

Carla Taunton
Queen's University

**Pauline Johnson and Maggie Papakura:
Indigenous Acts of Performative Resistance
In Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand**

In this paper, the performances of Mohawk writer and poetess Pauline E. Johnson (1861–1913) and Te Aware tourist guide, dancer and scholar Maggie Papakura, “Makereti” (1873-1930) are explored as political acts of Indigenous intervention and resistance. I explore Pauline Johnson’s performance strategies, specifically the use of her performance personas to articulate Indigenous lived experiences and stories at a time in Canadian history when Indigenous histories were told from Eurocentric, racist and patriarchal perspectives. I also investigate Makereti’s performances and her dynamic role as a cultural guide at Whakarewarewa, a ‘Maori Village’ one of New Zealand’s first cultural tourist destinations in the district of Rotorua.

I examine their use of performance strategies, such as storytelling and cultural performance to expose and voice histories and identities otherwise silenced in the colonial context, before discussing the sites of their performances as spaces for Indigenous intervention. Johnson and Papakura negotiated the colonial gaze during their performances on settler-stages and employed their bodies as a tool for intervention. In this way, one of the aims of this paper is to highlight Johnson and Papakura’s distinct acts of agency mediated through the performance of their bodies.

The theoretical framework that underpins my paper is Indigenous sovereignty and self determination. In “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” Tuscarora scholar, Jolene Rickard suggests that,

The work of Indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics...Sovereignty is the border that shifts Indigenous experience from a victimized stance to a strategic one (207).

I proceed from the premise that Johnson and Papakura’s performances were sites for Indigenous cultural continuance and made space for the imperative acknowledgement of the continued negotiations made by Indigenous peoples of colonial histories and contemporary experiences. More broadly, sovereignty and self-determination are lenses through which Indigenous performance can be explored in order to highlight agency, autonomy of Indigenous world-views, and the sophisticated and political performative strategies of sharing stories and experiences.

I link Johnson and Papakura’s performances to historic traditions of Indigenous performance to elucidate a continuum of Indigenous performance as a vehicle for socio-political and cultural resistance. To make this argument, I explore the history of Indigenous women performing Indigeneity as catalyst for intervention, making links as well to contemporary Indigenous women performance and new media artists such as, Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Rachael Rakana, and Lisa Reihana.

Although Johnson and Papakura are from distinct Indigenous ancestry and differing colonial experiences (Canada and New Zealand), they can be linked in a critical discussion of the history of Indigenous women performing on settler-stages. Johnson and Papakura are connected in this exploration to elucidate similarities and differences of Indigenous experience in the British Empire and also to explore how the heterogeneous peoples negotiated and resisted colonization. The exploration of similarities and differences of Indigenous experiences of imperialism and colonialism in local contexts, such as Canada and New Zealand, can ultimately inform and complicate understandings of Indigenous arts and resistance on a global scale.