Playing at the Margins: Colonizing Fictions in New England Larp

Zoë Antoinette Eddy

Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA; zeddy@fas.harvard.edu

check for updates

Abstract: North American larping (live-action roleplaying) is a collaborative performance that encourages critical and creative engagement with cooperative, improvisational narratives. Nevertheless, larping often relies on problematic engagements with race and racial stereotypes. Like many gaming hobbies, larp uses the idea of a "playable race." Unlike other gaming arenas, however, larping necessitates that players physically embody a character in order to participate in the collaborative narrative: larpers embody fictional races and engage in a complex form of "race play." Within this context, non-Indigenous players frequently appropriate Indigenous cultural practices and mobilize racist stereotypes. This paper explores this phenomenon and its ramifications. Based on seven years of ethnographic fieldwork and community participation in New England larping communities, I examine how concepts of Indigenous identity manifest in New England larp. I explore both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives in order to demonstrate (a) how fantastical play facilitates cultural appropriation and damaging "race play" and (b) how these spaces affect Indigenous players. I close with Indigenous perspectives on new possibilities for Indigenous larp projects and cultural reclamation.

Keywords: indigenous anthropology; live-action roleplaying; embodied play; indigenous futurities

1. Outsiders

"I don't like you outsiders," he says. "You come in and change things." There is a dramatic pause as he steeples his fingers, eyes downcast at the floor. The man, clad in flannel, looks up to catch my gaze. Sparing no courtesy, he says, "You need to leave, now. I need to consult with the rest of the tribal council."

Blinking quickly, I stand up and step away from the table. The man nods and dismisses me from the now-private conversation.

He's a talented actor: as I look at the group of men before me, now huddled in deep conversation about reservation politics, I feel like a stranger—an invader trespassing into things not mine. I feel a wriggling embarrassment at my own clumsiness: I had broken a rule I didn't know existed because I had assumed I was welcome. I look down at the ground and attempt to avoid eye contact. It's an anxious and uncomfortable moment.

However, in this expertly crafted tension—a fictional negotiation of power and belonging—there is a dissonance.

As I stand apart from the table, I remember we are standing on Pennacook land. I further remember, in the real world, I am a mixed-heritage Native woman. I finally remember that we are all larpers, caught up in intimately crafted characters and a fictional world. I remember I never thought to write my heritage into my character background (I will amend this later, partially so I am not told to leave, but it will feel false—playacting in a performance. A self-made deep fake.).

I then remember, as I stare at the ground, that the players in front of me are predominantly white and non-Native. One of the few "real" Natives, playing a character who is also a fictional real Native, looks back at me—he offers an apologetic frown and excuses himself from the conversation.

He walks over to me and touches my forearm, "Hey, you ok?" In-game, he speaks with a Southern drawl—I can hear it waver, as he's seen my reaction to the dismissal.

"Speaking frankly," I answer, "no."

In this larp community, "speaking frankly" is code for, "I'm talking out of the game right now; these are my real feelings." I explain quickly that I feel weird: as I've become immersed in my character and the narrative world, my real self has been erased. The escapism that larp affords most players has turned into a bitter reminder that I'm an outsider; the irony here, however, is that the real-me would belong in the fictional world, but the real-me wanted to play an unmarked popstar. The unmarked popstar, I chide to myself, is always white.

He purses his lips, "You want to talk?"

This is not the first time this will happen. At a weekend-long event a month later, a white player—who will announce himself as a tribal elder—will explain the plight of people living on the reservation. Two months later, a white woman will malign the state of tribal healthcare and the lack of government funding. A year later, I will learn that the town subjects all its residents to a "blood drive" wherein they collect blood samples (fictionalized by expertly made props)—these samples determine those connected to the supernatural, magical pulses of the tribal reservation: the implied Native folks long displaced. In the moment that finally breaks my patience, I will encounter the larp version of raceplay: a real Native, also playing a fictional Native, will encounter a Quebecois soldier; the soldier will tell him, "he's a little pale for an Indian." I will be the white-passing Native observing the scene—real identity played out in a narrative in which I have no agency. I will write a letter condemning the scene and will receive a polite non-apology.

The strange thing is that I kept returning: the story is good, I told myself. Additionally, these non-Native larpers were talking about things that mattered, if in an indirect and confusing way. Eventually, aided by the Native larper who first interceded, I will concede that something is not right—ultimately, I will realize that I have been complicit in the appropriation and exploitation of my heritage. As I submerge myself in an exploration of New England larp and settler-colonial fictions, I will realize this is a frequent transgression that defies easy definition. Entering the world of larp, after all, is entering the world of embodied fictions and fantastical performance of an unreal, yet lived, story.

2. Of Zoos, Embodiment, and Racecraft

As Cree scholar and filmmaker, Tasha Hubbard, suggests, North American Indigenous histories intersect with settler-colonial violence done to non-human animals (Hubbard 2016). As someone who embraces the work of Hubbard, Kim TallBear (2011), and other scholars grounded in Indigenous ontologies, I often think of how my experiences, as an Indigenous person, mirror those of my non-human counterparts. When I think about my problematic pastime, larp (live-action roleplaying), I often think of zoos. At a zoo, I watch and participate in the fantastical consumption of other creatures' lives. The captive environment is an artificial one that is a fantastical fiction of the wild—a space for humans to make-believe that they are connected to and immersed in "actual nature." Zoos are sociocultural constructions that allow us to pretend we understand something different from us; larps, I have come to determine, are not so different. As an Indigenous person, it has been fundamentally destabilizing to watch the performance and consumption of my history by non-Indigenous players.

Superficially, North American larping is a game: it is a hobby that enables people, generally adults, to play pretend. It is also, however, a collaborative performance that invites critical and creative engagement with cooperative, improvisational narratives. Nevertheless, larping facilitates reifications of race and racial stereotypes. Particularly within the fantasy and horror genres, larp reiterates the idea of a "playable race" (Everett and Watkins 2008). As in tabletop roleplaying and videogames, larp participants are able to select a fictionalized race—complete with cultural write-ups,

costuming tips, and roleplay notes—for their character; they are then able to engage in a narrative setting through their performance of this character. Importantly larp differs from other gaming hobbies in that larping requires that players physically embody a character. This means that larpers embody the aforementioned fictional races.

Following Karen and Barbara Fieldses' theory of racecraft, race is an imaginary product structured by social and cultural practices; the crafting of race, as mandated by white supremacist systems, has devastating and deadly consequences for non-white people (Fields and Fields 2014). Fictional races, such as those found in larping and other player-determined gaming spaces, are not simply fictional. Larp races, like all fictional races, are grounded in sociocultural norms that inform understandings of "the Other" (Fabian 1985; Pandian and Parman 2004). For the Indigenous larper, this presents a unique problem: Indigenous players, already marginalized in gaming communities, experience a complex web of non-Indigenous people playing at imagined Nativeness—"playing Indian" in the most literal sense. This play involves not only appropriative engagement with Indigenous cultures but assumptions of cultural practices as grounded in racial stereotypes. Moreover, while Indigenous people experience the indirect translations of Indigenous cultures—exoticized elves serving as stand-ins for "vanishing Noble Savages," while violent beast-people manifest as "dangerous Natives"—they also experience the co-opting of their lived experiences. Non-Indigenous larpers play as "tribal members" on reservations, "mixed-race" urban Natives, and "one-quarter Native [through a long-dead mystical grandparent]" wanderers: these fictions of race and self-racialization perpetuate a fantasy of Indigeneity as a commodity that settler-colonists can and should consume; moreover, as I will discuss later in this essay, this symbolic violence mirror and encourage contemporary material violence.

Based on seven years of ethnographic fieldwork and community participation in New England larping, this paper examines how non-Indigenous larpers, particularly white self-identified larpers, use fictitious playable races to embody fantasies of Indigenous identity and oppression. I investigate how these characters are influenced by popular renderings of "the Native" as well as real-world Indigenous communities. By investigating this topic, I aim to demonstrate (a) how gaming spaces appropriate cultural identities through fantastical, embodied raceplay, and (b) how this performance impacts Indigenous players. Ultimately, in the age of blood quantum politics, disenrollment, sexual and gender violence epidemics, and heritage contingent on DNA tests, these practices damage Indigenous people's access to storytelling both within and outside of their cultural heritage. I contextualize my discussion of non-Indigenous larpers' engagements, based on four case studies, with the reactions of various Indigenous larpers. This paper concludes with new efforts among Indigenous larpers to re-imagine the Indigenous character and story. These projects move beyond race/ist constructions and towards collaborative visions of what an Indigenous larp and Indigenous fictions might look like.

An important note before I investigate my field: I am a n/Native anthropologist and am involved with the interlaced communities that I research. This subjectivity informs how I do my research and my own engagement with it. Firstly, I am a larper: originally, I entered larp as a researcher with an interest in live-action roleplaying communities. I was interested in how people create fictive religions through communal storytelling and material culture. As I immersed myself in these spaces, I noticed that the fictive religion involved both indirect and direct appropriation of Indigenous lifeways. Often these appropriations were New Age translations of popularized philosophies: smudging ceremonies, visions for spirit guides, animal totems, and shamanic rituals to bring forth elder animal spirits. When I asked participants about their choices, I was answered with two lines of assurance. The first was, "all ancient cultures do this; this is actually based on my research on my own ancestry, which is Viking." The second response was more dismissive, "I'm playing a character." At first, I settled passively into these responses: what felt like redface (McKenzie-Jones 2019) to me was perhaps merely a performance about which I was overly sensitive.

My own reactions, however, resonated with my second subjectivity: I am a mixed-heritage Native woman. I am maternally Huron-Wendat and Anishinaabe but am culturally affiliated with/identify as Anishinaabe. As a researcher and a participant, I felt uncomfortable existing in a space where

predominantly white people were, to my estimation, playing Indian. New to the community, I assented that I was a stranger in a strange land. Nevertheless, when I encountered blatant embodiment of actual Indigeneity, I became less cordial.

The opening story I shared is from an experience I had while attending a weekend-long New England larp event. Within this larp, non-Indigenous people, most of whom self-identified as white, played characters who were Indigenous; these characters were from a fictional tribe that was an approximation of the Abenaki on whose ancestral lands we played. While the in-game tribe was nominally fictional, reservation politics, systematic disenfranchisement, tribal enrollment, and land-based sovereignty were key components of characters' narratives. This was my first contact with this sort of racial performance; the raciality of this became clear as the game's narrative unwound: the characters not only professed cultural affiliation with something definitively Native but were bound together by "cursed blood" that was an essential part of the plot. It made me wildly uncomfortable and fixedly intrigued.

While I have encountered this sort of raceplay and appropriation across larps, I nevertheless value these spaces. I study larp, but I am also a productive and visible member of the niche community: I play in games, as well as write and run my own. To put it in terms that those outside the community might understand best, I am a playwright, producer, director, and actor studying the world of live theater; at the same time, as an anthropologist, I am a participant-observer in an oftentimes carnivalesque world. Therefore, I am not merely invested in my research, but my community and the expansion of this craft. Most importantly, I believe critical engagement with this hobby/sport/artform can open spaces for Indigenous people to express a new type of storytelling.

For these reasons, this paper is largely autoethnographic. The accounts I tell are based on participation in larps, but also on my own experiences. I conducted very few formal narratives: as a member of a community dedicated to social play and camaraderie, I have developed intimate relationships with other players, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, that have shaped my own perspective on larping—the observations in this work are, in many ways, the product of collaborative thinking over many years. I am, perhaps obviously, deeply biased as to the preservation of the hobby, as well as to uplifting Indigenous voices within it.

In order to explore these various threads, I will detail larping and the mechanics of larping. I will frame my argument with considerations of both raceplay and cultural appropriation. Finally, I will investigate a series of case studies that examine how non-Indigenous larpers play at the margins of Indigenous experiences.

3. The Complications of Lightning Bolts and Lineage

While larping originated earlier than the 1990s, it came into its own during the age of pop media, the (new) New Age, and nascent globalist fervor. A swirl of multiculturalism and the rise of "geek hobbies" influenced creators and consumers to build worlds—unlike videogames or tabletop games, however, these were worlds in which people could physically embody and enact their own fictions. Undoubtedly odd to the outsider—the "lightning bolt" video remains an artifact of early stigma—these spaces provided adults with the opportunity to write, embody, and live out their own dramas. In the last five years, this seems less unconventional: Escape Rooms, virtual reality technologies, interactive theme parks, and immersive conventions position larping as only a bit stranger than indulging in turkey legs at the local renfaire. It is assuredly immersive, but it is a far cry from Jack Chick's now infamously laughable *Dark Dungeons*.

Larping has had a long tenure with continually increasing popularity. It is unsurprising that there is a huge diversity of larp types and genres. While the dominant form remains large-scale events within high fantasy genres, a multitude of other stories have emerged: high tech cyberpunk, radical historical fictions, and experimental modern games populate the market. Younger and more diverse creators offer words that challenge genre conventions, and many who have larped for decades have worked to professionalize larp as a public-facing business. Larp, in its many forms, is growing; while

early research on larp attempted to define it (Bowman 2014), it has become something that, like theater, is too varied to singularly define. Larping can be anything to anyone.

In the interest of standardizing my discussion, I will define the larps that inform my case studies. While the stories and systems vary, the larps in which I have participated most frequently follow a similar model. They are campaign combat/roleplay larps[1]—that is, larps wherein conflicts are resolved by both physical combat with padded weapon props and interpersonal communications. These games range in duration from one to eight years; the average length of a larp is four years, with some notable outliers. Time and shifting player numbers have decreased the lifespan of larps. Afterall, larps cost money and changes in player-base numbers and site rentals change directors' ability to run events.

Campaign larp refers to a continuous narrative that takes place over a number of years. Players exist in a world, created by game staff, and generally embody the fictional life of a single character. Staffers lead players through the narrative, collaborating with them on outcomes of the fictional world. Within these campaign larps, systems and stories wildly differ. Standard campaign larps, perhaps the most popular in my area of study, usually take place over a weekend and, for the duration of this time, players work to solve problems as a community, advancing both communal and personal narratives; rule-based combat is a common feature in these arenas; story narratives run the spectrum from Tolkienian high fantasy to post-apocalyptic drama.

Nevertheless, the majority of larping is united by two characteristics: (a) embodied performance of a character, and (b) collaborative narrative. Over a set amount of time, ranging from a few hours to multiple days, people engage within an agreed-upon system and perform a character; in most games, except in perhaps the most experimental, larpers rely on interacting with one another to tell a story.

I view larping as a largely positive space: it is one of the rare arenas wherein adults can play pretend in a communal setting. To dismiss this collaborative play is to dismiss the importance of community creative expression. Many larpers with whom I have worked have indicated that larp is integral to their health and wellbeing: it provides sociality, activity, and, for many, therapeutic expression and play.

Nevertheless, larping has a complicated lineage. Larping communities, like almost every EuroAmerican "geek" hobby community, lives in the shadow of an appropriative and often racist history. The canon of influential works and projects—Tolkien and the consequent explosion of (white) fantasy and sci-fi media, Lovecraft and the horror genre, Dungeons and Dragons, L5R, Vampire the Masquerade, and a range of other works—have all been heavily criticized for appropriation and exclusion of BIPOC (Monson 2012; Mueller et al. 2018; Ritter 2010). Larping is a product of this lineage and owes its origin and success to the giants that set the tone of fantasy and science fiction. While various groups within these circles have worked to change the content and impacts of this network of hobbies, larping remains a manifestation of imperial and colonial histories.

Beyond this, one of the most foundational parts of larp is that it is a form of embodied play: participants not only take on the persona of a character but communicate that performance through bodywork and immersive narrative engagement (Bowman 2017). Players change their voices, their gestures, their gaits, their expressions, and their general engagement with the people and the landscape around them. In North American larp[2], particularly in New England, this principle of embodied play is often referred to as "immersion." Players are expected to be "in-game" or "immersed" in the fictional world; they demonstrate that immersion through embodied engagement with the fictional world. Their relationship with the world is iterative and recursive: as they engage in play they change the fictional landscape through interactions with space, other people, and their own understandings of themselves.

---

[1]   These are generally called "campaign boffer larps" on the US East Coast.
[2]   There is a stark divide between North American larp and international forms—most notable European larp and US larp. My work is grounded specifically in New England games.

Embodied play is powerful and, according to many people with whom I have spoken, "more than just acting." While some larpers see themselves as taking on a character for a weekend and performing a part, many more see themselves as exploring a part of themselves that is not entirely fictional: the narratives they inhabit, they have told me are reflective of deeper truths about their own lives. Some larpers use the term "bleed" to talk about the slippage between the larper and the character and the person; as Sarah Lynn Bowman writes, "role-players sometimes experience moments where their real-life feelings, thoughts, relationships, and physical states spill over into their characters' and vice versa" (Bowman 2015). This experience is one that, as Bowman suggests, is "neither negative nor positive" but instead a reality of embodying a persona that is a living, breathing fiction.

When, in interviews, I asked larpers about bleed, many shrugged: the phenomenon, they contended, was not a phenomenon, but completely expected. "After all," a veteran larper noted, "why is it weird for your real life to impact your fake life? And, when your real-life leaks into your fake life, doesn't that just kind of show that they're both real?" She continued to add, "I think people get tied in knots trying to separate the real from the fake. When you're the one living the story, it seems like a stupid divide. No, none of us are going to go commit suicide because our character died—that's mentally ill. But we may experience profound sadness because XYZ happened—just like when you read a book and you cry . . . except we are the book."

To this point, many larpers will talk about how embodied play profoundly impacts them during and after events. Some players who adopt accents or verbal cadences different from their day-to-day ones will talk about how it is hard to "lose the accent" at their Monday morning office job. Some will assert that they dream in character, and others will confirm that they bring some of their characters' style, mannerisms, and outlook into their real-world lives. Others will talk about how, at the end of an event, they will miss the intimacy they shared with people during a game: since many larpers live far apart from one another, virtual communication is normal and many will yearn for the less inhibited and physically playful relationships they have in-character and at events. "Larp drop" is a term coined by the general community to speak to the emotional emptiness and general melancholy after a good event: it is not, players have explained, that the real world is bad, it's just that it would be better if it were a little more like the fictional world. "I don't need epic battles or a noble title," a larper provided, "but it would be nice to," and she sighed, "have a place where I lived with all my friends and we, you know, had late-night campfires and didn't mind doing stupid rituals or whatever." The physical experience of enacting a persona, a narrative, and a broader community is essential to larp.

4. Theorizing Fictional Race and Play

Clearly, embodiment is powerful and complex. It becomes fundamentally more complex and dangerous, however, when issues of race, fictionalized race, and raceplay are brought into consideration. I build on John G. Russell's theory of raceplay as ingrained within normative North American performances of whiteness and "the other" (Russell 2012).[3] Russell argues:

> Conscious and unconscious appropriations of racial and ethnic identities take place in one form or another every day and are not confined to black and white. The history of the minstrel stage includes not only Zip Coon, Jim Crow, and Mammy but also John Chinaman, Japanese Tommy, and a full spectrum of yellowface, brownface, and redface performances . . . Offstage, it was not all that long ago, in an age when Westerns dominated popular culture in a way since usurped by science fiction, adolescent wizards, and computer-generated virtual reality, that children worldwide played Cowboys and Indians, confusing and conflating an occupational identity with a cultural one. Today their (mostly American) parents give little

---

[3] I differentiate from scholars who have attended to race play in BDSM communities. While the conversations of racial construction and identity are complementary and related, the use in BDSM scholarship and porn studies differs in terms of who is engaging, with agency, in different forms of race play. (See Smith and Luykx 2017).

thought to assuming the caricatured ethnic likenesses and customs of Native Americans as they enjoy the national pastime.

(ibid., p. 47)

Within larp, raceplay is a form of adopting the fantasy of another race: fantasy and the racial imaginary is integral to this. Raceplay, specifically among white players, is grounded in settler-colonial norms that deprioritize the lives of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC). I am intentional in my use of play: larp is, as I have discussed, a form of embodied play. As much as larpers literally craft race in their narratives, so too are they actively and consistently playing in and with constructions of race. In the case of Indigenous raceplay, the adoption of a coded Indigenous identity revolves around the appropriation of cultural practices and ontologies; it also requires redface wherein players adopt costuming and makeup to conform to their conception of Indigenous race. This has hugely damaging consequences for Indigenous players as, to borrow from Russell once more, "Ironically, in the end, racial performance and mimicry leave us with a recycling of old racial clichés, not their destruction" (ibid., p. 80).

Identifying raceplay in larp is often exceedingly difficult unless the act is blatant. One of the four case studies is a blatant example of raceplay, but the others are not. In worlds of fictionalized races and cultures, it is hard to pinpoint the exact moment when a problematic stereotype grounded in racist literature, such as an orc, becomes a fully-fledged example of raceplay. Specific to my own identity and research, "redface" in North America is generally a product of cultural appropriation and both the known and unknown embrace of racist stereotypes (see Deloria 1998; Koffman 2018; Giacona 2016; Tahmahkera 2008; Tuck and Yang 2012). I find this equally true in larp.

Cultural appropriation is a useful tool for examining raceplay and Indigenous identity. I define "cultural appropriation" as the action of one or more groups taking a cultural practice, be it a tangible or intangible thing, for their personal use, generally without consent. I differentiate cultural appropriation[4] from a cultural exchange by locating appropriation as (a) grounded in historical inequities often rooted in colonial systems, (b) lacking equal and free exchange between parties, and c) consent is either absent or coercively given. To draw on a quote from Adrienne Keene, "cultural appropriation is a reflection of power and the marginalized position of Indigenous peoples in our societies. When this 'taking' (cultural appropriation) occurs, it is not a simple 'sharing' of culture; there is always a power imbalance that is being exploited" (Keene 2016, p. 56).

To return to theories of racecraft, race is a cultural construct grounded in inequities. In larp, the fictive engagements with race are doubly constructed as imaginaries of the real world. In order to identify those players "playing at the margins" of Indigenous identity, I use cultural appropriation and mobilization of racist stereotypes as guiding heuristics. Most importantly, I have contextualized the actions of players by examining their impact on the Indigenous players within the New England larp community.

5. Case Studies: Playing at the Margins

The following case studies are based on ethnographic fieldwork. Below, I explore four case studies—those of Brian/G'Krath, Naomi/Willow, Jennifer/Red Snow, and Sheila/Callie Gentle Rain—that demonstrate both subtle and overt forms of raceplay and appropriation. I have changed some identifying details, including the out-of-game and in-game names of the individuals involved. While I have preserved narrative details relevant to conversations of raceplay, I have shifted others to preserve these people's anonymity. However, all four individuals mentioned identify as white Americans of European descent. None of them have cultural ties to Indigenous groups in the US or globally. All four people played in the New England area high-fantasy combat/roleplay larp campaigns. I use these case

---

4   See (Eddy 2019) for extended discussion of cultural appropriation.

studies to explore four different examples of racist stereotypes being mobilized in larp. These players did not consciously mobilize these stereotypes nor did any of them ever mention that they themselves engage in raceplay. However, I analyze these examples to demonstrate how insidiously racist tropes have entered larp and how deeply entrenched these tropes are.

I conclude each of these case studies with Indigenous reactions. Two of these interlocutors, Sam and Annie (names changed), are people with whom I regularly collaborate. I consider these voices essential as we move towards new directions of collaborative larping arenas.

5.1. Brian/G'Krath

Out-of-game, Brian is unassuming. He's a quiet and mild-mannered 26-year-old man—someone who I've noticed is quick to smile, but slow to introduce himself. His out-of-game attitude, however, belies his ferocity in-game. In-game, cloaked in furs and his face painted in blue "warpaint", Brian, whose character's name is G'Krath, is a force: he charges into battle, howling and crying for bloodshed. When the battle ends, G'Krath retreats to the player community and speaks to them of their mettle and the glory of battle. He makes an offering of viscera—trophies he's taken from the battlefield—to his gods.

Before game one day, Brian and I spoke about G'Krath in his cabin. During the event, players live in campground housing, most of which are cabins. For many people, these structures are simply a space to sleep overnight. For Brian, however, the cabin is a space to express the full range of G'Krath's life. "I wanted to, you know, create his home. It helps me get immersed." Brian showed me the various furs that serve as G'Krath's bedding; he then led me to his "bone circle." This, Brian explained, was "like a shrine—my, G'Krath's religion." I looked at the assemblage of animal bones, teeth, fur, and sigils. "G'Krath is animistic," Brian continued, "but his main god is the Wendigo Spirit. Plot didn't make that up—I did. But I'm really big into Native American religions." I noded as Brian continued to explain his space in the player community: he was respected as a warrior, but, because he was from the Barbarian Tribes, also considered a savage. "It's cool—a good experience," Brian added. "It lets me feel like...wild. Like a Viking." I asked Brian what he meant by "savage." Brian affirmed, "you know, the war and stuff, but also—like—I'd be uncomfortable having him do this, but some of the other players who are Barbarians do this: they like," Brian looked noticeably uncomfortable and reminded me that he did not participate in this sort of roleplay, "the other guys, they like to paint up with warpaint, and they make jokes about raping and pillaging civilized girls. I heard one guy say he was going to 'club that girl and drag her back to my cave.'" Brian seemed embarrassed, "I don't do that, but it's a common thing. And like, obviously they don't *actually* do that, but if it were a movie they might."

Brian's curation of G'Krath exemplifies tropes connected to Indigenous masculinity as well as the appropriation of Indigenous ontologies. G'Krath is personified by his raging violence; initially, one might attribute this to Brian's interest in Vikings and mythologies of Viking berserkers. However, during combat, G'Krath invoked the name of the Wendigo; furthermore, his combat weapon reflected the form of an (anachronistic) Anishinaabe gunstock club. Finally, while most of G'Krath's costume evoked generic medieval fantasy, his accessories included the fur of North American mammals and turkey feathers. While Brian certainly drew on different fictive images of a "barbarian savage", the dominant aesthetic was clearly North American Indigenous.

When I questioned Brian on his interest in the Wendigo, Brian spent a good thirty minutes detailing different Wendigo stories to me. I was impressed: he not only spoke to the variety of myths, but also indicated his distrust of Algernon Blackwood. Nevertheless, while Brian's understanding of the stories was not superficial, he talked about the Wendigo like it was an ancient fiction no longer relevant to Indigenous life. As an Anishinaabe listener, I grew anxious: in my personal experience, the Wendigo remains a powerful actor used in both figurative and literal expressions of avarice and violence. As G'Krath had spoken on rape and sexual violence, I could not help but think of Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* and her own retelling of the Wendigo.

This conversation with Brian affirmed for me that, even though he exalts and admires "Native American mythology", he locates our ontologies as long-dead stories. Brian plays G'Krath as a caricature of Indigenous masculinity: he embodies colonial stereotypes of violent, primitive, and barbarian savages. Particularly within the context of sexual and gender violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirits, Brian forwards a deeply troubling narrative. Brian himself finds G'Krath to be admirable: he suggested multiple times that G'Krath, unlike the "civilized characters", understood nature and the cycle of life. This further distills the character of G'Krath into a two-dimensional trope: the Noble Savage. Importantly, Brian's play is not malicious in intent: far from it, he respects the character he has created and affirms that in his day to day life, he takes inspiration from G'Krath.

Brian's embodied play revolves around stereotypes of the savage brute and noble warrior—the savage lost to a distant history but memorialized in any number of fictions occurring across EuroAmerican literature (Deloria 1998; Maynard 2000; Redford 1991). While Brian's raceplay could be applied to any number of global noble savage fantasies, G'Krath is specifically coded as North American Indigenous and, more specifically, Algonquin. Brian's raceplay, and his description of others' embodied narratives, draws upon racist tropes of fetishized Indigenous masculinity (Grande 1999; Wernitznig 2003).

Sam, who started larping in 2012, is a Sugar Island Odawa man who also identifies as broadly Algonquin. Sam and I have spoken extensively on larp and appropriation of Indigenous identities, as well as the mobilization of racist tropes. Sam has mentioned that two things stick out to him when considering noble/ruthless savage tropes: (a) harmful depictions of Indigenous masculinity and (b) unconscious, entitled appropriation of Indigenous culture. "Oftentimes," Sam started, "they're kind of sneaky: it's standard tropes until you see the dreamcatchers or hear about Wendigo, skinwalkers, and that sort of thing. And that's when it crosses a line for me—otherwise, it's just annoying." Sam continued to identify that players who exaggerate "savages who murder, rape, and misbehave" facilitate the degradation of masculinity: "the Native brave who will brutalize or ravish you is a classic [trope]—we're imagined as the violent romantic lead you see on romance novel covers. And that hurts us: not only does it flatten who we are, but it turns into 'open season.'" I asked Sam to explain: "I'm half-white, but I'm a big dude who looks stereotypically Native. I wear my hair long, and I wear, I guess, cultural jewelry. A lot of white men make comments about my size or talk about my capacity for violence. They've made jokes about my characters going 'off-reservation.' I had a white dude refer to me as 'on a warpath.' And a lot of non-Native women—well, they make comments about how I should wear my hair or flirt with me. And they don't engage with white guys in the same way." Sam continued that the comments on his hair, which he had confronted multiple times, specifically bother him given his tribal practices related to hair and intimacy. Sam mentioned that racist comments that hypersexualize Indigenous masculinity are not done with ill-intent: "People just think it's appropriate, because [in-game] all these Barbarians are sitting around making jokes about killing and raping." Sam's comments indicated how raceplay involving plays on Indigenous culture, however banal, contributed to larger racism in games. Sam concluded, "It seems like these Barbarian Savages [other players] are just advancing tropes that leave no space for our actual experiences, and they are. For sure. But they're also having real world, moment-to-moment consequences." Moreover, his conversation spoke to the larger issues wherein raceplay allows for stereotypes to normalize the sexualization and related harassment/assault of Indigenous players—Sam indicated that various people had touched and grabbed his hair, an act that, within his own cultural values, was an intimate and violent transgression. Sam and I continued to discuss how this "play" mirrored and exacerbated the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirits as well as the brutalization of Indigenous men. Fictive conversations mediated by white conversations echoed, in Sam's words, "louder problems in Indian Country."

I also asked Sam about Wendigo in games. "They're constant," Sam sighed wearily. "Every year there's a new [non-Algonquin] story about Wendigo and the larpers get obsessed." Sam continued that the Wendigo is a massive contention for him. He explained the cultural, literary, and historical

significance of Wendigo in Algonquin lives. "For us, the Wendigo isn't fake—it's part of our religion. When non-Natives start crafting theories or making their own version of the Wendigo, they are violating our cultural spaces." Sam continued that, in games where players rely on appropriation to craft certain character types, he feels like there is no space for him to engage in the sort of productive self-expression that is afforded to others.

5.2. Naomi/Willow

When I met Naomi, before a game event, she looked like she stepped off the page of a fantasy novel: the gossamer tunic she wore swirled in the same summer breeze that ruffled her hip-length blond hair. At this late July 2018 event, Naomi was embodying her Player Character, Willow. Willow lived in a high fantasy world populated by elves and humans; much of the narrative revolved around the nature-worshipping elves and the industrious, urban humans. Willow was a half-elf bard who specialized in nature magic; Willow's specific form of magic involved group singing in order to heal various parts of a sick forest. The "sick forest" was a narrative that the plot staff has written for Naomi/Willow.

When I asked Naomi about Willow, she confessed to me, out-of-game, that Willow was her excuse to sing with other people. Thirty-five-year-old Naomi is a data analyst for a manufacturing company. Her work affords her little in the way of creative outlet, and larping provides her with a non-judgmental creative community. A bit sheepishly, Naomi indicated that she also enjoys the costuming—the sheer, pearly robes and wound-copper bangles are of her own construction. Willow's specific aesthetic, she noted, was influenced by Cate Blanchett's version of Galadriel. Indeed, like Blanchett, Naomi looked ethereal and nearly iridescent. I pushed Naomi on Willow's influences. Why nature magic? Why a half-elf with a human father and elven mother?

To my surprise, Naomi spoke very little on her own values, but leapt immediately into Willow's life. Willow's mother, I learned, was an Elven princess for the Light Elves—Willow was born and raised among the Light Elves, but never felt like she quite belonged. This was because, of course, Willow's mother fell in love with a human soldier: the soldier was part of a human brigade sent to ransack the Elven village, but Willow's mother was able to broker a peace. While doing so, she fell in love with the human soldier. As their love was, per Light Elf culture, taboo, Willow was born out of wedlock and raised amongst the Light Elves. Willow has always been, Naomi explained, "torn between two worlds." She finished her story by telling me that, as "Willow is a nature-worshipper who understands the importance of human innovation, she hopes to serve as a peacekeeper between the two sides of her heritage: the elf and the human." However, Naomi concluded, "she knows neither side will fully accept her."

Naomi and Willow embody a narrative rife with colonialist tropes. Superficially, and perhaps to someone outside critical Indigenous circles, Naomi/Willow seem to exist in their own fantastical realm. However, as various media scholars have demonstrated, elves have long served as a Western trope that exists as a racial/ethnic/cultural "Other" (Poor 2012). While sometimes, as with Tolkien's elves of Lothlorien, this other is an elite race grounded in whiteness, in other contexts the "elf" is the exotic foreigner coded as wild, separate, and distant from civilization. This is certainly true in larp: "dark elves" are common elvish races that are evil, conniving, and shrewd—they are frequently portrayed with Orientalist aesthetics and, equally problematic, with makeup darkened skin equivalent to blackface. Conversely, "nature elves" are often played as deeply mystical, devout to animistic worship, and removed from the complexities (and implied immoralities) of civilization. In larp games, this amorphous civilization is generally modeled on European histories that emphasize industry, commerce, and innovation. These "nature elf" tropes fall into the same pitfalls that media such as James Cameron's *Avatar* has: they craft a racial and cultural Other, grounded in fantasies of mystical natives and animistic savagery, that flattens the complexity of not only Indigenous ontology and experience, but contemporary life. Moreover, Naomi's conception of gender feeds racist and sexist stereotypes of Indigenous women as peacekeepers who are subject to the whims of white men (Anderson et al. 2018).

While Naomi is not explicitly engaging in redface, her raceplay draws on historical stereotypes that originate in colonialist literary tropes (Lajimodiere 2013; Marubbio 2006).

A conversation with Lorenne, a Mi'kmaq woman who has been larping since the 1990s, illuminated the damaging impact these narratives have. Lorenne first spoke to the trope of Elves: "I've been larping since NERO," she said, "and I've seen a lot of iterations of the 'mystic elf and especially the mystic elf princess.' She's goodness, beauty, light, and, most importantly, nature. She's like an Earth Mother but also a Fairy Princess. And I get why people want to play that." But Lorenne added that "She's so often a thinly veiled . . . well, Pocahontas allegory." Lorenne spoke to the stereotype of the Pocahontas or Sacajawea myth (Kessler 1998; Pillow 2007; Savage 2018): the colonial narrative that frames Indigenous women as pliant diplomats who abandon the "savagery" of their tribe to help, and even save, white settler-colonist men.

Another conversation with Annie, a Wendat woman involved with larp since 2013, detailed similar anxieties: "I'm a mixed person, and I see a lot of these 'tragic half-breed' stories. It's this assumption that every Indigenous woman is not only 'caught between worlds' but also has to translate cultures. We're not all upset to have mixed heritage, and that's really damaging to me." Colonial fantasies of mixedness, embraced by tropes such as the "tragic mulatto", position mixed-heritage women as delicate, sensitive, and volatile people who are locked into the tragedy of their own context. In these narratives—advanced by Naomi's conception of mixed heritage—successful integration of multicultural backgrounds is made impossible and a commodified melodrama. As Annie acknowledged, "it's difficult to be mixed, for sure, but it doesn't have to do, for me, with my inability to understand my lineage—more so it's about non-mixed people failing to understand that I am many different component parts. They put the tragedy on me."

Finally, both Lorenne and Annie commented on how portrayals of gender, like Naomi's, facilitate damaging narratives about Indigenous women, their bodies, and their cultural roles. Both women expressed their wariness about "elvish women as 'culture keepers.'" Annie mentioned, "part of the white adoption fantasy involves this long line of matrilineal descent: the great-great-great-great Cherokee grandmother princess. It's this idea that Native women are locked into roles of diplomat, wise woman, ancestor, and, as I said, keeper of cultural lore. It offers us no space to exist outside of the narrow definition." Annie echoed interventions made, perhaps most famously, by Vine Deloria Jr. and iterated in landmark pieces like Tuck and Yang's *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*. Colonial fantasies often whitewash the lives of Indigenous women and relegate them to arbiters of culture who, ultimately, reify settler-colonial regimes and white adoption fantasies (Deloria 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012). These embodied tropes, of course, facilitate the colonial logics that enable the epidemic of sexual and gender violence impacting Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people.

5.3. Jennifer/Red Snow

Jennifer had spent hours setting up Red Snow's hut. Afterall, her players had spent the better part of the last two years waiting to meet Red Snow, the high shamaness of the Bittermoon Tribe. Red Snow, Jennifer explained, is the elder of her tribe—she teaches the magic of her people to those deemed worthy. Jennifer wiped her brow and told me, "The players have been going through her tests. This event they get to meet her." She smiled broadly and gestured at the room.

As Jennifer went to put on her costume, I was both impressed and upset by the room. Much as Brian did with G'Krath's sleeping quarters, Jennifer had created an immersive space befitting a film. She had hung tapestries and arranged fur blankets to make the room feel homey. She set up a crockpot in the corner of the room in which she had stewed apples for the last 6 hours—the air smelled spicy and sweet and made me long for autumn. A variety of knickknacks added aesthetic clutter: drying herbs, painted animal bones, and various ceramic odds-and-ends punctuated the space. Jennifer, who was now changing into her costume, had told me she made most of them herself.

Of course, among all this sumptuous decoration were the things that made me uncomfortable: the dreamcatchers hung on various walls, the abalone stand, and the smoldering white sage—not to

mention the inexplicable katsina doll (which Jennifer informed me she bought on eBay). When Jennifer came out in her costume, I was unsurprised: she sported a black wig with grey streaks peppered throughout the hair; woven into a single braid were red and white feathers; her tunic was black leather which she had cut and dyed herself. She was barefoot, though her legs were painted with geometric designs. Finally, Jennifer had added lines to age her face. Jennifer explained to me the costume wasn't her idea, though she made it herself—she pulled out her phone to show me her larp Pinterest. She pointed to a painting of a woman, dressed identically to her, labeled "Tribal Shaman."

I said nothing as Jennifer's players were approaching the space in order to begin the encounter. Jennifer quickly squatted on the floor and closed her eyes. When the players entered, she greeted them with a low "You may enter, young ones." She nodded to me, and I made my exit—as she made clear, this wasn't my adventure to witness.

As Jennifer had said many times, she loves writing for people, and she loves her players. Red Snow, she emphasized, would come to be the players' maternal mentor. She was eager for them to learn "ancient magic" from Red Snow but was more so excited to give the players a chance to express their own stories through collaborative narrative. At the surface level, this typified what a good larp is: a generous and talented storyteller guiding players through cooperative play.

Nevertheless, the racism inherent to Jennifer's plot is obvious: Red Snow is the epitome of the Mystic Native trope. While there are many and varied "wise woman" figures across cultures, Jennifer's is distinctly North American Indigenous. She riffs on tropes of the sage, wise recluse who, removed from civilization, guides the players—all of whom are (non-Indigenous) adoptees. Furthermore, compared to Naomi and even Brian, Jennifer directly appropriates Indigenous sacred materials in pursuit of her gameplay. However altruistic, this cultural theft and her related nods to Indigenous costuming harm Indigenous players.

Jennifer's actions present a settler-colonial perspective on tradition and the imagined immobility of Indigenous life. Audra Simpson writes on the colonial impulse among anthropologists to flatten the Indigenous person and their larger history and community. Simpson writes, "I am interested here in investigating the ways in which the literature on the Iroquois, from the work of Lewis Henry Morgan to the present, has labored to authenticate early ethnographic assertions and place the Iroquois within Western epistemes. This research loop seeks to confirm an early Iroquois 'cultural pattern' . . . We will find that in their project to confirm the veracity of early reports on the Iroquois, scholars have taken an unproblematized and narrow model of 'tradition' as their unit of analysis. The product is this canonical body of literature that, in its narrowness, is removed from the bulk of the people that it purports to represent" (Simpson 2014, p. 88). While she is not an anthropologist, Jennifer's actions echo the settler desire to wrap Indigenous life into a neatly defined web of fantastical traditions—settler desires that have perpetuated stereotypes harmful to Indigenous people.

The direct appropriation of Indigenous materials, as combined with the flattening of Indigenous religious expression, considerably upsets the Indigenous individuals with whom I have work. As Sam said, this sort of appropriation leaves Indigenous people at odds with a space: they are forced with a decision—to confront, ignore, or change—that locks them in a tiring and painful moral quandary. An Abenaki player, Olivia, who favors more experimental larps, echoed this, stating that "Native looking things in larp immediately make me uncomfortable—I often worry that people are just stealing from me." Furthermore, as a white-passing player, she felt that, when non-Indigenous people co-opted her culture, she was denied space; the rampant appropriation made her question her own identity. Olivia frequently asked herself whether or not she should just abandon trying to embrace her own cultural heritage. Sam and Olivia both expressed a concern that, by bringing their culture into a gamespace, they were giving non-Indigenous larpers tacit approval to "steal" Indigenous objects and practices. In online group conversations I facilitated, a number of mixed heritage Indigenous women have emphasized this feeling of anxious ambivalence: a Choctaw player who plays games up and down the East Coast maintained that "when white larpers play vague Native American shaman or mystical sage, they create a stereotype—if I want to engage with my own cultural practices, some

people might assume I'm just doing the same sort of racial performance." Well-intentioned use of cultural objects, particularly when contextualized by antiquated tropes, denies Indigenous larpers creative expression afforded to others.

5.4. Sheila/Callie Gentle Rain

My final case study involves an instance of redface and direct appropriation of Indigenous identity. This case study, which was directly related to me by Sam, is perhaps the most immediately egregious and offensive to the average American literate in issues of racial appropriation. Sam's retelling follows:

> "The game was a sci-fi horror story pulling from pulp, urban legend canon, and conspiracy theories. It was a real-world, modern game set on a Native reservation, the tribe itself was fake but based on a real one. All of the staffers of the game played townies who were, implicitly, Native American. It's detailed, but it was a game about 'town secrets' that had knowledge entrusted to only the town 'elders.' To my knowledge, none of the elders were Native American, and they were majority white, if not all white . . . so that's the context for this. It was in 2014, so redface wasn't as big a deal as it is now, but I hadn't realized they were all pretending to be Native until I got to the game.

> "So this game had some background plotlines that revolved around broadly animistic religion—but they were clearly coded as North American Native. There were Wendigo mentioned and, for instance, a 'great wolf spirit' that was clarified as Native. This specific plotline involved these spirits: the spirits were taking an interest in the newcomers to town—the players. So they were sending emissaries to check on us, and these emissaries were causing problems. So, the town 'elders' hired an 'expert shaman.' Enter Sheila.

> "At the game, we stayed in cabins and plot people had to come find us . . . one of the people in my cabin was involved in Sheila's plot. He had informed me she was 'a shaman or something' who specialized in animal spirits. So, Sheila, who is a white woman, comes to our cabin and knocks on the door. And that's where the whole premise of the game hit me.

> "Sheila, who was fair-haired and light-skinned, was wearing a long, black wig that she had laced feathers and stuff into. She's also wearing a full buckskin dress and various beaded ornaments. Finally, Sheila is a pretty talented makeup artist, and she has darkened her skin using bronzer—her skin is noticeable dark. She then introduces herself to me, the character that is, as 'Callie Gentle Rain' a member of whatever tribe, and she tells me she's here to talk about the Great Wolf Spirit."

I asked Sam what he did when confronted with the woman in redface. Sam laughed grimly and replied, "I said 'NOPE' and walked the fuck away." Sam and I mused for a while on what seems like a particularly violent example of redface—Sam confirmed that, while some players were uncomfortable with the bronzer specifically, the game staff had normalized the appropriation of Indigenous ideas. Sam expanded on previous conversations we had had about high fantasy spaces: he asserted that, while Sheila/Callie Gentle Rain was "laughably bad" she was, to him, no more offensive than the insidious stereotypes mobilized by people like Naomi, Brian, and Jennifer. Sam offered that "you can at least push back on people like Sheila—the other stuff becomes this tail-chasing thing where you have to explain the entire history of Tolkien's elves *while* proving that cultural appropriation is a problem." Sam's comment points to the danger of normalizing colonial fantasies of Indigeneity in larp and other fictional arenas: it creates a space where non-Indigenous players engage in harmful activities that have completely emotionally drained their Indigenous peers. "Larp can be a place," Sam mentioned, "where I didn't have an option to engage with the Native stuff—I had to either aggressively confront it, which is exhausting, or I had to completely ignore it, which is hard to do. Ultimately, I just had no space."

Finally, I asked Sam the question I sometimes ask myself: why stay in an environment that is so aggressively racist and so committed to raceplay? Sam responded, "Because that's what there is, and I want to be able to larp too."

6. Conclusions: Leaving the "Other"

I have examined four case studies that suggest the racism that runs deep in New England's larping communities. This racism is not always overt: indeed, all of the people with whom I interacted did not think they were engaging in anything other than fantastical play—there was a general ignorance that the tropes they embody mobilize racist tropes from an often confusing science-fiction and fantasy lineage. Moreover, these players did not identify as engaging in raceplay or redface: they routinely emphasized that the fantasy origins of their characters transcended "real world" conceptions of race. Finally, issues of appropriation—such as direct adoption of Wendigo, dreamcatchers, and white sage smudging—were excused as "cultural appreciation." These players, as I have emphasized, affirmed they were doing no wrong and, if anything, felt their characters encouraged an appreciation of Indigenous cultures.

The attitudes of these players, however, do not change the impact this raceplay has on Indigenous participants. I have presented the deep discomfort shared by Indigenous players, as well as their general exhaustion and divestment from game spaces. In short, while these spaces provide therapeutic creative play for white players, they engender distrust, anger, and anxiety for Indigenous people. As one of my interlocutors confirmed, "I've never belonged in larps ran by non-Natives."

Beyond these feelings of isolation, however, there is a more insidious reality: all of my Native interlocutors expressed feelings of isolation and discomfort that mirror the reality of contemporary Indigenous life. Ironically, although non-Native larpers cling to antiquated stereotypes of Indigenous people, their roleplay exacerbates and reflects contemporary state violence that North American Indigenous communities face. Larp is not merely a frivolous space where players explore fantasies; it is instead an uncanny valley wherein settler-colonial imaginings of Indigenous life serve as one more occupation of Indigenous territory. In the case of larp, this occupation is largely symbolic: non-Native players embody aspects of our selves that are largely intangible. This symbolic violence—that playacting at our communal trauma—mobilizes the tangible violence of our day-to-day lives.

This final point leads me to perhaps the most important consideration of this piece. If New England larp, an activity with potential for dynamic community collaboration, advances colonialist tropes and raceplay, can Indigenous people make use of the activity? I conclude this discussion with current progressive moves within Indigenous larp circles.

Over the past five years, Indigenous players (including staffers) have carved out spaces for themselves. Initially, these were acts of small-scale radical play: players in modern games would introduce aspects of their personal experience to characters and plotlines; out-of-game, Indigenous players started to resist racist tropes and cultural appropriation. Perhaps most importantly, players have complicated conversations around redface and racecraft in games. At larp, players are literally crafting races for fantasy settings: even if an individual is not "playing [a real world] Indian", Indigenous players have demonstrated that creating parallels and narratives analogous to Indigenous culture is not only equally damaging but exponentially insidious. Encouraged by other BIPOC community actors, Indigenous players have catalyzed major changes in the New England scene.

Most significantly, Indigenous players are running their own games. Since the rise of Indigenous advocacy in larp, a series of Indigenous-ran larps have arisen in response. I return to Sam and his vision for Indigenous larp. Sam is in the process of starting a project grounded in a critical reinvestigation of the settler-colonially frontier imaginary. Sam's family is historically from Northern Ontario and Sam wants to build a game centered on the Indigenous perspective of "frontiers and conquest." Sam said: "I want to reappropriate the frontier Western and draw on new forms of Weird West fictions. I want Wendigo and stories from my culture, but I want to offer them the cultural reverence and creativity they're owed. I see a game that delves into Indigenous culture and religion, run by people from

those Indigenous cultures and religions, as essential to reclaiming creative space." Sam expanded that he wanted to offer a completely new approach to larp and fiction grounded in his own cultural modes of storytelling and aesthetic interpretation. He concluded, "I think larp can and should be worthwhile. More and more non-white people are building spaces for themselves. I want a space that is for Indigenous People, as made by Indigenous people. Where, we, as Natives, aren't the 'Other' but instead complex people who run spectrums of belief, personality, action, and ideology. I want and believe in Native larp." To conclude my own analysis, I echo this statement.

To return to Audra Simpson, the notion of "ethnographic refusal" seems simultaneously orbital and central to this context. Simpson, writing on the power of canon, details the politics of a Native anthropologist writing on their own community: "What is theoretically generative about these refusals? They account for the history detailed above; they tell us something about the way we cradle or embed our representations and notions of sovereignty and nationhood; and they critique and move us away from statist forms of recognition. In listening and shutting off the tape recorder, in situating each subject within their own shifting historical context of the present, these refusals speak volumes, because they tell us when to stop. Whether or not we wish to share that is a matter of ethnography that can both refuse and also take up refusal in generative ways" (Simpson 2007, p. 93). Simpson's call for complication and rupture of "colonial encounters" speaks to me of the potential for a truly Indigenous larp: one that is complicated, messy, evolving, and in stark refusal of the settler narrative of static passivity.

Larp and other activities in the hobby network offer phenomenal opportunities for creative play. The failure of larp to address the harm raceplay and appropriation causes has motivated Indigenous players to build their own spaces. These spaces are not only integral to change but revolutionary. As the BIPOC community sees massive upheaval in a variety of arenas, creators and consumers need to prioritize the work of marginalized community members. It is not simply that we seek reclamation of our past and present: we demand a space in any and all global futurities.

References

Anderson, Kim, Maria Campbell, and Christi Belcourt, eds. 2018. *Keetsahnak/Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters*. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2014. Educational live action role-playing games: A secondary literature review. *Wyrd Con Companion Book* 3: 112–31.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2015. Bleed: The spillover between player and character. *Nordic Larp*, March 2.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2017. Immersion into Larp. Theories of Embodied Narrative Experience. *First Person Scholar*, March 8.

Deloria, Philip J. 1998. *Playing Indian*. London: Yale University Press.

Deloria, Vine, Jr. 2012. Custer died for your sins. In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Edited by Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 199–206.

Eddy, Zoë A. 2019. When God Was a Keychain: Commercial Goods and Ainu Indigeneity in Hokkaido, Japan. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University Department of Anthropology, Cambridge, MA, USA.

Everett, Anna, and Craig Watkins. 2008. The Power of Play: The Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games. In *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*. Edited by Katie Salen. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning; Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Fabian, Johanne. 1985. Culture, time, and the object of anthropology. *Berkshire Review* 20: 7–21.

Fields, Karen E., and Barbara J. Fields. 2014. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Brooklyn: Verso Trade.

Giacona, Christina. 2016. Singing Redface: The Misappropriation of American Indian Culture in Popular Music. Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA.

Grande, Sandy Marie Anglás. 1999. Beyond the ecologically noble savage: Deconstructing the white man's Indian. *Environmental Ethics* 21: 307–20. [CrossRef]

Hubbard, Tasha. 2016. The Call of the Buffalo: Exploring Kinship with the Buffalo in Indigenous Creative Expression. Unpublished. Ph.D. thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada.

Keene, Adrienne. 2016. Engaging Indigeneity and Avoiding Appropriation: An Interview with Adrienne Keene. *English Journal* 106: 55–57.

Kessler, Donna J. 1998. *The Making of Sacagawea: A Euro-American Legend*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Koffman, David S. 2018. Playing Indian at Jewish Summer Camp: Lessons on Tribalism, Assimilation, and Spirituality. *Journal of Jewish Education* 84: 413–40. [CrossRef]

Lajimodiere, Denise K. 2013. American Indian females and stereotypes: Warriors, leaders, healers, feminists; not drudges, princesses, prostitutes. *Multicultural Perspectives* 15: 104–9. [CrossRef]

Marubbio, M. Elise. 2006. *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Maynard, Margaret. 2000. Staging masculinity: Late nineteenth century photographs of indigenous men. *Journal of Australian Studies* 24: 129–37. [CrossRef]

McKenzie-Jones, Paul. 2019. From Daniel Boone to Captain America: Playing Indian in American Popular Culture by Chad A. Barbour. *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 6: 167–68. [CrossRef]

Monson, Melissa J. 2012. Race-based fantasy realm: Essentialism in the World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture* 7: 48–71. [CrossRef]

Mueller, Jennifer. C., Apryl Williams, and Danielle Dirks. 2018. Racism and Popular Culture: Representation, Resistance, and White Racial Fantasies. In *Handbook of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations*. Edited by Pinar Batur and Joe R. Feagin. Cham: Springer, pp. 69–89.

Pandian, Jacob, and Susan Parman. 2004. *The Making of Anthropology: The Semiotics of Self and Other in the Western Tradition*. Gurgaon: Vedams eBooks (P) Ltd.

Pillow, Wanda. 2007. Searching for Sacajawea: Whitened reproductions and endarkened representations. *Hypatia* 22: 1–19. [CrossRef]

Poor, Nathaniel. 2012. Digital elves as a racial other in video games: Acknowledgment and avoidance. *Games and Culture* 7: 375–96. [CrossRef]

Redford, Kent H. 1991. The ecologically noble savage. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 15: 46–48.

Ritter, Cristopher Jonas. 2010. *Why the Humans Are White: Fantasy, Modernity, and the Rhetorics of Racism in World of Warcraft*. Pullman: Washington State University.

Russell, John G. 2012. Playing with race/authenticating alterity: Authenticity, mimesis, and racial performance in the transcultural diaspora. *CR The New Centennial Review* 12: 41–92. [CrossRef]

Savage, Jordan K. 2018. There Was a Veil upon You, Pocahontas: The Pocahontas Story as a Myth of American Heterogeneity in the Liberal Western. *Papers on Language and Literature* 54: 7–24.

Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Simpson, Audra. 2007. On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship. *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 9: 67–80.

Smith, Jesus G., and Aurolyn Luykx. 2017. Race play in BDSM porn: The eroticization of oppression. *Porn Studies* 4: 433–46. [CrossRef]

Tahmahkera, Dustin. 2008. Custer's last sitcom: Decolonized viewing of the sitcom's "Indian". *American Indian Quarterly* 32: 324–51. [CrossRef]

TallBear, Kim. 2011. Why interspecies thinking needs indigenous standpoints. *Theorizing the Contemporary: Cultural Anthropology Website*, April 4.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education Society* 1: 1–40.

Wernitznig, Dagmar. 2003. *Going Native or Going Naive? White Shamanism and the Neo-Noble Savage*. Lanham: University Press of America.

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.