



# CONFRONTATION AND RECONCILEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN THEATER

## Two Native American plays

Confrontación y reconciliación en el teatro nativo americano contemporáneo

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### KEYWORDS

Native American culture  
White culture  
Theater  
Confrontation  
Tradition  
Modernity  
Reconcilement

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### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary Native American theater consists of a long list of plays which normally include indigenous and mixed-blood characters who often find themselves living between two worlds, that is, Native culture and white American society. Therefore, it is common to find a significant confrontation and conflict between the two cultures, which is usually solved at the end of the plays with the characters' reconcilement or synthesis between their Native heritage and the white domineering society. In this way, Native Americans can ensure their Native cultural existence and survival whilst simultaneously adapting to the changes and customs required by white American society.*

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Cultura nativo-americana  
Cultura blanca  
Teatro  
Confrontación  
Tradición  
Modernidad  
Reconciliación

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### RESUMEN

*El teatro nativo-americano contemporáneo contiene una larga lista de obras que normalmente incluyen personajes indígenas y mestizos que a menudo viven entre dos mundos, es decir, la cultura nativa y la sociedad blanca americana. Por ello, suelen surgir enfrentamientos y conflictos entre ambas culturas, que normalmente se resuelven al final de las obras con la reconciliación o síntesis de los personajes entre su herencia cultural nativa y la sociedad blanca dominante. Así, los indígenas pueden asegurar su existencia y supervivencia cultural nativa al mismo tiempo que se adaptan a los cambios y costumbres que requiere la sociedad blanca americana.*

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Recibido: 17/ 07 / 2022

Aceptado: 23/ 09 / 2022

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of Native American<sup>1</sup> theater as a literary genre took place in the second half of the 20th century. However, in spite of being one of the newest literary genres of the Native American literary scene, its origins are often traced back to an extensive indigenous oral tradition. This oral tradition consisted mainly of stories and tales about different cultural aspects of Native Americans that were usually passed down from generation to generation to ensure and preserve Native American heritage. At the same time, this literary genre has also been adapted to the Western literary canon through writing; therefore, it can be perceived that contemporary American Indian theater contains oral and performative elements which come from Native American traditions and also a writing component which stems from Western civilization. In this sense, it is common to find multiple theater plays that deal with a confrontation between Native and white culture through the lives and histories of indigenous and mixed-blood characters. This conflict usually leads to a reconciliation or point of confluence between Native culture (past) and white American society (present), which takes place through a strengthening of Native identity (based on Indian cultural traditions) and an adaptation to the customs and changes imposed by the white domineering society.

Hence, this essay aims at presenting two Native theater plays with the objective of dealing with the confrontation between Native and white culture as well as the solution to this conflict. For this purpose, two plays have been selected: *Inter-Tribal* (1996) by Terry Gomez (Comanche) and *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance* (2002) by Diane Glancy (Cherokee). As will be seen, such a confrontation is manifested through the lives of Indian and mixed-blood characters, who struggle to survive in a world continually influenced by white society, while trying to preserve their Native identity. Thus, after a hard and intense struggle to recover their ancient cultural values (which help strengthen and consolidate their Native identity), these characters adapt to the changes of modern society whilst achieving a reconciliation or combination between Native and white culture, without ever losing their identity as Native Americans.

## 2. Contemporary Native American theater: a brief historical background

As King (2000) explains, “even though the word ‘theater’ is European, the art form, being universal is quite at home in Indian country” (p. 166). This statement can be said to make reference to the long history of Native American theater over the centuries. Although contemporary Indian theater did not emerge until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Native playwrights and scholars agree that there was an early form of theater which took place through traditional indigenous storytelling. This technique basically consisted of different stories and tales that were orally transmitted and passed down from generation to generation “in order to educate, entertain and preserve Native American cultural traditions” (López Pérez & Benali Taouis, 2016, p. 94). These stories were usually acted out and performed by making use of some theatrical elements which generally reflect the performative and dramatic dimension of indigenous oral storytelling traditions and their closeness and similarities to theater (López Pérez & Benali Taouis, 2016). However, it was not until the reawakening of cultural traditions and performances towards the 1940s and 1950s decades (Geiogamah, 2000) that contemporary Native theater started to emerge. The rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s also contributed to such revitalization of Indian cultures since it appeared as a movement in which minorities claimed for the end of discrimination while demanding the right to speak for themselves (López Pérez, in press). Within this context of hope and self-expression for minorities in the United States, contemporary Native theater emerged through the creation of several theater companies (see Heath, 1995; López Pérez & Benali Taouis, in press) with the aim to produce “both traditional dramas and works by new Indian playwrights” (Huntsman, 2000, p. 95).

In contrast to American theater about Indians, which generally provided an artificial and unreal portrayal of Indians (see Wilmeth, 2000), contemporary indigenous theater presented itself as a literary genre which gave voice to Native stories, concerns and themes from an authentic and realistic approach. With just a couple of predecessors such as *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1931) and *The Cherokee Night* (1934) by Rollie Lynn Riggs (Cherokee), contemporary Native American theater emerged within the so-called Native American Renaissance (see Lincoln, 1993) and different plays started to be written by indigenous playwrights and produced by Indian companies since the 1960s. The result is the publication of a long list of theater plays which can be found in multiple collections and anthologies and a significant body of scholarship (see López Pérez & Benali Taouis, 2016; Dāwes, 2013), which bear witness to the growth and visibility of the genre. At the same time, contemporary Native theater continues to be promoted through different Native theater companies (see López Pérez & Benali Taouis, in press) and multiple festivals (see López Pérez & Benali Taouis, 2016) in the United States. However, this does not mean that the Native scene remains without problems because the lack of support and funding from different sources continues to suppose an obstacle for the production of indigenous theater plays (López Pérez & Benali Taouis, 2016). However, and in spite of those difficulties, contemporary Native theater continues to expand

<sup>1</sup> All throughout this essay, the terms Native American, American Indian, Indian and indigenous will be used interchangeably in order to refer more generally to the indigenous peoples of the United States. However, the specific tribal names will be used whenever it may be possible.

and to provide new themes and aspects to be explored while establishing literary, historical and cultural links with other indigenous cultures around the world.

### **3. Confrontation and reconciliation in *Inter-Tribal* and *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance***

Terry Gomez is a Native American playwright who belongs to the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma. She is also an actor, painter and theater director, who has published multiple plays which have been included in some anthologies. Such is the case of *Inter-Tribal*, which was included in the anthology *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color* in 1996. Gomez's *Inter-Tribal* (1996) presents the story of two Native American women, a grandmother and her granddaughter, who belong to different generations. The grandmother, Hattie, is closely tied to her Native traditions whereas her granddaughter, Baby, seems to have "no ties to the past" (Yashpreet, 2015, p. 151). Therefore, different confrontations take place between the two protagonists throughout the play, although at the end the playwright leads both women to a reconciliation between Native traditions (past) and the white domineering society (present) in order to ensure a better future.

Hattie had taken care of her granddaughter since her mother's death and she had always tried to instill in her the importance of Native American cultural values. However, Baby decides to move in with her friend Joyce because she can't handle the fact that her grandmother is always interfering with her own decisions. Thus, it is common to find some conflicts between the two Indian women, which seem to respond to the confrontation between indigenous and white culture. The first confrontation between grandmother and granddaughter, and therefore, between tradition and modernity, occurs when Baby reprimands her grandmother for being in a bar:

BABY. Grandma, what are you doing here?

HATTIE. Looking all over town for you – where have you been? You're never home! (One of the three men comes and puts three beers on the table. He backs away, smiling.)

HATTIE. Get that away from me!

BABY. Grandma! This is not a place for you to be.

HATTIE. Why not? It's good enough for you and your 'friends', isn't it?

BABY. You don't belong here. This is not a 'old' people place. Why can't you just let me alone for a little while.

HATTIE. So this is what it has come to, Baby? You really like this kind of place? It's really dirty in here. Look, there's a roach just sitting on the wall. Look at these men. Low-down and don't work. You know what they're probably saying about you. BABY. Grandma, I'm not sorry. Christ, what's wrong with coming in to see a friend. It's just a place to relax. . . (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 202)

It is clear that both women have different perspectives, but Hattie's concern for her granddaughter is above any conflict that the two protagonists may encounter. In fact, Hattie's role as a mother and transmitter of indigenous cultural values is more important than any offense that her granddaughter may cause her:

HATTIE. I know I'm getting old, but I know a heck of a lot more than you. You still have a lot to learn, Baby. You think you're so smart. All you know so far is what white people have taught you in school . . . you don't seem to remember anything I have tried to teach you. When are you going to take time and learn about your own people?

BABY. I do know about our own people. Our people are still here. All the younger ones that you have no respect for are our people, too. I know that we still have to depend on the PHS Hospital, and the BIA still tells us what to do. We're still eating commodities, still get followed around by the clerks and security guards in the stores in town. And now I know that I'm going with my friends. At least they think I have sense. (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 206)

While Hattie's words reveal a traditional Indian woman who tries to reintegrate her granddaughter into her Native cultural values, Baby's response clearly reveals the harsh reality of today's indigenous peoples. Although the grandmother had instilled traditional Native values in her granddaughter since childhood, Baby seems to find herself overwhelmed by the injustices and the precarious situation that Indians are facing nowadays: unemployment, poverty, violence, drugs, alcohol, etc. In other words, Gomez's *Inter-Tribal* (1996) presents the opposing views of "an ardent follower of traditionalism" (represented by Hattie) and "an ardent follower of modernism" (reflected by Baby) (Yashpreet, 2015, p. 154). In spite of this situation, Hattie does not allow her granddaughter to lose her values and identity as a Native American. Although the young girl is annoyed with

the old woman for some of her traditional customs and often argues with her for her stubborn behavior, Baby still respects her grandmother and does not hesitate to ask her for advice. A clear example can be found in the bar scene in which Baby invites her grandmother to leave. Her friend Joyce (who has no respect for indigenous cultures, let alone Hattie) actually offends Baby's grandmother by making rude and obscene comments. Although at first the scene seems comical, Hattie is very offended:

JOYCE. That's right Grandma – pull your skirt up – unbutton a button or two on the top. Get some lipstick on. We'll all go out dancin'. Pick out one of these guys, pick one, any one!

BABY. Joyce! Shut up. Man, everywhere I go I catch sh . . . uh, trouble from everybody. You don't need to get nasty, Joyce.

HATTIE. (Upset) Baby! I'm leaving. I'm going home. I want to see you later, do you hear?

BABY. Yeah, Grandma. Go home! I'll see you there. Bye!

HATTIE. Well, you don't have to throw me out.

JOYCE. Bye Grandma!

BABY. Shit, Joyce – lighten up, will you?

JOYCE. Lighten up? What do you mean? She was likin' it! Seriously, don't you get sick of her putting you through a guild trip every time she sees you? How can you stand it?

BABY. Leave her alone, Joyce. And don't call her Grandma. I don't like it when you call her that. It sounds mean when you say it. (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 203)

It is clear that Baby loves and respects her grandmother, but she cannot help but feel annoyed by her insistence on controlling her decisions. Despite this, the young woman asks her grandmother for advice in situations she finds compromising, as Baby didn't really know what to do after her daughter's death:

BABY. Do you think it's OK if I go powwow?

HATTIE. That's up to you. Grieving after someone has died is different for everyone. Our tradition is to wait for a year, at least, out of respect. Nowadays, people don't seem to remember or care. But, like I said, each person has to decide for themselves.

BABY. Well, it's been over a year and some of my friends are going. (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 205)

Baby's behavior not only demonstrates that she respects her grandmother's opinion, but also respects the indigenous traditions that her grandmother had passed down on to her. In addition, when the young girl decides to attend the powwow and 49 celebrations, she does not participate in them, but rather watches in astonishment and offense at the lack of respect shown by some of the participants:

BABY. Joyce you ripped that little girl's moccasin! This means something to people! They want to dance, to listen to songs. They don't need people jumping, spinning, running, tripping out! If anyone is gonna do that they have no business out there! Indian or non-Indian! (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 210)

It is obvious that Baby knows and values the cultural and spiritual importance of the celebration of these events, since it was precisely her grandmother who asked the young woman to take her and accompany her to the powwows. Therefore, it can be noted that although Baby sometimes feels overwhelmed by her grandmother's presence, Hattie clearly assumes her role as a mother and transmitter of indigenous cultural values whilst also acting as a guide in Baby's life so that she can finally come to terms with her Native heritage. In this sense, it can be concluded that Baby has already achieved a reconciliation between both Native and white culture because, on the one hand, she knows and is aware of the changes and customs imposed by white American culture, and, on the other hand, she has been able to reintegrate Native traditional values into her life thanks to her grandmother's persistence and encouragement.

However, in her eagerness to guide Baby's life according to Indian traditions, Hattie does not seem to be aware of the problems that tribal communities are going through today. Baby complains about her grandmother's behavior in view of her lack of attention and indifference to the problems that the young indigenous people are struggling with every day:



BABY. Where is your compassion? You always tell me about the old ways, about Christian ways. Yet you turn your back on people that really need your understanding.

HATTIE. That's not true. I do the best I can. I'm not perfect. I'm not the wise old medicine woman who can give you the meaning of life while we sit and beadwork. That's the movies, Baby. I'm a woman that has been brought up learning about the woman's lib, the civil rights movement, why, we were allowed the vote just after I was born. I was raised by boarding school idiots, people that took me away from my beloved grandparents. I do the best I can. I was taught that the white way was the best way to live, it took me years to figure out that who I really am is all of these things. The main thing I realized is that Indians survive. We have so many things against us, and we are alive! Every generation knows more of the white way, but we old folks have to hurry and teach you all we can. Show you how to be proud of yourselves. We are beautiful people. We don't deserve all that we have been though! (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, pp. 213-14)

Likewise, Hattie does not seem to realize that she herself is an amalgamation or synthesis between both worlds (Indian and white American). Like most Native Americans, Hattie was educated in the Western world, learning and adapting to its new changes, laws and ideology. But at the same time, she continued to preserve her traditions and identity as an Indian. In the play, Hattie is an old woman in her seventies, which means that her time of birth (approximately 1920s) corresponds to a period of strong Western oppression, during which many Indians decided to live closely tied to their indigenous traditions whilst others preferred assimilation. It is clear that Hattie was strongly attached to her cultural values, but in the meantime the old woman grew up observing the new Western ideology. This ideology is apparent when Hattie speaks to her granddaughter about marriage, implying that after a certain time of living together young people should marry. This is also reflected through her admiration for President John Frank Kennedy, of whom she keeps a picture on the wall (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 205). This admiration can be seen as logical, specifically after considering that this president was concerned about Indians, meeting with several representatives of the various tribal communities and passing some laws and budgets aimed at improving their way of life. However, Baby does not really understand her grandmother's behavior and attitude and asks her to take that picture down: "Why don't you take that picture down? It's ugly and who cares about the damn president. I sure as hell don't. When are you going to hang an Indian face on that wall?" (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 205).

Although Hattie eventually hangs her great-grandfather's picture on the wall, it seems that Baby expected to find in her grandmother a traditional old Indian woman who was only aware of her Native cultural heritage. However, Hattie is knowledgeable about both worlds because she has lived between Native culture (tradition) and white culture (assimilation). At the same time, she has been able to preserve her identity as a Native American while simultaneously integrating Western ideology into her life. Although Hattie does not seem to be aware of the fact that she is an amalgamation or synthesis in herself, she recognizes that she is a mixture of all the things that have happened to her throughout her life.

At the end of *Inter-Tribal* (1996), it is possible to perceive a clear change in Hattie's behavior and attitude: the old woman accepts to take Joyce into her home after an intense alcohol ingestion and after a hard confrontation with a man who wanted to force her to go with him (*Inter-Tribal*, 1996, p. 214). Thus, Hattie is integrated into Baby's world and the granddaughter is reintegrated into the indigenous traditions that her grandmother had taught her about for years. Both protagonists seem to achieve a reconciliation or synthesis between Native culture and Western civilization, which paves the way for a better future and for ensuring Indians' cultural and existential survival (López Pérez, 2020). As McGillivray (quoted in Wheeler, 1991) explains, "it's not realistic to be totally traditional and we can't be totally contemporary because we lose our identity as people" (p. 11). In the case of *Inter-Tribal* (1996), it is clearly appreciated how the granddaughter revisits the past with her grandmother's guidance whereas "the older generation also gains strength to rebel with the help of Baby" (Yashpreet, 2015, p. 149).

The feminine gender also plays the leading role in Glancy's *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*. Diane Glancy is a prolific Native American writer, who is part Cherokee on her father's side, and of English and German descent on her mother's side. She is a playwright, a poet and a novelist, who has published different collections of theater plays that have been highly acclaimed. Such is the case of *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, which was included in the collection *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays* in 2002. Once again, the story revolves around the ongoing confrontations between a grandmother and her granddaughter. Grandmother is an elderly Indian woman who remains faithful to Native traditions whereas her granddaughter Girl tries to find a place of her own and survive the constant day-to-day problems in contemporary society. Therefore, it is possible to perceive from the very beginning a cold, distant and conflictive relationship between the two women, leading to a new confrontation between tradition (indigenous culture) and modernity (white culture), which finally evolves into a reconciliation between both.

On the one hand, Girl wants to know the story of Ahw'uste, a mythological spiritual deer of great traditional and cultural indigenous value, whose presence is sacred. It is a totemic animal that serves as a spiritual guide to

Grandmother, since all Indian tribes had a totemic animal that they venerated and used as a spiritual guide. Native Americans saw in this totem animal certain qualities and attributes that advised and guided them throughout their lives. However, Grandmother shows no interest in revealing the real importance of Ahw'uste to her granddaughter and she even seems to be resentful towards her:

GIRL. Have you heard of Ahw'uste?

GRANDMOTHER. I have, but I've forgotten.

GIRL. They said they fed her.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, they did.

GIRL. What was she?

GRANDMOTHER. I don't know.

GIRL. A deer?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, a deer. A small deer.

GIRL. She lived in the house, didn't she?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, she did. She was small.

GIRL. They used to talk about her a long time ago, didn't they?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, they did.

GIRL. Did you ever see one of the deer?

GRANDMOTHER. I saw the head of one once. Through the window. Her head was small and she had tiny horns.

GIRL. Like a goat?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, like that.

GIRL. Where did you see her?

GRANDMOTHER. I don't know. Someone had her. I just saw her. That's all. (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, p. 5).

This aspect clearly contrasts with the fact that in Native cultures elders usually transmit indigenous cultural values to younger generations and through their stories, experiences and different types of knowledge, they can certainly help young people to build a healthy future (Kahn et al., 2016; Pinazzi, 2000). This is a traditional role which is usually assigned to Native women, as Indian identity comes from Mother Earth and the land is considered to be the mother to all Indians (Allen, 1992). However, Grandmother is silent and reticent, and she remains reluctant to reveal and pass on the story of Ahw'uste, which is a part of Native tradition. Yet, it is soon discovered that the reason for her behavior lies in the existence of a modern world that does not embrace Indian traditions:

GRANDMOTHER. Why can't my granddaughter wait on the spirit? Why is she impatient? My granddaughter wants to do what she wants. Anything that rubs against her, well, she bucks. Runs the other way. I'm not going to give her my deer dress to leave in a heap on some dude's floor. It comes from long years from my grandmother – I have to live so far away from you. Take me where you are – I feel the pull of the string (she touches her breastbone). Reel me in. Just pull. I want out of here. I want to see you, ancestors. Not hear the tacky world. No more. (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, p. 15).

Whereas Grandmother is closely tied to Native traditional values, Girl seems to have "no sense of belonging" (Diyai & Muhammad, 2018, p. 110). Grandmother makes use of indigenous traditions, storytelling and spirituality in order to help her granddaughter to find her true identity as a Native American. However, Girl does not seem to

really believe in the importance of oral Native traditions, nor does she value the relevance of the spirituality and ceremonies performed in honor to Ahw'uste. On the other hand, Grandmother, in her obstinate traditionalism, is unable (or unwilling) to realize that the world has changed and that Indians are once again facing multiple problems:

GIRL. You always got your eye on the next world.

GRANDMOTHER. I sit by the television, watch those stupid programs.

GIRL. What do you want? Weed the garden. Do some beans for supper. Set a trap for the next spirit to pass along the road.

GRANDMOTHER. The spirits push us out so we'll know what it's like to be without them. So we'll struggle all our lives to get back in –

GIRL. Is that what life is for you? No – for me – I get busy with day-to-day stuff until it's over . . . Have you ever lost one job after another?

GRANDMOTHER. Have you eaten turnips for a week? Because that was all you had in your garden? In your cupboard? Knowing your commodities won't last, because you gave them to the next family on the road? They got kids and you can hear them crying. (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, pp. 14-15)

It is obvious that Grandmother and Girl share very different perspectives and are unable to come to an agreement. While "Grandmother" is an old traditionalist woman whose Indian identity is strongly rooted in her Native heritage, her granddaughter is a young Indian woman who "reflects modern American life" (Diyai & Muhammad, 2018, p. 107). As Glancy (personal communication, 2007) confirms, "it is often that way between generations. The question also is there, what happened to the mother? So many of the middle generation are unable to raise their children because of drugs, alcohol, economic instability, irresponsible behavior" (p. 3). While it is true that Girl's mother does not appear and is not mentioned in the play, it is important to note that Grandmother is the one to continue her role as a mother in addition to being the person in charge of passing down Native American traditions to her granddaughter. As Wong (1991) explains, "on the reservation there may be alienation from a biological mother; but there is always a family member who continues to exercise the role of mother, someone who integrates the person back into the world of the community (p. 190). In this case, Grandmother becomes the person who must reintegrate her granddaughter into the cultural values of the tribal community to which she belongs. However, it is difficult for Girl to accept and understand the spirituality of Native traditions and she apparently feels that the cultural values followed by her grandmother cannot offer any solution to her problems:

GRANDMOTHER. We're the tree waiting for the red leaves. We count on what's not there as though it is because the maple has red leaves – only you can't always see them.

GIRL. You'd rather live with what you can't see – is that the point of your red-leaf story? GRANDMOTHER. I was trying to help you over the hard places.

GIRL. I can get over them myself.

GRANDMOTHER. I wanted you to look for the red leaves instead of the dudes on the highway.

GIRL. A vision is not always enough.

GRANDMOTHER. It's all I had.

GIRL. You had me – is a vision worth more than me?

GRANDMOTHER. I wanted to keep the leaves red for you.

GIRL. I don't want you to do it for me. (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, pp. 11-12)

Whereas Girl is trying to cope up with her life in contemporary society in which assimilation seems to be required, Grandmother is making reference to faith and trust in indigenous cultural traditions. Faith is something invisible, but it is felt and alive inside as long as it is fully acknowledged. Girl must learn to develop and achieve

that faith in her Native cultural heritage in order to find the balance and strength to define her life and find herself. Girl's words reveal her alienation and isolated identity: "I already know I don't fit anywhere – I don't need to be reminded – I'm at your house, Grandma, with my sleeping bag and old truck – I don't have any place to go (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, p. 10).

In addition, it is very curious that despite the young protagonist's skepticism towards Native traditions, she turns to her grandmother and urges her to tell the story of Ahw'uste. Regardless of the fact that Girl has no place to settle, it is clear that she turns to Grandmother and oral Native traditions in her need to find herself. Therefore, it really seems that her interest in knowing the story of the mythological spiritual deer indicates her approach to Native cultural heritage.

In view of this situation, Grandmother finally reveals the story of the mythological spirit deer to her granddaughter and she finally succeeds in reintegrating her into her Native cultural values while she instills in her a noticeable pride as a Native woman (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, pp. 12-14). In addition, Grandmother also begins to realize that her spirit world had not always been that magical because it was clear that hard times had always been present: "Damned spirits. Didn't always help out. Let us have it rough sometimes. All my kids are gone. Run off. One of my daughters calls from Little Falls sometimes. Drunk. Drugged. They all have accidents. One got shot" (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, p. 17).

It really seems that Grandmother is becoming aware of the harsh reality that haunts indigenous peoples in contemporary America. It is the reality that the old Indian woman describes, but it is also the context that existed in her past. At the same time, it is possible to perceive and observe the faith and trust that Girl professes towards her Native cultural heritage after recovering her Indian identity. At the end of the play, the young girl finds herself alone looking for a job as she reminisces about her grandmother:

GIRL. So I told 'em at my first job interview – no, I hadn't worked that kind of machine – but I could learn. I told 'em at my second interview the same thing – I told 'em at the third – At the fourth I told 'em – My grandmother was a deer. I could see her change before my eyes. She caused stories to happen. That's how I knew she could be a deer. At the fifth I continued – I'm sewing my own red-deer dress. It's different than my grandma's. Mine is a dress of words. I see Ahw'uste also. At the rest of the interviews I started right in – Let me talk for you – that's what I can do. (*The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance*, 2002, p. 18)

Although at this point Grandmother is not alive anymore, her granddaughter remembers her presence through the oral Native tradition that she had instilled in her. In fact, it can be perceived that the famous mythological spiritual deer is now serving as a spiritual guide for Girl, as she manages to cope with her unemployment, whilst trusting, respecting and following Native traditions. Therefore, it can be concluded that both protagonists have reached a point of confluence and reconciliation between Native traditions (past) and white American culture (present): the old woman has managed to come out of her dreamy and magical spiritual world to realize the changes of the modern world and the girl has managed to reintegrate herself back into indigenous traditions. At the same time, Grandmother and Girl retain their Native identity and they reach a confluence that combines both their Native culture (from which they come) and white American society (within which they live and have to adapt). As Diyai & Muhammad (2018) point out, Grandmother and Girl finally get to a point in which they can bridge "the differences to live in one harmonic society" (p. 101).

Therefore, this reconciliation resolves the conflict between tradition (Native culture) and modernity (white domineering society) that had confronted the two protagonists all throughout the play. This synthesis or confluence between both cultures that Grandmother and Girl achieve at the end of the play can also be appreciated through contemporary Native theater itself (López Pérez, 2020). This makes reference to the fact that this literary genre contains traditional and distinctive elements of Native cultures, but it also has elements of Western culture. In other words, Native American theater plays simultaneously contain a strong oral and performative component, which comes from Native cultures and traditions, and a written component (narration/playwriting), which comes from Western white culture (López Pérez, 2019; López Pérez, 2020). In this sense, Grandmother's storytelling, traditionalism and spirituality can be considered as essential elements of traditional Indian oral theater, which basically consisted of multiple stories which were generally told, performed and acted out "with a close and direct communication between the storyteller or performer and the audience" (López Pérez & Benali Taouis, 2016, p. 94). In the case of Girl, her modern mentality, her struggle to survive and her walking into two worlds (Native and white) can be perceived as a clear component of contemporary Native theater. As Glancy (personal communication, 2007) explains, this confrontation "begins with the old world, which conflicts with the new, and looks for a healing or a bridge between the polarities" (p. 2). Thus, it is possible to perceive contemporary Native American theater as a literary genre which looks for "a bridge, connection or convergence between the polarities" (López Pérez, 2018, p. 23).



#### 4. Conclusions

As seen above, Gomez's *Inter-Tribal* and Glancy's *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance* deal with indigenous or mixed-blood characters who belong to different generations and whose lives revolve around Native traditions and the white domineering society. Both plays present a grandmother who is closely tied to Indian traditions and a granddaughter who struggles with the problems of modern day society. Although at first there are different confrontations and conflicts between the two, and therefore, between tradition (Native culture) and modernity (white society), at the end of the plays the conflicts lead to a reconciliation in which the characters recover or strengthen their Native identity while simultaneously adapting to the changes and customs imposed by white American society. In this sense, the characters in the theater plays achieve a synthesis or point of confluence between the Native and white world, without ever losing their identity as Indians.

At the same time, this reconciliation or point of confluence can also be perceived through contemporary Native American theater since it combines elements that belong to indigenous cultures (storytelling and performance) and elements which belong to the Western literary canon (playwriting). Therefore, this literary genre makes possible the creation of a bridge between Native and white culture which allows Indians to reconnect with their Native cultures whilst adapting to the changes and customs of white American society. In this sense, Native Americans would be closing a gap which began with the colonization and alienation of Native cultures and that they have been able to reconcile through contemporary American Indian theater.

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