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I AM INDIGENOUS TO MY BODY:

Indigenous Feminism & Resurgence of the Matrilineal Body, Honouring Blood Tides, a performance by Santee Smith

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Introduction

“When we bleed we retreat into ceremony, coming into union with our matrilineal lines. Our blood assures the continuation of our Tribal Nations. Our blood is a ritual of purification and renewal. Through the blood we shed the trauma of our colonial histories and activate our ancient relationships with female deities of the earth, water, winds, fire and sky. We call them all in through Blood Tides, waking the sacred teachings that will feed our spirits and return us to wholeness. Women are the cradle of the generations, the temple of humanity, the first territory.

When we heal and empower ourselves we liberate the people”- Ngāhuia Murphy - Cultural Advisor for *BloodTides* (Aotearoa)

Blood Tides was artistically directed, produced and performed by Kanyen’kehaka (Mohawk) dance artist, Santee Smith Six Nation, along with dance artists: Marina Acevedo, Jahra ‘Rager’ Wasasala, and Julianne Blackbird. The artistic and cultural exchange was between Turtle Island (Six Nations), Aotearoa and Mexico, featuring Nations: Kahnyen’kehāka (Mohawk), Fijian, Māori, Zapoteca, Guna, Rappahannock, Omushkego Cree, Metis (Cree), Tuscarora, Taino, Kickapoo and among other non-Indigenous collaborators (Kaha:wi Dance). *Blood Tides*, created and inspired by ancient Maori cosmological stories, ceremonies, and traditional practices regarding menstruation in pre-colonial Māori society, evokes the following two questions: What themes emerge from the performance *Blood Tides*, and how do they interconnect with the theoretical framework of Indigenous epistemologies? How do the methodologies of Indigenous Feminism, Indigenous Resurgence, enhance and deepen my understanding of *Blood Tides*?

Blood Tides will be analyzed through the theoretical framework of Indigenous epistemologies, thereby expanding a deeper understanding of Indigenous performance. The themes I created out of *Blood Tides* are: *Indigenous Epistemologies in Performance, Ceremony & Ritual in Performance, Indigenous Feminism & Performance, Land, Water, Wellness & Women, Indigenous Resurgence in Performance*, which emphasize how this Indigenous performance expresses the methodologies of: Indigenous Resurgence, Indigenous Feminism, and Embodiment

as revitalization of ancestral knowledge through traditional and contemporary dance and movement practices. Conveying the resurgence of matrilineal ancient rituals, and the embodiment of understanding of this wisdom, *Blood Tides* contributes to healing of Indigenous women as a result of the historical violence directed towards Indigenous women's bodies, minds and hearts, embodied as they are in women's traditional ceremonies and rituals, by empowering women, to understand and reclaim their political and social power in society.

I Am Indigenous to My Body, is inspired by the Fijian dancer of *Blood Tides*, Jahra 'Rager' Wasasala. In a Ted X Talks episode entitled *Exploring Identity Through Form*, Jahra describes her body "as a sight of exploration and physical ritual, which uses movement to channel different thoughts, symbols and, ideas, and uses choreographical tools found in contemporary dance technique, and manipulation of the English language through poetry". Jahra does so for the purpose of discovering an "intangible hybrid language", which is connected to ancestral memory. Jahra strongly states that her body "is the land that I was Indigenous to first, here, I found another way home, here, I have been able to answer the call of my ancestors, and here, is somewhere where I will always belong" (Jahra, TEDx Auckland, 2018). As the Indigenous theatre maker Jani Lauzon states "Our bodies are our books" (Nolan, Knowles p.92)

Indigenous Research Paradigm: Indigenous Epistemologies

Contextualizing research through an Indigenous Epistemologies paradigm allows for many entry points of inquiry and culturally grounds the research. Indigenous epistemologies are born from relational knowing, both inner and outer space, coming from a multitude of sources, such as: Indigenous teachings, observation, relational aesthetics, body and mental memory and intuition. It is important to note that Indigenous epistemologies allow for a space of inquiry that acknowledges place, territory, language, and emphasizes principles of respect and reciprocity. Margaret Kovach, states in *Indigenous Research Methodologies* that, "Descriptive words associated with Indigenous epistemologies include interactional and interrelation, broad-based, whole, inclusive, animate, cyclical, fluid, and spiritual. Tribal knowledge is pragmatic and ceremonial, physical and metaphysical" (Kovach 56).

Jill Carter, an Indigenous theatre practitioner and scholar writes in her article, *Sovereign Proclamation Of The Twenty- First Century: Scripting Survivance Through The Language Of Soft Power* in relation to Indigenous epistemologies and creation stories, she states "These stories contain the spiritual mandates, histories, cultural practices, mores, ethical principles, and knowledge systems of the people. As they have been passed down from oral performance from generation to generation, they have evolved as the land has evolved and have grown with each new happening that affects the people" (Nolan & Knowles 34). Creation stories "set the 'theoretical framework', or give us the ontological context from which we can interpret other stories, teachings, and experiences" (Nolan & Knowles 34).

Honouring the sacred tribal epistemologies of all women involved in creating *Blood Tides*, the performers were engaged in a resurgent process of revitalizing ancient cultural knowledge, and using that process to inform the creative work. The importance of following protocols is critical in maintaining harmony between different nation to nation relationships and dynamics.

Indigenous performance viewed through the lens of Indigenous epistemologies, includes creation stories, cosmological and ancient. An Indigenous scholar, Jeannette Armstrong wrote a book titled *Reconstructing Haudenosaunee Cultural Memory*, and she states, “We need only to look to our cosmology and feel the essence of woman as a constant thread throughout our creation story. Beginning with the ordeal of Sky Woman and her journey from the Sky World. The creation story deeply reflects respect for the feminine; Earth as our mother is always in a state of fertility giving forth the abundance of life to nourish us” (Rodriguez 55).

Since *Blood Tides* is culturally rooted and deeply inspired by Maori tribal knowledge, it is critical to acknowledge the influences and sources of research, in particular to the territory of which the knowledge comes from. In an interview by DanceWorks with Santee Smith (Santee) on *Research, Collaboration, and Creation*, Santee states “The title is representative of the cycling of feminine powers from our blood waters, and cosmic connection to Moon energies that regulate the waters of the Mother Earth and womb. I conducted quite a bit of research development with Ngāhuia Murphy in Aotearoa. Her book, *Te Awa Atua – Menstruation in a Pre-colonial Māori World* was a huge inspiration and exactly what I was interested in for the triptych series. It was through this that the title was realized” (DanceWorks 2019). Kovach writes about Indigenous epistemologies in relation to interrelated web of knowledge, “because of the interconnection between all entities, seeking this information ought not to be extractive but reciprocal, to ensure an ecological and cosmological balance” (Kovach 57).

Blood Tides acknowledges paradigms from both an Indigenous perspective from Turtle Island, and one from Aotearoa. This performance expresses cultural resurgence through creation production. It introduces Indigenous epistemologies into contemporary society, which includes dance theatre and the performing arts and contributes to a holistic approach to how we come to understand Indigenous performance, body, land and ceremony.

Intercultural Performance

Blood Tides has a strong inter-cultural aspect to the conception, creation, and dissemination process as it is inspired by Māori cosmological stories, ceremonies, and traditional practices regarding menstruation in pre-colonial Māori society. In an interview about Santee’s creation process of *Blood Tides*, she states “My approach to performance is from a Konkwehon:we Indigenous women’s lens which is very similar to a Mana Wahine stance. My process is interdisciplinary, multi-dimensional, intergenerational and intercultural. It spans ancestry to futurity, holding past, present, and future in one space, experience, and body. It privileges Indigenous voices and bodies and advocates for works that re-claim, re-construct, re-story, and honor our epistemologies” (*The Pantograph*, Smith, 2017).

All performers involved in *Blood Tides* carry with them their own traditional knowledge and practices of acknowledging space and place both internally, externally and outwards to the land. I will be using both traditional ancient epistemologies from both Santee’s Iroquoian ancestry and the cultural advisor from Aotearoa, New Zealand Ngahuia Murphy’s research on ancient

menstruation practices and rituals pre – contact, to expand *Blood Tides* in relation to its meaning, significance and purpose.

Sacred Space in Indigenous Performance

As the audience enters into the dim light of the theatre, they enter into the space of the divine feminine, a sacred space. Here, women have been remembered, honored, and most importantly, witnessed. It is in this place of sacredness, where *Blood Tides* has been birthed. Indigenous artists who engage in ritual and ceremony are keenly aware of the importance of creating sacred space. In an interview with Santee Smith about how to acknowledge sacred space in performance, she states “I am alive, I am here, there is a presence greater than me, and I am part of it. The seed center of creativity rests in my pelvis, the axis of my being, is timeless” (Smith 2016). These emerge from an Indigenous practice of preparation of sacred space, which embrace multiple energies of interconnectedness, spiritual cohesion, and a deep knowing that we are all equal- we are all related. Indigenous characteristics to creating sacred space for ceremonial performance are two- fold, “the concept of linear time- time that may be viewed cyclically from one perspective and eternally from another” and “the concept of dimensionless sacred place, the center of the universe and the locative counterpart of the ever- present time” (Geiogamah, Darby p. 70). These characteristics are in direct alignment with Indigenous epistemological understandings of holism embedded within Indigenous performance. I am Indigenous to my body, is about Indigenous women’s bodies being sacred. *Blood Tides* is an example of Indigenous women’s remembering their connections back to the ancestral traditions, by performatively intervening articulations of reclamation through dance theatre.

Entering into this multi-dimensional set, is a large projection shaped as a circle that symbolizes the birth canal of the female body within which, sacred shape is a video projection of rippling deep blue water. The water creates a mesmerizing, hypnotic, and spiritual experience. There are four large Iroquois clay pots that are seated in the foreground of the stage. They sit on a long piece of red fabric, which symbolizes menstrual blood. Ngahuaia Murphy, the cultural advisor for *Blood Tides* states, “Menstrual blood symbolises this power of creation and destruction, for whilst it is a sign of fertility, it also signals the failed attempt of a tipuna to be conceived (A. Greensill cited in August, 2004; Norman, 1992). The set represents the threshold, the womb, a portal between the ancestors, spiritual entities, and our human experience in this life. The interconnectedness between water and earth emphasize the connection of father sky and Mother Earth, the blood representing lineage, blood-memory - and the continuation of Indigenous life and living.

There are long sticks protruding upward into the sky, moving alongside the stage in a diagonal, shifting the focus back to the center, to the womb. The set design for *BloodTides* challenges the notion that Indigenous peoples who are represented on stage with natural elements are

romanticized as being the noble savage, one with nature. These beliefs have created a simplistic interpretation of the complexity of Indigenous interrelationships with others, and the earth, perpetuating inferiority towards Indigenous bodies. Bringing forth a theory of cultural ecology, we can expand our understanding of land into a theatrical dimension. Birgit Dawes is a cultural ecologist and states in her article *Heteroholistic Environments in Plays by Marie Clements and Yvette Nolan*, “cultural ecology serves as a framework to understand the ways in which cultural specific narratives (in this case, by Indigenous playwrights) creatively interact with their North American environments: not only textually and performatively representing their coordinates (of space, time, land, territory, cosmos, or nature), but dynamically (re)constructing them; seismographically registering imbalance within their cultural systems, and counteracting upon them” (Dawes, Maufort p.26). *Blood Tides* in its entirety is about re-centering Indigenous epistemologies in relationship to women’s rituals and practices, thus the ceremony begins.

Ceremony & Ritual in Performance

A soundscape enters into the space, layering sounds that mimic different cultural noises, yelps, and screams. The yelling is an awakening, invigorating the space with possibility, insinuating to the audience to pay attention; Ngahuaia Murphy states that, “One cultural expression of this energy is the ancient women’s ritual art of karanga (a high-pitched call) where kaikaranga (women who perform the call) stand upon the threshold between the worlds, calling the dead to unite with the living” (N. Dixon, personal communication, 8 November, 2009; A. Yates- Smith, personal communication, 8 November, 2009) (Murphy 24).

The women begin to smash their sticks onto stage floor, shaking up the energy of the space. They swirl their long sticks up into the heavens, seeming to connect with energies in the sky, the women’s voices begin to call and respond. The interweaving and connection between the women’s bodies, minds, and spirits amplifys the inter-cultural relationships to one another. All performers are calling from their ancestral voices, calling out to each other and to the sky-world, giving reverence to the women on stage, the women in the audience, and to the ancestors, supernatural beings, and to the ones still lost, never fully entering into the circle of ceremony.

Women have gathered together to be in ceremony and practice culture for millennia. It is critical, when speaking of Indigenous efforts to preserve culture, to keep in mind that “until 1978 many Native Americans were forbidden from teaching their culture and languages in schools or even from practicing ceremonies” (Rodriguez 2). This was also true of potlatching, which is a ceremony done by the west coast Indigenous peoples of British Columbia. “In 1884, amendments were made to Canada’s Indian Act to officially ban the potlatch and to prosecute those taking part or aiding in the ceremony—amendments that consolidated the power to prosecute, judge, and act as jury to a single individual, the Indian agent. The ban dictated that: Every Indian or other person who engages or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the “Potlatch” or in the Indian dance known as the “Tamanawas” is guilty of a misdemeanor, and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months ...; and every Indian or persons who encourages ... an Indian to get up such a festival ... shall be liable to the same punishment” (Hopkins 1). “Soul theft is a terrible crime” (Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* 204). And it is necessary for Indigenous peoples to invests much vigour in the reclamation, protection,

and assertion of those spirit – guided, internal mechanisms that direct our behavior toward each other as we do in the reclamation of our sacred bundles, ancestral remains, repressed languages and cultural practices, and traditional lands” (Nolan & Knowles 37).

It is important to acknowledge that the ceremony on stage is not a replicated version taken from its original ceremonial context, and rather, the rituals becomes a process for creating innovative, new material, and expressions that resonates and coincide with contemporary times. Indigenous ceremonial elements and creating the sacred conditions for the performers, audience and environment, which evokes emotional feelings, helps to locate oneself, to place self in a ceremonial environment is to be connected and attached. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Draby write in their book *American Indian Performing Arts: Critical Directions*, “a spiritual umbilical attachment that can connect you to the tribal past, to the ceremonial history, to your sense of Indian – ness. All of the carefully constructed integration work of the ceremonial performance director begins to coalesce at this point, and you will hopefully respond appropriately to activate the energy of the ceremony and become an integral part of it” (Geiogamah & Darby 108)

Together with, Indigenous resilience, self- determination and resurgence become critical factors which provide Indigenous peoples with a pathway to move onward with their cultural customs and traditions against all forms of governmental genocide, legislation and discrimination. *Blood Tides* directly addresses this injustice of illegalizing Indigenous ceremonies throughout history, and reclaims rituals in relation to menstrual practices, and expresses those ideologies on stage through performative dance.

Indigenous Feminism & Performance

Throughout colonial history the call of Indigenous women has been silenced - and Santee’s *Blood Tides* awakens in this dead silence, in which lies are the forgotten reports, the unresolved murders, the girls and women gone missing and never to be found, and the undocumented sexual violations, racist actions and discriminatory experiences- all silenced. The *2019 Final Report of the National Inquiry into the Murdered and Missing Indigenous women and Girls*, the greater Canadian population is now being informed about what Indigenous peoples have known all along: Indigenous women have, and are being murdered and going missing at 3 more times the national average (Baskin 2020).

Santee is left alone, while taking center stage, and continues to swirl her lighting rod into the heavens. Her presence alone on stage reflects strength, beauty, and purpose; contrast to how mainstream theatre, film and media has created negative and disempowered stereotypes of Indigenous women. The oppression, sexualization, and exploitation of female representation within mainstream society has been consistent over time, disregarding the rich cultural existence Indigenous women have maintained through traditional knowledge, social roles and power.

Cyndy Baskin, a scholar in the school of social work at Ryerson University writes in her article entitled *Contemporary Indigenous Women’s Roles: Traditional Teachings or Internalized Colonialism?* States that, “Demeaning, anti- Indigenous, sexist stereotypes that lead to violence are seen in many places across Canada”, she further explains college campuses as a site of

exploitation, when it comes to dressing up for Halloween as a sexy Pocahontas. These racist actions perpetuate the dehumanization and the misrepresentation of Indigenous identities, and promote more serious forms of violence towards Indigenous women. *Blood Tides* works through these misrepresentational images, while dismantling negative stereotypes of Indigenous women, through exposing the authentic truth of the diversity, power and respect Indigenous women represent both politically and socially. Baskin also defines colonization “as the processes by which Indigenous Peoples were dispossessed of their lands and resources, subjected to external control, and targeted for assimilation and, in some cases, extermination” (Baskin 2020). It is in this colonized history that Indigenous women have been eradicated, their souls cut from their umbilical cords, to lose their compass in life - the great spirit. It is critical to know about this history when witnessing *Blood Tides*, so Canadian society can acknowledge the significance of Indigenous performance that brings about issues of oppression, social injustice and colonization upon Indigenous bodies. *Blood Tides* becomes the salve of this traumatic past, and works in the present to mend and heal future generations, and expands to a global Indigenous healing – through ceremony and performance.

Santee continues to reach with her lighting rod towards the other two dancers to join her, assembling together as they synchronize their individual choreography into a group dance in communion with sky world. Just as Santee has gathered the women of *Blood Tides*, Indigenous feminist scholars are gathering in institutions to further investigate and explore impacts of colonialism on Indigenous women’s lives. Indigenous feminism has not been easily adopted by Indigenous scholars within and outside the institution. Indigenous feminism has “routinely been denigrated as untraditional, inauthentic, non-liberatory for Indigenous women and illegitimate as an ideological position, political analysis and organizational process” (Green 3). However, powerful, theoretical informed and politically potent leading female Indigenous scholars, such as; Lee Maracle, Kim Anderson, and Joyce Green are making “space for more work about Indigenous feminism, and for explicitly feminist Indigenous voices. That space has produced better analysis of the conditions that affect women’s lives, in particular, of colonialism and violence that attends it” (Green 1). Colonization is a leading factor for the inequality, and deep rooted oppression felt by Indigenous women, aligning political goals with social movements that honour the human rights of Indigenous women and women of color is essential in understanding the purpose of Indigenous feminism: “moreover, there has been a rise in critical feminist post-colonial and anti – racist writing that frames Canada as a colonial settler state infused with racist conceptions about Indigenous Peoples (Green 3).

Blood Tides is an example of how “Indigenous feminism educates movements unfamiliar with issues of colonization, racism, and sexism, and builds critical political consciousness and solidarity, contributing to justice struggles” (Green 16). Thus, the inter – cultural dancers of *Blood Tides* counter act these disempowered, misrepresented imagery of Indigenous women and reclaim, and assert their bodies as sacred, whole, and empowered.

Land, Water, Wellness & Women

Emerging from the womb, is a younger woman carrying a clay pot. She enters into the sacred space from the womb, and begins to witness the other women connecting to the sky world. The projection and sound changes into a loud, abrupt noise, paired with the fragments of broken pottery depicted on the screen. The women begin to gather, and embrace the young girl sitting by her clay pot. Her emergence into *Blood Tides*, represents the emergence of younger generations coming into the world, and the responsibility of the older generations to transmit the rituals and knowledge, for the purpose of carrying on these traditions that keep the mind, body and heart centered. Soft, gentle music comes into the space, and a contemporary iteration of the Mohawk language mixed with water sounds, and natural elements. The translation of the words is “I am thankful for the water, thank you creator, thank you”. The choreography expresses movements that replicate water, cleansing, sensuality, all while teaching the young girl who’s learning to embody the ancient teachings of water, ceremony, and its relevancy to women’s bodies and wellness.

Erynne Gilpin, a graduate PHD student from the Indigenous governance program at the University of Victoria, BC, writes in her dissertation “wellness of our peoples depends on the wellness of the Lands and Waters. Wellness depends on meaningful and consensual relationships to the Lands and Waters that raise us and our families. Despite ongoing colonial violence enacted upon Indigenous territories and waters (*consensual extractive industries - pipe-lines, fish-farms, tanker traffic and mono-culture agriculture*), our bodies (*structural racism within distal spheres of public health, removal of Indigenous woman from positions of authority*) and our spirits (*euro-centric dominant, capitalistic, settler-state values systems which prioritize self-interest, lateral violence, competition, merit and individualism*), Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and around the world are reclaiming culturally-grounded embodiments of wellness, healing and governance. We reclaim kinship to one another by reclaiming our kinship to the Land and Waters” (Gilpin 1). We witness in *Blood Tides* a resurgence of ritual, gathering in ceremony, and resurging rites of passage. It is within Indigenous rites of passage, that solidify the inter-generational transmission of ancient knowledge and prepare young women to enter into their journey, feeling loved, protected, and sense of belonging.

Jeanette Rodriguez, a mestiza professor of Theology and Religious Studies at Seattle University did an ethnographic methods and participatory observation, interviewing and recording oral history of an Iroquois Mohawk Bear Clan Mother from Akwesasne reservation, named Wakerahkats:teh. Wakerahkats:the is responsible for doing the Crossover Ceremonies, in particular the rituals for young women. She opens this ritual with a few remarks “As we begin to swim in the of female consciousness, we state our intentions clearly, and in the coming days we will project our reality to become what we have announced it to be. Our intentions for our daughters are to bestow moon time teachings upon them that will call them to new levels of responsibilities and accountability as they grow into womanhood. The wisdom of our grandmothers knew that coming into womanhood had to be a guided journey. We are co-creating a monumental event, and as we experienced the pain of its birth, we will push it forth to be lived reality. In its conception we will reach back to heal past wounds while looking ahead to bring

forth a new vision. In the timeless space of ceremony, everything becomes possible as we rescue the fragmented pieces of our culture” (Rodriguez 67).

These rites of passage are being revitalized within many Indigenous communities. It is critical in the effort of cultural resurgence to maintain connection to territorial teachings. There is no separation between Indigenous peoples, land, and waters. Emphasized within the artist, activist, and scholarly field, it has become a mantra that “Violence towards the land is violence toward the women” (Baskin 2012). Baskin further explains that Indigenous women are caretakers of the water, and “are inherently connected to the land they live on”, and “water is like the blood that runs through women’s veins. Celebratory ceremonies for women are about the connection of women to the full moon and menstruation. Due to these connections, disrespect toward Indigenous women and the earth are intertwined” (Baskin 2012).

Blood Tides expresses the intuitive powers of the feminine, re-balancing the patriarchal violence to the land and bodies of Indigenous territories. Performing ancient rituals on stage informs the audience of their own connection or disconnection from land and place.

Indigenous Resurgence in Performance

The young woman in ceremony in becoming take center stage, all women exit. A loud knocking transitions the gentle water scene into a moment of disarray. Santee and the other dancers grab their weapons and surround the young women. Her face is covered with a black scarf, and she dances to the sound of an erratic piano and the vocals of Indigenous phonetic sounds. She is dancing into becoming an embodied- women, enriched with the resurgence of her ancestors.

Indigenous resurgence implies a process of renewal, regeneration, and reclamation within the Indigenous context. Gina Starblanket, an Indigenous scholar from the Star Blanket Cree nation, defines and examines three aspects of Indigenous resurgence in her article *Being Indigenous Feminist: Resurgence Against Contemporary Patriarchy*. “First, I consider its temporal dimensions, which looks at the way in which the discourse of resurgence invokes the past to inform our present and future- oriented theorizations; second, I explore the grounded or land-based dimensions of resurgence, third, I examine the “everyday” characters of resurgence, which broaden the focus of political efforts from large- scale, long- term focus of change to include those acts that takes place within our daily relations and interactions” (Green 24). Therefore, Indigenous resurgence is critical in the revitalization of women’s roles within community, re-establishing their rightful positions as leaders.

Santee Smith speaks about Indigenous resurgence through her creative practice by saying in an interview “I connect with collaborators through my Indigenous arts and dance networks. From the beginning, I was seeking Indigenous womyn artists, academics and activists working to restore sacred feminine and pre- colonial knowledges of womyn. I basically sought out womyn who question and challenge the status quo and patriarchal systemic beliefs regarding the diminishment of her power and position. It was also important for to work inter-generationally as

Blood Tides supports womyn from teens to sixties – womyn in all her of seasons are acknowledged” (DanceWorks, 2018).

The last scenes of *Blood Tides* bring the ceremony into closure. The young woman takes out a long stream of red fabric from her clay pot, it is the moment that celebrates her blood line. The video projection transforms into an image of weaving. Interweaving all the knowledge shared, gifted, and nourished through the ceremony of *Blood Tides*. The women conjure, rejoice and embrace the *Blood Tides* through dance, and song. The red fabric transforms into a red river, as the women dance and celebrate the regeneration, renewal and ritual of the young women’s journey into her sacred body, into her sacred vessel. The young woman wraps her precious blood line back into her pot, and all women form a line. This last image is a representation of the resiliency, strength and power of Indigenous women, their survivance through colonialism, patriarchy, and discrimination. The audience is left with a choice of perpetuating old stereotypes of Indigenous women, continue to be complicit in the injustices that continue to oppress Indigenous women, or have become open, receptive, and in honour of spiritual healing, and powerful leadership inherently embodied in Indigenous women.

Blood Tides expresses the resurgent power of female collectivity, as it relates to the traditional roles played in matrilineal communities such as in Iroquois traditions. Kahente Horn- Miller, a Kanienkehaka scholar from my community of Kahnawake writes in her article *Otiyaner: The ‘Women’s path’ through Colonialism*, she writes that “Haudenosaunee women had well-defined and important economic, social, political and spiritual roles in traditional society. The central nature of women’s roles is reflected in the record of the Kaianerekowa or Great Law of Peace, known to the Iroquois Confederacy. For example, Wampum (law) forty- four of the Kaianerekowa states – “The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the Progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of their mothers” (Horn- Miller 58). It is within these traditional matrilineal systems of knowledge and responsibility where Indigenous women’s power lies, and rightful place to be part of the social and political structures that they belong to.

Conclusion

Indigenous women’s bodies, as sacred sites of memory, archives, knowledge and wisdom, is the essence of *I am Indigenous to My Body*. The quest for this connection to mind, body, and spirit, is the journey back into the sacred vessel, and in this place of womb knowledge. *BloodTides* is a strong example of how ceremony is implemented into process of performance creation, which conveys the resurgence of matrilineal ancient rituals and practices, and the embodiment of understanding this wisdom contributes to dismantling the historical and ongoing patriarchal violence towards Indigenous women’s bodies, minds and hearts by informing and empowering women to understand their political and social power in society. Resurgence of this matrilineal ancient knowledge and weaving the teachings into contemporary performative practices contributes to, the balance, restoration, and resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing,

strengthening the identities, cultural knowledge and harmony of Indigenous peoples. I will end this analysis of Blood Tides with another quote from Wakerahkats:teh (Bear Clan Mother, Akwesasne)

“We have come into this world through a woman’s body and our cells and souls carry the memory of her within, even if we never knew her. We are connected to all women who ever walked this earth. Like, them, we cycle every month. We share this intimate experience with them. In cycling, we are one. As cycling women, we are no longer confined by roles defined by men. We are all souls in a woman’s body, aligned with the moon and tides, bleeding and catching our blood monthly or conceiving children. Through the power of our extraordinary blood we are all made equal; we stand in the image of the first woman, Iottsi’tsison” (Rodriguez 69).