

# Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way

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MONIQUE MOJICA

*L'auteure nous parle de sa vie de comédienne, de scénariste et d'artiste-performeuse pendant les deux dernières décennies. Depuis 1991 elle a collaboré avec d'autres à la recherche en laboratoire sur la performance afin d'arriver à comprendre comment faire consciemment ce qui se fait inconsciemment. Elle a enregistré en studio, a produit et peaufiné une méthodologie appelée Native Performance Culture. (Deux directeurs visionnaires m'ont énormément influencée, je parlerai d'eux plus tard) Puisant dans ses écrits sur 20 ans, l'auteure a marqué la trajectoire de sa transformation personnelle comme artiste et comme femme autochtone.*

I have been thinking for quite awhile about knowing and not knowing. What we know and *how* we know it. There's a saying in Spanish—*saber sabiendo*—literally “to know knowingly.” But it also carries the connotation of knowing the unknown, the intuitively known, or what we don't know that we know.

Most of the work that I have done over the past two decades reflects tapping this kind of knowing. I haven't always done it consciously and I haven't done it alone. Since 1991, I have collaborated with Floyd Favel and Muriel Miguel, among others, in performance research and laboratories searching out how to do consciously what we do uncon-

sciously. This work has resulted in studio investigations and produced performances that aim to identify and hone a methodology that Floyd has called Native Performance Culture. These two visionary directors have had an enormous influence on me and I will talk more about them later.

So, I have been doing this performance thing for a long time. It has been 50 years since I first started training (!), 27 years since I first worked with an all Native theatre company: *Indian Time Theater*, directed by Bruce King, out of the now defunct Native American Center for the Living Arts in Niagara Falls, New York. It has been 24 years since I moved to Toronto to be one of the early Artistic Directors of *Native Earth Performing Arts*. Those were the times just preceding the infamous “Native theatre explosion” in Toronto when our small circle included the Highway brothers, Tomson and René, Billy Merasty, Makka Kleist, Maariu Olsen, Gary Farmer, Shirley Cheechoo, Graham Greene, and Doris Linklater. Over the years, I have accumulated quite a bit of material. Some there is no record of; some is in the form of drafts lost on floppy discs that my computer can no longer read. Some drafts hide in my not so organized filing cabinet, and still others are scraps of paper folded into notebooks: fragments of

stories and notations of improvisations. As someone whose writing process includes doing laundry, making lists, and sifting through papers, I excavated some two-decade old writings, dusted them off, and had a look. What I found is that not only could I recognize recurring themes and imagery, but I could also trace a trajectory, a personal transformation as an artist and as an Aboriginal woman. This trajectory transforms amnesia through stories drawn from conscious memory, muscle memory, blood memory, then births organic texts, allowing me to emerge trusting the Indigenous knowledge encoded in my dreams, in my waking visions, and in my DNA.

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I have organized this chronologically so I am going to begin with some fragments from a writing exercise written during the development of *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1988), dramaturged by Djanet Sears. When I uncrinkled this and read it, it occurred to me that it contains many of the themes that I have worked with since and that it is something of a prophecy for my life's path.

*Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived in a stone cave, not entirely by herself—but almost. She lived that way, away from other people, because she was not entirely*

*invisible—but almost (maybe about half). It made other people very uncomfortable that they couldn't see the other half of her even though she referred to it often and insisted that it actually was there and that it would bleed if she scraped it, and even scab over and get well.*

*One day, the girl got tired of waiting in her stone cave for some one to believe her and she decided to leave. But she didn't know where she was going so she didn't know how to get there. So, she called to the spirit of heartbreak and sadness, the spirit of blood and rebellion, the spirit of back-breaking endurance, and the spirit of transformation to help her make a map.*

The part of the story that follows has been lost but this is the next recovered fragment:

*"Easy for you to say," said the girl, "but I only have one foot!"*

*"Ah, ahhh," said the Grandmother spirits, "but just because other people cannot see your other foot doesn't mean it doesn't make an imprint when you walk. One foot in front of the other. Follow your own path, which is ours."*

*So she did.*

This is how elements from this exercise appeared in the final *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* script:

CONTEMPORARY WOMAN NO. 1:

No map, no trail, no footprint,  
no way home; only darkness, a  
cold wind whistling by my ears.  
The only light comes from the  
stars.

Nowhere to set my feet.

No place to stand. (*rising*)

No map, no trail, no footprint,  
no way home.

*Sees basin of water; brings it to center.*

He said, "It's time for the women to pick up their medicine in order for the people to continue." (*washes hands, arms*)

She asked him, "What is the women's medicine?" The only answer he found was, "The women are the medicine, so we must heal the women.

*Washes from basin head, arms, legs, feet. Tiple theme begins.*

*Squatting over basin in a birthing position, she lifts a newborn*

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*from between her legs, holding baby in front of her, she rises.*

When I was born, the umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck and my face was blue.

When I was born, my mother turned me over to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine—the sign of Indian blood.

When my child was born, after counting the fingers and the toes, I turned it over to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine.

Even among the half-breeds, it's one of the last things to go. (19-20)

"No map, no trail, no footprint, no way home," is a refrain echoed by the character, Lady Rebecca, as Pocahontas was renamed when she was converted to Christianity and

then taken to England's Elizabethan court as an advertising gimmick. The theme of being lost in my motherland, finding no trail to follow because my grandmothers and great-grandmothers left no written records of themselves or their experiences, weaves through my early work. Narratives of wandering without a map, having forgotten my way, evolved to another recurring theme: memory /remembering/memorializing.

The following text fragment is from a writing exercise on "amnesia" from *Un(tit)led* (1993), a piece co-written with Djanet Sears and Kate Lushington that explored the borders and boundaries of race and women's friendship. It was presented by Nightwood Theatre as a workshop production, facilitated by Clarissa Chandler, animated by Bañuta Rubess and directed by Muriel Miguel, with a set designed by Teresa Przybylski.

#### Amnesia fragments

Amnesia.

Long nightmare hallways,  
lost, wandering.

Memory just slipped away.

All recognition of myself,

who I was or am or  
might be.

Where does the spirit of an amnesiac go to find refuge?

Does it hang around waiting to be recognized, brought home,

fed and warmed as the relatives on the other side do when we forget to acknowledge them?

Plastic Halloween costumes,  
remnants of some vague need for ritual,

walking in the night—  
not to wander

nor to play but to be fed—Day of the Dead.

Sacred time to eat,

to celebrate,

to consecrate,

to pacify,

to subdue.  
Smoke filled hollows of spaces  
long neglected needing  
to be filled and fulfilled  
with the brimming nurturing  
sustenance of food  
of flavors on the tongues  
of we who are we who are we  
who make fire,  
who plant,  
who hands in the cornmeal  
bless the masa dough  
facing East.

I forgot.  
I forgot the ant spray.  
I forgot where I've been.  
I forgot where I walked  
I forgot what it's like to walk  
on sand,  
to be in the ocean every-  
day,  
to sleep in a hammock,  
to wake at dawn and go with  
the other  
women in dugout canoes to the  
mainland  
to get water from the river in  
the forest.  
I forgot what it's like to climb  
coconut trees and  
to know the jaguar  
watches over us.  
I forgot to remember.

The following is the piece that was actually scripted from this exercise and presented. It began as a monologue that I wrote and then we broke it up and Djanet and Kate added some character-specific images.

### Forbidden Territory

MONIQUE: In this forbidden territory, the landscape itself is treacherous.  
DJANET: No Exit.  
MONIQUE: No entrance.  
KATE: No admittance.  
ALL: (whisper) Only, only us.  
MONIQUE: White lies in twisted words of "Discover America!" (singing) "See the USA in your Chevrolet!"

KATE: Poor Dinah.  
MONIQUE: Twisted words of nice hiding behind a Sunday school smile.  
DJANET: Sssh, it's a secret.  
KATE: (singing) "Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah."  
MONIQUE: I always thought that meant Dinah Shore.  
KATE: Poor Dinah.  
MONIQUE: In this treacherous landscape where we by our natures are forbidden.  
KATE: In secret we meet.  
DJANET: It's a secret manoeuvre.  
KATE: Sssh.  
MONIQUE: Covert operation. Undercover. Under wraps. Under the stars, under the cover of night.  
DJANET: Dinah never fooled me; I always knew she was Black.  
KATE: In the shadows, in the margins ...  
DJANET: ... our spines pressed flat against the wall, bellies pushed against our spines ...  
KATE: We gasp for breath to fortify us in our vigilance. Vigilance, unless I keep constant vigilance, I will forget everything.  
DJANET: ... like a flower, a Black Cosmos, pushing up through the concrete.  
KATE: I have forgotten who I am, I have forgotten who you are, I have forgotten why we are important to one another. The stars are going out inside my mind. I used to remember; how to dance, Pythagoras theorem, the capital of Australia.  
ALL: We who are we who are we who are we ... (continues under)  
DJANET: ... we who jump the borderline into this forbidden territory. Clandestine.  
KATE: Clandestine.  
MONIQUE: Clandestine mass graves—bones of my ancestors, bones of my ancestors, bones of my ancestors.

DJANET: (singing) "Dong dong bell, bodies in a well! Who put them in?"  
DJANET: Sssh, it's a secret.  
MONIQUE: The souls of amnesiac Indians on the land roam like trick-or-treaters on a Halloween night in the suburbs.  
DJANET: (singing) "See the USA in your Chevrolet!"  
MONIQUE: White lies fall apart, shattered into millions of metallic mirrored pieces only to reproduce as mutant thoughts in the bodies of our unborn children.  
KATE: Poor Dinah.  
DJANET: Incognito we advance. Masked, veiled, disguised and hidden.  
KATE: Subversive.  
MONIQUE: We meet with a password:  
ALL: Now!

The voice in the previous piece became a character I named Rebel-da. Here is Rebel-da's story:

*There once was a woman named Rebel-da. She has a plan. She has a memory. Rebel-da knows they will come knock on your door, take you away and kill you. Rebel-da knows they will burn your homes. Rebel-da has no time to cry. Rebel-da plans. Rebel-da makes allies. Rebel-da strategizes. Rebel-da will not be wiped out.*

*She carries memorized in code: a recipe for cornbread, a song for birthing babies while under fire. Propaganda in her hand and propagation on her mind. A baby on each hip and a weapon in her hand. Rebel-da has no time to cry. Rebel-da plans. Rebel-da makes allies. Rebel-da strategizes. Rebel-da will not be wiped out.*

*Like the coyotes, they haven't built a trap that will hold her. Like the raccoons, Rebel-da spreads her brood. Rebel-da steals. Rebel-da eats garbage. Rebel-da will not be wiped out.*

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Another one of the recurring images in my work is the bag of bones-

carrying girl/woman. A character I will refer to as Bag of Bones/Rebecca first appeared in an early Native Earth production, *Double Take/A Second Look* (1983), written by Billy Merasty, Gloria Miguel, Maariu Olsen, and myself and directed by Muriel Miguel. Rebelda is another aspect of the same character. In retrospect, they are both early versions of Esperanza, my massacre-collecting atrocity tour guide from Turtle Gals' *The Scrubbing Project* (2002 and 2005). My original inspiration for this character came from Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which I read for the first time at age sixteen. This is a passage from García Márquez's magical novel:

That Sunday, in fact, Rebecca arrived. She was only eleven years old.... Her entire baggage consisted of a small trunk, a little rocking chair with small hand-painted flowers, and a canvas sack which kept making a *cloc-cloc-cloc* sound, where she carried her parent's bones. (47)

I carried this bag of bones around for a long time—these “bones of my ancestors,” and with the bones, the history of Native women on this continent. The history of being the sexual commodities for the conquest, the stories from the female side of the colonization experience, were not being told in the course of the “Native theatre explosion.” I wanted to work with other Native women who felt the void and who had the courage to tell their own stories.

Jani Lauzon, Michelle St. John, and I first worked together in 1990 on the set of a CBC mini-series, *Conspiracy of Silence*. At that time, during pre-dawn conversations on the way to the set in sub-zero temperatures, we discovered a common interest in a theme that had left its mark on us all. Each of us had, or knew some one who had, tried to scrub off or bleach out her colour. These con-

versations and recognitions were the first seeds of *The Scrubbing Project*. It was not until nearly ten years later that we gathered to create the work.

In 1999 Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble was formed. Its founding members included Jani Lauzon, Michelle St. John, Sandra Laronde, and myself. For the first two workshop presentations in Nightwood Theatre's Groundswell and Native

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Earth's Weesageechak Begins to Dance, *The Scrubbing Project* was performed by a four-woman ensemble. By our second Groundswell presentation in 2000, we had become a trio.

In *The Scrubbing Project*, the Bag of Bones / Rebecca / Rebelda character was fully developed and her story expanded to include the massacre imagery that I had been working with since The Centre for Indigenous Theatre's residency at the Banff Centre in the winter of 1995. This was a program that Floyd Favel and I co-directed that included Muriel Miguel, Pura Fé, Michelle St. John, Archer Pechawis, Maariu Olsen, Jennifer Podemski, Alex Thompson, and others. There were several questions from this residency that carried over into the creation process of *The Scrubbing Project*. They were: 1) What are the consequences of creating art out of

atrocities? 2) Is there such a thing as internalized genocide? (If so, what does it look like?) A question from a subsequent research project on memorials I did with Floyd Favel was: How do we create memorials to the holocaust in the Americas? To which Turtle Gals added: 1) Once Native women have put down the bundles of grief and multi-generational trauma that we collectively carry—then what? And 2) How do we get from victim to victory?

*The Scrubbing Project* is a study of the manifestations of internalized racism and genocide. Esperanza, my Earthplane character is a persona formed from my deepest victimization. She carries with her at all times a bag of bones she recovered from a clandestine mass grave: bones that she scrubs, feeds and cares for. She also carries a bag filled with shoes she collected from massacre sites, which she treats as prayers and offerings, which the play's three characters transform into tobacco ties, to honour them—to memorialize.

Esperanza was further informed by this quotation from a document entitled *Guatemala: Memory of Silence: Conclusions and Recommendations* from the Report of the Commission for the Clarification of History (CEH) in 1999 (see Tomuschat). This is an excerpt of testimony made by a witness to the commission who arrived carrying human remains. I put these words in Esperanza's mouth:

It is very painful to carry them ... it's like carrying death ... I'm not going to bury them yet.... Yes, I want them to rest, I want to rest too, but I can't yet.... They are the proof of my declaration.... I'm not going to bury them yet, I want a paper that tells me “they killed them” ... and they had committed no crime, they were innocent. Then we will rest.

In contrast, my Starworld character, Winged Victory, was created

from my strongest vision of victory: the huge copper and bronze winged beings, round breasted and full in the thigh, who crown the tops of the triumphant neo-Greco/Roman statuary our colonizers have erected in order to commemorate *their* victories. She is also rooted to the knowledge that the Tule Revolution of 1925, led by Nele Kantule, and the Mayan uprising of 1994, led by the Zapatistas, are evidence that sometimes we get to win.

This is an excerpt from *The Scrubbing Project* where Esperanza crosses a threshold into a “Massacre Portal” and tells the story of the recovery of the bones. By the end of the story she cradles the bones in her arms and addresses them. When Turtle Gals performs this, there are pieces of text woven into the story and the character Ophelia’s “Passion Portal” unfolds out of the “Massacre Portal” like a kaleidoscope before its conclusion. Here, I’ve put the sections back together in order to read it as a whole.

### Massacre Portal

ESPERANZA: Crack! / Thud!  
Crack! / Thud!

*BRANDA tries to hang on to tradition. DOVE spirals down to Earthplane, back to OPHELIA.*

ESPERANZA: It’s that once you see you can’t ever pretend you don’t see.

And I see,  
I see the men lined up on one side, the women trembling on the other. I’ve never witnessed a massacre/I see them all the time.

I see the soldiers raise their rifles—

I see  
Skulls shatter  
I see  
Bodies fall:  
Friends  
Companions

Husband  
Crack! Thud! (x 2)  
I’ve never seen a body fall under the crack of  
Bullet splintering bone / I see them all the time  
And once you’ve seen, you can’t ever pretend you don’t see  
And I see ...  
ESP & OPH: Little rivulets of blood ...

ESPERANZA: ... soaked up by the thirsty earth.

ESP & OPH: All the colours of the rainbow ...

ESPERANZA: ... dried to a rusty brown crust.

I’ve never seen my relatives’ bodies piled on the blood soaked earth/I see them all the time.

Spit on blood fades the stain.

But once you’ve seen, you can’t ever pretend you don’t see and I see.

*(as she gathers up bones)*  
I will carry you, I will care for you, I will feed you, and I will sing you songs of comfort. I will wash away the dirt, and the ragged flecks of flesh and skin  
And you will be warm  
And you will be loved  
And I will build memory.

I am very grateful to the process that Turtle Gals went through diving headlong into the dark places of our victimization. The willingness to go there has allowed me to use those depths as a springboard—a trampoline that offers me the possibility of grounding myself in another place: a place where I cease to identify with my own victimization and no longer recognize my reflection as “the victim.”

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I would now like to talk about two veteran theatre directors whom I consider to be light-bearers in our movement. They have consistently held up a beacon, shed light on the path and given me a direc-

tion through their incredible vision. They are: Floyd Favel of Takwakin Performance Lab on the Poundmaker Reserve in Saskatchewan and my aunt, Muriel Miguel of Spiderwoman Theatre in New York City.

I will start with this equation that Floyd created, and although it is somewhat “tongue in cheek” and pseudo-scientific, I think it works.

Trad (social/ritual) x M = NpC

Or, Tradition, social or ritual x Methodology = Native Performance Culture.

Instead of trying to interpret what Floyd means, I will offer a quotation from an article he wrote called “The Shadowed Path”:

One of the ideas of Native Performance Culture is to search for accessible ritual and social structures that can act as a catalyst for creative action. I believe that there needs to be a bridge from a ritual and social action to the professional stage. Tradition needs to be filtered and transformed for the objective needs of the theatre. Without this bridge, theatre risks presenting “Artificial Trees” on stage. “Artificial Trees” is the superficial or clichéd presentation of ritual and social structures on the professional stage.”

In another article entitled “Was-kawewin,” published in 2005 for *Topoi*, an international philosophy journal published in the Netherlands, Floyd defines the concept of “Artificial Trees” this way:

to take the traditional sacred dance as it is and transplant this to the modern stage. This process I feel turns the dance into folklore, or an “artificial tree.” A tree cut off from its roots, a facsimile of culture and sacredness. (114)

He describes the methodology for Native Performance Culture he has

been searching for in these words: One would have to isolate the technical principles of the dance and use these as starting points for contemporary performance. What is meant by technical principles is: the position of the body to the earth, the relationship of the feet to the ground, the head to the sky, the different oppositions in the body, balance. It is the enigmatic relationship between these technical principles that create the dance. These enigmatic relationships are the shadow zone where ancestors and the unknown dwell, and this is where creativity is born, where the impulse is born.

In Japan, they call this the *Ma*, the pause between beats and notes. In my tradition, they say the ancestors dwell in the space between the dancers. (114)

One of the things that I love about Floyd is that he doesn't get stuck in his own dogma. He warns against his equation being applied as a formula, saying that each artist must work from his or her own equation. In a recent phone conversation he also said, "'Artificial trees' is its own valid form." And that is true. It is what my grandpa did performing Indian medicine shows—it is the "Lakota" commercial. Which provides the perfect segue to ... Spiderwoman Theater.

I have known Muriel Miguel all my life; she is my mother's youngest sister. I grew up watching her, my mother, Gloria Miguel and their older sister, Lisa Mayo, perform long before Spiderwoman Theater was founded. They are my lineage and I am proud of the precious gifts that I have inherited from them.

As the director that I have worked with most consistently over the past two decades, Muriel has truly been the one to mold the raw material of my writing into performances. This is how she describes what she does. It is from the director's notes from

*The Scrubbing Project* program.

As Indigenous people, we see all disciplines as interconnected, with roots in traditional forms of storytelling. As the artistic director of Spiderwoman Theater, I have, over the past 30 years been using a methodology called *storyweaving* to entwine stories and fragments of stories with words, music, song, film, dance and movement, thereby creating a production that is multi-layered and complex; an emotional, cultural and political tapestry.

I have been thinking about the way Muriel works when she directs. She helps generate materials, she dramaturgs that material and weaves it together in a way that is very intuitive—not at all an intellectual process. In fact, it is a mistake to even try to justify something to her intellectually. She will wave it away with her wrist and say, "That sounds very intellectual"—as if to also say, "I can't do anything with *that*, Dearie—you're going to have to go deeper." Muriel does not allow an actor/creator to stay in her head. Muriel works from that place of what is unconsciously known, intuitively known—*saber sabiendo*: to know knowingly. Nor is she satisfied for a piece of theatre to be one or two-dimensional when it could be three, six, nine or even twelve dimensional. And dynamics!—do not play her the same note!

Then I had a brain flash. Maybe it was just menopause, but I could see, I thought, what Muriel does. She makes *molos* out of theatre. *Molos* are her palette and her dramaturgical tool. *Molos*: the art of Kuna women.

*Molos* are the traditional textiles of the Kuna nation from the autonomous territory of Kuna Yala, in what is known as Panama. Kuna women are renowned for their skills in creating their designs and combining colour. Originally the de-

signs were painted and tattooed on our bodies. Kuna women wear two *mola* panels—front and back—sewn together to form blouses. Each *mola* tells a story. Each story is a layered narrative. When the women walk it is said, "We are walking stories." Kuna perception, Kuna cosmology, Kuna identity is encoded in the layers of our *molos*.

*Molos* are made by the combined techniques of reverse appliqué, appliqué and embroidery. They require several layers of fabric and the designs are cut out free-hand to allow the colours from the layers underneath to show through. Stitching the edges of the designs with the tiniest of stitches is the most fastidious part because it is what connects the layers. The *mola* gets thicker and thicker. Sometimes a corner will be torn apart and another colour or pattern of cloth will be inserted. Some areas will be built up with appliqué and details embroidered on. There are no even edges and although symmetry and duality are central principles, even two panels of the same blouse will not be exactly the same. Ironically, sewing machines were introduced to make Kuna women's work faster, a more economically sound enterprise. They did make the work faster but these *molos* are thin with square edges to their designs and inferior overall. It is possible to trace the design of a *mola* and reproduce its outline but it would lack the multi-dimensional layers of meaning that make it Kuna. I have never made a *mola*, neither has my mother nor my aunts, but we all grew up living with them, touching them, tracing their texture and designs, smelling them, sleeping on them and wearing them. It is this thickness, this multi-dimensional knowing applied from the principles of Kuna women's art, that I believe is my inheritance from Spiderwoman's theatrical methodology. And I want that thickness in my work.

I still have a *mola* that was my mother's since before I was born.

When I was very small I used to put in on to dance around our apartment. It was too long and fell almost to my knees; it would slip off my shoulders. I always wore it accompanied by a little red ballet tutu, and I would dance and create performances all by myself. I would spend hours dancing in my *mola* and red tutu to Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, Rimsky-Korsokov. I have not thought about that outfit in fifty years, but I can feel myself going back to where I began, only now with more experience and more information. *Saber sabiendo.*

In November 2007 I had the unique opportunity to try these ideas in a studio/laboratory setting starting from a clear premise and intent. *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* is a multidisciplinary collaboration among three senior artists; myself as writer/performer, Floyd Favel as director and Kuna visual artist Oswaldo (Achu) DeLeon Kantule as painter, design and cultural consultant. Our proposal was: 1) to collaboratively create a multidisciplinary live theatre piece that integrates traditional and contemporary art forms and incorporates visual imagery with text and performance, and 2) to build on a methodology of Native Performance Culture by applying principles and structures from traditional visual story narratives to script development. We also wanted to explore: a) how organically generated text and story narrative can support (not explain) the visual image and b) how a performer can embody the visual image such that it can be used as the framework for a narrative structure.

The first three days of the workshop process were spent looking at paintings from Achu's considerable body of work—stunning contemporary paintings rooted in the aesthetic of *mola* designs and pictographic writing. Then we poured through piles of *molos*, with Achu making us familiar with the principles in *mola* art from the most abstract (most traditional) to the most

representational or figurative (most modern). We studied the *molos*’ dissection of designs, their dualities, multiples of dualities and thematic abstractions. We then turned to the pictographic writings that notate the chants of the traditional Kuna healers and identified the literary structure of the chants: a repetition that builds through the accumulation of verbs—*dramatic action*.

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From these principles, rooted in an Indigenous cosmology, identity and aesthetic, we employed abstractions (a process Achu has been using in his paintings for some time) to create the beginnings of a form and a structure for *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*. We also used the Kuna principles of presenting image and story metaphorically as if through the smoke screen of *Chocolate Woman*'s smudge in order to protect its true meaning by encoding it.

We knew from the first improvisation “on my feet” that we were onto a process that worked; however, we were quite astonished when I was instructed by Floyd to notate that first improvisation using the process and my text emerged as pictographs written from right to left, then left to right.<sup>1</sup> We have now taken a first step towards developing a dramaturgy specific to an indigenous aes-

thetic and literary structure—in this case, one rooted in the principles of traditional Kuna visual art and literature. In Achu's words, “We are reclaiming cultural history.” What is more, this same model could be adapted and applied by an Ojibwe artist investigating the bark scrolls, an Inuit artist examining the syllabic writing system, a Pueblo artist looking at rock paintings or a Mayan artist deciphering the glyphs.

This collaboration also gave space to a discussion about the evolution of Floyd's “formula” for Native Performance Culture. He has grown away from the term “methodology” as connoting something too fixed and product-oriented. He now prefers to call the transformative journey to the stage (and back to our origins) simply “process.” So the “formula” now looks like this:

Tradition ⇔ Process ⇔ Performance.

It is a fluid, multi-directional continuum where the three elements all relate to each other in an equal manner.

Tracing the themes in my work over the past two decades has allowed me to see up close my trajectory from victim to victory. Returning to the fragment from the development of *Princess Pocahontas* noted at the beginning of this piece, I can say that today I am no longer willing to call to the “spirits of heartbreak and sadness, blood and rebellion, or back breaking endurance.” I spent a long time digging around in massacre imagery and now I must call out to other spirits because transformation *is* a continuum and I must conjure myself into another place on my map. My writings and the theatre I create from them are my offerings, my prayers, my healing chants, my history, my identity—my *molos*. This is what the stories in *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* are about.

*Siagua*, cacao beans, are what chocolate is made from. In the

central part of the Americas (from Mexico south) they are very important. They are used as currency, they are burned as smudge to purify, pray and heal and they are an important part of the traditional diet. *Siagua*. Without it many Kuna have developed diabetes and high blood pressure. I have started eating these beans. In Kuna culture all the medicines are women, so *siagua* is referred to as Cacao Woman—*Puna Siagua*. Intrigued by the yummy image of a chocolate woman I began calling to Cacao Woman just as *Ixquic*, Blood Woman from the Mayan creation story, did when, bereft and alone, she cried out for help. This title piece of a new multidisciplinary collaboration evolved, in part, from a dream I had about ten years ago.

### Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way

An invocation

In this time when my blood is held inside,  
the cries of my dolphin children are carried farther out to sea into the arms of  
*Muu Bili*, Grandmother Ocean.

Now that my blood is held inside,

Purified by the smoke of Red Cacao Woman's beads—*siagua*—here on *Abya Yala* Land of Blood.

*Puna Siagua, Siagua kinnit!*

*Be an anwe be sagua waale waaletgine*

*Wrap me in the arms of your purifying smoke*

\*

*Olowaili*, the morning star is the sister of the sun.

My grandfather whose broad chest was tattooed with an eagle's wingspan open full, saw *Olowaili* fall to earth over New York harbour and named

me for her.

*Olowaili*, swirl and dance!

Spiral and place your feet in mine!

Fill my belly with starlight!

*Olowaili guile birya birya!*

*Be nak odoe an nakine!*

*Be an saban enoge nizgana gual-lu gine*

\*

In heavy chocolate dreams I swim to shore

I am naked as the warm turquoise water breaks over my face.

I can see the shoreline. There are houses made from cane stalks lashed together

their palm-thatched roofs hang low.

Swaying and rebounding in the sea breeze are the palms themselves.

The beach burns brilliant.

Sand blinding white. *Kuna Yala!*

I stand and walk out of the sea. Salt water slides off my naked skin.

Against the starkness of the sand there are *molas* neatly laid out.

A blanket of red layered and encoded with meaning.

To my left, a few steps away from the *molas*, stands a beautiful young woman.

She wears the clothes of *Kuna* women: a red *mola* blouse, sarong skirt, a red and gold headscarf, *winis*—beads wrapped tightly around her wrists almost to the elbow, adorning her ankles almost to the knee, a gold nose-ring and a gold necklace that falls over her entire chest like a breast-plate. A delicate line of blue-black paint traces the centerline of her nose. Her round cheeks are shiny with moisture and stained *achiote* red. Her black hair cropped short frames her face. There is

something on her head like ... a golden bowl whose sides undulate in constant motion.

She is smiling. Smiling at me. Her arms outstretched, fingers spread wide. She shows me her *molas*, neatly arranged in rows on the sand. She is proud of her work. She begins to spin and spin and spin. Faster and faster.

*Olowaili, guile birya birya!*

*Be nak odoe an nakine!*

*Be an saban enoge nizgana gual-lu gine*

*Puna Siagua! Siagua kinnit!*

*Be an anwe be sagua waale waaletgine*

Let my smile mirror the spinning girl on the beach!

\*

Full moon hangs low over the Ocean.

It is December. The air is humid and night cocoons the narrow thread of highway. Sugarcane fields whip past.

Shards of moonlight like fragments of broken disco ball bob in the black water—laying a path of stars to the Milky Way—*negaduu*.

If I could place my feet upon those stars like stepping stones, I would follow them to visit my ancestors. And we would drink cacao—*siagua* mixed with ground, roasted corn from gourds. We would smack our lips; wipe our mouths on the backs of our hands and talk. Wouldn't we talk! *Tegi!*

I, too, am a granddaughter fallen from the stars

I call to Sky Woman: send me your courage!

The courage of the valiant Morning Star, *Olowaili*, when she rises each morning to greet her brother, *Ibeler*, the sun, at daybreak

And there, for some moments, we hang in the liquid pigment of a watercolour sky.

*This essay is a revised version of two oral presentations, the first offered at the Distinguished Lecture Series, University of Toronto, in January 2006, and the second at the Honouring Spiderwoman Conference, Native American Women Playwrights Archive, Miami University, in February 2007. It was revised and updated in January 2008. An earlier version will appear in a forthcoming volume of essays on North American Native performance, edited by Steve Wilmer, to be published by Arizona University Press.*

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*Monique Mojica is an actor and published playwright from the Kuna and Rappahannock nations. Based in Toronto since 1983, she began training at the age of three and belongs to the second generation spun directly from the web of New York's Spiderwoman Theater. Her play "Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots" was produced by Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille in 1990, on radio by CBC and published by Women's Press in 1991. She is the co-editor, with Ric Knowles, of Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English, Vols. I & II, published by Playwrights Canada Press. Monique is a long-time collaborator with Floyd Favel on various research and performance projects investigating Native Performance Culture. Theatre credits include premieres of: "The Rez Sisters" (Native Earth), "Red River" (Crow's Theatre) "The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God" (Nightwood Theatre)*

*Obsidian/Mirvish) and "Home Is My Road" (Factory Theatre) as well as the one-woman show, "Governor of the Dew" by Floyd Favel (NAC/ Globe Theatre) Monique received a Best Supporting Actress nomination from the First Americans in the Arts for her role as Grandma Builds-the-Fire in Sherman Alexie's film Smoke Signals. She is a co-founder of Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble with whom she co-created "The Scrubbing Project" and "The Triple Truth." She was the Artist in Residence for American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois in Spring 2008 and her upcoming projects include "Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way," a new interdisciplinary collaboration with Floyd Favel and visual artist Oswald DeLeon Kantule. She continues to explore art as healing, as an act of reclaiming historical/cultural memory and as an act of resistance.*

<sup>1</sup>For much of the public reading of this work-in-progress presentation my text was read from pictographs.

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