cultures, but rather, a negotiation of resistances and worlds that suit the unique experiences of the artist. Extrapolating from this understanding, I believe artistic layering responds to oppressive borders by creating re-visioned spaces through the affective performances and actions of the peoples silenced by the settler-nation.

This reading of artistic layering productively offers an opening to dialogue between diasporic and Indigenous scholarships. Daniel Coleman’s “Indigenous Place and Diaspora Space: Of Literalism and Abstraction” helpfully discusses what this sort of conversation could entail. In this article, he draws upon Ermine and appeals for an “ethical space of engagement” between these scholarships, where their “differences can mutually inform one another” (1). Here, Coleman interprets difference – or what he calls, “strategic binarism” (1, 15) – as the crucial component needed to propel important critiques and strategies related to Indigenous and diasporic concerns. What interests me about Coleman’s article is the way his careful navigation of these two fields – both of which examine “undesirable bodies” of the nation-state – sets aside the tendency of solely centering on European settler cultures. As Larissa Lai shares in her work on Indigenous—Asian relations, “Anti-racist work of the last few decades constantly puts both First Nations people and people of colour in conversation with European settler cultures, but very seldom with one another” (qtd. in Coleman 3). Though my investigation of ATCR’s space-making work strongly pertains to settler Canadian/Indigenous relationships, my turn towards artistic layering still seeks to demonstrate the productive potential emerging from other forms of cross-cultural sharing (such as that of the hip-hop genre and space). This decision, admittedly, does not offer as focused an

approach as Coleman and Lai's comparisons, but it does seek to collaboratively expose the ways this sharing can, interdependently, undo oppressive controls.⁴

Despite similarities, I maintain that artistic layering differs from hybridity, a term that refers to the *mixing* of cultures and worlds. "In hybridity, no subject position can be privileged; all are equal," says Niigonweddom James Sinclair: "Hybridity compromises this ability of Indian people and communities to name themselves, determine their authenticity according to their own ideas, and govern their lives by their own values" (251). What Sinclair aptly notes of hybridity is that there is a blurring of boundaries that can come at the expense of Indigenous self-determination, a critique that certainly differs from Ermine's call for ethical spaces that more clearly delineate difference. I align with this need for more asserted boundaries, as the personal boundaries of Canadians and Indigenous peoples often overlap, a notable example being the claims to land. In this circumstance, lands are a personal boundary that both parties believe to be a right, regardless of whether or not it is land currently occupied or land taken through the breaking of Treaties. Differing from hybridity, which risks dismissing this conversation in its blurring of identities, artistic layering – as a negotiation of boundaries and worldviews that can be separated and interpreted – asserts the need for Indigenous spaces, even if this need transgresses the personal boundaries of Canadians. At the same time, this artistic form still holds the potential to be misinterpreted because, like hybridization, it does bring together and sometimes obscures different art-forms (as I demonstrate in my later chapters).

⁴ What I am noticing in these scholarships and ATCR's work is a paralleled but differing concern with nation and its silencing of those who do not conform. Christine Kim and Sophie McCall share this observation and suggest that – in spite of their differences – "diaspora and nation are interdependent and mutually constituting, just as indigeneity and nation are contingent and responsive" (2). Specifically, diasporic and Indigenous groups recognize that "the dominant vision of the nation is itself a colonizing representation" (4). Despite similarities, these scholarships have differing objectives: "activists from [various] ethnic minority groups [demand] greater space *within* nation," whereas "Aboriginal social movements [push] *against* government's efforts to [...] incorporate their nations within institutional structures of citizenship and national belonging" (5).

As a point of contact that stems from conflict, artistic layering remains situated within the very real leakages of the border-space. By consequence, oppressive behaviours can inevitably pass through or even settle in this space, regardless of the parameters determined. Though ATCR establishes spaces that offer decolonized perspectives, the unpredictability of audience participation and consumption remains troubling. For instance, many non-Indigenous audience members have arrived at electric powwows in headdresses and face paint, channelling the racist embodiment of Indigenous peoples found in media and pop culture (an adoption of the image that is otherwise known as red-face).⁵ Regardless of audience intentions, red-facing at ATCR's shows evidences the dangers of artistic layering, dangers that are only furthered by the cross-cultural response to their celebrity branding. Canadian media outlets, in particular, have used ATCR's brand to better their image of racial inclusivity without offering a thoughtful commitment. Given these problems of misuse, Emma LaRocque's concerns of hybridization are all the more valid. She asserts, "emphasis on [...] 'crossing boundaries', or 'liminality' can serve to eclipse Aboriginal cultural knowledges, experiences (national and individual) and what may be called the colonial experience" (222). Factoring in these consumptions – of narrative, video, performance, brand, celebrity – with the undeniable presence of capitalist and global ventures, the colonial experience always remains difficult, regardless of how much ATCR or others try to dismantle it.

Despite ATCR's ambitious attempts to foster meaningful contact, wrongful consumption reveals the epistemological tensions that still exist between groups. Differing from the ethical space – which continues to be an ideal space of listening and respect – layered art's demands for movement, contact, and action remain precarious, as there will always be uncontrollable perspectives that can – and often will – contaminate the re-visioning of narratives and

⁵ Red-facing is a common term used by ATCR to explain the wrongful consumption of Indigenous representation and racism.

relationships. Consequently, these spaces are always “in need” – of thoughtful facilitation, of patience, and of care. Acknowledging that the space’s cross-cultural exchanges are both productive and dangerously vulnerable to misuse, my project seeks to answer the following questions: What does red-facing say about Indigeneity in contemporary culture? What does it mean to have supporters contradict the political meaning of the music? Can the hyphen create productive dialogue and action between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, or does it lend itself to causing further dispute? And, are there problems with using popular urban forms of music and film to assert political resistance?

In my first chapter, “Layering and its Political Momentum,” I offer a closer examination of layered art within the context of ATCR’s music. In particular, I consider the artistic mobilization of layering as a complex negotiation between respecting and transgressing the personal boundaries of the oppressor. After situating this discussion within the context of Canadian/Indigenous divides, I then work through how ATCR’s hyphenated art asserts a nation-to-nation relationship among Indigenous artists to promote Indigenous solidarity and build momentum. Then, I consider the ways they weaponize their music to shift the focus of political conversations and narratives to the needs of Indigenous peoples.

In my second chapter, “Decolonizing ‘the Indian’ in Video and Performance,” I discuss the actionable possibilities of layering and its contact. Studying the interdependence of ATCR’s videography and performance space, I work through how ATCR’s layering of multimedia and performance decolonizes space. In doing so, they offer what I call a *decolonized frontier*, a video-performance space that re-visions colonial narratives and actualizes their decolonizing potential. Specifically, I consider how ATCR’s powerful facilitation of the multimedia performance space and its conditions comes to productively share Indigenous struggles and endurance with others. I

believe ATCR's creation of welcoming spaces for Indigenous peoples in spite of colonial conditions is, perhaps, the most powerful aspect of their hyphenated exchange.

In my third chapter, "The Emergence of the Post-TRC Indigenous Celebrity," I investigate the 'fold' – or, the dangers – of artistic layering through an analysis of the simultaneous productivity and (neo)colonial complicity of the band's celebrity. Differing from previous versions of the "Indigenous celebrity" – such as Hollywood's savage, noble, or dying "Indian"; or the fame of writer-celebrities like Thomas King or Joseph Boyden – my reading of ATCR as the post-TRC Indigenous celebrity (or more concisely, the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat) interprets their celebrity as an Indigenous space-making project. Politically active, confrontational, and always teaching, this celebrity is the new "healer" of the nation. Despite inevitable limitations, the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat embraces layering and its potential, as they negotiate with and pressure the nation to make space for the individually sovereign futures of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Perhaps most important to artistic layering in ATCR's work is the return to the sacredness of the land. The land holds spirit, it teaches, and it is the site of settler abuses; however, it can also become the place through which non-Indigenous peoples learn to acknowledge their positioning and their responsibilities. As Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel remind us, "solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must be grounded in actual practices and *place-based* relationships, and be approached as incommensurable but not incompatible" (3, emphasis added). Aligning with this perspective, my focus on artistic layering and its cross-cultural exchanges seeks to bring our dialogues and actions back to the one space that we, as Indigenous peoples and Canadians, occupy. Inhabited by different peoples with unique histories and views, this land could, ideally, become Ermine's

“meeting ground” made tangible. For this very reason, we must seek to nurture it so that it may become the site of ethical exchanges.

Understanding the importance of knowing our positioning and our responsibility to this land, I openly acknowledge my place as a privileged settler Canadian academic whose history has, in many respects, been shaped by my access to Western educational frameworks and institutions. As a legal citizen of Canada, I recognize my privileged advantages as well as the limits of my knowledge pertaining to other worldviews and cultures. Without dismissing these truths, I hope, with this project, to illuminate and contribute to these openings for dialogue and welcome spaces for peoples, within and outside of my scholarship. I truly believe that if we can respond to difference as productive, both through our words and actions, we can find better ways to navigate our relationships to this land and each other for future generations.

Chapter 1. Layering and its Political Momentum

“[Ethics] includes the serious reflection of those crucial lines we draw to delineate our personal autonomous zones and demarcation of boundaries others should not cross. Each of us knows our own boundaries, the contours of our sacred spaces that we claim for ourselves as autonomous actors in the universe. These are our basic personal boundaries, the moral thresholds that we will not cross and we are equally sensitive to others infringing or imposing on those spaces.”

—Willie Ermine, “The Ethical Space of Engagement” (195)

Layering creatively negotiates and re-visions the boundaries that subjugate peoples. Responding to Ermine’s call for an ethical space, which appeals for boundaries that thoughtfully attend to the unique needs of both groups, layered art – when strategically mobilized by oppressed peoples – recognizes boundaries as the political demarcation of safety for the nation’s ideal citizens that compromises the rights of those who do not comply. And so, complicating the (neo)colonial boundaries established by the privileged, this art-form and its exchanges, at its best, explores what it could mean to reconfigure boundaries determined as “sacred” by the privileged so that they accommodate – and sometimes, privilege – the needs of Indigenous peoples.⁶ Extrapolating from this understanding, this chapter explores the ways *A Tribe Called Red*’s layering negotiates boundaries; then, it works through how these negotiations weaponize art to assert the socio-political need for Indigenous spaces in Canada.

It is important to understand that the contemporary divides between Canadians and Indigenous peoples stem from settler colonialism. Lorenzo Veracini aptly describes settler colonialism as the practice of manipulating land insofar as it conforms to a specific set of ideals and self-perceptions. He writes, “settlers do not discover: they carry their sovereignty and lifestyles with them. [...] As they move towards what amounts to a representation of their world,

⁶ I must acknowledge that this negotiation of boundaries can be wrongfully used. As Daniel Coleman shared with me during a previous draft of this project, there are people from privileged backgrounds who are certainly taking on this art-form. My third chapter explores some of these risks more thoroughly when it tackles the instances of red-facing at performances.

as they transform the land into their image, they settle another place without really moving” (5).

As Veracini suggests, settler colonialism is the implementation of imperialist ideologies; it is, as Patrick Wolfe describes, “a structure rather than an event” (390), as settlers implement structures that can permanently ensure their holds over land(s) and people(s). Unlike an event, which occurs and then passes, these practices invisibly settle through time, becoming intractably locked into the nation’s systems, laws, and perspectives as we move into the future.

Recognizing the perseverance of this discordant relationship, my use of the term, “Canadian,” refers to settlers and their descendants: groups that have benefitted from settler colonial systems by perverting the meanings and values of Indigenous laws, customs, and cultures. Accordingly, my use of the term, “Indian,” specifically refers to the settler reduction of Indigenous peoples. In the words of Daniel Francis:

The Indian began as a White man’s mistake, and became a White man’s fantasy. Through the prism of White hopes, fears and prejudices, indigenous Americans would be seen to have lost contact with reality and to have become ‘Indians’; that is, anything non-Natives wanted them to be. (5)

The Indian Act, a piece of Canadian legislation that determines Indigenous rights and regulations, entrenches this construction by placing the colonizers’ “White man’s fantasy” of “the Indian” on Indigenous peoples, consequently excluding those who do not conform. Understanding this settler reduction, this chapter uses the plural, “Indigenous peoples,” to refer to the diversity of peoples subsumed or excluded by the constructs of Canada’s “Indian.” As Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, the term comes from the American Indian Movement and “internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples” (7). This movement places specific emphasis on this “final ‘s’ [as it recognizes] the right of peoples to self-determination [and] also [recognizes] that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples” (7). Though I am centering this chapter’s analysis on Canada’s political

climate and the Nations that occupy this land, ATCR's discussions certainly relate to other locations and peoples.

Canadian residential schooling may be one of the most widely known and violent examples of colonizer attempts at subjugating peoples through the construction of "the Indian." In 1884, there was an amendment to the *Act* that required "Indian" children to attend specific schools that would enforce in them a Euro-Canadian worldview. Under the control of Christian school officials, such as the Anglican and the Catholic churches of Canada, children were immediately forced to destroy their own clothes, cut their hair, and abandon their traditions and language(s) (Episkenew 47). Such practices operated to stifle any potential for "Indian" futurity. The conditions of erasure within these schools, however, went far beyond the *Act*'s assimilative terms and conditions. School officials possessed "unlimited access to children, absolute power over those children, and little scrutiny[.] [R]esidential schools attracted disproportionate numbers of pedophiles, who were free to wreak havoc" (50). Physical, emotional, and sexual abuses of all kinds occurred. In 1907, reports showed that the mortality rate of these students was around 30% in British Columbia and 50% in Alberta (King 114). Similarly, in 1928, reports revealed that students were grossly malnourished (115). The Canadian Government, however, dismissed these reported abuses in schools. It was not until 1996 that the last residential school in Canada shut down and June 2015 that this process was nationally acknowledged as a "cultural genocide."

Many Indigenous studies scholars stress the importance of creative work when responding to settler oppressions. Sam McKegney, in particular, observes the resistive threads of Indigenous art as a "magic weapon," where artists use their "creative weaponry" to re-vision the future for peoples. Drawing this term from Thomas Highway's, *The Kiss of the Fur Queen*, McKegney writes:

"The world has become too evil. With these magic weapons, make a new world" ([Highway] 227). The world that exists for First Nations people in the wake of residential schooling is in many ways "too evil." But they are not without the creative weaponry to change it, nor must the changes be restricted by visions for the future determined from without. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, [...] Highway's protagonists disseminate their artistry through the public vehicle of drama. They employ their magic weapons not simply to heal themselves but to provoke positive change in others—to "make a new world" through art. [...] This they [Indigenous artists] endeavour with skill, imagination, and courage. (8)

In this passage, McKegney understands that creatively re-visioning the world can compel response from listeners. His use of the words "weapon" and "provoke" implies a demand for contact and discomfort. I see layering as an art that negotiates Ermine's ethical space with the provocation of McKegney's creative weaponry to establish spaces that accommodate the futures of Indigenous peoples. By consequence, each layer presents a unique reconfiguration of boundaries and their power relations, as it is the person affected who determines the artistic presentation.

Indigenous humour is a form of creative weaponry that is often used within this layering process. As Drew Hayden Taylor outlines:

Native humour often crosses the tenuous and ambiguous boundary between the politically correct and the politically incorrect. Native humour pushes the envelope. It asks questions. It makes statements. It goes places polite and civil humour won't go. It reflects injustice and anger. It showcases observation and commentary.

Native humour comes from five hundred years of colonization, of oppression, of being kept prisoners in our own country. With legalized attacks on our culture, our languages, our identities and even our religion, often the only way left for Native people to respond to the cruel realities of the Fourth World existence was humour. Humour kept us sane. It gave us power. (69)

Humour is a transgression of boundaries, as it crosses what is deemed as "acceptable" to ask questions and confront wrongdoing. Notably, by transgressing the "politically correct," humour evokes its own kind of resistance and discomfort within a cross-cultural context. At the same time, it is also a powerful form of survival and self-determination. As Taylor states, "A good

portion of Native humour springs from a sense of survival. Frequently, it's a reaction against the world” (69). Karen Froman similarly reflects, “Humour, in the Native context, is a coping mechanism; we use it to deal with five hundred years of colonization and to help non-Native people understand us” (135). In both instances, humour acts as a provocation “against the world” that, when used creatively, can also respond to this need to “make” a new one. Within the context of ATCR's work, humour becomes a creatively resistive survivor's tool that is especially mobilized by their performance and celebrity. I explore some of these humorous threads more in my later chapters.

Negotiating Boundaries

As I shared in my project's “Introduction,” the ethical space of engagement models an ideal relationship of respectful negotiation between differing groups. The value of this ideal coincides with the Indigenous rights objective for a nation-to-nation approach to cross-cultural relationships and agreements. Idle No More's “Manifesto” defines nation-to-nation as Treaties between the sovereign nations of Indigenous peoples and the British Crown: “Treaties are agreements that cannot be altered or broken by one side of the two Nations,” it states, “The spirit and intent of the Treaty agreements meant that First Nations peoples would share the land, but retain their inherent rights to lands and resources” (Idle No More). Understanding that nation-to-nation is the honouring of intractable agreements for co-existence, the neglect on the part of Canadians to uphold Treaties is a violation of Indigenous peoples' rights that, consequently, normalizes the Canadian transgression of their sacred spaces. Supporting this perspective is the *Report of the Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, a governmental report released in 1996 that sought to document and heal Canadian/Indigenous divides, or as Chelsea Vowell more directly summarizes, a report that sought “to figure out what went wrong, how it went wrong, and what

can be done to correct the problems identified” (*The Winter...* 308). In particular, the report outlined the need for a nation-to-nation approach to negotiations:

Parties to a treaty do not give up nationhood or their own ways of living, working and governing themselves. Rather, they acknowledge their shared wish to live in peace and harmony, agree on rules of coexistence, then work to fulfil their commitments to one another (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).

The report's focus upon unique cultures, self-government, and cooperation anticipates Ermine's consideration of difference as an ethical negotiation tool. As the report reveals, nation-to-nation approaches remain inextricable from the ethical space's delineation of personal boundaries and must, therefore, be honoured as such.⁷

The problem with the report and Ermine's ethical space is that Canadians have yet to implement – or perhaps, be provoked by – these nation-to-nation approaches to policy and legislation. It is, here, that dialogues without provocation sustain political inaction. Responding to this need, I believe ATCR's second album, *Nation II Nation* (2013), artistically engages in a process of layering to garner momentum for Indigenous rights and incite action from Indigenous peoples and Canadians.⁸ As Bear Thomas outlined in an interview with Jesse Kinosh-Goodin:

Nation II Nation [...] is actually a layered name. Just within our group, Ian being Ojibwa, Dan and myself being Cayuga, those are two nations coming together that weren't always friends. And then Idle No More and how Canada has to deal with us as our own nation, and the larger picture of how Aboriginal people the world over are standing up and saying the same thing and making those connections, and now those nations are talking. ("A Tribe Called Red's Nation...")

⁷ The parallels between the report and Ermine go beyond their calls for co-existence; they acknowledge the political need for Ermine's "meeting ground" that compels respectful dialogue. As the report later asserts, "negotiated settlements, in which the parties talk face to face and work out complex deals, are preferable [and] in nation-to-nation relations, they are essential" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples), an assertion that is certainly comparable to Ermine's "human-to-human" meeting ground. The "Highlights" emphasize this sentiment, stating: "information alone will not break down walls of indifference and occasional hostility. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people need many more chances to meet each other face to face and learn about one another" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples). Understanding that the "face to face" encounter is, in some ways, its own kind of social education, there is a relational and even socio-political value to developing these exchanges in Canada.

⁸ I have chosen their *Nation II Nation* as it is their first album to assert an overtly political objective.

In this passage, Bear reveals the album's intersecting of art and the political need for action, by first contextualizing cultural conflicts among group-members and by then situating these conflicts within a global network of solidarity (of "standing up" and "talking" among each other). What makes this album different from previous calls for nation-to-nation, is that their album models this objective through artistically collaborating with Indigenous artists and activists. By working with artists of differing – and sometimes, conflicting – Nations, ATCR models the ways contact can ignite change, even if it is only within the artistic "meeting ground" of the music or record.

ATCR's album further layers these nation-to-nation dialogues through their established partnership with the Indigenous record label, *Tribal Spirit Music*. The group's agreement with *Tribal Spirit* grants them access to an extensive powwow music library with the condition that the respective groups can share the remixed track(s) on their album(s) (Colhoun; Kinos-Goodin, "A Tribe Called Red's Nation..."). *Nation II Nation*'s mutual sharing of music between artists has become a political act of Indigenous solidarity and "taking back" of culture that, on the one hand, participates in an artistic nation-to-nation agreement, and on the other, reveals a shared political demand among peoples. For instance, each track on *Nation II Nation* is in a First Nations language while their titles are in English. We might read this naming as a metaphor for the ways Canadians have colonized peoples through stripping away language and how, in spite of these efforts, Indigenous peoples remain present and thriving. As Bear Witness and DeeJay NDN share in many interviews, asserting presence as an Indigenous person in Canada remains a political statement because Canadian laws and structures have done everything possible to eradicate Indigenous cultures ("A Tribe Called Red brings 'Nation II Nation'..."; Bondy; Wentte, Beagan

and Campeau). By highlighting the languages and voices of different cultures, the album reclaims a lateral, nation-to-nation approach to working together.

I believe ATCR's *Nation II Nation* not only collaborates with artists; it mobilizes artistic layering to provoke action. Their track, "The Road," featuring music group, Black Bear, from the Manawan First Nation, demonstrates this potential. Though, on its own, the track emphasizes a strong drum beat with an occasional higher-pitched vocal, the video's dedication to the Idle No More movement layers the song with a political meaning. At the opening of the video, there is a map and a title that states: "IdleNoMore Rallies" (A Tribe Called Red). Below, the text says, "A Tribe Called Red. New track in solidarity with Chief Theresa Spence and the #Idlenomore movement. The Road" (A Tribe Called Red). The repetition of Idle No More's protesting alongside the words, "solidarity" and "rallies," embeds nation-to-nation support within the video. This support, importantly, extends beyond North America and into areas like Egypt, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. While the map remains present throughout the video, the camera cross-cuts to images of a drum circle and protest signs from the movement, thus incorporating physical bodies and demands for "face-to-face" interaction. The unwavering presence of the map throughout this footage insists that their nation-to-nation message is shared globally.

This artistic nation-to-nation approach does not mean that Nations, collectively, support ATCR's music. Despite being generally well received and respected, some have criticized the band's use of the word powwow, given the presence of substance abuse at their performances. This concern regards the fact that powwow celebrations are sober events that encourage participants to explore and embrace who they are within a welcoming space. In an interview, Ian Campeau and Bear Thomas (Bear Witness) responded to critiques:

Bear: I have had some guys give me a bad time about what we do. You know, there was a guy at the studio, a guy who was involved in the powwow circuit

telling me that we shouldn't be doing this, that it's not respecting tradition. *And, of course, I listened to him. I gave him his space. But things are evolving.*

Campeau: The thing is, powwows as they stand today, are not respecting tradition. They aren't like they used to be. Nobody remembers exactly how they used to be. Up until the 1950s it was illegal for Indians to gather, to get together. The powwow was illegal. And it wasn't until later in the 1960s and 1970s that you started to see powwows again.

The truth is that things like the Grand Entry, which is the opening dance at powwows, while it's an important thing and sacred thing now, it basically comes from the Wild West Show when they had the Indians parade out in their regalia. They never used to have the Grand Entry in the real old days.

Bear: I ask the guys who are the serious keepers of the powwow tradition if what they are doing now is the same as even in the 1970s. It's not. They admit it's not. *It's evolved. And it continues to evolve.* (Finken, emphasis added)

Here, Bear acknowledges the importance of “listening” and “giving space” when interacting with other people who disagree. In this way, while Bear and Campeau assert a different position on powwow celebrations – with them seeing the powwow as an evolution of culture and with others seeing it as tradition – their vocalization of differing perspectives educates non-Indigenous peoples about the various interpretations of their music, including the views of those who find it problematic. While, of course, Bear and Campeau assert their position quite vocally – as they are promoting their music – they do not silence the presence of people(s) who are against their work and perhaps even offended by it.

Mindful of these differing perspectives, ATCR only samples music through *Tribal Spirit* or in open collaboration with other artists. As Campeau reflects, “The traditions are strict. But our agreement is working. [...] They know that we might sample their songs. They promote us. We promote them” (Finken). Working within the parameters of their agreement, the group never remixes sacred songs. As previous member, Dan General (DJ Shub), explains:

There are certain songs in traditional music we won't even touch, like honor songs or veteran songs – those songs can't even be recorded. They're sacred. Whereas round dances and inter-tribal songs – those are made specifically to get people to dance, usually at powwows, to get everyone involved. So it's a natural flow to use that in the club scene. (Casselmann)

In the context of the sampled music, the choice to only remix songs intended for dancing and from their artistic agreements ethically attends to personal boundaries. Even if some disagree with the music, it is, nonetheless, created consensually and not simply taken without permissions.

Returning to *Nation II Nation*, the use of English track titles communicates Indigenous concerns and resistance to a cross-cultural audience. For instance, *NDN Stakes*, with “NDN” being another spelling for “Indian,” repurposes the original word to convey another meaning. In an interview, Campeau revealed that the urban meaning of “NDN” – “Never Die Native” – specifically “retaliat[es]” against the belief that “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” (Risk), and counters the *Indian Act*'s naming and expectations. Similarly, the track title, “Tanto's Revenge,” re-purposes the representation of *The Lone Ranger*'s “Indian” sidekick, Tonto. With “tonto” being the Spanish word for “fool,” this renaming uproots the racist labelling of the original television series and defies settler colonial practice of placing an undesired name – and attribute – on “the Indian.” In both cases, taking the colonizer's constructions and throwing it back at them becomes a powerful form of resistance. Other track titles that do this include “Red Riddim” and “Different Heroes,” the first problematizing the English language and the latter demanding a remaking of our understanding of what makes a “hero.”

Though *Nation II Nation*'s tracks each offer some kind of resistance, “Sisters” remains one of the most politically motivated tracks on the album. With ATCR stripping down the vocals to highlight Northern Voice's female vocalists – a notable change, as women are placed in the second circle behind the men of the first – the track emphasizes female presence and endurance. This artistic move counters masculine narratives of colonization and recognizes the presence of Indigenous girls and women—an overtly political move given the growing number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. In doing so, ATCR's collaboration

expresses the socio-political need to address this community and national issue (see my second chapter for a further analysis of the song's video).

Weaponizing Art

“We cannot understand the full horror of Indian residential schools until we understand that *their very existence*, in however benign form, constituted an abomination”

—Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young (qtd. in McKegney 21, emphasis original)

Following *Nation II Nation* and their increasing network of artistic collaborators, ATCR offered another complex shift in focus: they refused to play for the opening of the Canadian Human Rights Museum due to its representation of Indigenous peoples and denial of genocide; they released the two politically charged, anti-colonial songs, titled, “Burn Your Village to the Ground” and “Working for the Government”; they gained recognition for the banning of cultural appropriations at music festivals (Bateman, “More music festivals...”; Marsh); they shared a new wrestling-themed EP, *Suplex*; and, they announced their music tour of First Nations reserves in Canada (A Tribe Called Red, “Tour”; Hudson, “A Tribe Called Red Announce Tour...”). Alongside these accomplishments, ATCR has continued to perform on popular North American stages and participate in panel discussions to spread awareness about Indigenous concerns. Responding to these initiatives, this section illuminates how their layered art transgresses (neo)colonial holds to create Indigenous spaces in Canada.

Though ATCR was already known for their activism with regards to racist mascots and red-facing at performances, their political assertiveness began in September 2014, when they refused play for the Human Rights Museum and brought the conversation of Indigenous “genocide” to the national stage (see my third chapter for details of the cultural impact). Though, on its own, this was an important cultural move for bringing about awareness of Indigenous concerns, as it brought these dialogues to the forefront of Canadian media channels, the release of

a song sustained its coverage. On American Thanksgiving, when dialogues of Indigenous genocide dwindled, the band released the free-download track, “Burn Your Village to the Ground.” Likely responding to the museum’s rejection of genocide in the exhibits and Canada’s denial of Indigenous oppression, the track enacts a revenge upon all settler narratives that have secured a socio-political denial of wrongdoing. The song echoes:

You have taken the land which is rightfully ours.
Years from now my people will be forced to live in mobile homes on reservations.
Your people will wear cardigans, and drink highballs.
We will sell our bracelets by the road sides, you will play golf, and enjoy hot hors
d'oeuvres.
My people will have pain and degradation. Your people will have stick shifts.
The gods of my tribe have spoken.
They have said, "Do not trust the Pilgrims."
And for all these reasons I have decided to scalp you and burn your village to the
ground. (A Tribe Called Red)

These lyrics are drawn from the outcast Wednesday Addams of the *Addams Family Values* film, when she plays Pocahontas in a school play and rejects the script. ATCR’s use of these same lines similarly outcasts the desire for Indigenous complicity and cooperation by breaking the narrative expectations. Beginning with a “you vs. we” narrative, with “you” (settlers) as the “benefactor” and of the oppressed “we” (Indigenous peoples), the narrative shift to the “I” becomes a powerful moment of self-determination and individualization. No longer able to accept that “we” must “sell our bracelets” and “have pain and degradation,” the speaker becomes an “I” ready to take revenge on the settlers. Notably, the phrase, “I have decided to scalp you,” parallels “NDNs From All Directions,” a track from their first album that also exposes the violence of the colonizers (who desire to “scalp” the “Indians”). In both instances, there is a refusal to be “scalped,” transforming the songs into anti-colonial retaliations against the oppressors; however, unlike “NDNs From All Directions,” which seeks to bring together Indigenous peoples, “Burn Your Village to the Ground” channels this solidarity towards a

specific concern, as it was released on a holiday that celebrates the relations between Indigenous peoples and North Americans. Regardless of whether or not we read the release as a reaction to the Canadian Human Rights Museum (as both depend upon historical narratives that idealize “the Indian”), the tracks following openly express anger with the contemporary state of the country and its narratives.

I believe ATCR's rejection of the museum and their circulation of “Burn Your Village to the Ground” anticipates an unfavorable evaluation of the TRC reports, given the previous neglect of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* and the ongoing socio-political denial of Canadian colonialism. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is a modern archive that gathers testimony from former students impacted by the emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuses of Residential Schooling in Canada. According to its mandate, the TRC seeks to provide a “safe, supportive and sensitive environment for individual statement taking/truth sharing” (Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement). As this passage suggests, the TRC – seemingly – seeks to take legal accountability for Canada's colonial history; however, what this passage neglects is that the process of “truth sharing” still protects the Canadians involved by foregoing subpoenas and document requisitions. For Roland Chrisjohn and Tanya Wasacase, the TRC's – arguably colonial – process is “backwards,” as it relies upon the survivors of Residential Schooling to take accountability for the perpetrators to the very institutions that sustained their efforts:

It looks and sounds like some bizarre confessional, where one confesses what was done to him or her, instead of what he or she did, and, in a further perversion, confesses to representatives of those who committed the original offenses. Somehow, the crimes of clergy are absolved, not by them accepting responsibility for their actions, but by listening (if they so choose) to victims accuse them of those actions. At least those testifying at the Commission hearings are not going to be sent away with acts of penance to perform. (204)

By confessing “what was done to them,” survivors occupy a precarious position: their voices are made to be “part” of the record but they are still manipulated to fulfil Canadian motivations.⁹

Though the released reports, for the first time ever, take accountability for Canada's implementation of a “cultural genocide,” there is still an implicit – and unsurprising – denial through the term's softening of settler colonial violence. As Wolfe argues, cultural genocide “confuses definition with degree”:

[T]he practical hazards that can ensue once an abstract concept like ‘cultural genocide’ falls into the wrong hands are legion. In particular, in an elementary category of error, “ether/or” can be substituted for “both/and,” from which genocide emerges as either biological (read “the real thing”) or cultural—and thus, it follows, not real. (398)

What Wolfe compellingly delineates, here, is the fact that cultural genocide can be mistaken for something less damaging, as it places narrative limitations on the extent of the violence committed. These limitations comply with Canada's denials of settler colonialism and also support Chrisjohn and Wasacase's criticism of the TRC being colonial in its very structure. Contrastingly, ATCR's articulation of “genocide” prior to the reports brings this violence to the forefront of the conversation before the release. Moreover, by following up with “Burn Your Village to the Ground,” ATCR continues to contaminate the “purity” of the national narrative and does so on their own terms.

Wolfe's critique of cultural genocide draws upon the problems of the hyphen. After regarding cultural genocide as a hyphenation of the original term, he asserts the “insurmountable problem with the qualified genocides is that, in their very defensiveness, they threaten to undo themselves. They are never quite the real thing, just as patronizingly hyphenated ethnics are not fully Australian or fully American” (402). Wolfe's argument, here, aligns with Mishra's

⁹ In this paragraph, I draw from a paper I gave at the University of Toronto's “Memory, Memorialization, and Forgetting” Conference: “Excavating the Indigenous Bones for Tomorrow in Robert Kroestch's *Badlands*.”

observation that the nation-state privileges citizens who are “pure” and “un-hyphenated” (*Literature of the Indian Diaspora...* 184). While “pure” citizens comply with nation-state expectations and remain, in Wolfe’s words, “the real thing,” citizens deemed as “hyphenated” – or even those deemed as “conditional” – remain undesirable and “patronizingly” categorized. Within the context of the term, “cultural genocide,” there is a similar negation of its very real extermination(s) of groups and peoples. Without refuting the importance of the TRC reports with regards to Indigenous testimonies and national admissions, I do believe we must recognize the power-dynamics involved in this definitional determination. After all, it is the determinations of the Canadian nation-state – arguably maintained through the TRC – that have compelled the use of the hyphenated term rather than genocide on its own, even if the report works with Indigenous peoples and was first shared by the TRC Chair, Justice Murray Sinclair (of the Ojibway Nation). Recognizing that the hyphen is still being mobilized by a privileged institution, the use of the term, while valuable, simultaneously acts as another medium through which Canadian institutions can assert their colonizer control, as it can downplay the extent to which our systems have inflicted suffering on others.

What ATCR shows through their re-creation of narratives and spaces is that there is both a need and an opportunity to begin reframing our understanding of what and who constitutes “real” citizens and peoples of the land. Instead of complying with (neo)colonial expectations for a conditional assimilation, ATCR’s artistic layering – as an oppressed peoples – forcefully revises spaces of divide to vocalize the concerns of peoples. In doing so, they draw upon layered art’s spirit of recognition: its ability to make known the existence of continuities and discontinuities between differing groups and, more important, its ability to confront Indigenous concerns without Canadian demands of cooperation and comfort. In the circumstances of the

museum and song, ATCR's articulation of "genocide" and subsequent demand of Indigenous peoples to "scalp the pilgrims" contaminates the "purity" of Canadian citizenship as well as the Canadian expectation for Indigenous complicity. In this way, the use creative weaponry by those who have been oppressed by the nation's (neo)colonial systems *is* an actionable response that challenges representation and the settler colonial practice of placing narratives onto peoples.

Not only does this moment trouble Canada's legislative and cultural "containment" of peoples, it also complicates the durability of Ermine's ethical spaces of respected difference (at least, within the frame of these traditionally vertical relations). Though Ermine certainly never insists on the need for comfort in the ethical space – and in some senses, demands the opposite, as he depends on difference as the means for productive dialogues – his attention to personal boundaries implies an expectation of *some* comfort in order for respect to be earned and maintained. The problem with this condition is that while it may be necessary on the part of Canadians (as there is a Canadian entitlement that propels the manipulation of land and peoples), respect on behalf of Indigenous peoples could detrimentally hurt efforts to garner momentum for Indigenous rights, given the entrenched infringement of Indigenous boundaries in Canadian legislation. ATCR's music, at its core, is an uncomfortable art-form that demands war against the "White man" – sometimes humorously and sometimes forcefully – before an audience that contains some of the people they condemn; their refusal to play because of Canada's neglect of Indigenous genocide is similarly directed. Ultimately, what these confrontations reveal is that discomfort – through, what McKegney would call "creative weaponry" – is an important part of political resistance. Discomfort serves as a reminder of contact and so long as discomfort remains, so does the call for change and action. With regards to the ethical space, while a level of comfort can productively drive much needed dialogues, maintaining comfort in and beyond the

space – even if it is limited – has its own ramifications, such as with the museum's neglect of genocide in the exhibits or, perhaps, even with the hyphenation of Indigenous genocide.

ATCR calls for this productive discomfort in their newest EP, *Suplex*, released a month prior to the publication of the TRC reports. Named after the famous wrestling maneuver, the EP consists of four wrestling-themed songs: “Suplex” (featuring Northern Voice), “The Peoples’ Champ,” “Bodyslam,” and “Bodyslam” (featuring Smalltown DJs). These tracks come together to bring peoples together and creatively transgress (neo)colonial controls. In a public statement, Bear Thomas explained the theme:

Growing up in a world where indigenous people are so under-represented in the media, you tend to identify with what's available to you. The connection between the indigenous communities of the Americas, and professional wrestling, is really heavy. In North America we had pros like Chief Jay Youngblood and Wahoo McDaniel who were indigenous, but had to dress in headdress and tassels to compete.

In my generation, we all loved the Ultimate Warrior and hated Tatanka. Even if nothing about the Warrior was indigenous, we made some kind of cultural connection to him. More recently, The Rock has shown us how a proud indigenous man can make it as a wrestler on his own terms. (Hudson, "A Tribe Called Red Releases..."; ICTMN Staff; Van Evra)

Though the album is a celebration of a cultural phenomenon that connects with many Indigenous peoples (despite issues of stereotyping), the EP's theme is still quite different from their previous work. With three out of the four tracks dedicated to moves used to “take down” opponents and the other offering a variation on The Rock's known name, the People's Champ, ATCR's EP offers an overt “fighter's” stance on behalf of Indigenous peoples. Notably, this “fight” includes collaborations with the well-known Indigenous artists, HellnBack (rap vocalist and producer), and Northern Voice (a collaborator from their previous album); and, additionally, features the Canadian deejay duo, Smalltown DJs. The presence of the latter group notably extends their artistic nation-to-nation approach to Canadian artists.

On the same day they released the EP, ATCR also shared a video for “Suplex”—a decision that determined the narrative tone of their EP before others had the opportunity to review it: “the idea of the video was to show th[e] connection we made to [wrestlers] beyond stereotypes,” Bear said, “[and] also to see an indigenous character make it, without needing the stereotype” (Hudson, “A Tribe Called Red Releases...”; ICTMN Staff; Van Evra). Directed by Jon Riera, the video cross-cuts between a group of Indigenous youth in a handmade wrestling ring and a young Indigenous wrestler who excels without assuming “the Indian” image. Outside both of the wrestling rings are supporters of all ages, cheering for their contenders as they fight against their opponents. What connects the peoples in the video is their investment in the sport and the ATCR logo, fashioned on their hats, bandanas, and wardrobes. This shared logo offers an alternative to previous sports representations of “the Indian,” as seen with famous teams that assume a “redskins” image. In contrast to these consumptions, the people in the video take on a different representation, one that stands for solidarity and resistance.

The video for “Suplex” offers a narrative that celebrates and attends to the needs of Indigenous youth by envisioning better Indigenous representation and role models. At the beginning, a young boy (wearing ATCR’s new memorabilia) listens to “The Peoples’ Champ” in the backseat of a car; then, when he walks down the street, he proceeds to imaginatively wrestle and cheer, eventually purchasing tickets for a wrestling match. By focusing on his young imagination, the video captures the entertainment industry’s influence on youth. Following this sequence, the video then features a group of young kids making their own wrestling masks and eventually wrestling in a home-made ring. The making of these masks figuratively re-vision the narrative of “the Indian,” as the kids create their own representations and fighter-personas and then make these visions tangible, fighting with their handmade masks on. Though, on its own,

this representation targets the cultural circumstances that inform Indigenous youth, such as representation in the entertainment industry, one of the kids wears a shirt that politicizes their interactions. As the kid fights another, his shirt, which says “I’m here” (A Tribe Called Red), becomes a dominant focus of the frame. In line with ATCR’s assertion being here as an Indigenous person is a political statement, the video politicizes the presence of Indigenous youth and makes them the focus.

This narrative of the youth is complemented by that of an on-the-rise Indigenous wrestler. This narrative, in particular, envisions a new role model for youth that is outside of problematic representations of “the Indian.” Beginning the young person’s personal narrative in a handmade ring, the video depicts him cheering at wrestling matches until he joins the professional ring himself. But his rise to fame is not easy. Early in his career, he is on the receiving end of a violent “bodyslam,” and later, expresses his frustration and pain in the change room; however, he does improve, eventually making it to a final match against a strong contender. Crucially, when he gets thrown to the ground during a match, he looks at the crowd supporting him and fights harder, eventually winning the title belt. The struggle of the video’s wrestler stresses the need to keep fighting for the right to self-determination regardless of the ongoing hardships and, importantly, calls on communities to be encouraging of Indigenous youth, who must continue the fight for Indigenous space in North America. In this way, the video – and its release on the same day – frames the EP as a nation-to-nation political fight for an Indigenous future.

Though the video for “Suplex” powerfully asserts ATCR’s political objectives, the track, “The Peoples’ Champ,” featuring rap vocalist, HellnBack may be their most explicit resistance yet. As HellnBack sings:

Contact
Deal with conflict

I'm a disaster
Fight for clean water
Now that's a better rapper
Red-blood
Redskin
How need for sayin'
You talk and I walk
That's the difference

I put my people on my back
Got my whole Nation knowing
They're the reason that I rap

Tell me what you rappin' for
If you waiting there for change
Then don't break about the score

[...]

That is ever still breathin'
Redskin with a battle cry, here
For every season (A Tribe Called Red; HellnBack)

HellnBack's emphasis on "contact" and "conflict" positions Indigenous human rights issues – such as the "fight for clean water" – as the by-product of Indigenous "contact" with settler politics and practices.¹⁰ The repetition of "redskin," a derogatory term for an Indigenous person that originates from settler goals to eradicate peoples, alludes to this violent history, with "red-blood" perhaps referencing the *Indian Act's* "degrees of kindred" section (a section that delineates "half-blood" and "full-blood" conditions for registered "Indian status") (48.9). By singing the related words together, HellnBack creatively exposes the violent similarity between perceptions of Indigenous peoples then and now. Framed by the human rights demand for "clean water," his later evocation of the "Indian battle cry," insists that we are still locked in a Canadian/Indigenous battle for fundamental rights and human recognition.

¹⁰ The "fight for clean water" also evokes the protests of Idle No More. See *The Winter We Danced* for more details.

I believe this passage draws upon creative weaponry to confront settler politics and its ramifications. When HellnBack raps, “You talk and I walk / That’s the difference,” he critiques the unknown “you” for their “talk” and passivity. As an artist and rap workshop speaker in the industry who “walks” by reaching out to Indigenous youth in Canada, HellnBack refuses to be complicit with Canadian systems and expectations; however, when he raps, “If you waiting there for change / Then don’t break about the score,” he reveals an implicit activity that can emerge out of artistic vocalization. The “you,” in this sense, could very much be a challenge to Indigenous artists, who also have the artistic ability to “walk” and compel change but who are not necessarily doing so. This – potential – confrontation with other Indigenous artists prompts an invitation for an ethical space of engagement between Nations, as it urges other Indigenous artists – and youth – to appeal for change by creating music about the political issues.

But unlike *Nation II Nation*, this track offers a critical commentary on North American nationalism that articulates the pain shared among Indigenous peoples and threatens the nation-state. As HellnBack sings:

She’s hell, no angels
Star, no spangled
Never had no angles as bonds
And fans faithful

It’s always family over everything
Family is the motivation in my pain medicine (A Tribe Called Red; HellnBack)

HellnBack’s reference to the United States flag – through the lyric, “star, no spangled” – situates his lyrics in a North American setting, not solely a Canadian one. This is a resonant transgression of (neo)colonial knowledge, as many Indigenous cultures see the divide between the United States and Canada as an arbitrary one. Within this context, “she’s hell” because “she” determines the lines (or boundaries) that bring together or divide territories.

By characterizing the nation as hell, HellnBack posits a lyrical rejection of the parameters determined by settler colonialism¹¹; however, he complicates this further when he says, “Never had no angles as bonds,” a line likely referencing the scientific term, “bond angles.”¹² A bond angle is the line that joins together two atoms. According to the Valence-Shell Electron-Pair Repulsion model, there are ideal geometries for bond angles—with multiple bonds “exert[ing] slightly greater repulsions than those from single bonds” (Brown et al 387). HellnBack’s reference to being a “single bond” suggests that he possesses less power than those who have multiple bonds, for reasons that are beyond his control. He then complicates this determination of his value by bringing in his own connections, saying, “It’s family over everything / Family is the motivation in my pain medicine.” Unlike the arbitrary stipulations of borders or angles, the continuation of familial bonds – which, of course, evokes Indigenous futures – ruptures nationalistic resolves. While such an example may not qualify as a mobilization of discomfort, his criticism of politicians places settler colonialism in a contemporary context. As he later says, “My lack of public figure made my future not so clean,” placing the blame for the “fight for clean water” and being a “single bond” on the nation-state’s systems and people.

I see HellnBack’s frequent self-references as a form of creative weaponry, as he moves from verbal critique to experienced suffering, at one point even rapping about the loss of his brother and residential school survivors who are “living off their last [...] settlement” (A Tribe Called Red; HellnBack). Moving away from dialogues about “the system,” his personalization brings the body of peoples to the forefront. As with “Burn Your Village to the Ground,” ATCR’s collaboration takes on the contemporary narrative just prior to the release of the TRC reports, and

¹¹ I am indebted to my colleague, Brycen Janzen, for noting how the angles could be in reference to the “drawing of lines among existing territories” during the construction of North American nations.

¹² This observation stems from the fact that the lyrics flip each term, i.e. instead of Hell’s angels, “she’s hell, no angels”; and, instead of star spangled, “she’s star, no spangled.”

subsequently manages to determine their own representation before national narratives get the chance. In this way, these artistic negotiations initiate a complex “taking” of power back from their oppressors. Seeking to further this conversation, my next chapter explores the ways artistic layering not only expresses the need for Indigenous spaces, but actually establishes them through their videography and performance.

Chapter 2. Decolonizing “the Indian” in Video and Performance

“Decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future”

—Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” (3)

Countering its common neo-liberal meaning of altering – without fully upturning – pedagogies and practices, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang helpfully remind us that decolonization is *always* about the Indigenous repatriation of land and culture. Intentionally or unintentionally, metaphorizing the term is an assertion of (neo)colonial control and privilege, as it postpones issues of land and peoples for the benefit of the settler-state. This assertion aligns with the writings of Aman Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes, who argue that “decolonization *necessarily* unsettles” (iv). Decolonization is the practice of rupturing (neo)colonial holds over bodies, land, language, and beliefs; it is lived and felt. Drawing from this understanding, in this chapter, I suggest that ATCR’s videography is a decolonial re-visioning of culture that is made tangible through performance. Videography and performance fold together to unsettle – and in turn, decolonize – the cinematic and performance space.

What unites ATCR’s videography and performance is the resistive, decolonizing practice of storytelling. Differing from a Western epistemological context, where stories can be dismissed as fiction, Indigenous storytelling is experienced, restorative, and part of an inter-relational network of humans and non-humans. In Vanessa Watts’s telling of the Haudenosaunee and the Anishnaabe Creation stories, she stresses that, despite their differences, “these two events took place. They were not imagined or fantasized. [They are] not lore, myth or legend” (21). Though Watts is speaking of sacred stories, this relational view extends to all modes of thinking and communication. Watts refers to this understanding of the world as “place-thought”: “the non-

distinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated” (3). As part of a network of being, Indigenous storytelling is always concrete and felt, taking on a decolonizing potential through its centering of Indigenous place-thought in colonial spaces that, otherwise, disavow its existence and value. Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes interpret this centering as the actionable value of stories, arguing that “[s]tories become mediums for Indigenous peoples to both analogize colonial violence and *resist it in real ways*” (V, emphasis added). Storytelling, as a restorative and a decolonizing medium, makes the vision of an Indigenous future tangible.

The video for “Sisters” (featuring Northern Voice) is perhaps the clearest example of ATCR’s decolonized folding of videography, performance, and storytelling. In the music video, produced by Landon Ramirez and The Field, three Indigenous women of different Nations migrate through urban spaces and Indigenous Creation worlds, eventually ending their journey at an ATCR concert. The featured women in the video are the professional performers, Sarain Carson-Fox (Objibay Nation), Aria Evans (Mi’kmaq Nation), and Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs (Mohawk Nation): Sarain Carson-Fox is a dancer and clothing designer; Aria Evans is a dancer and videographer; and, Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs is an actress and videographer who has already acquired a Canadian Screen Award nomination for her role in the film, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013).¹³ ATCR’s inclusion of these accomplished women in the video, which also extends to the female vocals of Northern Voice, honours the presence of Indigenous girls and women while also responding to their need for safe spaces in Canada.¹⁴ Karyn Recollet asserts that “Sisters” is a “revisionist storytelling project” that attends to the North American targeting of Indigenous women by presenting “a shift wherein spaces considered unsafe—as in the forested

¹³ In March 2015, Jacobs began raising funds through Kickstarter for her next film project, *Stolen*, a short film that seeks to address the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women in Canada.

¹⁴ Though the Northern Cree Singers are comprised of men and women, *Sisters* focuses on the female vocalists.

areas beside highways, and small-town gas bars—are seemingly transformed into sites wherein Indigenous girls and women can feel free to dance and move” (“For Sisters” 98). Extending Recollet’s analysis, I believe the video’s incorporation of their dancing at the ATCR concert suggests that their performances are already concretizing these spaces (see figure 1). In doing so, ATCR enfolds their re-visioned landscape with the lived experiences of peoples.

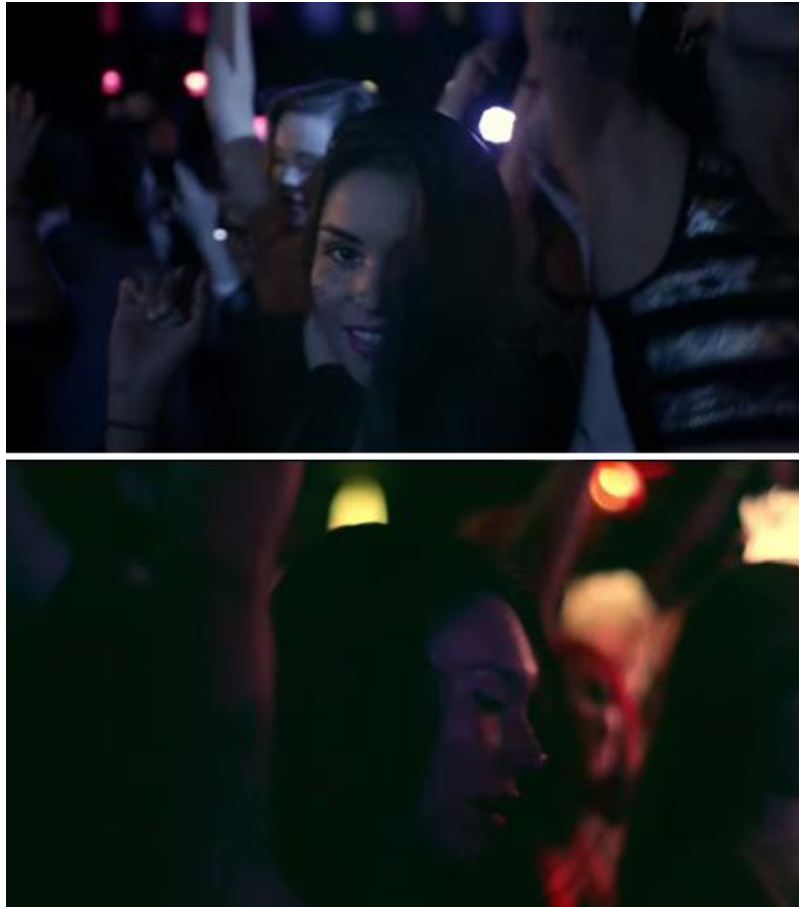


Figure 1 Close-up from “Sisters,” featuring Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs (above) and Sarain Carson-Fox (below) dancing at the ATCR concert¹⁵

The blending of Indigenous stories and urban spaces in “Sisters” informs and worlds ATCR’s decolonized landscape. Recollet notes that the movement between “different realms or

¹⁵ Received official permissions on July 9, 2015 to use screenshots from the videos. Permissions were offered by ATCR’s publicist, Amanda McCauley.

‘jumping scale’” stems from Indigenous Creation stories found within the video (95).¹⁶ Drawing from her own Haudenosaunee tradition, Recollet reads the three sisters as Corn, Beans, and Squash: three sisters who support and “elevate” each other (96). This story of support not only aligns with ATCR’s nation-to-nation approach to Indigenous solidarity; it extends support for Indigenous girls and women to the cross-cultural space. Opening Recollet’s reading of their urban movement as bound up in the formation of an “urban—NDN—identity” (102), I see the video’s footage of a diverse electric powwow crowd as also indicating that this “NDN” formation is separate from and part of a cross-cultural space of difference and celebration. The cross-cutting between Indigenous women of different ages within the crowd then reveals a cross-cultural admiration and support for their lived presences and survival.

While this chapter focuses on how ATCR mobilizes artistic layering through videography and performance to decolonize space, I address the need for a further examination of the cross-cultural exchanges emerging out of the art’s ambitious, interdisciplinary re-visioning. As it currently stands, the scholarship contemplating ATCR’s work centers on Indigenous storytelling and urban modes of music and dance. Recollet’s “Dancing Between the Breakbeats” and “For Sisters” (arguably the trailblazing articles of this scholarship) are particularly helpful examinations of ATCR’s decolonizing momentum that provide the groundwork to analyze their videography, performance, and dance-spaces as interconnected. Continuing this work, the integration of shared space—a space of movement and exchanges—crucially contributes and perhaps even sustains ATCR’s urban project. To unpack the complexities of these exchanges, I first offer a reading of ATCR’s re-visioning of Hollywood film; then, I return to “Sisters” and the

¹⁶ Recollet also emphasizes the connection between their migration and the belief that “Indigenous women can [jump] scale to occupy a space between land and cosmos wherein the past is *in* our future” (102).

performance space to consider the ways performance and dance not only decolonize Indigenous movement but also ignite cross-cultural connectivity.

Decolonizing the Frontier

“You know, Ray, when we were kids, we used to play cowboys and Indians? I was always Gary Cooper. I didn't want to be an Indian.”

—Crow Horse, *Reel Injun*

In *The Inconvenient Indian*, Thomas King insists that “Indians were made for film” (34); “all those feathers, all that face paint, the breast plates, the bone chokers, the skimpy loincloths, not to mention the bows and arrows and spears, the war cries, the galloping horses, the stern stares, and the threatening grunts” (34).^{17,18} As King reveals, film narratively presents “the Indian” as a historic, uncontainable body that either threatens or submits to the Nation’s heroic Cowboys. The Hollywood Western, in particular, capitalized on this relationship by providing some of the most circulated and detrimental “Cowboys vs. Indians” films – or, what we may more aptly call, moralistic “good guys vs. bad guys” entertainment. In these films, the naked and technologically inadequate “Indian” hardly compared to his Cowboy counterpart, who famously fashioned a Cowboy hat and shoes, collared shirt, leather vest and compact guns. The Cowboy triumphed over “the Indian” and became a popularly nostalgic image among North American consumers. Understanding the enduring influence of this Hollywood history—and arguably, its subsequent nostalgias—Adam Beach (Saulteaux) asserts that “[w]e will never be able to change the fantasy of who and what Indians are” (Diamond). Due to the popular consumer’s narrative

¹⁷ King offers three “Indian” types: “the bloodthirsty Indian,” “the noble savage,” and “the dying savage”: the first presented “the Indian” as a violent enemy of the Cowboy; the second was a ‘sidekick’ who assisted the Cowboy in defeating “bloodthirsty Indians”; and the third, “was the Indian who was simply worn out, who was well past his ‘best before’ date (34-5).

¹⁸ *Reel Injun* documents representations of “the Indian” in Hollywood film.

expectations, “the Indian” remains an enduring construction, regardless of its “fantasy” or “fiction.”

But “Indians” were not just made to suit the consumer requirements of film or entertainment; they were made to satisfy the needs of the nation too. The repetition of the “Indian” image was and continues to be an assimilative tool used to justify the dominant desires of the contemporary nation-state. In many of these films, “Indians” would terrorize and steal the village’s women and children, sometimes even assimilating them to their own “tribal” customs.¹⁹ Such actions narratively threatened the futurity of the North American family and in turn, rationalized the violent retaliation of the Cowboys. In Joanna Hearne’s discussion of the families on the Western frontier, she notes that, “Westerns omit any images of Native families or children, instead focusing on white settler families threatened by groups of (exclusively male) Indian warriors” (9). These hyper-masculine narratives of “divide and conquer” consequently erase Indigenous personhood to construct North American nobility, intricately applying Cowboy-narratives of heroism, civility, and progress to strengthen the nation. I believe Christopher Bracken’s investigation of the potlatch papers propels this argument further. Commenting upon Canadian settler letters and documents, he observes:

A nation is “civilized” only insofar as it remembers itself, but its memories are of a past that “projects” itself into the future. [...] By “projecting” its past into the future, the nation recollects itself as the “country” it *will* have been, in the future perfect tense. It carries its dead within itself in order to remember a national destiny that is still to come. (205)

In an Orwellian sense, Bracken insists that the production of a nation’s “past” shapes its idyllic future. Hollywood’s “Indian” participates in this “nation-making” as it reconstructs the Western

¹⁹ John Ford’s acclaimed film, *The Searchers*, is a strong example of this Hollywood narrative.

frontier of the past to euphemize North America's "bloodthirsty" desires of the present and future: Indigenous erasure.²⁰

Regardless of whether these narratives present "the Indian" as "noble" or "savage," these films of "good guys vs. bad guys" satisfy the nation's nostalgic needs. In particular, by presenting "the Indian" as incapable or threatening, these narratives seek to paternalistically—and moralistically—justify North American colonialism. As Tuck and Yang suggest, settler colonialism differs from other forms as it holds "the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain" (5). These desires for home permit the settlers' absorption of "the dead" and false assertions of a simplistic heroic past. Michelle Burnham recognizes this colonizing strategy, asserting that the national community "depends on remembering to forget the border transgressions and colonial violence that have secured it" (4). By perverting historical accounts of Indigenous presences and ownership of the land, these nation-making narratives are able to secure a fabricated account of settlers cultivating a home-less, borderless landscape.

Responding to these depictions and their (neo)colonial consequences, ATCR's videography uproots "the Indian" to restore representation on the cinematic landscape and beyond it: "It's something my work has always explored," Bear Thomas explains, "taking one-dimensional, racist, stereotypical images from the media and flipping them, as well as digging deeper into these images and the connections I had to them" (Kinos-Goodin, "A Tribe Called Red's urban powwow"). Bear Thomas's videography re-visions nostalgia and nation by re-centering depictions of the popularized "Indian" so that they comply with his own personal

²⁰ Joanna Hearne similarly notes that the "orientation to the national past [...] encodes a national future" (11).

experiences, connections, and stories. In doing so, his videography decolonizes, but does so through the artistic layering of Indigenous and North American stories and cultures.

In this section, I refer to the space of ATCR's cinematic re-visioning as *the decolonized frontier* because their videography visualizes exactly what this term implies: an unsettled, (re)stor(i)ed version of the nation-making narratives and cultural landscapes that have sustained Indigenous oppressions and erasures. To re-story this landscape, the decolonized frontier depends upon three particular modes: layered multimedia, colour manipulation, and repetition. *Layered multimedia*, the process of overlapping narrative(s), image(s), and/or sound(s), is an artistic mode of decolonization that disturbs the structures that assume control over peoples. As layered-multimedia opposes troubling practice and stereotypes, it also undoes the narrative strings of popularized constructions, or what we might think of as the “layer[s] upon layer[s] [through] which colonialism acts through and upon” (Sium, Desai and Ritskes X). Similarly, ATCR's use of *colour manipulation* (the radical alteration and brightening of a clip's original colours) challenges representation by removing the colonizers' “whiteness.” Bracken's noting of Canada's preservation of “whiteness” illuminates this decolonizing potential:

It is whiteness, after all, that permits Euro-Canadians to consider themselves superior to the original inhabitants of their new nation. If they were to lose their precious colour, they would have no mark to reassure them of the justness of their mission to put aboriginal cultures to death. (64)

Extrapolating from Bracken, ATCR's manipulation and removal of “whiteness” shifts the focus from the destructive “superiority” of the White-colonizers to their troubling actions. This shift in the narrative becomes a forceful and compelling demand for accountability and one that is often humorous in its cartoonish appearance. Finally, *repetition* satirically emphasizes and ridicules the oppressive popularity of “the Indian” in Hollywood. Countering these images, ATCR responds—and, arguably, aims to popularize a new image—through repeating footage of Indigenous

peoples' powwow and hip-hop dancing. This latter response is an empowering vocalization that celebrates Indigenous movement and survival. Though these three modes, together, decolonize film, I maintain that there are three ATCR videos that completely rewrite the Hollywood Western: "NDNs From All Directions," "Electric Pow Wow Drum," and "Red Skin Girl."

"NDNs From All Directions" challenges Hollywood representation by narratively encoding Indigenous solidarity into the frontier. ATCR's video and song draw from deejay Super Cat's, "Scalp Dem," a reggae song that partakes in a "Cowboys vs. Indians"-themed narrative.

He sings:

Indian, from our direction
Surrounded will eliminate to the Grand Canyon
That's her, Cherokee and Cheyenne
Got to all lord radar, and Bounty killer, yeah
And woman, not fitted quite Indian
Me take the money and the gold, and burn the young one (Super Cat)

The desire to "burn the young one" for financial gain vocalizes the nation's "benefits" arising out of the process of Indigenous genocide. The song emphasizes this sentiment through its repetition of "scalp dem" at the chorus and the music video's sepia footage of an Old Hollywood Western starring Super Cat. Combating Super Cat's lyrics of erasure, ATCR remixes the line, "Indian, from *our* direction," to sound like "*all* directions," transforming the oppressive us-them lyric into one of inter-Nation solidarity.

ATCR's vision for solidarity is evident from the beginning of the video. As the remixed "NDNs from all directions" lyric plays at the beginning, a group of Indigenous peoples powwow dance in a circle with various Nation flags standing in the background (see figure 2). Though it is difficult to determine the location of the original footage, the presence of the powwow drums and the flags suggest that it is from a real powwow celebration. Gayle Broad, Stephanie Boyer, and Cynthia Chataway's study of the Canadian powwow helpfully emphasizes the powwow's

contributions to Indigenous endurance, arguing that the “re-establishment” of the powwow in Canada is a pan-Indigenous celebration that has brought about the gathering of Nations, even though it is not necessarily “traditional” (44). As a participant in the case study group highlights, the powwow circle “gives you a sense of identity... it makes you realize that you’re a First Nations person and dancing is just a way to celebrate that... [... a place] where all tribes can come together and celebrate” (44). By starting “NDNs From All Directions” with the powwow, ATCR visions the decolonized frontier as pan-Indigenous space of solidarity and community.



Figure 2 Opening powwow dancing from “NDNs From All Directions” (A Tribe Called Red)

The video’s cross-cutting—and layering of different media—acknowledges this vision’s inevitable interruptions. These interruptions insist that movements for cross-cultural solidarity in

North America remain difficult. The first interruption occurs with the video's presentation of Merle Dixon, an overtly racist character from *The Walking Dead* television series (see figure 3). In the context of the video, Recollet reads Merle as a "gun-wielding cowboy" (Recollet, "Dancing..." 425), implicitly connecting the Hollywood frontier with ATCR's re-visioning. Channelling this stereotype, Merle holds a gun and stands over the others, saying, "powwow, huh?" (A Tribe Called Red). The video repeatedly cross-cuts between the powwow dancing and Merle's line, uprooting the stereotype of the heroic Cowboy by humorously revealing its violence and also its foolishness (humorously, as the repetition becomes its own kind of spectacle as the video continues). Though these cross-cuts repeat a few times, the video eventually presents footage from the 1970's British show, "It's Cliff Richard." Using the segment, "I'm an Indian Too," the music video features a group of White people role-playing "Indians," narratively presenting the host's "Indian" kidnapping and assimilation into their "tribe" as he dances with the other "Indians" in a straight line (figure 4).²¹ This moment overtly mocks the potential for a respectful "Cowboy" (settler)-"Indian" (Indigenous peoples) relationship, as the interaction with the "Indians" leads to the host's debased behaviour. For Recollet, "such staged Indian role-playing represents an erasure of Native American people[s] and a stifling of the Indigenous movement socially, politically, and physically" (425).²² The video's submersion into this narrative—and phasing of the opening powwow dancing clip—supports Recollet's suggestion, as it ominously captures the oppressions facing movements for solidarity.

²¹ As Lorraine York has pointed out to me, "Red Indians," in a British context, was an especially obnoxious term of the time.

²² Recollet notes that the dancing from "I'm an Indian Too" features a group of White people engaging in "typical 'Indian' dancing: stomping, limbs in angular shapes, unison formations, and the looking-into-the-distance gesture as represented by the flat hand resting above the eyes" (425).



Figure 3 Merle Dixon from "NDNs From All Directions" (A Tribe Called Red)



Figure 4 Colour manipulation of the "It's Cliff Richard Show" from "NDNs From All Directions" (A Tribe Called Red)

Extending upon Recollet's observations of the "staged dancing," I see the modes of colour manipulation and repetition as satirically – and humorously – undoing the (neo)colonial influence of the original sequence. The colour manipulation (which crucially, removes

Whiteness) places emphasis on the actions of the “staged performance” rather than the dancers’ privileged positioning (figure 4). The video’s repeated looping of the sequence (first, in black and purple then later, in yellow and blue) supports this reading, as it satirically elucidates the narrative’s one-dimensional representation and takes apart oppressive “Indian” narratives through humour. We might read this moment as engaging in a kind of (neo)colonial mimicry, as the colour manipulation repeats the actions of the colonizer with a difference. As Homi Bhabha’s work on mimicry delineates, “The display of hybridity—its peculiar replication—terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (157). The cross-cutting between Merle and the staged dancing (another “display of hybridity”) further mocks the colonizers. Not only does his presence illuminate the racism of the original clip, his *inclusion* in the powwow—implicit when he says, “*we’re* going to have ourselves a little powwow, huh?”—transforms their dancing into a spectacle of racist ignorance (A Tribe Called Red). With the eventual repetition of the lyric, “scalp dem,” encoding the scene, the colour manipulation and repetition satirically reconstruct the “White-washed powwow dancers” as the new spirit-less enemy of the decolonized frontier.

While “NDNs From All Directions” mobilizes multimedia layering (and creative weaponry) to upturn stereotypes of the Hollywood frontier, the video “Electric Pow Wow Drum” explicitly rewrites them by narratively blending two films: Henry Hathaway’s *Buffalo Stampede* and Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man*. I find it fascinating that ATCR combines footage from a conventional Hollywood Western with Jarmusch’s revisionist one, given that this particular revisionist Western aligns with ATCR’s goals to decolonize representation. As with many of ATCR’s videos, *Dead Man* uses the conventions of Old Hollywood as a platform to comment

upon its problems. Jarmusch discusses this strategy in an interview for the film. Speaking of the Western, he says:

...history was mythologized to accommodate some kind of moral code. [...] I just wanted to make an Indian character who wasn't either A) the savage that must be eliminated, the force of nature that's blocking the way for industrial progress, or B) the noble innocent that knows all and is another cliché. I wanted him to be a complicated human being. (23)

By “complicating” the Western and its characters, *Dead Man* de-mythologizes the genre and creates something new. The use of the Makah language without subtitles as well as jokes catered towards Indigenous peoples (such as the “no, I don't smoke tobacco” line) are examples of how the film defies a singular interpretation and mobilizes humour as a resistance against oppressive stereotypes (Rosenbaum and Jarmusch 21). Returning to “Electric Pow Wow Drum,” ATCR's decision to combine two differing films from the same black-and-white Hollywood Western landscape artistically layers these films to achieve a shared entertainment and decolonization goal. Though Jarmusch's revisionist film thoughtfully approaches the problem of Indigenous representation in film and erasure in North America, ATCR's integration of the film celebrates and uproots its original narrative.

The video's use of layered multimedia decolonizes stereotypes by privileging movement over Hollywood's depictions. This revitalizing strategy is evident at the beginning of the video, where a transition clip from *Buffalo Stampede* states, “From every tribe came the Chiefs, banding together against the destroyer of the buffalo... and drums sounded ominously across the vast savage West, declaring war on the White man” (A Tribe Called Red's Videos; Hathaway). This declaration against the “White man” centers the story on decolonization, furthered by the cross-cutting to a sequence of the film's extras – all wearing headdresses and face paint as they drum and dance to ATCR's opening beats. The video blends this footage with a sequence from *Dead*

Man, where the train's fire-worker says to Blake: "Government says... killed a million of them [buffalo]... last year alone" (*A Tribe Called Red*; Jarmusch), attending to the concerns of Indigenous peoples over those of the heroic-Cowboy. Resisting the conventions of the silent film era, the discussion of the buffalo as well as the presence of the powwow drums embed Indigenous concerns and spirituality into the frontier.



Figure 5 Powwow dancer from "Electric Powwow Drum" (A Tribe Called Red)

Just as the cross-cutting and condensed dialogues recode the Western landscape, the repetition of a *Buffalo Stampede* film extra dancing re-centers the frontier on Indigenous actors at the peripheries of Hollywood film (figure 5). ATCR's choice to highlight his dancing comments upon and challenges the casting of White actors playing "Indians" in film, such as Elvis Presley, Anthony Quinn, Charles Bronson, Daniel Day-Lewis, Chuck Connors, Burt Reynolds, Burt Lancaster, Pierce Brosnan, William Shatner, and more recently, Johnny Depp (Diamond). Contrasting with the Hollywood glamour of these actors placed at the forefront, Indigenous peoples were often paid in tobacco and firewater to act in the background (Diamond; King 35-6). In this way, powwow dancing was a skill that enabled the crossing of precarious cinematic

boundaries for Indigenous peoples. Bear Thomas attends to this neglected history, stating that the dancers from *Buffalo Stampede* were of “actual Native dancers” (Bondy). His emphasis on powwow dancing, then, vocalizes the presence of the silenced peoples of the film set.



Figure 6 Nobody (Gary Farmer) and William Blake (Johnny Depp) in "Electric Powwow Drum" (A Tribe Called Red)

Though the video includes features *Dead Man's* character, Nobody (a Mikah man played by Gary Farmer of the Cayuga Nation), there are two exchanges that are powerfully sardonic: Nobody (Farmer) and Blake (Depp)'s conversation in the woods and Nobody's exchange with the Missionary. In the first exchange, Blake sits at the base of a tree, close to the ground and hunched over. Strongly believing that the dying Blake is the famous dead poet, Nobody recites lines from *Auguries of Innocence*. He says, “Ever morn and ever night, / some are born to sweet delight. / Some are born to endless night” (A Tribe Called Red; Jarmusch). The video cross-cuts to the drumming scenes from *Buffalo Stampede* then to Nobody standing. Though the drumming silences the next lines, the video offers subtitles to translate Nobody's dialogue: “You were an artist... you were a poet... now, you are a killer of White men” (A Tribe Called Red; Jarmusch).

The use of the written subtitles privileges the voice of the drums over the English language, once again, bringing spirituality into the frontier. Julian Rice's reading of the original *Dead Man* scene aligns with this decolonizing strategy. Reading Nobody's lines as a creative rejection of societal ideologies, Rice asserts, "Those 'born to sweet delight' may become poets and painters of their lives, but in order to do so they much unhesitatingly become killers of 'white men' regardless of their ethnicity" (44-5). To be a "killer of White man" is to reject *his* hold over language. The opening transition's declaration of "war on the White man" similarly enacts this resistance.

Complementing the main focus of the Nobody-Blake exchange is a disempowered Johnny Depp, whose clips feature his slumped posture and silence. Though he and Nobody are allies, the omission of his dialogue in favour of the dancing from *Buffalo Stampede* enacts another artistic killing of the White man. In fact, the only moment Depp speaks is when he says, "I know nothing about poetry" (Jarmusch; A Tribe Called Red). This choice to limit his dialogue is unsurprising given the controversy surrounding Depp's public claims of Indigenous ancestry in 2002 on *In the Actor's Studio* and in 2012, when he discussed his casting as Tonto in Disney's remake of *The Lone Ranger* (2012). As Depp claimed in the interview, "I guess I have some Native American (in me) somewhere down the line [...] My great grandmother was quite a bit of Native American, she grew up Cherokee or maybe Creek Indian" (Breznican). The problem with this statement is not the ambiguity of Depp's Indigenous ancestry; it is that Depp's Tonto plays into offensive stereotypes and fits into the mould of a White actor playing "the Indian," a claim he downplays by assuming Indigenous "authenticity." Though ATCR's video pre-empts *The Lone Ranger* by a year, his rumoured involvement with the film dates back to 2008 (Daily Mail; Schaefer). Consequently, the video's footage of a timid Depp, ironically, and perhaps even purposefully,

silences Depp's troubling vocalizations.²³ Understanding this scene as folding the fictional with the contemporary life of the celebrity, Depp's dialogue – importantly related to his incompetency and “not-knowing” – transforms into a much-needed public confession.²⁴

The second exchange, which occurs between Nobody and a Missionary at the end of the video, constructs the historical “ending” of colonizer-Indigenous exchanges, wherein the colonizers purposefully sought the genocide of Indigenous populations. In the clip, Nobody asks the Missionary for tobacco. The Missionary responds, “We sure don't... Perhaps we could interest you in some beads... or possibly a blanket” (A Tribe Called Red; Jarmusch). Nobody knowingly chooses the blanket, an item that colonizers laced with small pox and other diseases for the purpose of killing Indigenous peoples (Jarmusch). This clip recalls this tragic history of colonization and loss; however, the layered multimedia also takes this narrative back. By depicting the Missionary as hateful and destructive, ATCR troubles the motivations of the Hollywood Western: specifically, the blanket's signification of the broader history of Indigenous genocide subverts the trope of “bloodthirsty Indians” who threaten the safety of the Western's “heroes” and their families. Nobody's recitation of the William Blake poetry just prior to this exchange further contributes to this narrative of erasure. As Nobody says to the Missionary, “The vision of Christ that thou dost see is my vision's greatest enemy” (Jarmusch). The assimilative practices of the Missionaries at residential schools are intimately woven into these lines, as “the vision[s] of Christ” eventually aided in the suffering and loss of peoples. Complimented by the presence of a successful and thriving Gary Farmer, from the same Nation as Bear Thomas, this moment demonstrates the decolonizing power of endurance and vocalization. In “Electric Pow

²³ In 2013, the *National Post* shared an interview with ATCR, featuring their critique of *The Lone Ranger* film and Depp's Tonto (Richardson).

²⁴ I am indebted to Lorraine York for her comment on an earlier draft about this being a moment of the celebrity “coming clean.”

Wow Drum,” Gary Farmer does not fit into the mould of the “bloodthirsty Indian” or “noble savage”; instead, he maintains a strong, unwavering presence on the screen.



Figure 7 Wovoka (Wes Studi) dancing in "Red Skin Girl" (A Tribe Called Red)

The video for ATCR’s “Red Skin Girl” similarly decolonizes the Western frontier by highlighting Indigenous dance and movement. This theme of transformation occurs with the video’s opening loop of Nightwolf from the *Mortal Combat* series transitioning from a wolf to human. The repetition of this transition rhythmically matches the drum beat, making it appear as if he is dancing. I believe this decision emphasizes the transformative – and decolonizing – ability of music and movement, as Nightwolf’s “becoming” human signifies a taking back of Indigenous personhood. Complementing this footage, the video cross-cuts to footage of Wes Studi (Cherokee Nation) dancing in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (2007) (see figure 7). In this film, Studi plays Wovoka, a religious leader of the Northern Paiute Nation who prophesied and asserted for the removal of the American colonizers through “the Ghost dance.” Though he inspired many followers, the massacre of the Lakota people at Wounded Knee ended these hopes

for many. In “Red Skin Girl,” Wovoka moves to the drum beat, leading a group of Indigenous peoples in dance. ATRC’s evocation of “the Ghost dance,” a dance that was used to scare away the colonizers, offers a resistance that is similar to their “killing of the White man” in “Electric Pow Wow Drum.” Within the cross-cultural performance space, this call to “kill the White man” becomes especially ironic and powerful.

Differing from “NDNs From All Directions” and “Electric Pow Wow Drum,” “Red Skin Girl” enacts a gendered re-visioning of the frontier by showcasing and rewriting the “Indian Princess” stereotype.²⁵ The “Indian Princess” is a representation of the Indigenous woman that pervades Hollywood Western narratives. She is beautifully erotic by Western standards but just different enough to be exotic with her long dark hair and braids, her ripped buckskins and revealed skin, her easy communication with the animals and nature, her gentle touch, her “noble” silence, and her submissive love for the White colonizer and his civility. These carefully crafted images and motivations come together to satisfy the colonizer’s sexual fantasies (Shackleton 260), all of which contribute to her doubled objectification by race and gender.²⁶ Desires of the settler-nation propel this construction. In “The Pocahontas Perplex,” Rayna Green documents the relationship between the Indigenous woman’s body and national consumptions. After exploring some of the different origins of “The Indian Princess” image, she writes:

Americans had a Pocahontas Perplex even before the teenage Princess offered us a real figure to hang the iconography on. The powerfully symbolic Indian woman, as Queen and Princess, has been with us since 1575 when she appeared to stand for the New World. Artists, explorers, writers, and political leaders found the

²⁵ The “Indian Princess” is also known as the “Chief’s Daughter” trope.

²⁶ I am indebted, here, to Pauline Wakeham’s *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality*, when she briefly mentions “the Chief’s daughter” trope in her analysis of Edward Curtis’ work. She says, “...as an Indigenous woman living within colonial power structures, she was subordinated by both ‘race’ and gender: like the figure of the ‘Chief’s Daughter’ that she portrayed, Hunt was identified and defined by her relation to a man” (102).

Indian as they cast about for some symbol with which to identify this earthly, frightening, and beautiful paradise (701).²⁷

Working with these narratives of the mythic “Indian Princess,” ATCR’s remixed version of Northern Cree’s *Red Skin Girl* decolonizes the narrative of the Indigenous woman’s beauty as it acknowledges her history of oppression and celebrates her movement and freedom. As Recollet delineates, “Red Skin Girl” presents the woman’s “unbounded movement coming out of a space of struggle and a need for movement. Her image seems appropriate [...] [as] it represents transformation and change amidst the ruins of Indigenous representation” (425).

There are three moments in “Red Skin Girl” that, together, chronicle the Indigenous woman’s transformative journey on ATCR’s decolonized frontier. I will refer to them as the sexual encounter, the Western gaze, and (drawing from Recollet) unbounded movement. In the video, the sexual encounter features a White man wearing a cowboy hat and fringed jacket, walking across the frontier towards an Indigenous woman who fits the mould of the “Indian Princess” (figure 8). The strong colour manipulation of the clip detracts from their appearance and emphasizes their actions. When the man reaches the tent, the woman’s head bows in submission, focusing the cinematic gaze on her “Indian Princess” attire. With her head bowed, the man dominates the scene by pushing her into the tent by the shoulders. The video then cross-cuts to their faces, with the woman looking down as the man watches. While this exchange certainly bleeds into my second category of the Western gaze, the man’s assertive movement across the land and within the tent emphasizes his sexual agency and power to reconfigure her

²⁷ Angela Aleiss similarly notes these tensions in *Reel Injun*. In her reading of Disney’s 1995 big screen version for children, she asserts: Why is this woman, the Disney Pocahontas, such a profound image, a mythic image, for American people? What about children who know nothing about Native society? And they see this young woman who has this one-shoulder skimpy dress that she’s wearing. And she has Meeko, a raccoon that she communes with. Well, the reality of Pocahontas is that at the time of the contact with John Smith [...] she was about nine years old. So we imbue in her all of the wrong notions of what we want to see in a mythical princess, and she becomes the embodiment, not of Native society; she becomes an embodiment of American society, of American desire. (Diamond, emphasis added)

space as *his*: there is no exchange of permissions and no dialogue that welcomes his presence.

Moreover, his sexual dominance reveals his unwavering power over the futurity of her relations.



Figure 8 'The sexual encounter' from "Red Skin Girl" (A Tribe Called Red)

The video's emphasis on the Western gaze exposes the colonizer's role in constraining Indigenous women's mobility and vitality. This dynamic occurs most explicitly in the following clip from the children's film, *Night at the Museum* (2006). In this film, the museum exhibits and its figures come to life at night and interact with one another. Drawing from this film, "Red Skin Girl" includes its romance between President Theodore Roosevelt (Robin Williams) and the famous Shoshone interpreter of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Sacagewea (Mizuo Peck). Though both characters are exhibits at the museum, the included clip highlights the mobility of Roosevelt and the stasis of Sacagewea (see figure 9). In the video's sequence, Sacagewea blows a kiss at Roosevelt and entices him to visit her exhibit. Differing from the dominance of the sexual

encounter in the previous clip, here, Sacagewea's kiss reveals some level of interest – arguably, working within other stereotypes of the “Indian Princess” and her sexual preference for the colonizer. With her “Indian Princess” appearance already framing her as an object of North American desire, her limited occupation within the museum (a space of artifact) implicates Western desires of hyper-sexualisation with cultural ends, contrasting with Roosevelt's freedom to move and respond to her invitation. Standing on the other side of the glass, the once-president embodies the image of the privileged Cowboy with his cowboy hat and fringed jacket; however, as he bows and gazes upon her exhibit – a gesture of respect and civility – Sakagewea gazes back, making her presence known and felt. His recognition of her returned gaze is a decolonizing strategy that reveals the ignorance of the Western narratives that determine her spectacle and her entrapment; however, his privileged gaze maintains control *over* her circumstances, as he studies the conditions of her exhibit and leaves without the promise of freedom, dialogue, or movement.

ATCR's colour manipulation of the sexual encounter and the Western gaze emphasize the endurance of the “Cowboy” and the “Indian Princess” constructions, as the actors from both clips look very similar (figure 8 and 9). By layering these popular culture images, in this way, ATCR not only heightens the racism of the frontier; they also interact and respond to the narratives of the colonizer. The productive narratives emerging from this re-visioned, layered art-form decolonize the original art while still sharing their message through popular culture. In particular, the inclusion of Sacagewea, a border-crossing and cross-culturally recognizable historical figure who aided in Lewis and Clark's expedition, returns to this idea of a shared history. Though some scholars have read admiration for Sacagewea as problematically stemming from her aiding a “White expedition” (Howard ix), ATCR's flipped story – of her also being a cultural artifact suited to fit the varying needs of the privileged – offers decolonized perspective that

acknowledges her circumstantial complicity as well as her entrapment in Western narratives that sexualize.



Figure 9 'The Western gaze' from "Red Skin Girl," featuring Sacajawea and Theodore Roosevelt (A Tribe Called Red)

The final scene in “Red Skin Girl” features a woman dancing at the center of a drumming circle. Following the two clips of entrapment, the woman’s unbounded movement enacts a reclamation of space and freedom. The close-up shot removes the narrative encoding of her clothing and focuses instead on her face and movement. With her eyes closed and hands swaying to the drumming and voices of the music, this woman presents a new vision of Indigenous beauty: unbound, vocal, and moving. The chorus emphasizes this sentiment:

Take a look
Just one more time
Beautiful smile
Beautiful eyes
That's a Red Skin Girl
She's so pretty
She's so fine
Red Skin Girl

I'll love you all the time (A Tribe Called Red)

The lyrics address the Indigenous woman as beautiful rather than an object of the settler-nation's desire. Moving away from one-dimensional sexualisation, as seen with the White dancers in the "Indian-styled" bikinis of "NDNs from all Directions," this song and its video celebrate the Indigenous woman's beauty within a space that encourages movement, freedom, and love.



Figure 10 'Unbounded movement' in "Red Skin Girl" (A Tribe Called Red)

What fascinates me about bringing these videos together is the way they collectively reconfigure the Hollywood archive to decolonize our popular culture; however, these narratives are more than just rewrites. Unlike the original films, ATCR's decolonized frontier is not specifically set in a time period or location.²⁸ The various flags in "NDNs from all Directions," for instance, insist upon an indeterminate, name-less frontier that enables dancing and exchange on *all* land. As ATCR's videos envision a landscape that enfolds time and space, they

²⁸ The videos that specify a time period are "MoombahWow," which takes place in Spain 1519, and "Woodcarver," which narrates the shooting of John T. Williams on August 30, 2010 (A Tribe Called Red).

are simultaneously writing history, the present, and the future. They envision a future that welcomes Indigenous thought and that celebrates the unbounded movement of peoples. I see ATCR's collapse of time in these videos as a form of place-thought that privileges relations above all else: both among humans and between humans and non-humans. Just as Hollywood film constructs nation-making narratives for the Western world, ATCR's revisionist storytelling project builds a 'Nation II Nation' space of exchange through movement and connectivity.

Bloodthirsty Movement

“People that listen to dubstep are now checking out powwow singers all of a sudden, to hear what the original sounded like. [...] [It's] the same the other way. Kids on reserves are now listening to dubstep, which they'd never really heard before. It's a good cross-cultural thing, where conversations are being opened both ways.”

—Bear Thomas, “Electronic Powwow is Music Made for Dancing”

In Recollet's “Dancing ‘Between the Break Beats’,” she examines the various ways urban dance decolonizes movement. In particular, she describes the “break beat” as a space of creativity, wherein the hip-hop artist's movement can “evade the gaze that marks bodies of difference” (419). As this form of dance “evades the gaze,” it ruptures the narratives that determine difference as problematic and threatening. “Breaking between the beats” is especially important for Indigenous hip-hop and spoken word artists who, in Recollet's words, “embrace an understanding that the presence of impulse as the spirit or life force lives in between the drum beats” (420). Extrapolating from these observations, urban modes of music and dance have a spiritual pulse, infused by traditions, experiences, communities, and creativity. Each artist and their history offer something unique to these circles, as there is simultaneous cohesion through music and difference through movement. In line with Ermine's call for an “ethical space of engagement,” spaces that are only made possible through respect and acknowledged difference,

dancing at “break beats” – and arguably, within the cross-cultural space of the powwow circle – holds the potential for ethical exchanges.

ATCR's “pow wow-step” blends R&B, reggae, electronica, and dub-step with First Nations drumming and powwow dance music to create a new movement in the urban scene that constructs welcoming spaces for Indigenous peoples. Situated in a cultural and political climate that is fraught with Canadian/Indigenous divides, these inclusive electric powwow spaces are significant. Interviewers, reviewers, and even ATCR's biography page refers to the “pow wow-step” as a “phenomenon,” as it vocalizes, in David Ball's words, “a distinctive [Aboriginal] identity” for the urban club scene (A Tribe Called Red; Ball; Dacks). The repetition of “phenomenon” is apt when considering the term's etymological rootedness in causing appearance or making something appear (“phenomenon, n.”). The “pow-wow step” is not simply a genre; rather, it is a visual and tangible movement that creates multi-dimensional spaces of exchange. In an interview with David Ball in 2012 at an earlier stage of ATCR's career, Bear Thomas and Ian Campeau reflect on the importance of electric powwows: “We had to keep doing it,” says Bear Thomas, “We had started something that was needed in the city. We'd *created a space* that was comfortable for Aboriginal people within the club environment” (Ball, emphasis added). In the same interview, Ian Campeau elaborates, “It turned out all those people we didn't know were students from rural communities who never felt comfortable going out until they heard there was a party geared towards Aboriginals” (Ball). The emphasis on “spaces” and “comfort” in the interview indicates that the phenomenon goes beyond “pow wow-step” as a genre of music; “pow wow-step” is the emergence of ethical spaces that welcome difference.



Figure 11 Sarain Carson-Fox, Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs, and Aria Evans dancing in “Sisters” with a “Plains Indian” image on the wall (A Tribe Called Red)

The dancing in “Sisters” concretely visualizes ATCR’s decolonized landscape and, in turn, construction of urban spaces for Indigenous peoples. One of the repeated scenes, for instance, involves each of the women dancing in front of a wall containing a stereotypical “Indian” image (figure 11), a strategy which is similarly employed by ATCR’s performance space through hoop-dancing at the front of the stage with the decolonized videography in the background. In both cases, dancing at the forefront privileges Indigenous motion – and Indigenous personhood – over popular culture constructions that dehumanize. In her analysis of “Sisters,” Recollect reads the dancing in front of the wall as undoing oppressive representation, arguing that:

This trope [of “the Indian”] is challenged through the process of foregrounding Indigenous women who embody 'new' Indigenous femininity using popular house fused with fancy shawl powow-dub step dance. These movements contribute to an urban Indigenous dance aesthetic that reshapes Indigenous women's relationship to movement through taking ownership and breaking free of colonial representations of Indigeneity. (“For Sisters” 99)

Aligning with the unbounded movement in “Red Skin Girl,” here, movement and dance are powerful modes of decolonization; however, what makes this strategy even more influential is the fact that the video bears witness to the dancing of accomplished women of the here and now. As these young women “break free of colonial representations” in a landscape that entraps and victimizes, their “dancing at the break beats” reframes the stories of their victimization by showing their empowerment. Rather than representing these women as solely “endangered,” ATCR celebrates their beauty, presence, and endurance.

While I support Recollet's scholarship on dance and the video, “Sisters,” there is still a need to discuss ATCR's facilitation of cross-cultural spaces. The footage of the electric powwow in “Sisters” records this space, showcasing the diverse crowd, live painting, and ATCR on the stage. The video, notably, does not present the space from one point of view, but instead journeys to different dancers and attendees in the crowd, at one point even providing an – almost – over the shoulder look at the crowd from ATCR's on-stage perspective. This use of the camera takes on a relational perspective and, importantly, a lateral one, as it removes ATCR's performative authority – or control over – almost altogether. In other words, ATCR maintains control of the space, but does so through sharing the space with other live performers. With the video ending with the back of Bear Thomas' shirt—of the *Nation II Nation* album logo—they frame this space of connectivity as “nation-to-nation” solidarity.

I believe ATCR's integration of the decolonized frontier in performance enfolds cultural oppressions with the lived, establishing a shared narrative between people of differing histories and cultures in the room. For instance, we might think of ATCR's use of African-Caribbean forms, including hip-hop and dub-step, as drawing upon popularly known, resistive art-forms. Similarly, as the videography tells the story of Hollywood's perverse moulding of “the Indian,” it

also mobilizes the power of nostalgia by projecting and remixing familiar images. Someone in the crowd is going to be a fan of *The Walking Dead* or *The Sopranos*; someone is going to remember watching *Brave Starr*, *Super Friends*, or *The Emperor's New Groove*; someone is going to recognize Johnny Depp or be proud seeing Gary Farmer and Wes Studi on the screen. The layering of these images in performance layers the diverse histories and worldviews of the people in the room; perhaps, the decolonization of these narratives in performance may even change some.

But the inclusion of the videography not only brings nostalgia into performance; it also repurposes its original usage without changing its entertainment value. While the Hollywood Western continuously provides dehumanizing depictions of “the Indian,” the decolonized frontier’s frequent focus on dance takes on another role in performance. As a Canadian attendee at the Danforth Music Hall performance – with little exposure to the powwow space – I became quite aware of pedagogical role of videography in their performance. Without fully knowing the meanings of each narrative on the screen at the time, the videography enabled me to participate and be welcomed into the electric powwow space. For instance, the videography provided a visual repetition of certain dance moves that integrally established a rhythm for me to follow. As a result, the pedagogical value of the decolonized frontier was concretized in performance for me personally.

Does a shared purpose suggest a shared identity or assimilated nation? Absolutely not. A proposition of this kind or anything related is not the intention of my observation. What I am instead noticing of ATCR’s electric powwow performance space is a navigation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds—what I see as a cross-culturally layered exchange, an exchange that acknowledges the tenuous sharing and crossing of epistemological borders while

still insisting upon difference and individual sovereignty. In this context, this exchange occurs in a space that creatively layers the worlds of groups in conflict to prompt various connections, ranging from exchange of capital to shared entertainment to (at their best) ethical engagements. Returning to the electric powwow space, ATCR determines the narratives, stories, entertainment, music, and performers. ATCR's electric powwow space sustains the conditions of their decolonized frontier in performance and subsequently suspends the narrative circumstances propelling Canadian privilege.

There are typically three layers to ATCR's electric powwow performance that, together, form these exchanges: videography at the back, ATCR at the DJ switchboards, hoop-dancing at the front of the stage, and sometimes, live painting on the dance floor. Transforming the performance into a space of exchange, these different modes of art entertain, decolonize, and initiate all sorts of contact—of capital, of bodies, of gaze, and of voice. Similar to the dancing in front of the wall in "Sisters," ATCR's fronting the stage with hoop-dancing – an Indigenous mode of dance that tells stories – privileges Indigenous storytelling over the layered pop culture narratives of their decolonized frontier. Significantly, non-Indigenous audience members are on the outside of this narrative and do not have access to the meanings of the hoop-dancing movements. Though it can certainly be entertaining to watch, the meanings of the dance remain reserved for Indigenous audience members. At the same time, however, the existence of the videography at the back supplies another narrative. As the dancer takes on more hoops and performs more intricate movements with each song, the performance becomes more heavily informed by the weight and difficulty of what the dancer is doing. In my position as a Canadian scholar at the Danforth show, I could not disentangle the relationship between the live dancer and oppressive narratives of "the Indian" on the screen. Each hoop felt as if it were another narrative

string in need of bending, escaping, and reshaping. The dancer's ability to always transform the hoops into a globe at the end felt like an assertion of survival and a call for unity. I say this recognizing that I will never really know the full meaning or weight of the narratives the hoop dancer was shaping.

Just as the sisters' dancing ruptures "the Indian" in ATCR's videography, the live hoop-dancing unsettles "the Indian" on the screen. Further decolonizing even their own narrations, ATCR privileges the unique story of the dancer on the stage. The presence of these different narrations and modes may be a form of "embodied sovereignty." In "For Sisters," Recollet describes "embodied sovereignty" as a phenomenon of resistance within the urban space, wherein the weight of colonialism can be felt in the moving body (93). Though I still do not know the meaning of the dancer's movements, I felt the palpable heaviness in the electric powwow space as the hoops continued to increase. This weight in the performance, which was only emphasized by the videography, did not fully cease until the end of the show, when we, as an audience, held hands and created a new circle. We became the continuous globe the dancer kept making. This example I share speaks to the decolonizing potential of artistic layering, as the layered meanings resist simple coherence. These exchanges are relational, independent, and deeply felt. Dancing, here, is solidarity among difference because the weight of the movement is shared, even if it is not fully understood by all.

Chapter 3. The Emergence of the Post-TRC Indigenous Celebrity

“You have to stumble to learn... They're not showing up in war paint to make fun of us. They just don't understand. It's coming from a standpoint of childlike ignorance, and that's fine. You just have to teach people, and that's what we're trying to do through our music.”

—Ian Campeau, “A Tribe Called Red”

In the previous chapter, I discussed how ATCR uses videography and performance to decolonize space and movement. While I framed the interdependent use of these mediums as igniting a cross-cultural sharing in the performance space – of the weight of colonialism and of socio-political problems – there have been instances of red-facing at performances, where fans have arrived fully assuming “the Indian” image and misunderstanding the purpose of the performance. As the presence of red-facing fans shows, the negotiations of ATCR’s layered art-form risk further legitimizing the commodification and consumption of “the Indian.” The dangers associated with this sort of “Indian”-commodification are especially difficult in Canada, where divides are situated in a wrongful Canadian consumption of Indigenous lives and histories. These consumptions include the reductive “Indian” definition in the *Indian Act*, the breaking of Treaties for the sake of taking and mistreating the land, the attempts to absorb Indigenous peoples into a Euro-Canadian identity through residential schooling, and the increase of missing and murdered Indigenous women due to the belief that their bodies can be “rightfully” consumed, abused, and forgotten. Without a national Indigenous educational framework in schools, ATCR’s provocative blend and manipulation of “the Indian” can offer a much needed education, or it can be misunderstood as “authentically Indian” and “okay” to reproduce, contributing towards another wrongful consumption among Canadians. In this chapter, I assert that ATCR’s response to red-facing through their layering of performance and celebrity demonstrates a complex navigation between pedagogical discomfort and compromise.

The scholarship addressing ATCR's work has yet to fully approach the group's pedagogical response to red-facing. Perhaps Adam Barker comes closest to compelling this broader discussion when he mentions the anti-colonial "transgressive action" of their art-form at the end of his examination of *Idle No More* (17).²⁹ Though he is not the first to note ATCR's production of resistance, Barker's evocation of their transgressive actions within his larger examination of *Idle No More* situates ATCR's artistic production within a dialogue of activism and socio-political resistance. Similarly, Lauren Jessica Amsterdam's considerations of the Indigenous hip-hop scene connects ATCR's music with political activism, suggesting that ATCR's work "affirms that corporeal existence is cultural resistance" (53). To support this assertion, Amsterdam draws upon their public relations and interviews, subtly demonstrating the value of their celebrity; but, as with Barker and others, she limits the scope of this dialogue to their music and art. What fascinates me about these articles and others – particularly ones that analyze their performance space(s) – is that there is a praising of their socio-political work that evades the presence of substance abuse and red-facing at ATCR's shows, a fact that does not negate the productivity of their work or its scholarship, but one that certainly complicates their reconfiguration of space.

Seeking to extend these scholarly dialogues to the – circumvented – messiness of consumption, this chapter navigates a variety of interconnected "folds" emerging from ATCR's work. These folds include their music and their celebrity; their celebrity and their activism; their activism and their politics; and, their politics and their branding. Permeating each of these relationships are their navigations of race, positioning, and consumption. ATCR's pedagogical goal to (re)vision connections between people(s) brings this expansive network and continuous

²⁹ Barker uses ATCR as an example of a "creative contentio[n] against settler colonial norms that [was] energised by *Idle No More*'s transgressive actions have continued even if not under the same moniker" (17).

folding of culture together and reveals artistic layering at its best: its ability to provide actionable, tangible space-making goals. At the same time, though, ATCR's attempts to make issues accessible and understandable for their non-Indigenous fans risks compromising the decolonizing momentum of their work and its political objectives.

Responding to these pressures, I suggest that ATCR's celebrity pedagogy moves into uncharted territory where there are no "bloodthirsty Indians" or "noble savages" but just people, seeking to re-vise the narratives of Indigenous oppressions. To address this objective, I first examine ATCR's response to red-facing in performance and within culture; then, I work through the ways they ambitiously pave a new space for the post-TRC Indigenous celebrity, or what I think of as the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat: a figure in constant negotiation between "legitimizing" their position for the public, demonstrating their political utility, and modelling what a nation-to-nation relationship could look like. The Indigenous celebrity-diplomat is Canada's educator who resists oppression but who also compromises to make space for an Indigenous future in a settler-landscape that has done everything to suppress it.

Racist Mascots

"When they drop the problematic Atlanta Braves 'tomahawk chop' into a song, are you supposed to dance or riot? When people appropriating headdresses stop by to dance, do you lecture them or simply gawk at their ignorance?"

—*Rolling Stone*, "45 Best Things We Saw at Bonnaroo"

On June 13, 2014, ATCR performed at the Bonnaroo Music Festival, a four-day outdoor concert event in Tennessee that attracts audiences of over 100,000 people every year. ATCR's presence among the venue's acclaimed artists—including Elton John, Kanye West, Lionel Richie, and Sam Smith—was not only an indication of their growing fame; it also established the high-stakes publicity of their socio-political brand, as music festivals often attract headdress and

face-paint fashions among fans. As musicians actively confronting racist representations, ATCR's performance to a – partially – red-faced audience, importantly, transformed the party-goer event into an uncomfortable, pedagogical moment. As *Maclean's* journalist in attendance, Emma Teitel, reflects:

Not only did the band notice the dozens of white people in headdress costumes resembling feathered war bonnets typically worn by Plains Indian warriors, they even dedicated a song to them. I was standing near the back of their show, but I heard the dig loud and clear: "This one goes out to all the racist mascots." (Teitel)

By dedicating their music to the "racist mascots" of the crowd, ATCR – humorously – confronted their celebration of red-facing; and, more importantly, pushed a dialogue of red-facing beyond this performance space and into culture, as it was their confrontation of representation that become the topic of review in the days following.

Rolling Stone's list of the "45 Best Things We Saw at Bonnaroo" evidences an invested interest in ATCR's pedagogy over their music brand. Listing ATCR's performance as the festival's "Best Sociology Lesson," they define the "pow wow-step" as a "socio-political experiment" that explores the relationship between Indigenous peoples and North Americans. They ask: "When they drop the problematic Atlanta Braves 'tomahawk chop' into a song, are you supposed to dance or riot? When white people appropriating headdresses stop [to] dance, do you lecture them or simply gawk at their ignorance?" ("45 Best..."). Similar to Teitel's remark – of ATCR's message being heard, "loud and clear" – *Rolling Stone's* list captures ATCR's socio-political pedagogy and its interpretive discomfort. As the article ponders the uncertainty of how to respond to the playing of the "tomahawk chop," it reveals the resonance of ATCR's pedagogy: while outside the context of ATCR's performance, the song might be played and well received

among fans, within the context of ATCR's performance, the song creates discomfort and prompts reflection.³⁰

Though the article favourably evaluates and responds to ATCR's pedagogy, its positioning "dancing"/"rioting" still conveys a "gap" in understanding, since responding to traditional powwow music as it was originally intended—through dance—is a political statement. Understanding the presence of these "gaps" in culture, ATCR confronts the risks of non-Indigenous misunderstanding quite frequently. Their dedication at Bonnaroo, for instance, was more than just a humorous "dig" at the audience members; it also gestured towards their socio-political involvement with Idle No More and their own activism in Canada. Their use of the word "mascot," in particular, evokes Ian Campeau's grievance with the Ottawa Nepean Redskins. In September 2013, almost a year prior to the festival, Campeau filed an official complaint at the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal to change the team name and logo. "The players call each other 'redskin' on the field," he argued, "How are they going to differentiate the playing field from the schoolyard? What's going to stop them from calling my daughter a redskin in the schoolyard? That's as offensive as using the n-word" (CBC News; Hofley).³¹ Campeau's comparisons of the field with the schoolyard and the logo with the "n-word" are pedagogical strategies that unsettle the spectacle of the sports industry and the Canadian nation-state. As Graeme Turner suggests of sports publicity, the "standards" or "rules" teammates must follow transform them into "ambassadors" of their country (116-7). Campeau's criticisms of the young team, tellingly situated in Canada's capital city, trouble Canada's multicultural veneer of inclusivity and safety. I believe ATCR's dedication at Bonnaroo similarly dismantled nationalistic identifications with

³⁰ Notably, ATCR's facilitation of their "racist mascot"-audience's dance to the "tomahawk chop" transforms the power-relations at the festival, as they reframe its wrongful consumptions of "red-face" to suit their own terms.

³¹ Ian Campeau offered to assist in the financing of the team's name change. He shares in the public statement, "I've offered to volunteer DJ and to help raise funds to offset costs, as have other artists and musicians, as the uniforms have to be replaced every year or two anyway" (Hofley).

sports logos and their images. Their recognition of the audience's "racist mascots"—directly connecting the complaint and the consumers through humour—confronted the ignorant racism of the crowd while also likening these "consumer-mascots" to the problematic commodity of "the Indian." Regardless of whether or not ATCR's message was received by all of their audience, calling it "racist," at the very least, confronted both the team's adoption of the logo and the audience's troubling consumption.

Campeau's fight against the Nepean Redskins logo demonstrates the need for education among non-Indigenous consumers. During Campeau's human rights complaint, he sported a t-shirt with the logo "Caucasians" in ATCR's promotional photos. The t-shirt emulates the more widely known NFL Cleveland Indians team logo and their Chief Wahoo "Indian" mascot, with the "Caucasians" mascot as a cartoonish White male whose dollar sign takes the place of Chief Wahoo's feather (ICTMN Staff, see figure 1). This emulation, right down to the font size and colouring, satirizes the use of racial identities as commoditized logos. Though the Nepean Redskins eventually changed their name to the Nepean Eagles in January 2014 (CBC News), complaints about Campeau's t-shirt heightened after the Bonnaroo Music Festival. One complainant, in particular, wrote to the Ottawa Westfest Music Festival organizers to demand they drop the band from their set list. After mentioning that Campeau's human rights concerns and "racist" t-shirt are incongruous, the message ends with the following: "I will be boycotting the fest because of that racist, hypocritical band, A Tribe Called Red, but please take this [message] into consideration" (ICTMN Staff). As the hostility of the letter ironically suggests, there is nothing humorous about the purposeful commodification of a racial identity. Ian Campeau expressed these same concerns in an interview with *Vice*:

There are no other races being exploited like this for a sports team. Other people argue that you've got the Notre Dame Fighting Irish and the Boston Celtics, but

those are all cultures; they're not races. If you identify with any of those your race is Caucasian. (Balsam)

The letter as well as its misunderstanding of ATCR's intentions from the above passage reveal the epistemological risks of ATCR's layered approach to art and celebrity.

Under a closer analysis, however, the satire of Campeau's shirt powerfully exposes Canadian anxieties of losing colonizer control. Daniel Francis analyzes this anxiety in *The Imaginary Indian* when he shares his discomfort with Tonto's "us-them" humour in an episode of *The Lone Ranger*. In the episode, The Lone Ranger and Tonto become "surrounded by hostile Indians," prompting an "us-them" dialogue between the two characters. Francis reflects:

One of the earliest cartoons I can remember depicts the Lone Ranger and Tonto surrounded by hostile Indians. The Lone Ranger turns to his faithful companion and says something like, "It looks like we're done for, Tonto." To which Tonto responds, "What do you mean, *we*, White Man?"

That cartoon was a shock to me [...] because I had always assumed Tonto was one of Us. Now I had to recognize the obvious, that in fact he was one of Them. The world was a less comfortable place than I had imagined.

But just as importantly, the cartoon is shocking because in it Tonto cracks a joke. It violates one of the most common stereotypes non-Natives have about Indians. They are considered stern, emotionless, stoical. We believe that they don't have a sense of humour. (Francis 85)

Francis's shock and realization that the world is "less comfortable" than he had thought reveal how discomfort can prompt important realizations. Recalling Drew Hayden Taylor's reflections on Indigenous humour as a "transgressive" form, in this context, Francis's discomfort powerfully stems from Tonto's stepping outside his "Indian" role and into a space that threatens the cemented power relations between the "powerful White Man" and "the stoic Indian."

I see a similar "us-them" discomfort occurring with the promotional photos, as Campeau's mobilization of an "us-them" humour ruptures narratives of Canada's "stoic" and submissively assimilated "Indian." Significantly, these same complaints failed to mention Bear Thomas's (Bear Witness's) memorabilia in the promotional photos. In the same photo, he wears a

Chicago Blackhawks hat and necklace, a team name deriving from a leader of the Sauk American Indian tribe (Lupick, see figure 1). The logo, which features a conventional “Indian” with tanned skin, black hair, face paint, and feathers, participates in the commoditization of a race and its stereotypes. Considering that the accusation of racism among consumers occurred with one shirt but not the other, the response to the promotional photos evidences a humorous hypocrisy—and illogic—among non-Indigenous consumers. These reactions reveal that Indigenous humour, especially in the clever form of satire, is unacceptable among many Canadians as it does not play into the culturally accepted “Indian” depicted in Bear’s attire. In turn, Bear’s attire is revealingly acceptable because it conforms to Canada’s normative consumptions of “the Indian” image.



Figure 12 Promotional photo of ATCR taken by Pat Bolduc (Bolduc)³²

These epistemological tensions among consumers exhibit the essential problem of layered cross-cultural exchanges: reception. Although artistic layering can create welcoming and pedagogical spaces among various cultures, its emphasis on solidarity can, as Emma LaRocque warns of hybridity, risk “eclipsing” Indigenous world views and cultures and contribute to colonialism (222). This concern certainly has merit in the context of ATCR’s performances,

³² Received permission from Pat Bolduc to use this image on July 5, 2015.

which are first and foremost parties that enable Indigenous youth to feel welcome in the urban scene and yet, at the same time, remain undeniably dependent upon colonial space(s) and cross-cultural consumption(s). With ATCR's artistic negotiation between differing worlds and cultures, it can be difficult to navigate the group's socio-political objective (as seen with their use of the "tomahawk chop").

Moreover, as the problems of red-facing reveal, there are risks to performing in colonial spaces and to crowds that are – often – misinformed about Indigenous peoples and their circumstances in North America. Most national research pertaining to Indigenous peoples focuses upon community problems and negates community strengths. This pattern is "a central theme in imperial and colonial attempts to deal with Indigenous Peoples" as they "tactically [take focus] away from the role of Western institutions and systems" (Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey 23).³³ Acknowledging the absence of Indigenous histories in Canadian schools and the frequency of these reports, community problems—such as poverty, alcoholism, and abuse—come to determine the dominant "reliable" narrative that informs Canadians of "the Indian." Understanding that there is a "gap" in knowledge, certain questions arise. For instance, what does it say about the state of Canadian/Indigenous relationships if productive connections are happening in spaces that accommodate alcohol consumption and substance use, the very problems that shape Canadian perceptions of Indigenous peoples? And, more critically, is ATCR's work only effective because the urban party scene seemingly fails to threaten larger socio-political conversations that can tangibly change Canadian perspectives of Indigenous peoples? Is it only working because Canadians do not take the space and its subsequent conversations seriously?

³³ Drawing from many Indigenous thinkers, Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffrey's report, "The Ethics of Researching Involving Indigenous Peoples," asserts that this "focus on social disarray and pathos [is] evidence of a perspective of 'deficiency' whereby Native lives are pathologized" (12).

Though ATCR's artistic layering cannot fully contain audience-response beyond the performance space and, at times, risks blurring "the Indian" image among non-Indigenous consumers, I believe it also productively establishes another complicated border between people. The *Rolling Stone* article articulates this idea quite well when they ask if we should "lecture" or "gawk" at the ignorance of those culturally appropriating headdresses. This divided reaction is the border—or what I think of as, "the fold"—of their layered cross-cultural exchange: the navigation between those who understand the purpose of ATCR's pedagogy and those who do not. Non-Indigenous consumption of powwow music following ATCR's performances, for instance, demonstrates a cultural willingness to "cross" epistemological divides to learn and engage. As Bear suggests, "It's a good cross-cultural thing, where conversations are being opened both ways" (Ball). Establishing "understanding" and "misunderstanding" difference as another catalyst for divides, this new border (or, perhaps even, ethical space) holds the potential to open conversations about the relationship between Canadians and Indigenous peoples that can – and do – compel action.

Cleaning up the War Paint

"I cannot stress this enough: without education, there can be no justice. And until there is justice, there will be no peace."

—Chelsea Vowell, "Idle No More: Where Do We Go From Here?" (*The Winter...* 314)

The epistemological "blurs" and "divides" among fans do not lessen the value of ATCR's work; rather, they illuminate the need for more spaces that educate Canadians and foster positive connections between Canadians and Indigenous peoples. I believe ATCR's engagement with Canadian culture as Indigenous micro-celebrities plays a crucial role in responding to this need, as they educate consumers outside of performance while also saving a space for influential Indigenous presences in culture. The micro-celebrity, a term coined by Theresa Senft, is a "new

domain” of celebrity wherein “ordinary people create a web presence and public persona through blogs and social media” (Turner 23). The presentation of an uncensored, “ordinary” presence is an integral part of the micro-celebrity brand that contributes to its popularity and power. As Alice Marwick and danah boyd share, “[T]his practice [of the micro-celebrity] involves ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity, and access, and the construction of a consumable persona” (140). In particular, “popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management [and] self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others” (140), and yet, their ordinary appearance downplays their celebrity construction. The major benefit of being a micro-celebrity is control, as these celebrities determine and self-market their own image; however, it is possible to transition into a “real” celebrity through a growing fan-base, as seen with the YouTube-made famous Canadian musician, Justin Bieber.

ATCR’s creates their own YouTube videos, they remain active social media pages, and maintain a continuous – and often, humorous – presence online through a micro-celebrity process.³⁴ Through their self-made persona, ATCR possesses the agency to “take back” control of their media-image, one notable example being the frequent images of them laughing (see figure 12). I see their micro-celebrity control as a complex form of resistance and education that, in many ways, attends to the struggles of self-representation. Just as ATCR’s music presents racist pop culture depictions through, what they call, a “de-colonial lens” (Wente, Beagen and Campeau), their presence as “go-to” Indigenous personalities online and in Canada is another form of cultural re-visioning and pedagogy. With ATCR’s urban music, graphic t-shirts, and humorous vocalizations against “the Indian” image, their celebrity offers a new, urban image that

³⁴ In a previous version of this project, Daniel Coleman brought to my attention that *Rolling Stone* is quite a big name to be associated with “micro-celebrity.” This is definitely an important point to consider. ATCR is still, for the most part, self-managing their image. I believe, at this point, the group is in a transitional phase between micro and real celebrities, given some of their recent publicity. It will be interesting to see what will happen when their self-management transitions fully.

is self-determined and distinctive. Specifically, their persona counters preconceptions of “the Indian” and connects individually with Indigenous and non-Indigenous consumers without claiming to be experts and without speaking on behalf of all peoples.

The group's micro-celebrity brand is not solely related to their music; their socio-political involvement also positions them as micro-celebrity activists. As Zeynep Tufekci explains:

[S]ince the identity of the microcelebrity activist is constructed as activist first and foremost, the audience is seen not as fans but rather as political allies, supporters, political opponents, and mediators to broader publics such as journalists; and attention is treated, at least insofar as the issue is addressed explicitly, as an instrumental resource that is sought for the cause rather than solely for the sake of attention on the person. (850)

ATCR's affiliation with Idle No More, their successful fights against “redskins” logos, and their ongoing confrontations of red-facing at performances contributes to their activist brand, where consumers act as supporters and allies; however, their transgressive approach to art and exchange does complicate this activism, as not all fans knowingly comply with the group's socio-political objectives (especially heightened by their being in this transitional phase between micro and real celebrities). I see ATCR's activist brand as vigorously growing through their confrontations online, as their social channels humorously critique racist messages and articles they find throughout culture. In doing so, their online branding transforms unknowing followers into students of their activism, learning about the history and ongoing concerns of Indigenous peoples.

ATCR's online community of sharing—and, perhaps even, online spectacle of sharing—is a pedagogical approach to micro-celebrity that re-educates non-Indigenous people about Canada's colonial history and contemporary politics. I believe their targeted conversations on social media—exchanges that are presented as personal conversations but that are publicly witnessed by the online community—contribute to this spectacularized pedagogy. Marwick and

boyd notably refer to these online exchanges as “backstage performance(s),” as they are perceived as intimate and out of the publicist’s “watchful eye” (144), acting as the celebrity’s “true” self. By educating fans through intimate exchange, ATCR develops a close-knit community among fans. An example of this “backstage” education occurred when they responded to red-facing at performances. They tweeted, “Non Natives that come to our shows, we need to talk. Please stop wearing headdresses and war paint. It's insulting. Meegwetch and Nia:we” (A Tribe Called Red (@ATribeCalledRed)). Following this tweet, ATCR actively sought to educate their non-Indigenous fans about cultural appropriation and headdresses. They addressed these issues in interviews on prominent Canadian stations like CBC, and they refused to allow fans in red-face to attend performances (Moya-Smith). Recognizing that non-Indigenous people were not purposefully being racist, Campeau shares, “You just have to teach people, and that's what we're trying to do through our music” (A Tribe Called Red). The effects of this teaching are already occurring, as seen with the banning of red-face at prominent music festivals, such as WayHome Music and Arts, Boots and Hearts, and Osheaga (Bateman, “More music festivals ban First Nations headdresses”).³⁵

In March 2015, ATCR used their social media channels to continue Campeau’s human rights dialogues surrounding “Indian” mascots. These conversations began when Quinn Campbell and Curtis Bietz used ATCR’s music in a promotional video for Calgary’s Western Canada High School team (Ruiter). The video was titled, “Night of the Redmen Highlight Video 2014,” and was set to the “Electric Pow Wow Drum” track. In the video:

[A] feathered-headdress image of the school [“Indian”] mascot, is all over [...]. It gets superimposed over the screen 20 times and there are 14 distinct sequences where the logo or name is centered by a zoom, pan, or close-up. The footage also captures a student, nearly nude, his face and body painted in red. (Ruiter)

³⁵ After banning headdresses, Osheaga welcomed ATCR to their 2015 line-up (Bateman, “More music...”).

Responding, ATCR tweeted, “Western Canada High School. Please stop using our music to perpetuate harmful stereotypes against First Nations” (Ruiter). Comparable to their tweet at red-facing audience members, this online confrontation once again publicly stated the problem – “harmful stereotypes against First Nations” – and respectfully addressed the participating community to “please stop.” One of the video-makers, Quinn Campbell, answered by stating that he was “horrified that the video may be seen as offensive” (Ruiter). Following this confrontation, he took the video down and the school changed their team mascot. Notably, the “horror” that the videographer experienced not only supports Campeau’s belief that these racist actions among fans are coming from a “childlike innocence” (certainly comparable to Francis’ childhood “shock” at Tonto’s “us-them” commentary); it also exemplifies the tangible change that can occur from ATCR’s backstage social media engagement with their fan-base community.

As ATCR’s exchange with Campbell and Bietz shows, ATCR’s backstage engagement with fans intersects with their activism and its triumphs. Addressing the “redskins” logo as racist, for instance, teaches the harm of consuming dehumanizing stereotypes and concretizes change. But overcoming these stereotypes also offers their community another, more subtle, education. When Ian Campeau’s campaign against the Nepean Redskins succeeded in changing the team’s name, he tweeted: “It’s official. The Nepean redskins will be dropping the name and the logo at the end of the season. WE DID IT!!! #changethename” (Deejay NDN (@deejayndn)). He then included the #ChangetheName hashtag in his Twitter biography to highlight the importance of extending this change to other teams. Campeau’s tweet publicly acknowledged this triumph as a result of the online (and offline) community’s work, a sentiment he further emphasized in a backstage dialogue with Dr. Adrienne K. On the same day, she tweeted, “I hope @deejayndn’s heart is full today with the announcement from Nepean. I know this has been a long, hard battle.

#changethename” (Dr. Adrienne K (@NativeApprops)). Campeau then tweeted back, “@NativeApprops We're all ecstatic. WE did it. It's not just 'my' win. It's our win” (Deejay NDN (@deejayndn)). Campeau's capitalization of “WE” and revision of “my” to “our” gestures towards a shared triumph with his community and fans. By responding to the congratulations while also explaining that “changing the name” involves the work of many, Campeau transformed this triumph into another teachable example of the powerful momentum of community. The hashtag still remains part of Campeau's online biography page, evoking the victory of the moment while also acknowledging the need to continue advocating for change.

The Limits and Folds of the Indigenous Celebrity-Diplomat

“We just wanted to throw a party... [but] everything you do as Indigenous people is a very political statement; [throwing a party] became a very political statement”

—Ian Campeau on *q with Shad* (Wente, Beagen and Campeau)

While the spectacle of ATCR's pedagogy ensures its success, it also reveals their brand's inescapable dependence upon colonial practices. Leanne Simpson's reflection on her experience publishing an article regarding Idle No More exemplifies this difficulty to maintain self-representation within the media, especially as an Indigenous person. After sharing the ways *Huffington Post* altered her article to conform to the stereotypes of their Canadian demographic, Simpson writes:

Herein lies one of the challenges with the media representation of the Idle No More movement—Indigenous Peoples have little agency to represent themselves within mainstream media, which has boxed our peoples inside the confines of the same recycled stereotypes it insists upon invoking...

...the mainstream media reports Indigenous issues through the lens of the colonial ideology that permeates every aspect of Canadian culture. Since the beginnings of Idle No More, they have consistently chosen to exaggerate and manufacture controversy and crisis, rather than create an open dialogue. They've promoted fear over understanding and have amplified potential divisions as a way of destabilizing the movement (*The Winter... 295, 297*).

In this passage, Simpson reveals the ways media – and its outlets – deny the opportunity for dialogue that respects difference.

As I have already asserted of ATCR, their political and pedagogical work seeks to educate against these nationalistic idealizations of Indigenous peoples; but, there is a darker implication that must be recognized about the intimate ties between ATCR's celebrity and the Canadian nation: the profit of their anti-authoritarian brand depends upon pleasing a North American audience that is willing to pay. The presence of engaged non-Indigenous consumers who misunderstand their education reveals the possibility that ATCR works within the nation's narrative—of wrongfully consuming Indigenous peoples—while it dismantles it. This difficulty is certainly not unique to the group and is, in fact, part of a legacy of celebrity negotiation. Emily Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), a writer and performer who drew from various aspects of her mixed Mohawk and Canadian identities on the stage, is certainly an example of a celebrity who negotiated between Canadian-consumer expectations of “the Indian” and her desires for self-determination. In W.H. New's “Learning to Listen,” he notes the relationship between the “Indian” image and Johnson, stating that she was “accepted as a performer, and accepted as a poet only to the degree that the performance—complete with Mohawk ‘costume’—was patronizingly being praised” (5). This “patronization” speaks to the difficulty of working with cross-cultural audiences. As more recent scholarship and creative work offers, Johnson's work is far more complex than many Canadian audience members recognized. Independently and through Johnson's collaborations with other women, Johnson “cross[ed] boundaries as intrepidly as she ran rapids” (Boag and Gerson 3), offering a transgressive art and celebrity. While there are aspects of Johnson's work that continue to be questioned, her liminal occupation of various identities and performative spaces contributes to her role as “a complicated, contentious, and

passionate personality whose life blurs the boundaries of what it means to be Native, a woman, and Canadian” (3), and perhaps even, a person who works within and resists (neo)colonial constructions. We might think of ATCR as similarly engaging in these negotiations through their celebrity, as they artistically assert a need for Indigenous spaces but must also work with Canadian venues, audiences, channels, and ceremonies in order to sustain their music and branding.³⁶

These difficulties to maintain self-representation for the Indigenous celebrity intensify when we consider the contemporary circulation of online branding. As Graeme Turner argues, “Celebrity is not only a discursive effect, [it is] also a commodity” (10). While ATCR’s brand seeks to educate people and challenge authority, it can also be used by Canadian consumers and channels seeking to better their image. As Wab Kinew mentions in an interview with CBC, “You can buy a Tribe Called Red T-shirt and not give up any land” (Kinos-Goodin). To purchase or follow ATCR’s brand is to “buy into” the Indigenous rights protest without necessarily committing to changing legislation or practice. Instead, non-Indigenous fans can engage in the moralistic benefits of ATCR’s “imagined community” of racial equality without committing to making this vision a reality; or, as Kinew’s criticism implies, consumers can join their online community for non-political reasons. I borrow Benedict Anderson’s term quite purposefully, as the “imagined community” is a group of connected people who do not know each other but who are a part of the same network (or, in Anderson’s case, the same nation) (6). ATCR’s decolonized frontier might be considered a countercultural nation in its “visioned” decolonization of North America; however, even as this frontier concretizes equality in performance, it is only sustained for so long. This imagined community among fans, while certainly important for spreading

³⁶ It might be worth noting, here, that their shows at First Nations reserves are free whereas many of their Canadian venue performances require an admission fee.

awareness of Indigenous concerns, is also inexorably dependent upon capitalism and self-branding.



Figure 13 CBC Arts' Twitter promotion of "The 100 Best Canadian Bands Ever." (CBC Arts)

CBC Music's compilation of the "100 Best Canadian Bands Ever" exemplifies the nationalistic gain of consuming ATCR's music and micro-celebrity brand. With White bands comprising more than three quarters of the featured artists, CBC's "best Canadian bands" tellingly suggests that quality Canadian talent comes from normative White people. More crucially, the dominance of White musicians on the list implies that successful Canadian musicians must subscribe to a universal "Whiteness" through their look, brand, and audience. While these evocations, alone, are nationalistically and politically charged, especially given the criticisms of the recent passing of Bill C-24—a legislation that makes it difficult for immigrants to gain or even hold onto their Canadian citizenship intergenerationally (Citizenship and Immigration Canada)—the presence of *some* racialized "Canadian" artists on the list allows for the veneer of a "multiculturally inclusive" landscape without threatening the dominance of "the best Canadians'" artistry.



Figure 14 Dr. Adrienne K.'s tweet with a screenshot of Ian Campeau's comment

Ranked as number nine on CBC's list, a major accomplishment for the micro-celebrity band, ATCR was the *only* Indigenous group selected; and yet their standing was incredibly marketable. CBC Arts, in particular, capitalized on the band's activism and Indigenous cultures on July 1, 2015 – Canada Day. Advertising their newly released article on Twitter, CBC Arts tweeted: "Happy #CanadaDay2015! Where does your fave band fall on @CBCMusic's top 100 Cdn bands ever?" (CBC Arts). The tweet was accompanied by ATCR's promotional photo with a superimposed logo in the forefront: "100 Best Canadian Bands" (see figure 14). With "Canadian bands" highlighted and centered, CBC's image re-brands ATCR's music and label as Canadian, symbolically assimilating the racialized group into a larger (and as the article implies, "better") Canadian community. Such an action, on the one hand, enables a circulation of a "racially inclusive" Canada and, on the other, suggests that the group is "Canadian" because their brand (to some extent) complies with the expectations of a non-Indigenous audience. While it could be argued that, despite this inclusion, their music maintains its resistive genres – including hip-hop

and dub-step – this acceptance of their music as “Canadian” and “mainstream” softens the appearance of their activism (or, in the least, makes it appear less threatening).

ATCR is subtle about their brand's promotional complicity. For instance, when I began this case-study analysis in September 2014, the promotional photo of Campeau's shirt, “Caucasians,” was on the front of the band-page and has, since then, been changed to the promotional photo used by the CBC. There is also a rumored tweet by Ian Campeau that can now only be traced through a screenshot and some articles. Dr. Adrienne K. quoted this tweet on June 20, 2014 (a few days after The Bonnaroo Festival and the surfacing of complaints). It states: “I'm truly sorry if I offended anyone while I was wearing my Caucasians shirt...I thought I was honoring you'--@deejayndn #BOOM” (Dr. Adrienne K. (@NativeApprops)). Notably, this tweet exemplifies a celebrity-form of creative weaponry, as Campeau used humour to confront the issue of racism. However, Dr. Adrienne K.'s screenshot suggests that the original tweet was deleted (figure 14). The deletion of Campeau's tweet – specifically, a tweet that mobilized Indigenous humour and challenged the politically accepted boundaries of White North Americans – reveals the band's dependence upon pleasing their consumer-community that was outraged by its supposed “racism.”

ATCR's retweeting of CBC's recognition certainly expresses gratitude to the demographic combatting their micro-celebrity activism; however, they also humorously responded to their popularized “Canadian-ness” by releasing a free remix of “Working for the Government,” a protest song by American-Canadian Cree musician and Indigenous activist, Buffy Saint-Marie. She sings:

The neighbours like him
Think he's a great guy
He wears a neck tie

He get you elected
He take the heat y'all
He know the plan yeah

Civil servant y'all
Mufti uniform
He keep a place in town

He keep his mouth shut
Nobody know him
He G.I. Joe yeah
Workin for the government (A Tribe Called Red; Sainte-Marie, Buffy)

The included lyrics thematically negotiate between social likeability—because “the neighbours like him / he’s a great guy”—and governmental obedience, as “he keep[s] his mouth shut [...] / Workin for the government” (A Tribe Called Red; Buffy Sainte-Marie). With the song later calling him “Mr. Invisible” and “James Bond” (both civil-servants-in-disguise), his likability becomes undercut by his public deception (A Tribe Called Red; Buffy Sainte-Marie). I believe these themes ironically acknowledge ATCR’s own “invisible” government work given that they released the song on the same day their brand was marketed as quality-“Canadian” music. But even without this intention, their decision to release a protest-themed song on Canada Day implies a self-aware complicity and resistance to their own national and consumer-brand positioning. A humorous retweet from the day before on the band’s and Ian Campeau’s individual Twitter accounts supports this reading. The tweet says, “[...] I have never even heard of you... but hey, congratulations!” (Tony P (@J_Anthony_22)). Though Campeau shared information about ATCR with this receptive user (through a backstage Twitter dialogue) the retweeting of this comment to fans – which, visually, places this tweet before their CBC recognition – communicates an awareness that they are hardly a recognizable “Canadian” band just yet. Returning to the “Working for the Government” remix, their emphasis on catchy

Indigenous musical talent around this higher-than-usual publicity moment privileges their “Indigenous” brand over their “Canadian” one.

The relationship between ATCR's micro-celebrity pedagogy and their capitalistic brand is difficult to unravel. While their online conversations remain pertinent to Indigenous activism and Canadian politics, their availability for consumption contributes towards the problematic usage of their brand. These tensions are heightened by their political involvement with Idle No More and other activism, relationships that are certainly capitalized among self-branding consumers. But regardless of how the consumer “buys-in” and responds, ATCR's community remains engaged and confrontational through their “backstage” conversations. These interactions emphasize—and in aggressive cases of racism, ridicule—the individual's right or wrong-doing just as much as in-person exchanges, if not more given the accessibility of social media. Campeau observes the dialogues emerging from this work, stating:

A lot of people have been embracing Indigenous culture and non-Native people have been coming in and listening to what we're doing and then also researching cultural stuff, researching the groups that we're sampling... it seems that a lot of interest has come into Indigenous culture through connectivity and showing it, showing our music on a national platform and being able to share culture like that... conversations are happening now on a way faster timeline than before with the advent of Twitter and Facebook. (Wente, Beagen and Campeau, Truth and Reconciliation Commission: how the arts shape our view of history)

His use of the term “connectivity” is important. ATCR's music and celebrity have become productive conduits of “sharing” between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. This sharing of cultures and interest is creating tangible connections between people from all over, some of which continue at performances or elsewhere.

For Smaro Kamboureli, virtual engagement is an “inhabitation” that is just as real as our lived experiences (36). I consider her use of “inhabitation” as cannily speaking to Anderson's “imagined community” – a term that stems from the growth and circulation of print culture. This

“inhabitation” of the virtual is, in part, a new kind of nation-making and news-circuit that is facilitated through prominent people and national recognitions. Given ATCR’s micro-celebrity persona and online activism, it is possible to read their engagement as similarly engaging in a virtual community of “imagined” decolonization. Though I am aware of the risks associated with this sort of suggestion—as there is nothing “imagined” about these decisions or the desire for re-negotiation of land claims and other treaty issues—I do believe that ATCR’s creation of an imagined decolonized frontier outside of performance is the first step needed towards educating fans of their vision for a nation-to-nation relationship among Canadians and Indigenous peoples. After all, the historical and ongoing relationship between these groups has primarily been vertical, in that Canadians assert an entrenched control over Indigenous peoples. Combatting this relationship, the imagined nation “is *always* conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7). By facilitating successful encounters between *self-sovereign* individuals and groups online—encounters which Kamboureli and many others would argue to be just as legitimate as those in person—ATCR initiates cross-cultural communication and education through their fans.

But this suggestion has its limits. As micro-celebrities with less fame than others, ATCR fails to be a recognized threat to the larger imagined community of Canada, much less the global market that is the internet. Their “Canadian” branding (such as CBC’s tweet) significantly makes them more useful than threatening. These difficulties manifest further when we consider the unseen but still-present racial politics existent online. As Turner argues:

It might be seductive to think of the internet as an alternative, counter-public sphere – and in many ways its chaotic contents would support such a view. But it is still a system that is dominated by white, middle-class, American men, and increasingly integrated into the major corporate structures of the traditional media conglomerates. (93)

The seemingly inescapable White communities—online and offline—complicate ATCR's imagined community and their Indigenous space-making. Understanding that ATCR must work within these systems to establish connectivity and solidarity with remote communities, their “imagined” decolonization still remains just that: imagined.

Extrapolating from the complexities of the imagined community, it is evident that ATCR's micro-celebrity agency and branding negotiate between aiding Canada's national narrative and confronting its political problems. ATCR's national acclaim through awards and recognitions is an incredible example of their enfolding triumph for Indigenous awareness in Canada and the simultaneous consumer-manipulation of their brand. ATCR's recognition on the Polaris Prize long-list in 2012 (self-titled album) and short-list in 2013 (*Nation II Nation*), their 2014 “Juno Award for Breakthrough Group of the Year,” and their ranking on CBC Music's 2015 list of the “100 Best Canadian Bands Ever” contribute to their brand's celebrity and political capital. Winning a Juno award outside the category of “Aboriginal,” in particular, establishes an inclusive space for Indigenous peoples on the national stage. The intentions of this space are evident in their Juno award dedication: “...to Native youth everywhere from Turtle Island,” they stated, “[know] that this moment right now is proof that whatever goals you strive for in life, they're completely attainable so aim high. Thank you so much,” (Juno TV). Similar to calling out the “racist mascots” of their crowds, ATCR's presence on the stage transformed into a moment of activism, and in this case, a moment to show others that success as an Indigenous person is possible. Though the dedication was short, its attention to Indigenous youth shifted the focus away from the Canadian-centric stage and appealed to an Indigenous future. Tanya Tagaq's nomination outside the Aboriginal categories the following year demonstrates the possibility of their vision for change and Indigenous acceptance.

At the same time, the emergence of the Idle No More Movement and the anticipated release of the TRC reports pressure Canada to establish a more progressive narrative of racial unity. Canadian awards ceremonies may be responding to these pressures by increasing the number of Indigenous artists winning awards on the national stage. Some of these wins include Thomas King's 2014 Governor General's Literary Award, Joseph Boyden's 2014 Canada Reads win, and Tanya Tagaq's 2014 Polaris prize. Though nation-state motivations do not negate the talent, the human rights progress, or the worth of these wins, they do make Indigenous triumphs within a national context more complicated. Together, these wins circulate a narrative of Canadian acceptance of difference without having to undo the problematic politics. These platforms, while helpful for Indigenous activism, then also contribute to the national "value" of ATCR's Indigenous branding.

The value of ATCR's brand on the national stage, however, does not always benefit Canada's contemporary narrative. Previous red-facing at festivals and the focus on wrongful Indigenous deaths in their videos are undoubtedly moments of Canadian embarrassment. Perhaps ATCR's most provocative resistance occurred when they cancelled their performance at the Canadian Human Rights Museum (CHRM) opening, a refusal that generated more publicity from CBC News than the museum's actual event. In a public statement, they stated:

Human rights are great for society. We appreciate the work the museum has been doing to bring attention to global issues. Unfortunately, we feel it was necessary to cancel our performance because of the museum's misrepresentation and downplay of the genocide that was experienced by Indigenous people in Canada by refusing to name it genocide. Until this is rectified, we'll support the museum from a distance. (CBC News)

ATCR's cancellation of the performance was, quite openly, a refusal to be complicit in Canada's denial of its violent colonial history. In contrast with the desire for inclusion at music awards ceremonies, there is an independent sovereignty at work in this passage, as they admit that they

will “support the museum from a distance” but not through their celebrity brand or influence. In fact, their brand—in its refusal to play—overtly rejects the representation of Indigenous peoples within Canada’s human rights narrative.

ATCR’s articulation of “genocide” is a powerful enfolding of culture and politics. While the applicability of the term “genocide” to Canada’s treatment of Indigenous peoples, at this point, is certainly uncontested among most Indigenous scholars and activists—specifically because residential schooling and arguably, the “Sixties Scoop,” violate the United Nations’ convention on “genocide” (The United Nations)—it was not nationally accepted until the release of the TRC reports in June 2015. As *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* states:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as “cultural genocide.” (1)

This same section suggests that the taking of sacred lands, the banning of Indigenous languages and practices, and persecution of spiritual leaders are examples of Canada’s own active role in the eradication of peoples. Not unlike the historical intentions of the Crown to, in Sinclair’s words, “divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources” (3), the denial of the CHRM to publicly—and globally—confront this history similarly divests itself of the legal obligations and contentious politics of challenging the national narrative. ATCR’s early vocalization publicly recognized the museum’s silencing of this history as a cultural and political disavowal of Indigenous personhood.

The CHRM’s response to ATCR demonstrates how layered art and celebrity holds the potential to develop an “ethical space of engagement” in the media and in culture. Commenting on ATCR’s criticism, the museum shared:

The CMHR understands the group has elected not to participate over concern around the way Indigenous issues are presented in the Museum. [...] We know that *building dialogue* and earning trust is a long-term process, and we hope this will again be *an opportunity for respectful conversation* on issues that historically haven't been easy to talk about. (CBC News, emphasis added)

Ermine's ethical space depends upon these very concepts of "building dialogue" and "respectful conversation" through difference. By framing ATCR's refusal to play as "an opportunity for respectful conversation," the CHRM publicly interpreted the group's rejection as productive; specifically, they regarded this rejection as illuminating the need for more dialogue between Canadians and Indigenous peoples. I read the museum's acknowledgement of ATCR's reasons for not performing as a move towards Ermine's respectful response, as they did not misrepresent or argue with the group's concerns of Indigenous representation; at the same time, while this response was respectful, the museum did not partake in any actions to concretely change the exhibits. This dialogue without change indicates that "ethical spaces" must still be accompanied by vigorous action, not simply vocalization. Moreover (and certainly reminiscent of Chrisjohn and Wasacase's assertions), this dialogue without change on the part of Canadians questions the ethics of the TRC process altogether.³⁷

Though the dialogue between ATCR and the CHRM never went any further, the group's music and celebrity-capital ensured the issue's endurance in the media. As coverage lost momentum, ATCR released a free song on American Thanksgiving titled, "Burn Your Village to the Ground." As my first chapter indicates, this song features a clip of Wednesday Addams (from the *Addams Family Values* film) playing the character of Pocahontas in a school production. Drawing from a moment when she improvises her lines, the song repeats: "The gods of my tribe have spoken. They have said, 'Do not trust the Pilgrims.' And for all these reasons I have decided

³⁷ I am indebted to Daniel Coleman's suggestion on a previous draft to extend this criticism to the TRC process.

to scalp you and burn your village to the ground” (A Tribe Called Red; Sonnenfeld). Countering the Thanksgiving narrative of the “Pilgrims” and “Indians” being at peace at the Thanksgiving table, Wednesday’s lines reveal that the “Pilgrims”—North Americans—cannot be “trusted.” While there are many reasons for this lyric to be in the song (such as its cutting use of the original film-lines), I find the media-timing of its release to be quite fascinating. Not only was this song shared on a day of North American pride and gratitude, it also surfaced around the same time that media coverage for the museum faded. Mobilizing their music to challenge representation on a historically prominent day, ATCR resurfaced media conversations of the CHRM’s neglect of “genocide” during the preceding weeks.

The release of “Burn Your Village to the Ground” at a moment of much needed action and resistance insists that the potential for socio-political education rests with artists, filmmakers, musicians, and writers: people who may have the influence to change the opinions or practices of some but who do not have the legislative expertise or power to actually re-vision the system. At the same time, it is, here, that their celebrity pedagogy loses its momentum. While ATCR’s important pedagogical work establishes a community of cross-cultural conversation, and at times, even rejects problematic thinking, their musical and their celebrity presence downplays the weight of their pedagogy. They are not scholars, politicians, or experts but rather, Indigenous musicians who make “the best Canadian” music. While their teachings might cause discomfort among fans and may even, as I have argued, establish a productive pedagogical discomfort within culture, their negotiation never fully threatens (and sometimes even profits) from the political system – the very system Indigenous scholars and activists identify as the cause of Indigenous oppression and subjugation. And so, questions must be asked: Why are we popularizing Indigenous celebrities versed in the complexities of culture but not popularizing those versed in

the complexities of legislation, politics, and system? Why are we depending upon the pedagogy of the Indigenous celebrity but not extending their pedagogy to other outlets? These are the knowledge-gaps in the conversations that the Canadian nation will not acknowledge because popularly broadcasting the voices of Indigenous peoples outside the realm of celebrity would validate Indigenous concerns. Consequently, the question at hand is not simply who Canadians are listening to; it is also who is being made publicly available and why.

At the start of this chapter, I discussed “reception” as the problem of the ATCR’s cross-cultural exchanges; but there is a more critical problem at hand that I have not yet explored—the problem with compromise. As Hollywood film has historically shown, “the Indian” is not a person, but rather, a body that can be moulded and consumed to satiate the desires and alleviate the anxieties of the settler nation.³⁸ Now, upon the release of the TRC reports, at this turning point in Canadian history and future, we are venturing into a world where Indigenous peoples can and are responding; and more interestingly, a connected world where – some – Canadians might be listening. But there is a compromise on behalf of Indigenous peoples that is still occurring, one that is implicit in ATCR’s choice to cross-culturally share the imagined – and performative – frontier. If ATCR is creating a space for Indigenous peoples through their celebrity – and if their image is attracting an increasingly receptive following – then we must reflect on previous consumptions of “the Indian” and ask ourselves, what is the ultimate gain for Canadians? What do Canadians gain by mobilizing the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat brand to improve their image?

There are no easy answers; however, after studying the production and cross-cultural consumption of ATCR’s image, I believe *one* possible answer is the assimilative benefit of

³⁸ Neil Diamond’s *Reel Injun* and Thomas King’s *The Inconvenient Indian* both offer a much more in-depth analysis of these stereotypes.

compromise. Niigonwedom James Sinclair's concerns about hybridization (and I would argue, about compromise) helpfully articulate this sentiment when he states that "hybridity *forces* [Indigenous peoples] *to confess that they have to share* [...] sovereignty with the very colonial powers that dominate them" undercutting the "nation-to-nation" goals of most communities in North America (251, emphasis added). In light of the TRC's ("forceful") push for Indigenous peoples "to confess what has been done to them," Sinclair's canny usage of "confess" once again evokes an unethical power imbalance, where those who have been wronged—who have been consumed and fractured by Canada's cultural genocide and contemporary (neo)colonial systems—must once again be the ones to carry the burden of the future and its compromises.

My critique of compromise is not intended to negate its productivity. As this chapter has shown, ATCR's celebrity negotiations have led to some important changes and dialogues. But if compromise is a necessary component of layered cross-cultural exchanges – and arguably, of all ethical exchanges between Indigenous peoples and Canadians – then it is important to interrogate *what* exactly is being compromised and for *whom*. I believe the "forceful demand" for a "confessed testimony" from the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat exposes the new post-TRC desire of the settler-nation: Indigenous compromise for the benefit of rejuvenating Canada's multicultural landscape. It is through this negotiation between a difficult past and a potential future that the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat must compromise the resistance of Indigenous peoples to enable the potential for (co-)existence. The problem with this position is that it continues to present compromise as one-sided – the celebrity *compromises* and the consumer *decides* what to "buy into." And so, just as Canadians were not required to speak about residential schooling to the TRC – and in fact, were not even subpoenaed for their crimes –

Canadians, once again, may be “off the hook” from responding to the conversations arising from this new kind of celebrity.

What can the Indigenous celebrity-diplomat do to fold their influence into legislative change? What steps can be taken to heal the nation? It is an ambitious task but one that ATCR attempts through exchange and art: through their videography's inclusion of protestors and Indigenous women and film and silent-film dancers; through their showcasing of Indigenous talent, like Buffy Sainte-Marie and Leonard Sumner and Northern Cree; through their creatively humorous responses to their “Canadian” branding. Together, these folds between the fictional, the historical, and the lived come to develop an uncensored re-vision of the world. It is only through art that their cross-cultural exchanges come to reveal their productive diplomacy – of continuously working against and working for the nation, of being simultaneously threatening and non-threatening through the resistive, tenacious practice of pedagogy.

Final Thoughts

“Hopefully [art] can be a peace-making force; it can be a force for reconciliation and understanding. I hope it's a force for education too.”

—Wab Kinew, interview from “Native Noise”

At the beginning of this project, I questioned the actionable impact of Willie Ermine's ethical space of engagement: How do we move dialogues outside the ethical space? How do we make respectful dialogue actionable? These concerns of the ethical space have resonated throughout this project, as it witnessed the rise of A Tribe Called Red's socio-political resistances and the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports. Though the scope of my analysis has centered on ATCR's compelling space-making work, it has also sought, more broadly, to illuminate the various socio-political pressures facing our post-TRC Indigenous artists, activists, and celebrities—those who will be impacted by the response to the reports but who also have the performance and media platforms to educate non-Indigenous peoples. Responding to these pressures, I hope this project has shown how artistic mobilizations (and negotiations) of layered art can sustain an empowering taking back of culture that holds the potential to provoke socio-political action. After all, ATCR is a group that establishes their objectives. During the span of this project, alone, they applied enough pressure through their art and celebrity to change the “redskins” name of various sports teams and were credited for the banning of red-face at popular music festivals in North America. Complimenting these victories, they also responded to the release of the TRC reports by extending their 2015 summer tour to First Nations reserves in Canada. In doing so, they have compelled a powerful socio-political momentum that tenaciously seeks to establish welcome spaces for Indigenous peoples.

At the same time, these accomplishments should not idealize the problems ahead.

Perhaps, the most critical contribution of my project is its focus upon the non-Indigenous abuses

of space and the troubling interpretive differences among consumers. Most scholarship pertaining to ATCR's work provides an admiration of their artistic space-making work without much critique of its problems. What I hope my project has shown is that the work of ATCR is ambitious and resonant; and yet, still compromised by their dependence upon a cross-cultural audience and the (neo)colonial system that sustains Indigenous oppressions. Without downplaying the value of ATCR's ambitious objectives, I believe this project calls for a broader discussion of what it means to produce and consume popularized Indigenous art-forms in a culture that has normalized the wrongful consumptions of peoples; and, moreover, a further exploration of how these influences can infringe upon the re-visioning of (neo)colonial spaces. How do Indigenous artists mobilize their creative weaponry to "make a new world" that provokes response from their non-Indigenous audience members? And moreover, how do they negotiate between the desire for the repatriation of all lands and the pressing need for safe spaces that can, more assuredly, accommodate the futures of Indigenous peoples?

Throughout this project, I have reflected upon my own privileged positioning and the fact that I – like many others before me – have introduced a term to Indigenous studies that could potentially re-establish (neo)colonial boundaries. For this reason, I have been careful not to use this term to name or speak on behalf of peoples and I stress the importance of maintaining this stipulation if conversations of layered art are to continue through scholarship. What I hope to offer through my project is a response to those who have termed ATCR's work as a hybridization of worlds.³⁹ While this assertion might hold within the individualized context of their music, their interdependent use of videography, performance, and celebrity offers a complex negotiation of worlds that maintains a right to self-determination. Unlike hybridity's demands for liminality,

³⁹ For instance, Simon Moya-Smith's compelling reading of Indigenous art-forms within the urban scene referred to the pow wow-step as a "hybrid" genre (Native Noise).

which risks negating this objective through the blurring of identities and privileging of nation, layered art's confrontational re-visioning of boundaries demands an acceptance of difference and its discomfort. In doing so, layering depends upon the ethical separation of spaces and worlds, just as much as it puts them in dialogue.

And so, I end this project by putting forth the need to respond to this productive – and pedagogical – discomfort as we move towards negotiations of the TRC reports and its recommendations. While *A Tribe Called Red* still remains relatively unknown, what their work has shown is that the bringing together of entertainment and pedagogical discomfort can establish an actionable change in our culture that resonates with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This realization remains all the more valuable, with movements like Idle No More, the release of the TRC reports, and the upcoming Canadian federal election's potential to address missing and murdered Indigenous women. For now, Canada's legislation and politics continue to maintain an oppressive control over Indigenous peoples; however, with these changes offering a growing awareness of the Indigenous Rights Movement, there is a promising education that can emerge from our post-TRC Indigenous artists, who not only have the performance and online spaces to vocalize this need for change, but who also have the creative weaponry to incite it.

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