

Université de Montréal

**Inventing Interventions:  
Strategies of Reappropriation in  
Native American and First Nations Literatures**

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Inventing Interventions:  
Strategies of Reappropriation in Native American  
and First Nations Literatures

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## RÉSUMÉ

Ma thèse de doctorat, intitulée *Inventing Interventions: Strategies of Reappropriation in Native and First Nations Literatures* traite du sujet de la réappropriation de la langue anglaise et de la langue française dans les littératures autochtones du Canada et des États-Unis, en tant que stratégie d'intervention de re-narration et de récupération. De fait, mon projet fait abstraction, autant que possible, des frontières nationales et linguistiques, vu que celles-ci sont essentiellement des constructions culturelles et coloniales. Ainsi, l'acte de réappropriation de la langue coloniale implique non seulement la maîtrise de base de cette dernière à des fins de communication, cela devient un moyen envers une fin : au lieu d'être possédés par la langue, les auteurs sur lesquels je me penche ici possèdent à présent cette dernière, et n'y sont plus soumis. Les tensions qui résultent d'un tel processus sont le produit d'une transition violente imposée et expérimentale d'une réalité culturelle à une autre, qui, pour plusieurs, n'a pas réussie et s'est, au contraire, effritée sur elle-même. Je soutiens donc que les auteurs autochtones ont créé un moyen à travers l'expression artistique et politique de répondre (dans le sens de « *write back* ») à l'oppression et l'injustice. À travers l'analyse d'œuvres contemporaines écrites en anglais ou en français, que ce soit de la fiction, de l'autobiographie, de la poésie, du théâtre, de l'histoire ou du politique, ma recherche se structure autour de quatre concepts spécifiques : la langue, la résistance, la mémoire, et le lieu. J'examine comment ces concepts sont mis en voix, et comment ils sont interdépendants et s'affectent à l'intérieur du discours particulier issu des

littératures autochtones et des différentes stratégies d'intervention (telles la redéfinition ou l'invention) et du mélange de différentes formules littéraires.

**Mots-clés :** Peuples autochtones de l'Amérique du Nord, Études autochtones, études littéraires, critique littéraire, colonisation, résistance, réappropriation, politiques gouvernementales, souveraineté, mémoire collective.

**ABSTRACT**

My doctoral thesis, entitled *Inventing Interventions: Strategies of Reappropriation in Native and First Nations Literatures*, explores the reappropriation of the English and French languages, as a strategy for retelling and reclaiming hi/stories of the Aboriginal people of Canada and the United States. In effect, my project disregards national and linguistic borders since these are, in essence, cultural and colonial constructs. To reappropriate the colonial language, then, entails not only its mastery as a means for basic communication, but claims it as a means to an end: instead of being owned by and subject to the language, it is now these authors who own the language. The resulting tensions of this process are the product of the imposed and tentative violent transition from one cultural realm to another, which, for many, never succeeded to its fullest, but rather crumbled back upon itself: for First Nations and Native American authors, I argue, creating means through art and politics to “write back” against oppression and injustice. My thesis, an examination of contemporary fictional, autobiographical, historical and political, prosaic and poetic works written in French and English, is structured along the analysis of specific keywords – language, resistance, memory and place. I explore how these concepts are voiced, and how they are not only inter-related but affect each other within the particular discursive framework of Indigenous writing, set in motion by different strategies of intervention (redefinition, invention) and the mixing of different literary devices.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Peoples of North America, Native/Aboriginal Studies, Literary Studies, Literary Criticism, Colonization, Resistance, Reappropriation, Governmental policies, Sovereignty, Collective Memory.

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*All my relations.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **DEFINING A LANGUAGE AND (UN)SETTLING BOUNDARIES**

## **Part One – Background, Methodology, Contribution**

This dissertation stems from over 10 years of active research and swelled out of my *Mémoire de Licence*, which I wrote and defended in 2003 at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. In that project, there was hardly any reference made to First Nations literature produced in Canada, and none whatsoever to that written in French in Québec, simply for lack of material available on that side of the Big Blue Pond. The incorporation of these two literary fields into my already large corpus made this project swell to the point of being painful; there was (is) simply no end to what could be integrated, what needed to be interpellated, what screamed to be included. But, as I was made aware early on, it is not my place to write a literary history of Native/First Nations literature – hence the major amendment to the first version of my chapter outline, the first section of which was to be entitled “Politics and History: Renaissance and Affirmation,” an explanatory survey, in essence, of Native/First Nations writings and the political occurrences which enabled the field to develop into how we know it today.<sup>1</sup> While I maintain the importance of “making visible” certain political turning-points, and that, as Len Findlay and Peter Kulchisky, amongst others, have observed, it is necessary to know about the legal as well as the literary, I must agree this can only be done on a scale that pertains to my research, that is, how a practice of critical reading is necessarily informed by political, legal and pedagogical issues and how literary interventions are performative (in the sense of how certain uses of

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology: Throughout this dissertation, I have maintained the language that

language seem to, by their very utterance, create an act)<sup>2</sup> in their recognition and reappropriation of dominant discourses. Hence, this is neither a comparative nor a recapitulative project. Rather, my aim here is a thorough exploration of the reappropriation of the English and French languages, as a strategy for retelling and reclaiming the hi/stories of the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States. In effect, my project blurs, disregards even, national and linguistic borders since these are, in essence, cultural and colonial constructs. By the same token, this project seeks to offer new ways of thinking about these literatures, without them being constrained to or by fictitious frontiers.

To reappropriate the colonial language, then, entails not only its mastery as a means for basic communication, but claims it as a means to an end: instead of being owned by the language, it is now these authors who own the language. The resulting tensions of this process are the product of the imposed and tentative transition from one cultural realm to another, which, for many, never succeeded to its fullest, but rather crumbled back upon itself: for First Nations and Native American authors, I argue, to create means to “write back” at the Empire through art and politics. My thesis, an examination of contemporary fictional, autobiographical, historical and political, prosaic and poetic works written in French and English, is structured along the analysis of four specific keywords – language, resistance, memory, and place. I explore how these concepts are voiced, and how they are not only inter-related but affect each other within the particular discursive framework of

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<sup>2</sup> I am thinking here of J. L. Austin’s theory on the performative utterance and his theory of speech acts. I will discuss this in further detail with regard to my analysis of Tomson Highway in Chapter One, Section Three.

Indigenous writing, set in motion by different strategies of intervention (redefinition, invention) and the mixing of different literary devices.

Lee Maracle, in her article “Oratory on Oratory” wrote: “We need to draw upon the tangled web of colonial being, thread by thread – watch as each thread unfurls, untangles, shows its soft underbelly, its vulnerability, its strength, its resilience, its defiance, its imposition, its stubbornness – rediscover Canada and First Nations people” (68). This quote sums up the current state of the field of Native/First Nations literary studies: a new way of thinking is unfolding in regards to the actual study of Native/First Nations literatures, in its relation to Canada and/or the U.S., and its presence and/or absence in the fields of Canadian/American literatures, despite its needing, indeed, some “untangling.” Writers and scholars, both Native and non-Native, are working towards a new methodology, one of “interpretation and literary analysis” (Ruffo 8), that I hope to show can be radical: “Radical Native viewpoints, voices of difference rather than commonality, are called for to disrupt the powers of literary status quo as well as the powers of the State” (Womack 15). This undeniable link between thought and activism, combined with critical pedagogy and collaborative research, upsets previously existing institutional discourses that have compartmentalized Native/First Nations texts and, according to Gerald Vizenor, further entrenched, falsely, their authors as “indians” (*Manifest Manners*) – a notion I discuss in Chapter One. This, then, is where the field is heading: towards collaboration and collective work, which forces traditional literary scholarship away from a ‘comfort zone’ of regarding these literatures solely from the perspectives of Canadian/American Lit, into a liminal zone in which Native/First Nations Studies becomes and affirms itself as a literary discipline of,

and on, its own, while effectively borrowing from and crossing over other disciplines such as politics, law, and environmental studies.

The entry on First Nations Literature in W. H. New's *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (2002) qualifies these literatures as 'dormant' until the later second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Authors such as Louis Owens and Thomas King would certainly dispute this, focusing rather on a silent, yet present, continuity in storytelling. Nevertheless, writers across Canada and the U.S. have not only brought to the foreground a wide range of literary texts – whether drama, poetry, or prose – but, finding the existing 'traditional' critical theory insufficient and ill-equipped to address the questions and issues raised by Native/First Nations writing, writers such as Jeanette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Gerald Vizenor, Kimberly Blaeser, Greg Sarris, Louis Owens, to name only a few, laid the groundwork for a literary criticism that crosses genre borders, that "points toward a way of reading Aboriginal literature in which 'text' and 'critical context' are linked in a similar fashion as 'performance' and 'commentary' in oral storytelling" (Eigenbrod 17). As a consequence of the onset of this critical debate came the inevitable question: who can do the speaking, the theorizing for these literatures, especially in the light of decades of cultural appropriation? Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, in 1990, spoke of "culture theft, [and] the theft of voice" (Ziff and Rao 71), while Jeanette Armstrong, in *Looking at the Words of Our People* (1993), one of the very first anthologies to collect critical essays written solely by First Nations people, suggests that "First Nations Literature will be defined by First Nations Writers, readers, academics and critics and perhaps only by writers and critics from within those varieties of First Nations contemporary practise of culture and knowledge of

it.” (7) Clearly, the empowerment through writing was viewed not only as a decolonizing methodology to protest dispossession, assimilation and marginalization, it was also viewed as a hard-won privilege, one by which “writing home” was more important than merely “writing back.”<sup>3</sup>

Today, in 2011, not only is the field still about, and more strongly so, “writing back/writing home,” in the sense that Charles Coocoo describes as an “intellectual disintoxication,” a “communal path towards healing ... away from [a] frontier of despair,”<sup>4</sup> it is now taking place on collaborative grounds: writers and scholars, Native and non-Native, from a wide array of disciplines, are working together in this collective process of decolonizing institutions, communities, and ideologies. Consequently, the field of literary criticism of Native/First Nations literatures has burgeoned. Renate Eigenbrod, in her *Travelling Knowledges* (2005), lists several noteworthy books published since Armstrong’s aforementioned collection, which address the questions of cultural appropriation and the modes of response/resistance developed by Native/First Nations writers, while establishing grounds for understanding Native/First Nations literatures. I would add specifically the following recent publications, to further show how this field is developing, and how it is making use, more and more, of a variety of interventions (from fields such as environmental studies, postcolonialism, eco-criticism, political sciences) while

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Writing home’, in this sense, has been used by several authors, including Lee Maracle, Ruby Slipperjack, and Dionne Brand (see Lutz, Hartmut. “First Nations Literature in Canada and the Voice of Survival.” *The London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11 (1995)). I will discuss this notion in further detail in Chapter One.

<sup>4</sup> Coocoo, Charles. « Éducation et transmission par les pétroglyphes : une perspective atikamekw. » CIÉRA Annual Colloquium, Université Laval, April 12-13, 2007. [My translation]



continuously addressing, questioning and upsetting the themes of identity, language, resistance and community: *Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction* (2000) edited by Rasunah Marsden, Louis Owens' *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions* (2001), Marie Battiste's *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (2001), Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), Maurizio Gatti's *Littérature amérindienne du Québec* (2004) and *Être écrivain amérindien au Québec* (2006), Winona LaDuke's *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (2005), Peter Kulchyski's *Like the Sound of a Drum* (2005), David Treuer's *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* (2006), *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, edited by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior (2006), The Native Critics Collective's *Reasoning Together* (2008), Jo-Ann Episkenew's *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* (2009), Emma LaRocque's *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850-1990* (2010), and *Across Cultures, Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures* (2010), edited by Paul DePasquale, Renate Eigenbrod, and Emma LaRocque.<sup>5</sup>

### **Why “Reappropriation”?**

Renate Eigenbrod, in her *Travelling Knowledges*, uses migration as the “central metaphor to emphasize movement and process in [her] readings, resistance to closure and

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<sup>5</sup> There are many, many other works that I could list here; the field is truly in expansion. I have collected in the Annexe section of this dissertation a non-exhaustive “Further Readings” list – a variety of works that I have come across over the years, many of which I have read but could not necessarily discuss in the scope of this project, others which I hope to work on in a near future, and others which might be of use and interest to other students and scholars in the field.

definitiveness” (xv). Building upon the already-existing theories on modes of resistance and countering cultural and linguistic appropriation as explored by many of the authors I mentioned above, I choose to use reappropriation as my key explorative intervention in the emerging collaborative critical discourse underway in the field of Native/First Nations literary studies. I explain in detail what I mean by *reappropriation* as a literary strategy in Chapter One, but, in brief, the act of reappropriation goes further than appropriation, resignification and reclamation in the sense that it is a *process* of recuperation on the one hand, and a decisive *act* of resistance on the other. It is about taking back colonial language and terminology, and making them bear what Louis Owens referred to as “the burden of one's own experience” (*Mixedblood Messages* xiii). To reappropriate the colonial language, then, entails not only its mastery as a means for basic communication, but claims it as a means to an end: instead of being owned by the language, it is now these authors who own the language. It is not liberation *from* language, but *by* language: for, as Owens argues, “the only way to be really heard is to make them read on our terms, though within the language of the colonizer’s terminology” (7). The original violence of linguistic and cultural appropriation is thwarted by the embedded violence of *reappropriation*, by which language is infiltrated and upset from within. This enables a stepping outside of a solely *reactive* mode into a discursive proactive space, a ‘strategic location’ of positive resistance and transformational power. As a consequence, through a particular range of strategic interventions (both literary and non-literary), it is the taking control of (hi)story and language that is at stake, in the attempt to create a possible future in which being of two

previously antagonistic cultural realms – Native and non-Native – need no longer be a source of conflict, but one of creative power.

In their introduction to *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao set out to define an analytical framework for addressing the problem of cultural appropriation, that is, the “taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> This act of taking is more often than not derogatory, and deforms the initial meaning or purpose of what is appropriated, that is, anything that relates to an individual’s, or a community’s, sense of identity and belonging to a particular culture: first and foremost, I would argue, language. In terms of language, “to appropriate,” explains Jean-Jacques Lecercle “is also to destroy” (238); the colonial appropriation of Native/First Nations stories and voice (i.e. spoken language) was fuelled by the sole desire to destroy, indeed erase traditional knowledge and cultural belonging in an attempt to forcefully assimilate the Native populations. In so doing, coupled with the physical and psychological violence of reservation schools and fostering homes, the image of the “vanishing indian” was invented and imposed, the result of which being that “everything an Indian needed to help himself, to think the way a human person should in order to survive” was washed away.<sup>7</sup> The lack of texts or testimonials by Native/First Nations writers available to counterbalance the over-production of so-called ‘real indian stories’ further entrenched this created image of an

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<sup>6</sup> Resolution of the Writers’ Union of Canada, approved June 1992 (In Ziff & Rao 24)

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by a former student (anonymous), upon finishing Residential School (In Barman, Hébert & McCaskill 11).

‘indian’ that, in the words of Gerald Vizenor, never even existed.<sup>8</sup> It was this ‘indian,’ depicted as vanishing, defeated, and dying, that had to be reclaimed; indeed, storied into existence.



*End of the Trail, by James Earle Fraser, ca. 1918 (Photo Bob Swain).<sup>9</sup>*

Not an easy task, since this image had been deeply rooted, indeed cast in bronze, within mainstream imagery and psyche, as James Fraser’s famous statue attests to. However, critical works such as those by Gerald Vizenor set the tone for the path towards

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<sup>8</sup> Neil Diamond’s documentary *Reel Injun* analyzes a large amount of these ‘real’ ‘indian’ stories. Also, Thomas King’s Massey Lecture, “You’re Not the Indian I Had in Mind.”

<sup>9</sup> Published for public access October 6, 2005. Retrieved September 15, 2011. [<http://picasaweb.google.com/112903412228597938783/FraserJamesEarle>]

Note by the photographer: FRASER, James Earle (1876–1953) American sculptor Fraser grew up on the frontier seeing Native Americans being pushed ever further west or confined to reservations. These early memories were expressed in “End of Trail” & Buffalo nickel. Original “End of the Trail” in plaster because bronze was unavailable during WWII.

reappropriating language: it was first of all necessary to determine what concepts exactly were to be taken back. The very word ‘indian,’ for instance, is synonymous with closure, ending, vanishing, and absence. The vacuous term is built on nostalgia and melancholy; it is a term that has no referent, neither in English (for it is a construction) nor in any Native languages. Hence this invented, constructed figure cannot exist, and never has, because those very people who exist now, whom Vizenor calls the ‘postindians’, are the living proof of continuity, and authors of survivance.<sup>10</sup> In this lies the core of the act of ‘writing home’: to write ‘home’ is to write so as the audience can recognize innovations and allusions, can be revitalized by communal knowledge and, ultimately, find themselves as whole in the discourse they hear or read. Reappropriation, then, is not only about resisting past and present forms of colonization; it is also about restoring traditional knowledge and attempting to harmonize it with present-day societal preoccupations. Today, in 2011, almost twenty years after Lee Maracle wrote “We conjure new words by understanding our different and common pasts. We cannot resolve this past unless we can come to this silver streak between river bank and sand without quarelling” (“The Post-Colonial Imagination” 207), I believe that we are in this latter stage, that of ‘attempting at harmonization,’ albeit that the former stages of the decolonization process are still undergoing – for the struggles are far from over, and, indeed, the quarrelling continues. Nevertheless, positive signs of this movement towards harmonization can be found in the collaborative work that has been done to this day and that is further developing in the works such as those I mentioned above. In the 1980’s and 1990’s, it was not uncommon for Native/First Nations authors to

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss these terms and Vizenor’s position further in Chapter One.

resist explaining their work. In the words of Ruby Slipperjack, “I cannot tell you why this and this and that happens, you figure that out yourself” (“Ruby Slipperjack: An interview with Hartmut Lutz”). However, since then, writers and critics, both Native and non-Native, have worked towards building the field up (albeit we are still somewhat at the foundations, especially in the province of Québec). Nevertheless, we are still, indeed, “figuring it out”: language having been reappropriated as a decolonizing tool, it has taken on what many have dubbed a “transformative power”: it enables liberation from an oppressive past, while offering constructive alternatives towards a better future. It has opened up a little more that ‘frontier zone,’ that liminal space, creating “a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question. [The] frontier... is the zone of trickster... and trickster defies appropriation and resists colonization” (Owens *Mixedblood Messages* 26).

Through the examination of fictional, autobiographical, historical and political, legal, prosaic and poetic texts of several contemporary Native/First Nations authors, ranging from recognized scholars and authors to lesser-known writers – all of whom I intend to value equally – from both the United States and Canada (both Francophone and Anglophone), I look at how certain particular and difficult themes transpire through and are developed in Native/First Nations literatures, and how they have been addressed so far: in particular, as aforementioned, language, resistance, memory, and place. These key notions need to be reformulated and redefined according to the perspective of Native/First Nations people, one that inevitably calls forth an investigation of what it means, today, to be “Native.” I explore the emergence of ‘upset’ literary devices as the products of a

reappropriated, newly redefined, yet liminal existence, as depicted by a necessary change in world-view and the effects on colonial language, the direct link to a past of colonialism, and the undeniable connection to a present/future of imperialism.

This project is the result of several years of research, conducted both as an undergraduate and graduate student. Through my work, I have come to view the values of literature in a different way: one of my key proposals is that one cannot read and understand Native/First Nations literatures without a necessary upsetting of critical theory. A radical change in thought is required and it must take place, perhaps simultaneously, in two spaces: the academic and the non-academic, the private and the public, thus calling forth a form of radical methodology, which, by definition, challenges rationality as a base for making decisions regarding how to go about the modification of a given world-order.<sup>11</sup> In this field of enquiry, these two spaces are not separate and distinct, they intermingle in a contact zone in which new forms of critical thought and modes of learning can emerge. Specifically, this change in thought requires a thorough analysis, through a decolonizing process, of what colonialism was and how it is still affecting Native/First Nations people today. This task asks for, first of all, the acknowledgement that colonialism is not over, that it is still taking place, although its means of oppression/repression have been updated and

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<sup>11</sup> Take, for instance, the figure of Coyote, in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. Coyote embodies this radical form of challenging, questions that which is deemed authoritative, does not act 'rationally', rather continuously makes mistakes, thus upsetting the 'natural' order of things. In this form of upsetting resides the intervention of the literary critic, the writer: "Like tricksters," argues Pulitano, "writers must constantly unsettle, contradict, and unglue the creeds of authoritative discourse. Like tricksters, writers have as their ultimate goal raising people's consciousness by calling forth for their direct participation in the dialogue" (170).

reframed according to a world governed by globalization and capitalism. In critical terms, if the current challenge is “to demystify, to decolonize” prior assumptions and discursive expectations (Tuhiwai Smith 16), what is required of this decolonizing process is a denouncing of the different forms of exploitation, thus giving space for the social function of the literary, the uprising of different forms of resistance (whether in writing, speech or action), bearing in mind the need to acknowledge one’s ultimate complicity with any discourse that one resists.

The texts I focus on, ranging from the 1980's to the present, each denounce in their own way the history of colonialism in North America, the methods of assimilation that were forced for centuries upon Native/First Nations people, and the gradual abuse of the land and heritage. More importantly, not only do they raise questions about how to deal with a past that is still affecting both Natives and non-Natives, these texts bring forth the current issues of how to deal with a present/future in which, although it is now ‘easier’ to claim multiple origins, questions of identity and community are being (re-)defined by a neo-liberal, global world order. Because this analysis requires such thorough research on – and an extended knowledge of – various historical and political facts, I include non-fictional texts, such as journalistic accounts, documentary film, unfinished land claims, governmental decisions on person and land status, and other accounts of ongoing struggles against capitalism and globalization. Indeed, the question of genre is a very slippery notion in this field: the line between literary and non-literary is at times blurred, while the mixing and upsetting of genres and devices (such as orality/oratory, autobiography, creation story, short story, political tract, manifesto) is of common practice for many authors. By



reappropriating their stories, traditions and culture, and mingling them with elements of the modern world, the liminal space in which collaborative research with scholars and artists of non-Native descent is enlarged, giving rise to transformational deliberation. There, a new form of critical analysis, whether literary, political or historical, takes ground, by which to consider, with the appropriate urgency, the environment in which we all live and must learn to share.

This project makes an important contribution to the burgeoning field of Native/First Nations literary studies, but also to the fields of Canadian and American literature. It also addresses certain questions and issues with regard to postcolonial studies. Firstly, it is impossible to ignore the literary and political wealth of this distinct, cross-disciplinary field and its numerous connections to other forms of intervention, such as politics, law, and pedagogy. Secondly, the field is gaining in importance on a more global scale, a strong interest having developed over the recent years in various universities in Europe. However, there are still many gaps. Scholars in Europe working in the field of Native literature, for example, are considering texts and theories produced in the U.S., but are paying little or no attention to those produced in Canada (although the research undertaken by Professor Hartmut Lutz at the Universität Greifswald in Germany is greatly helping). Furthermore, while there are numerous authors and specialists teaching at the university level in the U.S., the field of scholarship in Canada is still at a fledgling stage. In Québec, Native/First Nations literature in French is in desperate need of acknowledgement, research and thorough analysis: while there are numerous First Nations writers in Québec, having published as far back as the 70's, the first complete anthology of literature written in French

was only published in 2004, by the Italian scholar Maurizio Gatti.<sup>12</sup> Richard Desjardins' documentary *Le peuple invisible* (2007) was born out of his concern for the lack of interest and knowledge amongst his students in regards to the First Nations ("Indiens sans réserve"). Consequently, one of my principal goals is to contribute to building a strong field of Native/First Nations literary studies in Québec – in dialogue with that across North America – by focusing on the reappropriation of voice and language as the key process towards restoring identity and community wholeness, indeed towards what Charles Coocoo has called "the formation of a New Social Contract."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, my project is unique in the sense that it is the first to consider Native/First Nations literatures by countering the current conventional tendency to separate Native/First Nations writing according to its place of origin – Canada or the U.S. – or according to the language in which it is produced (English or French). Bringing in texts written in French is crucial to this project because it further underlines how literature has mapped and territorialized the fields of study in which, as literary scholars, we work. There has been, to my knowledge, no critical work produced in this field that brings together texts written in English and in French by Canada's Aboriginals, be they First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and I argue that, for instance, critical theories that have stemmed throughout Anglo-Canada and the United States can inform the literatures produced in French, specifically in Québec.

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<sup>12</sup> Diane Boudreau's « Histoire de la littérature amérindienne au Québec : oralité et écriture » originally published in 1993, was the only such work available until Gatti's. Her anthology however only cites 18 authors, and qualified as such according to Euro-traditional standards. Gatti cites over 40 authors.

<sup>13</sup> Coocoo, Charles. « Éducation et transmission par les pétroglyphes : une perspective atikamekw. » CIÉRA Annual Colloquium, Université Laval, April 12-13, 2007. [My translation]

Additionally, the specificity of Québec's literary history may help, I believe, to inspire a cross-border genealogy of Native and First Nations Studies (I discuss in Chapter Four, for instance, how Simon Harel's notion of "poaching" ("*braconnage*") is of particular interest and use to a discourse of retrieving situatedness). However, while upsetting these national constructs and linguistic borders, I nevertheless pay careful attention to the underlying differences so as not to subsume the complexities of these literatures into a single trope. By moving away from these paradigms of classification, my project aims to contribute in the moving away from institutional analysis, moving towards collective knowledge, local activism and pedagogical interventions that underline the importance of interconnectedness; in Jeanette Armstrong's words, "it is about collaboration as an organizational system" ("Let Us Begin With Courage" 7).

### **Part Two – A Self-Reflection on Methodology**

The first problematic that had to be addressed was that the act of intervention, in the literatures I am analyzing here, takes place within the dominant languages. How, then, does one go about incorporating a system of thought that one finds oppressive? Louis Owens wrote, as I remarked earlier, that to make language bear the burden of one's own experience is to make language a means to an end, the end being liberation; but, again, this liberation is not *from* language, it is *by* language. It is about using language, rather than being used (or defined) by it. This, however, leads to a further problem: how can one use language as a tool towards decolonization, bearing in mind the very dangers of such instrumentalization? What, in the translation of this burden of experience, is lost, and what remains? For one

must remember to acknowledge how the dominant discourses inevitably shape and influence us; as Roy Miki has said, “We *are* made by the discourses that precede us; but we must learn to understand how these govern our affects and dispositions.”<sup>14</sup> The fact is, then, that one can never ‘do away’ with such discourses; but rather than blindly participate in them, one can problematize them, from within, and in this resides the process of decolonization. For though social cleavages and inequalities have been framed differently across time, they have always been present, though not necessarily (officially) recognized as such. Recognition is thus the point of departure in the process of decolonization – but what is it, exactly, that needs to be decolonized, aside from language?

From within a Canadian context, and from within academia, I must necessarily wonder at my own involvement in these “word wars,” as Vizenor calls them, and be careful that my own terms of engagement remain within, without overstepping, a scope of collaborative research. On the one hand, there is the inevitable fact that without recognition, there can be no reconciliation: by this I mean that, in a Canadian context, one is quickly limited by governmental attempts to withhold transparency, in its attempts to de-responsibilize itself for past actions by way of official apologies. But how is this possible when the Prime Minister himself affirms that Canada “has no history of colonialism”?<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, every government must be held accountable for its acts: in this too, perhaps, resides the pedagogical project, in that it is our choice – or duty even – to resist the national

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<sup>14</sup> Keynote address at the TransCanada Two Conference, “Literature, Institutions, Citizenship,” University of Guelph, October 11-14, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Harper’s address at the end of the summit of the Group of 20 in Pittsburgh, on September 25, 2009.

project of transparency and “making invisible,” and work collaboratively and collectively towards what Len Findlay terms “redistributive justice.” Indeed, for Findlay, it is not only about “reading justly,” it is about “reading with justice.”<sup>16</sup> In this sense, then, redistributive justice has transformative potential. To do so calls for the deconstruction of the very norms that come to us through education, the ‘mental’ colonization process that is responsible for stereotypical assumptions and discursive expectations. Thus, from within the academic context, in the active re-shaping of this already-encoded relation between, on the one hand, imperial powers and, on the other, indigenous societies, how can one participate, without it inevitably leading to forms of complicity with the very discourse of humanism, which is ultimately operative in any struggle for humanity? The unfortunate stagnancy within academic and institutional processes often seems to give further credibility and potential to the progressive work that is taking place within communities – Québec being a perfect example of this. Nevertheless, I argue, this can be counter-balanced with not only an *active* involvement with non-academic actors, but a *practical* (as opposed to theoretical) participation in helping to further open up a mutual space in which we may learn how to defy the very systems that are continuously attempting to renegotiate their modes of control. This, then, is the point of origin in the process of creating new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses that account for the past and the present, and work towards a possible future of mutual understanding.

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<sup>16</sup> Keynote address at the TransCanada Three Conference, “Literature, Institutions, Citizenship,” Sponsored by the University of Guelph and Mount Allison University, July 16-19, 2009 at Mount Allison University.

Lee Maracle, in 1989, claimed (rightfully, I believe) that Native authors have their own voice, their own stories, in effect, their own theory. Therefore, and to the non-Native critics, “Move over” (“Native Myths” 185). Today, in 2011, I still ask myself, what valid reason, if any, have I in claiming to be a ‘specialist’ in the field? Am I not appropriating the very word ‘claim,’ which itself has an entirely different meaning in the writings and political activism of Native people? Finally, I ask myself, truthfully, is the only contribution I may provide really only to “move over”? To this last question, I must answer no. But such an affirmation involves undertaking a serious investigation of my own academic training, and requires an undoing of assumptions and expectations that I may bring to a text, not only as a literary critic, but also simply as a reader. For, in Joy Harjo’s words, “How do we know what [is] a ... good story? By whose definition, the community’s or the university’s?” (Harjo & Bird 29) In effect, according to whose standards shall I / do I read? As a partial answer to this question, I would like to mention Helen Hoy’s *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*, in which she “examines the problematics of reading and teaching First Nations writing from the perspective of a cultural outsider.” In addressing basic issues of reader location, cultural difference, and cultural appropriation, it concludes that “these authors have refused to be confined by identity categories such as “woman” or “Native” and have themselves, provided a critical voice guiding how their texts might be read and taught.”<sup>17</sup> In this sense, then, I have indeed “moved over”: to echo Louis Owens, it is about learning to read “on their terms” – it is, after all, their story and

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<sup>17</sup> These two quotes are taken from Helen Hoy’s web profile on the School of English and Theatre Studies, University of Guelph, website: [<http://www.uoguelph.ca/sets/sets-helen-hoy>] Retrieved August 21, 2011.

their voice; a position that will become clear in my discussion in Chapter Three of Eden Robinson and Richard Wagamese. Therefore, through this apprenticeship, I must learn about a particular cultural context and, more importantly, about a specific zone, a “frontier zone” (Owens), a streak “between the sandbank and the river” (Maracle). Thus, inevitably, a critical theory of Native/First Nations literature can only emerge from that same, particular, liminal space. While this does not negate the possibility that other critical theories, such as postcolonial theory, can provide interesting elements to the field, it is important to consider that the very tools one might ‘borrow’ from other theories will not necessarily apply, and will need, too, to be revised and redefined, just as the English and French languages within Native/First Nations literatures have been. For example, Gerald Vizenor not only effectively mingles postmodern and poststructuralist theories with his own ‘trickster hermeneutics,’ he applies the former’s literary strategies to Native paradigms and discursive systems. As a result, his works, both fictional and theoretical, are extremely difficult to understand if one is not, to a certain degree, familiar with both the European theories, and with the characteristics and tropes of Native writing. Thus, it is in this space of overlapping and juggling, that my own research and critical thinking can take place, as I work towards untangling the assumptions and expectations linked with Native/First Nations literatures and theory.

**“So What is Native/First Nations Literature About?” (Or: What is it NOT About?)**

My thinking process has changed drastically since I began my work on Native/First Nations writings. It is continuously changing – in part due to the new readings I discover, in part due to the various voices I hear speak about the topic. Thus, it is difficult to choose

from the many issues that have arisen since I began my project. One issue I wish to raise here, in this introduction, is the difficult and at times antagonistic relationship between postcolonial theory and Native/First Nations literatures. While this discussion is only a part of my entire project, it seems to be a rather appropriate example of how seemingly opposite discursive systems operate and create/re-create the dominant fields of study within the labyrinths of academia. This choice stems in part from various reflections on the discrepancies encountered in texts, as well as in open discussions, when reading (and dealing) with Native/First Nations works and issues. In effect, as I discussed above, it becomes necessary to (re-)consider the tools that are at hand, how they are being put to use and being redefined continuously in the process, bearing in mind a sometimes inevitable – whether willingly or not – opposition between the academic and the non-academic worlds, the Native and non-Native worlds. With this in mind, I would like to briefly address some of the arguments raised by a selection of Native/First Nations writers and critics against postcolonial theory per se, and their proposed alternatives and own critical modes of analysis. For in this field of study, it is necessary to open up a space in which an anti-colonial discourse against and an analysis of imperialism can function, the very tools of which (i.e. language) need to be re-explored and re-asserted according to ‘new’ truths and normative systems; preferably indigenous-only, according to many writers and critics. For the solidly-anchored social narrative of “the Indian,” produced centuries ago and fuelled by mischievous bureaucracy and fake representations, has had as an effect the internalization of the stereotypical aspects by the people themselves, as they experience their sense of individuality and community through the so-called ‘norms’ that surround them.



Paula Gunn Allen, in her section entitled “Kochinnenako in Academe: Three Approaches to Interpreting a Keres Indian Tale” (*The Sacred Hoop* 222-244) discussed that, in the end, it is the (cultural) perspective from which one reads that will ultimately shape one’s understanding of a story and because past (that is, prior to the creation of a properly Native critical theory) readings have all been from a white, Eurocentric perspective, Native people themselves, upon their attempts to regain their stories and traditions, have been influenced and inevitably shaped by this (imposed) critical mode. Indeed, as a non-Native student and literary critic, what tools do I use or disregard, and from which space do I speak while trying to avoid imposing Euro-American models of thought without making Native/First Nations critical positions and paradigms the only/essential ones? How, in the end, do I situate myself within this liminal space? One necessarily wonders whether, in the act of resisting a discourse (e.g. postcolonialism), one does not ultimately make use, in a distortive manner, of its core elements. This is what I term, in my work, *reappropriation* – whether of language, literature, propaganda, etc. – and that I find operative in most (if not all) Native/First Nations works. For language must be re-manipulated into a “transformative decolonizing tool” (Lundy 112), a language which not only reports and shows what *has been done* to the Native populations of North America, but which re-affirms and celebrates what *is being done* in numerous acts of artistic performance, which underline discourses of continuity and resistance, rather than discourses of victimization and statutory grief. The creation of these new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses are, as suggested by, amongst other, Jeannette Armstrong, part of the responsibility of the Native/First Nations writer and artist,

spaces in which the mythical, the elusive, the in-between, can empower and transform, indeed, *redefine* the human condition and experience.

To qualify the relationship between postcolonial theory and Native/First Nations literatures as difficult, and at times even antagonistic, stems, in part, and in the eyes of contemporary Native writers and critics, from what it means to be ‘postcolonial,’ as it is defined and used by scholars – keeping that ‘postcolonial’ does involve a multiplicity of facets and hence theories. Thus, before being able to address the question of relationship, it becomes crucial to understand the kind of postcoloniality that is being put into question by Native critical theory. To this effect, it is important to look at how, in the first instance, these theories came to be applied to Native literatures, which, in the case of Canada, stems from the question whether Canada itself can be considered postcolonial. While it is difficult to imagine, according to Cynthia Sugars, a “singular ‘postcolonial’ identity for Canada” (*Unhomely States* xxii), it remains necessary to draw a distinction, as does Linda Hutcheon in her article “Circling the Downspout of Empire,” between a ‘Canadian’ postcolonialism – that is, a Whiteman’s experience of colonialism – and the postcolonialism that is resonant with Third World experiences – such as in Africa or India – or a First Nations perspective. Hutcheon describes this “Whiteman’s postcolonialism” as partaking in the necessary acknowledgement of Canada’s settler history and the “psychological effects of a colonial past” along with its grappling with a sense of, as a nation, never having felt “central, culturally or politically” (75). Indeed, Canada, being wedged between the great emptiness of the North (which today has become a rich site for political attention and struggle for rights on the Northern Passage, an issue I will raise further in Chapter Four) and the

suffocating proximity of the American neo-imperial machine, could not feel otherwise than marginal: in the first instance, as Alan Lawson remarks in his article “The Discovery of Nationality in Australian and Canadian Literatures,” “in countries where the climate, the landscape and the native inhabitants did little to foster any sense of continuity, where the sense of distance, both within and without was so great, the feeling that a new definition of self – metaphysical, historical, cultural, linguistic and social – was needed, was, and is, overwhelmingly persuasive” (168). For without a sense of self, of belonging, in the midst of nowhere, there is only space for the realization of one’s insignificance.

However, in the case of Native/First Nations literatures, the question cannot, in my eyes, be confined to the question of Canada. In Thomas King’s short story “Borders,” which I discuss further in Chapter Four, the protagonist is asked by customs officers to reveal her nationality, to which she answers “Blackfoot.” But, the guard wants to know, is it Blackfoot-American side or Blackfoot-Canadian side? If one were to analyze, for instance, Blackfoot literature, it would be necessary to consider it from both Canadian *and* American “sides.” Thus, one would need to raise the question as to whether the United States can be considered ‘postcolonial’ – that very same space that is defined today as one of the most imperialistic that has ever been. For this reason, in my exploration of whether Native/First Nations literature can be qualified as ‘postcolonial,’ I bring in critics from ‘both sides’ (a middle ground that the editors of *Across Cultures, Across Borders* were faced with as well). Bearing in mind that, ultimately, these “sides” are cultural (if not virtual) constructs and in many cases devoid of meaning for many Native and First Nations Peoples, it is through

these authors' voices that 'sides' are undone – small victories indeed, just like for the protagonist in King's short story. But victories nonetheless.

But, to return to Hutcheon, it is precisely the 'suggestion' that Native/First Nations "should be" the voice of postcolonial Canada that is problematic. On the one hand, does not the very use of the word 'should' imply that Native/First Nations peoples are not claiming their voice (whether it be post-colonial or not) and that they ought to? (Though I believe that we all know the answer to that question). On the other hand, what does 'the' voice mean, and intend? Does it mean that such a voice can only be postcolonial, or can it be, indeed, something else? Is there space for multiple voices? The alternatives that Native scholars are putting forth as part of their own critical theory are attempts to answer these questions: for in essence, the latter stem from that very center that resistant writers are writing against. To be labeled 'postcolonial' is viewed as yet another form of colonialism (to this many would answer that the first round of colonialism is not even over yet). "Linguistic colonialism" (Owens "The Song is Very Short")<sup>18</sup> is the imposition of a structural and critical process, developed and applied by the very same institutions that originally instigated the erasure of Indigenous peoples in the first place and that are, inadvertently, still complicit with the continuous dissemination of a false national imagery – an imagery in which First Nations writers and critics do not wish to partake, as much as First Nations literature cannot be subsumed into, or made a sub-category of, Canadian literature. Notwithstanding the interesting fact that 'postcolonial' writing comes out of, indeed, postcolonial spaces, it is read, analyzed, and critiqued by contemporaries who hold

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<sup>18</sup> no page numbers (online version).

prestigious positions within academia, often within the old colonial Empire itself. Nevertheless, rather than merely rejecting postcolonialism for the limits it imposes on a critique of First Nations literature as an inevitably necessary (counter-)part of the study of Canadian literature, writers and critics are developing a critical theory that, while distinct from postcolonial theory, actively borrows from it, as a logical consequence of the acknowledging of how dominant discourses have influenced, indeed shaped, much of First Nations writing. This process of ‘borrowing’ is similar, as I mentioned above, to that of Gerald Vizenor, whose critical theory is a conscious intermingling of traditional Native American beliefs and tales with contemporary theories such as deconstruction and poststructuralism.

Though it is clear that such acts of language reappropriation in First Nations writing resemble similar techniques employed in postcolonial critique (for example Achebe’s use of the “African Palimpsest” or Ngugi’s subversion of imperialism by “writing back” in a local language), there remains the undeniable fact that these experiences need to be significantly differentiated yet not isolated into parts: that is, not all experiences can be put into the terms of postcolonial experience, however much that in itself, it is complex and multi-layered. As long as colonialism is still present in Canada, there can be no postcolonial discourse per se, in relation to First Nations writings – but this does not mean that there is no postcolonial *condition* in Canada, and that the terms of Canadian literature are not being engaged in by postcolonial critique. What does remain to be done, and in effect, perhaps it is the postcolonial approach that will enable this, is, as Diana Brydon suggests, “making accountable nation-state institutions and encouraging the reading, writing and discussion of

literature... For Canadian literary critics, that means reading our national literature in global contexts and in dialogue with Indigenous concerns” (“Metamorphoses” 16). There is indeed a formidable challenge in self-education and public education to be undertaken; for as long as Canadians cannot face their past, there cannot be, for many, any kind of resolution, and even less a sense of reconciliation. However, I contend, change is underway; within and beyond academia, there is a clear movement towards co-operative and collective relationships.

However, out of this problematic one needs to explore the difficulties raised by what I call the ‘politics of complicity.’ On the one hand, several Native writers (such as King, Krupat and Owens in particular) have critiqued the fact that postcolonial scholars seem to ‘forget’ the existence of and, more importantly, the resistance within Native/First Nations writing. For instance, recurrent, and ironic, reference is made to Edward Said’s “extraordinary description in *Culture and Imperialism* of what he calls “that sad panorama produced by genocide and cultural amnesia which is beginning to be known as ‘native American literature’” (quoted in Owens “The Song is Very Short”). This sentence in itself underlines exactly what Thomas King suggests in “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial”: that to label Native/First Nations literatures as ‘postcolonial’ ultimately shows them as orbiting around colonialism, thus breaching any continuity with past ‘pre’-colonial tradition. However, the authors that I consider would all argue, their literatures *are* about continuity.

On the other hand, several Native/First Nations writers and critics question the problematic of implicit complicity, since many of them hold positions in important universities throughout North America. If one considers, i.e., postcolonialism to be, as

Tuhiwai Smith put it, “a convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world” (14), then one should indeed, “move over,” in Maracle’s sense. But Native/First Nations writers are the first to acknowledge the influence of such discourses on their writing, whether fictional or theoretical; Maracle herself wrote, “I possessed enough of Europe’s poison to mock Raven” (“Native Myths” 184). What becomes important, then, is the “decolonization of academia,” a process that can only take place with the creation of a proper Native/First Nations critical theory: all the while *distinct from* postcolonial theory and other diasporic-/ethnic-oriented theories, but which nevertheless *borrow from* the very theories that are set aside. In effect, out of such a process have already risen, to name only a few, Vizenor’s “postindian hermeneutics,” Krupat’s “anti-imperial translation,” King’s “interfusalional and associational literature,” Womack’s “literary separatism,” Warrior’s “intellectual sovereignty,” or Armstrong’s “En’wokin process.” Faced with such a list of alternatives, inevitably, one is faced with the question: which to choose? But if one considers the drastic differences among literary practices by Native/First Nations writers, it seems impossible to come up with just one word – at least for the present time being. But to label these literatures only as ‘postcolonial’ is, evidently, far too reductive and needs to be/is being protested. In the end, could this dilemma be a case of Gerald Vizenor’s “word wars”?

If the current challenge is “to demystify, to decolonize” (Tuhiwai Smith 16) prior assumptions and discursive expectations, while still within a state of ongoing cultural and linguistic oppression, it is understandable why many Native/First Nations writers consider the term ‘post-colonialism,’ when applied to their literary works, a “luxury” (Maracle,

“Post-Colonial Imagination” 204), which allows them little space and little possibility, if any, for working through their own processes of regaining memory, de-victimizing and empowering. In effect, in 1989-1990, when individuals started coming out with their tales of horror about what they went through in residential schools, the officials of the Department of Indian Affairs said that “that fell to Aboriginal peoples themselves” (Milloy 297). This is what they did – but on their own terms. They were left to imagine, as Maracle would put it, “new words to deal with old dilemmas” (205), while continuously being put face to face with the old colonial fort, that continues to refuse to acknowledge that the colonial condition is still an ongoing one, and that it should be decreed unacceptable. As the former leader of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine – who was the first public figure to recount the abuse he suffered in residential school – remarked in an interview: “The government inaction on aboriginal issues is making it harder for native leaders to keep a lid on First Nations anger. The anger and frustration are palpable. People are so tired and so fed up with this type of existence -- especially when all around them is a better life and hope” (“Native Anger About to Spill Over, Chief Warns”). If, then, any form of moving forward, towards a “sense of renewal” (the very words of the government in 1998) can only take place in the conjuring of “new words,” in the mutual understanding of different and common pasts (Maracle 207), there can be no resolution, nor renegotiations, as long as there remains any quarrelling. Unfortunately, while the *Indian Act*, up to its last major amendment in 1985, has removed any notion of the non-human from its provisions, it nevertheless is still greatly defined in a ‘normative’ way, an all-too inclusive and reductive, de-produced and re-produced ‘normativity,’ one which is not, necessarily, mutually shared.



It is thus perhaps necessary that instead of attempting to impose and, consequently, quarrelling over whether ‘post-colonial’ is an appropriate term or not for a present reality, it may rather be more useful to re-construct it as well, in view of a possibility for the future, in which tension may be regarded solely as a source of creative, transformational power, out of which a common space for meeting, and discussing, may emerge.

The decolonization of national and individual imagery is a tumultuous process – more particularly so when questions of gender and race necessarily come to the forefront. However, one cannot forget that in the construction of a national identity, one in which the newcomer has become the ‘Native,’ such colonization becomes dependent on the continuity of stereotypical projections to ground itself in its validity. As Len Findlay has put it,

Commercial society extended its domains and enhanced its profit margins in part by using science and technology to reinforce stereotypes of Canada’s First Nations as hostile to or incapable of participating in modernity and hence ripe for assimilation or elimination... [Furthermore] much of the modification to date has attempted to reconceal, minimize, sanitize, or even justify colonial practices radically at variance with Canada’s professed sense of itself, domestically and internationally. (“Always Indigenize!” 369-70)

Again, this begs the question: can there be a space reclaimed for First Nations people in a postcolonial Canada, if that is what Canada is? If Canada is postcolonial, then, as I remarked, it is in the sense of a postcolonial condition, rather than a state; for the status of colonialism is still undergoing and the process of decolonization is still active, most especially in the institutions (educational and governmental). There is, still, argues Findlay,

a massive and persistent deficit in the national understanding of the rights of Indigenous peoples and the value and potential relevance of Indigenous knowledge to economic prosperity and social justice in Canada. The

Canadian academy continues to face a formidable challenge in self-education and public education in this area. (370)<sup>19</sup>

Thus, while postcolonialism may serve towards concentrating “on the role of education as a tool of colonial rule” (Moss 8) and as a “reading strategy,” (11) in the sense that it too addresses and complicates discourses of continuity, resistance, identity and healing, Canada and its literature still remain “implicated in a colonial legacy because of its continued focus on issues of identity and nation” (9). Canadians have, indeed, much to learn, for “at this time in history,” says Maracle, “Canadians are unable to face themselves, and so the concatenation between us is limited,” and for as long as there remains a colonial system, “which still rests squarely on our historic path,” there cannot be resolution (“Oratory on Oratory” 69). Nevertheless, the ongoing processes of decolonization of the Canadian academia (Findlay 370) and the calling for a “literary citizenship” by which, according to Brydon, the literary scholar is held responsible (accountable) for “her subject, her profession, her national and global situatedness, and her students” (11), are proof that change is underway, and that there is movement towards co-operative relationships and collective process, and hopefully a “safe engagement in mutually beneficial relations” (Maracle, “Oratory on Oratory” 64).

However – and this is the second issue I wish to raise in this introduction – this call for a “literary citizenship” suggests yet another different approach to Native criticism,

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<sup>19</sup> In effect, while conducting research on the legacy of the Residential School System in Canada, I was shocked at how many Canadians were ignorant of this portion of their past. I was shocked to find that the last federally-run residential school in Canada closed in 1996, and that the government did not issue a formal apology until 1998.

which, with regards to my analysis of the exploitation of the colonial language, needs to be acknowledged here: that of Indigenous Literary Nationalism. In his 1981 “Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism,” Simon Ortiz, often referred to as the key figure in the development of Native nationalism, suggests that the exploitation of the colonial language is not a question of authenticity; rather,

it is the way that Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance... It has been this resistance – political, armed, spiritual – which has been carried out by the oral tradition. The continued use of the oral tradition today is evidence that the resistance is on-going. Its use, in fact, is what has given rise to the surge of literature created by contemporary Indian authors. And it is this literature, based upon continuing resistance, which has given a particularly nationalistic character to the Native American voice. (10)

It might be argued that, in the choice of critics that I turn to in my conceptual framework (primarily Vizenor and Owens), I have not given sufficient attention to the critical perspectives of the American Indian Literary Nationalist critics, who approach Aboriginal sovereignty in a way that is diametrically opposed to Vizenor and Owens, and whose perspective on cultural sovereignty, by presenting Aboriginal culture “from the inside,” must be distinguished from Vizenor’s postmodern hermeneutics and Owens’ focus on hybridity. Furthermore, it might seem odd that, in setting up my theoretical framework, I have made largely made use of Native American critics. However, my reason for this choice is two-fold, at the least: firstly, as Niigonwedom James Sinclair suggests, the 1980s and 1990s were marked, in the United States, by “calls for Indigenous-centered literary scholarship... to consider the specific contexts and aesthetics of Native literary production” (“Opening Thoughts: Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism – A Criticism of our Own?”

20). Although scholars such as Lee Maracle, Emma LaRocque and Jeanette Armstrong were amongst those calling for such approaches, it was scholars from the United States that laid the theoretical groundwork for the criticism of Native literary production. I contend that this trend is closely linked to political activism, and in terms of time scale, major moments of resistance – those that mark the cultural and national psyche – in both the United States and Canada are separated by 10-20 years. In my view, this results in the later development of a strong critical movement in Canada (and more so in Québec) advocating specific spheres of Indigenous literary study and innovative definitions of Native literary criticism (I would add that there is a further discrepancy in time scale, in Canada, between the West Coast and the East Coast, as the early works of Maracle and Armstrong suggest). Thus while I consider the works of Vizenor and Owens to be critical and fundamental to my research, I do regard them first and foremost as informative and constructive as to how literary criticism has been/is developing “up here.” It is in this sense that I ask: how might one learn, extend, or benefit from their teachings? And similarly, which aspects might not be applicable to the specificity of a Canadian- and Québécois context? Similar questions were raised by the other authors of “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?: Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Context – A Collaborative Interlogue” (of which Sinclair’s “Opening Thoughts” is the introduction) in relation, precisely, to the American Indian Literary Nationalism perspective. The co-authors ask:

- Is this somewhat American-led movement applicable in Canadian Indigenous contexts?
- Can (and should) Indigenous literary self-determining efforts in Canada be localized?

- Does dealing with different colonial regimes result in different senses of “rhetorical sovereignty?”
- And, perhaps most simply, what are the benefits of this vein of analysis and what are the challenges? (19)

To the first question, inevitably, one would answer yes – if only given the work of Daniel Heath Justice, one of the authors of the aforementioned article. For Justice, “Indigenous literary nationalism involves a firm commitment to understanding Indigenous literary expressions in part through their relevant Indigenous intellectual, cultural, political, cosmological, and historical contexts” (25). He adds that this type of “literary nationalism as a theoretical movement offers important and nuanced distinctions from the nation-state nationalism that has given rise to some of the most offensive and brutal political ideologies of the last two centuries” (25-26), a distinction that I believe I make clear in particular in my section on genocide. Justice also underlines the importance of responsibility, as do the four authors of *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior – also critics from the United States but without whom, possibly, the debate around Indigenous Literary Nationalism might not be as developed. Ultimately, it is about individual voices coming together and advocating responsible criticism tied to actual communities, and placing an emphasis on continued dialogue. Inevitably, according to Justice, “scholars (both Native and non-Native) are increasingly employing interpretive principles of Indigenous literary nationalism, to varying degrees, in their analyses of tribal literatures.”<sup>20</sup> It is in this respect that I can say that, in my dissertation, I most certainly do apply some of these interpretive values; as I remarked earlier, the mixed and continuous

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<sup>20</sup> Author’s website.

corpus of this field of study, by its very heterogeneity, cannot be subsumed under a single narrative. Rather, this type of strategic, conjunctive, and informative approach opens a space in which one can discuss the complexities, specificities, and differences within Native/First Nations literatures, in relation to their respective and particular sociological, historical, political, and economical contexts, all the while accounting for the similarities in the provocativeness, the violence, the humour, and the denouncing of injustices embedded in these narratives.

The emphasis that I have placed in my research on the use value of colonial language for Aboriginal artists leads me to another element that is resonant with certain principles of Indigenous literary nationalism. With regards to cultural sovereignty, the Literary Nationalist perspective – and Craig Womack is a fierce advocate for this element – also suggests that Aboriginal nations should attempt to separate themselves culturally from the colonizing culture and return to their specific tribal traditions, practices, and languages in order to do so. In my emphasis on the colonial language as a site of reappropriation, I am well aware that this might suggest a minimization of the importance of Aboriginal languages as themselves sites of resistance and decolonization. However, as I show in my discussions of the poetry of Rita Mestokosho, who “tames” language, and that of Joséphine Bacon, who believes learning French was a “necessary evil” – both writers strongly value their Innu oral tradition and language in both the writing and publishing processes. Another example is my analysis of Tomson Highway’s “process of simultaneous translation,” through which the English language becomes informed by Cree-ness. With these processes in mind, there are numerous further questions to consider: Why do these writers cross

languages in this way? What are the effects created by the decision to use Native languages? Do these instances center, however briefly, the latter language? Do they defamiliarize the Anglo/Franco reader? And what does it say about who is writing, to whom, about codes shared and not shared?

Ultimately, what is important is the use one makes of the English and French words, which must rise out of one's own understanding of the world: these three authors, I contend, are evidence that Aboriginal languages still provide important grounds for the survivance of Aboriginal cultures and for resistance to colonial ideologies. It is worth noting, as well, that other critics, such as Julie Cruikshank, have even suggested that English has *become* another indigenous language (Krupat "Review: Red Matters" 659). This rejoins another element stated by Ortiz:

the indigenous peoples of the Americas have taken the languages of the colonialists and used them for their own purposes. Some would argue that this means that Indian people have succumbed or become educated into a different linguistic system and have forgotten or have been forced to forsake their native selves. This is simply not true. Along with their native languages, Indian women and men have carried on their lives and their expression through the use of the newer languages... and they have used these languages on their own terms. This is the crucial item that has to be understood, that it is entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language. (10)

This process, concludes Ortiz, is "the primary element of a nationalistic impulse to make use of foreign ritual, ideas, and material in their own – Indian – terms" (8) – which resonates deeply with what Louis Owens advocated as well: "the only way to be really heard is to make them read on our terms, though within the language of the colonizer's terminology" (*Mixedblood Messages* 7). In conclusion, what is of crucial importance here

is to privilege the relationship and the connection between literary production and community life. Craig Womack writes, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, “I have felt that literature rises out of land and language and stories,” and that “looking... at the places of origin for Native literature, makes a lot of sense” (76). He also adds that, in terms of a Creek national literature – the perspective from which he is speaking and advocating – that this “is not the *only* way to understand Creek writing but an important one given that literatures bear some kind of relationship to communities, both writing communities and the community of the primary culture, from which they originate” (4). I concur: it is in this conjunction of interpretive values, I concur, that movement towards co-operative relationships and collective processes may indeed lead to a “safe engagement in mutually beneficial relations.”

### **Part Three – Chapter Outline**

As aforementioned, my thesis is structured as an analysis of the following concepts: language, resistance, memory, and place. To each keyword I devote a chapter, in which I explore how they are voiced, and how they are not only inter-related but affect each other within the particular discursive framework of Indigenous writing, set in motion by different strategies of intervention (such as redefinition and invention) and the mixing of different literary devices. Additionally, each chapter is divided into three sections: this structure enables me to move between authors, the works of which always refer back to the main keyword, albeit it is explored from different perspectives.



In my first chapter, entitled “Language: The Voicing of Silence, Stories and Survivance,” I develop my understanding and use of the notion of reappropriation in Native/First Nations writings, as a tool and methodology towards reclaiming and reaffirming (rather than merely restoring) collective memory and communal knowledge. I explain how the act of reappropriating as a strategy of intervention is critical to the formation of a Native/First Nations critical theory and the conceptualization of collaborative research. The notion of using a cross-border approach as a process of study is discussed as stemming from Louis Owens’ theorization of a “frontier zone” or “liminal zone” in his *Mixedblood Messages*, which I relate to my choice of a cross-bordering (linguistic and national) corpus. Further to this theorization, a section of this chapter is devoted to Gerald Vizenor, and in particular to his two founding works, *Manifest Manners*, originally published in 1994 and re-printed in 1999, and *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, published in 1998. These works are, according to Elvira Pulitano, “the most radical, the most innovative, and definitely the most subversive” (148) of contemporary Native American critical theory. My particular interest in these works is how they may inform a more general, comparative critical literary theory not only for works produced in the United States, but those produced in Canada and Québec – since, for instance, the critical corpus in the latter is, in comparison, barely emergent. I further offer in this chapter an insight on the position from which I speak as a non-Native scholar. I discuss how the proposed change in world-view (what I refer to as a radical change in thought) came about through the technique of the reappropriation of language, i.e. how, as part of the colonial-style repression, many writers who were forced to learn English (or

French), and hence were inevitably transformed by it, instead mastered the language to a higher degree than expected, and have come to be able to use it, turn it inside-out, indeed own it as a mechanism towards retransformation. The initial violence that is thus put upon language at the onset renders the very tensions it unveils as a source of creative power; and rather than to be mulled upon, it is exploited in terms of humour, parody and exaggeration. This will require a thorough analysis of the imposition of the English (and in the case of Québec, French) language on Native/First Nations populations, the direct on-going link with a past of colonialism in North America, and the current conditions which lead to concur that this process is still underway. To this end, I focus on Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, his short story "Hearts and Flowers," and Joséphine Bacon's poetry in *Bâtons à message – Tshissinuatshitakana*, as well as her collaborative work with José Acquelin in *Nous sommes tous des sauvages*.

In the second chapter, entitled "Resistance: From Governmental Wards to Reclaiming Warriors," I discuss how a practice of critical reading can, and should be, informed by political, legal and/or pedagogical intervention. Because globalization and imperialism are often termed as a 'second colonialism,' I look at how these issues are raised and discussed by Native and First Nations authors and activists, and their reactions to, for instance, Stephen Harper's Apology, and Canada's refusal for several years to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This discussion ultimately requires an analysis of certain governmental policies of genocide and assimilation – such as the (in)famous *Indian Act* in Canada, or the *Termination Act* in the US – and how, though they have been removed or amended, these policies still maintain oppressive measures that,

according to Ellen Gabriel, “prevent Indigenous peoples from prospering socially, culturally, politically and economically” (“Statement”). I explore the implications of these governmental policies on the continuing discrimination and rise in violence particularly against Aboriginal women in Canada. I argue that the imposition of colonial and patriarchal values successfully devalued the traditional role of Native women at large, within their communities and societies – to this end, I turn to the works of Paula Gunn Allen, her theoretical work entitled *The Sacred Hoop* and her novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. I also discuss the work of a women’s movement, *Walk4Justice*, that has sought to address violence against Native women, particularly omnipresent in British Columbia, several elements of which can be read in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*. Finally, I explore how many writers are proposing new solutions to counter ongoing oppressive governmental processes, such as sovereignty, – which, in Mohawk (Kanien’kéha), means ‘to carry oneself’ – self-governance and, most importantly, how such transformations can only be achieved through community and individual healing. To this end, I work with Alfred Taiaiake’s *Wasáse, Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (that seeks to reappropriate the term “warrior”) in conjunction with Lee Maracle’s novel *Sundogs* and Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*. All these works emerge from a liminal space in which the discourse of “The Indian Problem,” which involves complex and still-tabooed issues such as racism and sexual abuse, is addressed and upset, in order to dissolve the polarities between ‘Indian’/‘non-Indian’ and ‘human’/‘non-human,’ and, as Mark Shackleton has suggested, to “establish grounds for common humanity” (“Beyond Conflict” 151).

In my third chapter, entitled “Memory: How to Live With Ghosts,” I explore how memory is an important trope in Native and First Nations literatures. I argue that, in conjunction with the notions of home, haunting and homelessness, to reappropriate the gaps, or “ghosts,” in stories enables the keeping and – where necessary – the restoration of memory, whether collective or individual. This, in turn, participates in establishing a sense of situatedness; one, I argue, that does not necessarily invoke that of ‘home’ in the traditional sense. Through an analysis of Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*, Richard Wagamese’s *Ragged Company*, Darrell Dennis’ play *Tales of an Urban Indian*, and a section from Robert Majzels’ *City of Forgetting*, I discuss how themes of guilt, dislocation, trauma and colonization are addressed and complicated by various forms of haunting and homelessness. Indeed, the idea of transgenerational haunting is interesting in relation to Canada’s history of genocide vis-à-vis its Aboriginal peoples. The necessity to record, transfix and transcribe the narratives of those that survived this genocide is not only about a growing fear of forgetting (as is the case with Holocaust narratives); it is about mending bridges, filling gaps, and restoring memory. In addressing questions of cultural appropriation and the modes of response and/or resistance developed by, and through, an understanding of Native/First Nations artistic interventions, intergenerational bridges are being built back, generating empowerment, agency, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of pride. For rather than thinking about the urge to record and to seek answers as nourishing a dark and dismal dialectic, these acts of reappropriation not only report and show what has been done to the Indigenous populations of North America, but they re-affirm and celebrate what is being done in numerous acts of artistic performance.

In my final chapter, entitled “Place: Indigenous Poaching and Acts of Citizenship,” both spatial and linguistic translation are key to the beginning of understanding. Of equal importance, and in relation to my discussions above of the importance of reclaiming language and memory, is the reclamation of place: a place from which to express, firmly rooted, cultural affirmation and overture towards new avenues for artistic, individual and pedagogical expression and performance. To establish place, then, is to learn how to subvert participation in a discourse of victimization into the claiming of self-location: it is to impose oneself, but without violent conquest. I discuss, through a short analysis of Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, the notion of “being in occupied territory”: for in the creation of a Canadian national literature, each of the barren, ‘wild’ elements – climate, landscape, Native – was taken into the national project of writing place and, one by one, fashioned into a picture where everything has its place – or non-place: the Native, in turn, was erased out of the landscape, leaving an empty space for the newcomer to settle in, to claim as his own. However, through acts of “poaching,” as described by Simon Harel in his *Braconnages identitaires*, I argue that there are many instances of resistance from within the “occupied territory” that destabilize any sense of situatedness or control: for the actual space in which Natives are poaching is beyond the territorial – this poaching, I argue, takes place within linguistic, intellectual and, to an extent, ethical spaces. Instances of this type of “poaching” can be found in Thomas King’s short story “Borders,” that upsets the notion of citizenship as linked to a pre-defined territory, or in disputes regarding land claims and border crossings – the latter of which I discuss in relation to Courtney Hunt’s movie *Frozen River* and the particular liminality of the Akwesasne reserve. Finally, I contend that the

reappropriation of place has enabled to reinscribe the reserve as a space from which to assert sovereignty and elements of territorial control. Reappropriating the reserve as a community (and no longer as a ghetto) is not only about resisting past and present forms of colonization. It is also about ‘communing’ traditional knowledge and attempting to harmonize it with present-day societal preoccupations; I discuss this in relation to the poetry of Rita Mestokosho and Jeannette Armstrong’s essay “Sharing One Skin.”

In conclusion, I argue that the reappropriation of place and language, through means of positive resistance and reaffirming collective memory, are inter-related and continuously work together in a transformative process, which is as much at the core of most Native/First Nations literatures and artistic events, as are political actions and legal claims, thus underlying the importance, the urgency, of collaboration and collective deliberation.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **LANGUAGE: THE VOICING OF SILENCE, STORIES AND SURVIVANCE**

## **Introduction**

Drawing from the theoretical works of Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) and Louis Owens (Chocktaw), as well as from the creative works of Tomson Highway (Cree) and Joséphine Bacon (Innu), I discuss in this chapter the reappropriation of the English and French languages within Native American and First Nations contemporary literatures, and specifically how literary texts enable the retelling and reclaiming of Indigenous Peoples' histories and rights for sovereign governance. In this way, through their fiction, Highway and Bacon address their artistic experience in having to write in a language (English and French, respectively) that is not their mother tongue (Cree and Innu, respectively), but through which they find ways to give voice to what has been left unspoken and repressed in earlier generations. Furthermore, notwithstanding the ongoing challenges Indigenous people face, including that of demystifying the political rhetorics through which colonialism continues to model assumptions and discursive expectations throughout North America, what is produced, I argue, in the literatures I explore, is a strategic space of positive resistance and transformational power, a liminal zone in which new forms of critical thought and modes of collaborative learning may emerge, generating a possible dialogue beyond cultural and linguistic divides. The works of Vizenor and Owens, in this regard, set the grounds for these new forms of critical thought, which involve an exploration and an upsetting of previous norms, nomenclatures, and boundaries, both linguistic and intellectual. Each of the authors I address in this chapter explores the dynamic, performative nature of their oral tradition when brought together with the written



form, the outcome of which ultimately produces a “resultant tension,” as Owens terms it (*Mixedblood Messages* 176), but that is nevertheless the very source of their creativity.

By means of the productive violence of reappropriation, these literary performances generate upsetting and comical interventions that demystify, as well as denounce, the ongoing forms of exploitation within Canada and the U.S. For such processes are crucial for establishing discourses of reconciliation and practices of negotiation towards equity and sovereignty. These objectives are of crucial importance, considering that up until the 1960’s, “indians” were still defined in terms of the non-human, as mere wards of the State.<sup>21</sup> The right to vote, for example, was only bestowed on March 31, 1960. With this event, according to Tomson Highway, “Native people were finally able to move away from reserves, and to live as recognised human beings, so to speak, in so far as the status of being a human being is equated with the right to vote” (Shackelton & Lutz 75). Indeed, as Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada, asks in her foreword to the collection *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada’s Past*, “the question [that] is at the very heart of racism: is the Other a human being?” As if to answer her own question, she continues: “Even though our laws did not explicitly state that Aboriginal people were not human, they were routinely excluded from society” (8). In effect, the Canadian government had set to solve the “Indian Problem”: this unspoken legislation was upheld from 1876 (when *The Indian Act* was implemented) to 1985 (when *Bill C-31, An Act to Amend the*

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<sup>21</sup> I will return to this notion of “being human” in Chapter 2, in my discussion of Canada’s *Indian Act*.

*Indian Act*, was passed, following pressure coming from the United Nations).<sup>22</sup> What I wish to point out here, and this will be the subject of this chapter, is that language was – and still is – a key tool in this ongoing process of tentative assimilation.

### **Part One - Reappropriating Language, Mastering Silence and Writing Home**

*“Silence is the tricky start, not the end of our stories.”*  
(Vizenor and Lee 142)

In their introduction to *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao set out to define an analytical framework for addressing the problem of cultural appropriation, that is, the “taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (24). This act of taking, instigated by the colonizer, is more often than not derogatory, and deforms the initial meaning or purpose of what is appropriated, that is, anything that relates to an individual’s, or a community’s, sense of identity and belonging to a particular culture: first and foremost, I would argue, language. In terms of language, “to appropriate,” explains Jean-Jacques Lecercle “is also to destroy” (238): the colonial appropriation of Native/First Nations stories and voice (i.e. spoken language) was fueled by a desire to destroy, indeed erase traditional knowledge and cultural belonging in an attempt to forcefully assimilate the Native populations. In so doing, coupled with the physical and psychological violence of reservation schools and fostering homes, the confinement of the reservation and the denial

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<sup>22</sup> The different periods of the *Indian Act* and its amendment will also be addressed in further detail in Chapter 2.

of civil rights, the image of the ‘vanishing indian’ was invented and imposed within literature, art, popular culture, and of course, in federal policy, with the *Indian Act* in Canada (1876), and different, yet very similar policies in the US, such as the *Indian Removal Act* (1830), the *Relocation Act* (1956) or the *Termination Act* (1954). Most importantly, the imposition of the image of the ‘vanishing indian’ meant that ‘the Indian Problem’ would eventually come to an end, as it certified the ‘indian,’ by definition, as inadvertently doomed to extinction. As Edward Curtis’ famous picture reveals, they were to simply vanish into oblivion, without leaving a trace of their passage:



Edward Curtis, *The Vanishing Race*, Navaho 1904

All the same, a trace *is* always left, however ephemeral – and this is at the heart of my argument, that the texts I analyze throughout this dissertation are, in effect, witness to the

continuity of story, communal knowledge, and survivance. Out of the traces, there emerged a scope of voices that have come together to refute policies of assimilation, and a history of abuse and genocide, and to take control over the emergence of narratives of conquest. These are what Edward Said has termed “Western techniques of representation,” as noted by Emma LaRocque in her *When the Other is Me*; they are techniques and “textual records [that] colonizers have left and continue to perpetuate in the Canadian academy” (4), produced by non-Natives in an urge to ‘write Indian.’ Consequently, these false narratives further entrenched the created image of ‘the indian,’ that “colonial enactment,” (Vizenor *Manifest Manners* 11) that never truly existed in the first place as it has no genuine referent. I am thinking here for instance of Rudy Wiebe’s *Temptations of Big Bear*, James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* or Yves Theriault’s trilogy *Agaguk*, *Tayaout* and *Agoak*.<sup>23</sup> Such portrayals would merely offer romanticizations of either the fierce savage or the noble vanquished – two uncomplexed ‘truths,’ the negative and the positive, ignoring all the shades of gray in between. As Anishnaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor has discussed,

the *indian* is the invention, and *indian* cultures are simulations, that is, the ethnographic construction of a model that replaces the real in most academic references. Natives are the real, the ironies of the real, and an unnameable sense of presence, but simulations are the absence, and so the *indian* is an absence, not a presence... The *indian* was simulated to be an absence, to be without a place (*Postindian Conversations* 85; emphasis in the original).

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<sup>23</sup> For further discussion of the controversial nature of Thériault’s trilogy (as controversial as his own possible “montagnais” ancestry) see Sandra Hobbs’ article “La représentation ambivalente de l’Autochtone dans le roman québécois: vers une perspective postcoloniale,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* Vol. 9 No. 3 (2006): 347-364.

It was this empty image, this storying into absence, that had to be reclaimed and retold. Unfortunately, during the two centuries of this active erasure, texts or testimonials produced by Native American and First Nations peoples available to counterbalance this overproduction of so-called ‘real’ indian stories, were scarce – not for a lack of want, but rather for lack of capacity: for as quoted by a former anonymous student of residential school, “everything an Indian needed to help himself, to think the way a human person should in order to survive” (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill 11) was washed away.

Nevertheless, no matter how hard the actors of governmental, religious and popular forms of assimilationism tried, little did they realize the extent to which their policies across Canada and the United States, in the attempt to silence and erase any trace or voice of the Indigenous peoples, in fact produced, although slowly, in the end, the exact counter-effect of their expectations. Silence, indeed, was *not* the end of the stories – rather it bared witness not only to a quiet persistence, but also to an insistence of existence and identity. Choctaw scholar Louis Owens wrote, “Tyrants have always known the power of language and story. Silence a people’s voices and you can conquer them... Silence a people’s stories and you erase a culture” (*Mixedblood Messages* 210-211). Rather, I would argue that the imposition of silence was perhaps even the very fuel in the creation of what E. K. Brathwaite termed a “language for revolution”: “English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree” (282). And to the question whether English can be “a revolutionary language” he

replies, “it is not English that is the agent. It is not language, but people, who make revolutions” (282).

Silence need not be all negative; as the saying goes, it can be golden. Silence is mostly understood by contemporary Western thinking as a lack, as the absence of speech, of sound – it is thus deemed solely negative. Instead, it may also be thought of as a positive presence. Sara Maitland, in her memoir *A Book of Silence*, describes silence as something that “may be outside, or beyond the limits of, descriptive or narrative language... Perhaps it is a real, separate, actual thing, an ontological category of its own: not a *lack* of language but other than, different from, language; not an *absence* of sound but the presence of something which is not sound” (27-28). While on the one hand, silence is indeed the place where oppression takes place, where the silenced are controlled by the silencers, the place from which one escapes only through a coming to voice and language, it is also a creative warzone. As noted by LaRocque, “the colonizer’s language employed against indigenous peoples is odious,” and what might have been, initially, “a gross misunderstanding... is no benign cross-cultural misunderstanding, though there was and is certainly that, but rather *it was and is a war of words*, words that have animalized and demonized Aboriginal peoples” (4; emphasis mine). Gerald Vizenor, who considers the best stories to be written in the shadows, in the midst of what he calls a “trickster war,” has analyzed this “war of words” in depth. In his epic poem *Bear Island: The War at Sugar Point*, this war indeed takes place in the shadows, within the tree line between the forest and the garden, “solitary spirits / marvelous sentiments / of shamans / court and tradition / under the cedar / set by names /

ravens and bears / visual memories / traces of bagwana / turned in translation / by my heart / a native warrior / and natural presence / at the tree line” (20-21). Indeed, out of this warzone in the tree line, from the shadows, what has emerged is a counter voice to silence.

I discuss Vizenor’s critical theory in further detail in the second part of this chapter, but what is important to note here is not only the deliberative use of a discourse of war (which inevitably works itself into any discourse of resistance), there is, ultimately, the notion of a positive resistance that is put in motion, one that emerges from silence as well as from the colonizer’s language – one that takes over a language of demonization and animalization, and re-inscribes a sense of personalization and humanization into an Indigenous counter-discourse of resistance. This is made possible, specifically, through a process where literatures produced by Indigenous peoples open up a space of empowerment and agency, and in which are operative both the acts of ‘writing back’ against the methods of assimilation and colonial abuse, as well as that of ‘writing home’ – by revitalizing communal knowledge and affirming, rather than merely restoring, a sense of collective memory. ‘Writing home’ is a strategy of intervention – one, according to Vizenor, that would be of the “postindians of survivance”<sup>24</sup> – that looks towards emphasizing the

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<sup>24</sup> The “postindian,” according to Vizenor, “overcomes the manifest manners of dominance,” “absolves by irony the nominal simulations of the *indian*, waives centuries of translation and dominance, and resumes the ontic significance of native modernity. Postindians are the *new* storiers of conversions and survivance; the tricky observance of native stories in the associated context of postmodernity;” “Survivance,” an amalgam of the words [survival + resistance], is “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of

importance of continuity in stories. Language, then, becomes a decolonizing tool towards rewriting “the existence and presence of Aboriginal Peoples into North American society, as well as their celebration and cultural affirmation;” which are, according to Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong, “necessary paths towards healing” (“Disempowerment” 241). It is to write so that the audience may recognize innovations and allusions, be revitalized by communal knowledge and, ultimately, find themselves as whole in the discourse they hear or read. This strategy calls for the creation of a discourse within a liminal space. Cree artist and writer Neal McLeod has recently described the process involved as “not so much returning to some idealized location of interpretation: rather, it is a hermeneutical act, perhaps an act of faith. It is the attempt to link two disparate narrative locations, and to find a place, a place of speaking and narrating:” through stories, “to anchor ourselves in the world” (“Coming Home Through Stories” 33).

However, there is, inevitably, a gap in the storytelling as well; which, rather than entailing a discontinuity, suggests, I argue, a silent continuity. This gap is largely due to the decades of shame and assimilation, the generations of parents who would no longer share their stories because of the sense of overwhelming guilt (for being ‘indian’) that was ingrained in them as children in residential schools. I will return to this notion of guilt in relation to residential schools in further detail in Chapter Two, but wish to draw attention to the fact that the discourse of guilt is tightly linked to the discourses of forgetting and forgiveness, discourses that are found in governmental instalments of and/or participation

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succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy” (*Manifest Manners* vii-viii).



in different Reconciliation Commissions.<sup>25</sup> More often than not though, and to echo Deena Rymhs, these discussions, that come out of the very processes of reconciliation, tend to re-enact the very same colonial dichotomies that are in question.<sup>26</sup>

The key element in the act of writing home, then, is about retrieving and re-awakening memory from – to quote Tomson Highway – its “padlocked doors” (*Kiss of the Fur Queen* 285), and attempting to bridge the generational gap of shame caused by governmental assimilation policies. Many Indigenous artists address this gap in the storytelling, and a variety of artistic performances explore different means to reconnect the elements of the past with those of the present and future. For instance, Algonquin filmmaker Kevin Papatie addresses this gap in his short film *L’amendement* [*The Amendment*] (2007). Presenting extended close-up snapshots of the protagonists, the narrator, in voice-over and in Algonquin, tells a story of the disappearance of the Algonquin language within three generations – Zoé is an Elder, who only speaks Algonquin; her son, Noé Louis, age seven, was taken away to residential school, and returned speaking French as well as his Native language; Noé’s daughter, Nadia, was raised speaking both French and Algonquin, but was taken away to residential school when she

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<sup>25</sup> Such as, for example, the *Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, or the *Qikiqtani Truth Commission* (created to conduct an inquiry on the truth surrounding the “Dog Slaughter,” “Relocations” and other decision-making policies of the Government up until 1980, and the effect on Inuit culture, economy and way of life).

<sup>26</sup> Rymhs, Deena. “Word Warriors: Indigenous Political Consciousness in Prison.” Keynote address at the “Contested Spaces: Conflict, Counter-Narrative, and Culture from Below in Canadian and Québécois Literatures” Colloquium, May 1-2 2009, Université de Sherbrooke. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Rymhs for sharing with me the unpublished paper version of this communication (Forthcoming in *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada*, Wilfried Laurier University Press, January 2012).

was five, and upon her return, had mostly forgotten the Algonquin language; and finally Nadia's daughter, Ingrid, also taken away, and who now only speaks French. Ingrid, therefore, cannot communicate with her great-grandmother, Zoé. Nevertheless, the film explores the possibilities of silence within this gap, the space in which resistance may take place: memory insures that stories cannot be silenced, even if they are silent. By exposing the intricacies and the constructions of the blind doxa that led to the very social narrative that is being questioned, the trick is to, precisely, dissolve the polarities between empty concepts such as indian/non-indian, and to "establish grounds for [a] common humanity" (Shackleton "Beyond Conflict" 151). Those whom Gerald Vizenor has called the "postindian warriors," now lay bare the events that occurred in the shadows, the dirty government tricks. These postindians are witnesses of continuity, and the authors of survivance. They are, so to speak, the proof that the 'indian,' synonymous with closure, ending, vanishing, absence, is merely an invented, constructed figure that cannot exist, and never has.

Reappropriation, then, is not only about resisting past and present forms of colonization; it is also about restoring traditional knowledge and attempting to harmonize it with present-day societal preoccupations. In this sense, then, it also defers from what might be called *counter*-appropriation as it unveils a facet of positive, creative resistance. It enables the creation of a space in which the ghosts of Canada's past may be exposed and dealt with, and in which collective knowledge, local activism and pedagogical approaches underline the importance of interconnectedness. This new methodology, which combines

critical pedagogy and collaborative research, upsets previously existing institutional discourses that have compartmentalized Native/First Nations literatures, and further entrenched, falsely, their authors as ‘indians’ – that vacuous term synonymous with closure, vanishing, absence, built on nostalgia and melancholy. This new way of thinking – that is currently unfolding with regard to the study of Native American and First Nations literatures, in its relation to Canada and the U.S., and its presence and/or absence in the fields of Canadian and American literatures – is, in the words of Jeannette Armstrong, “about collaboration as an organizational system” (“Let Us Begin With Courage” 7). Collaboration, in this sense, is indeed crucial – not only for the scope of this project, but for the way analysis in the field is heading, and how far it has come.<sup>27</sup>

In 1989, Lee Maracle, in her article “Native Myths: Trickster Alive and Crowing,” claimed (quite rightfully) that Native authors have their own voice, their own stories, in effect, their own theory, and that we, non-Native academics and writers, should “Move Over” (185). Similarly, many of the contributions to Jeannette Armstrong’s anthology, *Looking at the Words of Our People*, published in 1993, resonated with Maracle’s desire (and call) for a critical literary theory, made solely *by* and *for* Native texts: “First Nations

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<sup>27</sup> Some examples of collaborative works that I have found particularly inspiring include (but are by far not limited to) *Reasoning Together*, by The Native Critics Collective; *Across Cultures, Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures*, edited by Paul DePasquale, Renate Eigenbrod and Emma LaRocque; *Aimititau! Parlons-nous!* collected by Laure Morali, and which led to further collaborations between Native and non-Native writers in Québec; *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*, edited by The Telling It Book Collective; and *Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice*, a chapbook edited by Maria Campbell et al., and published by Gallerie: Women Artists’ Monographs.

Literature will be defined by First Nations Writers, readers, academics and critics and perhaps only by writers and critics from within those varieties of First Nations contemporary practice of culture and knowledge of it” (7). However, in 2007, almost twenty years after her “Move Over,” Lee Maracle wrote that

Study is a collective and collaborative process: collective not in the sense that one wants to come to a common position, but collective in that many participate, and collaborative in that we all wish to come to a good mind about what is cherished and hidden... Study is a process, a journey of discovery (“Oratory on Oratory” 57).

Evidently, a lot has been accomplished within the last two decades. While the study of Native and First Nations literatures is still very much about processes of “writing back/writing home,” it is indeed also now “a collective and collaborative process.” Writers, scholars, autodidacts and activists, both Native and non-Native, are working together in this collective process of decolonizing institutions, communities and ideologies, as well as addressing questions of cultural appropriation, and the modes of response and/or resistance developed by, and through, an understanding of Native/First Nations artistic interventions. Finally, the creation of new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses, that account not only for the past and the present, but that work towards a possible future of mutual understanding, is made possible in this liminal gap, the crossroads at which dialogue – across and beyond linguistic and cultural divides – may be achieved, within a shared space of renegotiation and resistance.

If language is to become one “of revolution,” through an act of reappropriation, it is important to emphasize that not only words, voice and concepts need to be taken back, it is necessary, I argue, to acknowledge the silences too – or rather, what goes on within them. For within these instances of non-speech, there is still a ‘word war’ going on. In this resides the responsibility of the writer: to unburden the discourse, as well as the silence, from the erroneous interpretations, the anchored social narrative produced centuries ago and fueled by mischievous bureaucracy and fake representations. It is important to note though that not all writers fall into the category of dutiful bearers of this responsibility, that a sense of duty is not the sole vehicle for creation, and that Native/First Nations literatures should not be subsumed as such; Julian Mahikan (Atikamekw), for instance, writes first and foremost a story, and his works are neither addressed to a particular audience, nor does he advocate himself specifically as a “Native” writer.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, I argue that each and every one of these works, regardless of the purpose behind them, participates in the foregrounding of a distinct literary field, one that counterbalances the all too many representations of the ‘indian’ injected into mainstream imagery, and that works towards unraveling the stereotypical aspects internalized by the people themselves, ingrained through pounding guilt, as they experience their sense of (or lack of) individuality and community through the so-called ‘norms’ that surround them. Thus, in order to effectively question, and afterwards upset, the complexities and constructions of such blind doxa, it is necessary to first expose its intricacies, and analyze the anchored social narrative, produced centuries ago and fueled

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<sup>28</sup> I discuss this position further in Chapter Three, with regards to Eden Robinson and Richard Wagamese.

by mischievous bureaucracy and fake representations. To this end, I wish now to turn to an analysis of the works of Anishnaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, whose established Native critical theory may serve to inform a broader understanding of some of the issues crucial to Native and First Nations literatures.

### **Part Two – Gerald Vizenor and the Trickster Tales of Survivance**

*Deception is one good ironic theory on the origin of language; that is, the prompt and inspired, primary purpose of language was to deceive by direction and metaphors the listener, who was a stranger... Why else would humans have a need to create a language? Similarly, and in the context of language theory, trickster stories are openly deceptive, but the difference, of course, is that everyone is aware of the pleasure of illusion, transformation, and deception in trickster stories (Pulitano 148).*

In *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, Elvira Pulitano sums up, with this quote alone, several of the key elements that are pertinent to an understanding of Gerald Vizenor's critical theory and his fiction – for, in his case, the two are never too far apart. Vizenor's two founding works, *Manifest Manners*, originally published in 1994 and reprinted in 1999, and *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, published in 1998, are, according to Pulitano, “the most radical, the most innovative, and definitely the most subversive” (148) of contemporary Native American critical theory. My particular interest in Vizenor's works lies in how they may inform a more general, comparative critical literary theory not only for works produced in the United States, but those produced in Canada and Québec – since, for instance, the critical corpus in the latter is, in comparison, barely existent. Furthermore, his theoretical considerations on

the English language, and how it may be manipulated into a tool towards liberation, enable a proactive equilibrium between voice and silence. This is made possible through the entanglement of liberation, mutation and healing within the actual discourse of resistance that arises out of the warzone, in which clash the different languages of converging dominations:

English, that coercive language of federal boarding schools, has carried some of the best stories of endurance, the shadows of tribal survivance, and now that same language of dominance bears the creative literature of distinguished postindian authors in the cities. The tribal characters dance with tricksters, birds, and animals, a stature that would trace the natural reason, coherent memories, transformations, and shadows in traditional stories. The shadows and language of tribal poets and novelists could be the new ghost dance literature, the shadow literature of liberation that enlivens tribal survivance (Vizenor “Native American Indian Literature” 227).

Pulitano also draws attention to an important feature common in both Native American and First Nations writing: in the active attempt at recovering or, as Louis Owens has termed it, rearticulating an identity, “a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community, [this task] becomes in the face of such obstacles [such as colonization and assimilation policies] a truly enormous undertaking” (*Other Destinies* 5). It is therefore only natural that the writings of many of these authors seem, at first glance, so difficult to penetrate, to understand, to make sense of from a Eurocentric perspective. In this lies Vizenor’s (amongst others) ‘tour de force’: both his theory and his fiction are, to say the least, obscure, at times incomprehensible; but this density is only a facet to the complex energy that his works reveal. On the one hand, the writing is deceptive, manipulative: the reader perhaps expects too much, a proper closure, a linear argument. In other words, the

reader is attuned to his or her expectations that ‘should’ fit into the “manifest manners” of literary theory. These manifest manners are

the course of dominance, the racist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as ‘authentic’ representations of *indian* cultures... [they] court the destinies of monotheism, cultural determinism, objectivism, and the structural conceits of savagism and civilization (*Manifest Manners* vii).

But the sense of deception is a lure, a trick. In fact, it is liberation: the initial incomprehension should not be regarded as “a humiliating defeat or a piece of mysticism” but rather as “a kind of joyous invitation to reread” (*Fugitive Poses* 34). This is what Vizenor seeks in his works, and has sought to teach his audience; as he has said himself, “some upsetting is necessary” (Bowers and Silet 47). This notion of education, of “an invitation to reread,” is highly relevant to the works of Tomson Highway, as I will show. For indeed, the literature of dominance, the so-called ‘authoritative discourse,’ needs to be upset: for it is within its framework that the ‘indian,’ the literary construction, is still reflected in narrative and is consequently depicted, and thought of, as a vanishing entity of a past life. In the literature of dominance ‘about’ Native peoples, the figure of the ‘indian’ continues to conceal the actual members of vital, active and living communities. This, then, is Vizenor’s starting point in his deconstruction of empty inventions, and his tentative re-invention of a new creative and liberative space.

Upsetting is present in Vizenor’s life as of his birth: he was born a ‘mixed-blood,’ another colonial misnomer and unfortunate invention of language. The word was often



replaced with that of a ‘halfbreed,’ the resulting produce of two opposites.<sup>29</sup> These concepts will, too, be upset and in turn celebrated throughout his works. He was born to a Swedish-American mother and a French Anishinaabe father (of French Canadian descent), who was relocated by the government, in accordance with the *Urban Indian Relocation Program*, to the city.<sup>30</sup> His father was found brutally murdered when Vizenor was but two years old. He thus grew up in a series of foster homes in the Minneapolis area, close to the White Earth Reservation where his father’s relatives lived and taught him about traditional tales and his family roots. His choice to pursue journalism as a career (well before his career as an academic), upon his return from his military assignments in Japan (where he became interested in drama and haiku), led him to investigate his father’s murder, which remains to

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<sup>29</sup> In a conference given at the Université de Montréal in February 2009, John Ralston Saul had an interesting anecdote on the construction of the derogatory term “halfbreed.” According to him, it took a very strange mind indeed to come up with a theory that stated that  $1+1$  did not equal 2, but equalled  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

<sup>30</sup> According to the Encyclopædia Britannica, the program, instituted by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1948 and supported by Congress from the 1950s on, was designed to transform the predominantly rural native population into an assimilated urban workforce. Through program auspices, the Bureau promised to provide a variety of services to effect the transition to city life, including transportation from the reservation, financial assistance, help in finding housing and employment, and the like, although the distribution and quality of these services were often uneven. From 1948 to 1980, when the program ended, some 750,000 Indians are estimated to have relocated to cities, although not all did so under the official program and not all remained in urban areas permanently. Evaluations of its success vary, but it is clear that urban relocation helped to foster the sense of pan-Indian identity and activism that arose in the latter half of the 20th century (“Urban Indian Relocation Program”). Though the definition given by the Encyclopædia Britannica underlines the intent on helping and assisting, many other sources refer to the Program as yet another means towards assimilating the Native populations into local economies and cultures. During the 1970s, many of the policies and legislative initiatives of Termination were reversed, mainly due to nationwide activism, protests and marches, which led to an unprecedented extensive media coverage, in which federal Indian policy was severely judged (Josephy, Nagel & Johnson 126-127).

this day unsolved. He eventually met the answer that “nothing was known because no one paid much attention to the murder of an Indian in those days” (Owens *Other Destinies* 227); it is important to remember that “in those days” (ca. 1936), the only ‘good Indian,’ was, as they said, ‘a dead Indian’ (the government’s Termination Act and Assimilation Program, as official instances, are, so to speak, just around the corner (1950’s)). All of this, then, constitutes Vizenor’s sense of “crossblood remembrance” as he calls it, but which he celebrates “in the autobiographical myths and metaphors” of his imagination. For in the end, it is from the meanders of his imagination that have stemmed his sense of self as a mixed-blood, as a trickster, indeed as a postindian warrior of survivance.

In both *Manifest Manners* and *Fugitive Poses*, Vizenor underlines how the existing literary representations, the “simulations of dominance... that have become manifest manners in literature” (*Manifest Manners* 4) celebrate the absence, not the presence, of the Native. Vizenor rejects harshly what he calls “terminal creeds,” those “views of Native Americans that fix them in a certain cultural pose – usually established by anthropologists and romanticizers – and out of which they can never evolve without destroying their identity” (*Manifest Manners*, Back Cover). In other words, any term or concept that calls forth “the romantic tension of savagism and civilization” or that invites manifest manners and the literature of dominance (32), in which Native Americans are fixed into a cultural pose, a museum figure, or a dying abstraction. His active deconstruction of terms such as ‘the indian’ have led several authors (both Native and non-Native) to put forth the crucial questions: “What is an ‘Indian’?” or rather “What *makes* an ‘Indian’?” Is it a question of

blood quanta, or of ancestry? Is it, as N. Scott Momaday has said, “An Indian is someone who thinks of themselves as an Indian?”<sup>31</sup> Since the English language, along with anthropologists and ethnologists are, so to speak, to blame for the “misnomer,” the “European error,” “the colonial enactment” that “has superseded the real tribal names” (*Manifest Manners* 11), that “initial moment of entanglement in the metanarrative of Western expansionism” (Owens *Mixedblood Messages* 21), who is entitled to speak for Natives, and set these definitions straight? Who is entitled to propose a critical theory proper to Native texts?

While some authors firmly root their theory in their politics – that only Natives may speak for Natives (since non-Natives have done so for long enough) – Vizenor is amongst those who have chosen a different way. Instead of letting people wallow in their ignorance and stereotypes of manifest manners inherited from narratives of dominance, he wishes to educate his audience – not only about what the ‘indian’ never was, and what the postindian is, but about the importance of adopting a critical, enquiring stance when faced with any so-called authoritative discourse – in other words, to adopt a trickster’s stance. To this effect, according to Karl Kroeber,

Vizenor writes to heal. He encourages recognition that authentic sovereignty depends on a healthiness free from the twentieth century’s twinned diseases of dominance and victimry. He is no casual optimist, but he believes that, if

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<sup>31</sup> The question is not as simple as it may seem at first, for Momaday adds: “But that’s not so easy to do and one has to earn the entitlement somehow. You have to have a certain experience of the world in order to formulate this idea. I consider myself an Indian; I’ve had the experience of an Indian. I know how my father saw the world, and his father before him” (Quoted in Bordewich 67).

American natives can free themselves from a simulated existence as indians, stop defining, and even celebrating, themselves as survivors, they can attain a psychological and communal sovereignty that will benefit not only themselves but also whites. For although Vizenor writes from a native position, he always addresses white Americans as directly as natives, and although he never minimizes divisive difficulties nor passes over the enduring hurtfulness of colonial injustices, his manner is persistently comedic, his tone hopeful, his target curing wounds, not exacerbating animosities. He has no concern with another world, only with the immediate, practical future of this one. (31)

Commenting on his own fervour to deconstruct the stereotypes that have evolved around Native Americans and have been, at large, interiorized by the very actors of this unfortunate colonial farce, Vizenor calls out his educational vendetta, “My pen was raised to terminal creeds” (*Interior Landscapes* 235). These “terminal beliefs,” according to Pulitano, are those that have “prevented and still prevent Native Americans from imagining themselves as contemporary, living human beings” (146). I would add that these terminal beliefs are also preventing non-Natives as well from moving away from stereotypical assumptions and dogmatic expectations, and rendering it quasi impossible for any form of questioning of the very authorities who validate this assimilationist discourse in the first place.

Vizenor’s method and style are not easily described. At best, one could attempt to define them as stemming from a conscious intermingling of traditional Native American beliefs and tales with contemporary theories such as deconstruction and poststructuralism (which, Vizenor believes, converge due to their similar views regarding language). Indeed, both have a serious tendency to see language as a universal game; as opposed to analytical views on the nature of language, in this instance language is seen as opaque, and no word

holds a fixed, definite meaning. For instance, Vizenor recuperates the Derridean concepts of “trace” and “différance”: first, in the sense that no one sign can function without necessarily referring to one, or several, others; and secondly, a word’s meaning is not automatically present; rather, it is “deferred, set in motion and depends on a variety of other traces which are interwoven within it.” Vizenor calls such words “shadow words,” that is, words that “are intuitive, a concise mediation of sound, motion, memories, and the sensation of the seasons” (*Manifest Manners* 65). If words can become mediators, then in his rejection and indeed deconstruction of the utterance “indian,” which he deems not only a simulation (in Baudrillard’s sense) but furthermore entirely empty and lacking of a referent (*Manifest Manners* 11), Vizenor does not propose directly a new word, as this would only fix meaning once again. Thus this, too, remains in the shadows. For to name is to fix; and the names that have been sustained so far, he claims, are those that are simulated, “they are not the names in tribal languages” (11). He argues that

Native American Indians have endured the lies and wicked burdens of discoveries, the puritanical destinies of monotheism, manifest manners, and the simulated realities of dominance, with silence, traces of natural reason, trickster hermeneutics, the interpretation of tribal figurations, and the solace of heard stories (*Manifest Manners* 17).

The ‘indian,’ according to Vizenor, is synonymous with closure, with ending, with vanishing, with absence. The indian is built on nostalgia and melancholy. It is a term that has no referent, not in the English language (as it is a construction), and definitely not in Native languages. Hence this invented, constructed figure cannot exist, and never has; because those very people who exist now, the postindians, are the living proofs of

continuity. According to Vizenor, not only do postindians create a native presence, “that sense of presence is both reversion and futurity” (Vizenor and Lee 84), they are the new storiers (storytellers) of cultural conversions and presence. “The postindian,” Pulitano explains, “[is] the Native presence after the simulation who represents both resistance and survival, reinvented as survivance. Postindian warriors of survivance thus become, for Vizenor, the embodiment of a Native presence, those who overturn the tragic notion of Manifest Destiny and eternal ‘victimry’” (152). Survivance, Gerald Vizenor’s key concept, has too been refuelled with additional meaning and depth, by being reappropriated by Vizenor himself in his two founding works, as well as in more recent theoretical works. As Karl Kroeber explains:

*Survivance*, originally a good English word roughly synonymous with *survival*, became obsolete in the nineteenth century. Gerald Vizenor revived it a couple of decades ago, injecting into the old word red coloring and teasing connotations. He uses *survivance* to subordinate *survival*’s implications of escape from catastrophe and marginal preservation; *survivance* subtly reduces the power of the destroyer. He seizes on *survivance*’s older sense of *succession*, orienting its connotations not toward loss but renewal and continuity into the future rather than memorializing the past. This refashioning of the commonest word in all discourse on the history of American native peoples – *survival* – epitomizes Vizenor’s inadequately appreciated but most significant contribution to the remarkable resurgence of native cultures during the past half century (25).

Vizenor notes that the suffix *-ance* holds within it “the quality of action,” implying the notion of continuance. “Survivance, then,” he writes, “is the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb *survive*, ‘to remain alive or in existence,’ to outlive, persevere with a suffix of *survivancy*” (*Survivance* 19). But it is foremost “an active sense of presence, the

continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name” (*Manifest Manners* vii). The right of succession, as implied by the word’s original meaning, is the right of succession “of the estate of native survivancy.” This notion of succession is crucial, especially in regards to the reappropriation of place, the main subject of my final Chapter.

As with the English language in general, Vizenor’s plans do not count on a total denial nor erasure of the colonial language; rather he is counting on a recuperation, a reappropriation of that very language – in the image of the Trojan Horse, to infiltrate and deconstruct from within, not only to be liberated *from* language, but *by* language. Owens, in his *Mixedblood Messages* wrote, “the only way to be really heard is to make them read on our terms, though within the language of the colonizer’s terminology” (7). Though they were silenced and silent, the postindian warriors of survivance are now recovering their voices by means of the very language that once proclaimed their termination. Vizenor writes:

English has been the language of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, and the written domination of tribal cultures; at the same time this mother tongue of neocolonialism has been a language of liberation for some people. English, learned under duress by tribal people at mission and federal schools, was one of the languages that carried the Ghost Dance, the religion of renewal from tribe to tribe on the plains at the end of the nineteenth century (Vizenor “Native American Indian Literature” 227).

Indeed, the American government, in the 1890’s, thought that by prohibiting the Ghost Dance, the dance would eventually disappear, as would the beliefs and traditions related to it. Canada did alike in outlawing potlatches in 1884 (though it was rescinded in 1951). These acts of silencing were thought to be a means to the end of “the Indian Problem.”

However, if silence may seem terminal to the act of storytelling from a Eurocentric perspective, it is not considered as such by many Native people. Rather, silence is a strategy of survivance (*Manifest Manners* 16) and as I have discussed above, it works through modes of deferral and observation, continuance and motion.

Something else arises out of silence, out of the shadows, and remains a symbol of continuity: the Trickster figure. For Vizenor, as much in his theory as in his fiction, the importance of the Trickster figure is reflected throughout two essential themes: in stories and in storytellers. Trickster is not a person *per se*, but Trickster's consciousness can be embodied; either in the form of the story/narrative/essay, or in that of the storyteller/writer. According to Vizenor,

Trickster stories arise in silence, not scripture, and are the holotropes<sup>32</sup> of imagination; the manifold turns of scenes, the brush of natural reason, characters that liberate the mind and never reach a closure in stories. Trickster stories are the postindian simulations of tribal survivance (*Manifest Manners* 15).

Trickster stories, in essence, are ultimately aimed at liberating people's minds; it is the operative mode, perhaps, that may seem at first mischievous. But by tricking them first into a state of disequilibrium and confusion, Trickster thus provokes a reaction (often of outrage) that forces people into self-recognition and to confront knowledge. Thus, traditional trickster stories that are remade, recovered into a contemporary context provide the "postindian warriors" with the necessary (discursive) power to rise up and fight against

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<sup>32</sup> A holotrope is, for Vizenor, "the whole figuration, that which contains within it all parties to the narrative, including the author(s), narrator(s), characters, readers and listeners, as well as the narrative (written or oral) itself" (*Manifest Manners* 15).



oppressive systems by undermining the literature of dominance. Indeed, who better than the Trickster figure to address the shadows within this liminal war zone? This is what Trickster does best, and is therefore an important figure throughout Vizenor's work. As with all definitions, Vizenor counters all fixed definitions of the trickster, such as those made by anthropologists who see trickster as an individual, an amoral figure who is a "creator and destroyer... [who] knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being" (*The Trickster of Liberty* xiv).<sup>33</sup>

Vizenor first (counter-)defined the Trickster in terms of his/her function (as opposed to prior definitions which see the Trickster as semi-mythical, semi-human being, often associated with laziness, gluttony, cheating) as a "comic holotrope and a sign in a language game," a "semiotic being in discourse" (*Trickster of Liberty* x). While Trickster does retain his cheekiness, for Vizenor, s/he is neither good nor bad; rather, s/he plays between the poles of this binarism that s/he ultimately undoes, much as s/he undoes other oppositions and expectations. In effect, the Trickster's gender, although referred to more often in the masculine, is ambiguous – for many, the Trickster is thought to be a "two-spirited being," thus incarnating both genders alternatively and simultaneously.<sup>34</sup> The importance of the

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<sup>33</sup> Vizenor quotes the anthropologist Paul Radin here. It is furthermore interesting to note that in this definition, Trickster is referred to solely in the masculine. Whereas the trickster figure, in reality, as shape shifter, can be both male and female.

<sup>34</sup> According to Brian Joseph Gilley in *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country*, "'Two-Spirit' people are Native peoples who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles found traditionally among many Native Americans and Canadian First Nations indigenous groups. The term usually implies a masculine spirit and a feminine

Trickster figure to Indigenous writing cannot be overlooked and his/her presence is felt in the characters of Coyote, Raven, Weesageechak, and Nanabush. Nanabush, according to Highway, is in fact said to have “left the continent when the whiteman came. [But] we believe he is still here among us – albeit a little the worse for wear and tear – having assumed other guises. Without him – and without the spiritual health of this figure – the core of Indian culture would be gone forever” (*Highway Rez Sisters* xii). The essential characteristic of the Trickster is his/her ability to upset things: the disruptive interventions challenge conventional interpretations and readings of the world. Vizenor’s Trickster intervenes in the linguistic realm as well as in the ‘natural’ world, upsetting constructions of manifest manners and terminal creeds, by “ousting the inventions with humor, new stories, and the simulations of survivance” (*Manifest Manners* 5). Trickster symbolizes both reason and mediation, challenges the reader to reconsider what is being said on the page, as well as what has been said in prior historical assumptions about the ‘indian,’ and ultimately works towards the underlining of Native presence, rather than absence.

Vizenor’s Trickster, then, is the subversive, imaginative figure who, in his/her capacity for duality, contains as much mythological substance as contemporary language theory, “the one who cares to balance the world between terminal creeds and humor with unusual manners and ecstatic strategies” (Bowers and Silet 42). Trickster, using humour as

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spirit living in the same body and was coined by contemporary gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Native Americans to describe themselves and the traditional roles they are reclaiming. These individuals are often viewed as having two spirits occupying one body. There are many indigenous terms for these individuals in the various Native American languages as what scholars generically refer to as ‘Native American gender diversity’ was a fundamental institution among most tribal peoples” (8).

his/her weapon, questions that which is posited as ‘authoritative,’ regardless of the ‘authority’ that is behind it. The Trickster balances, challenges and mediates and, in Owens’ words, “will assume the guise of hypocrisy and even repression in comic roles, [but] as a trope, trickster abhors repression and hypocrisy and challenges us to reimagine the world and liberate ourselves in the process” (*Other Destinies* 250). This is particularly striking in the works of Tomson Highway, which I analyze in the following section, and his exploration of how different discourses of dominance and oppression converge. Highway is, according to the editors of *Troubling Tricksters*, “the most famous spokesperson for the trickster-worldview theory” (4) in Canada, making him possibly the Canadian counterpart to Vizenor when it comes to trickster-theory. For indeed, as Deanna Reder remarks in the preface to *Troubling Tricksters*, “critics sought to begin critical conversations and surmount [the] lack of background [in the Canadian education system by drawing] upon discussions in postmodernism, post-colonialism, and the work in the U.S. on and by Gerald Vizenor” (vii). The manufactured infrastructure around the Trickster figure,<sup>35</sup> as part of an aim “since the late 1980’s” to publish and circulate Indigenous fiction in Canada, resulted in “Trickster criticism [having] emerged as one of the first critical approaches for Indigenous literature in Canada, an approach that at one point became so popular that in recent years it has become somewhat of a cliché” (vii-viii). However, I argue, Vizenor and Highway have accounted for “the trickster” well beyond the mere realm of a mythical figure hidden behind every

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to remember that “tricksters” per se are “an invention of a nineteenth-century anthropologist, Daniel Brinton” (Reder vii), a fact that Vizenor himself picks up on and mocks by quoting Paul Radin in his *Trickster of Liberty*.

work of Indigenous literature. Rather, as a holo-/trope, as per Vizenor's definition – “the whole figuration, that which contains within it all parties to the narrative, including the author(s), narrator(s), characters, readers and listeners, as well as the narrative (written or oral) itself” (*Manifest Manners* 15) – “trickster” may seem a one-word concept, but it in fact encompasses the whole of the traditional history and cultural heritage of both the writer and the audience, thus firmly rooting itself within the use one makes of language, unveiling its underlying complexity; a complexity, I contend, that has not been brought to its full potential within Indigenous literary criticism, as it got bypassed in the race to find a “culturally appropriate” (Morra & Reder 5) marker to differentiate Indigenous writing from Canadian/American literature. In this way, the word “trickster” is reappropriated from its anthropological, all-including trope, under which differences within texts (and within the text itself) were subsumed. Consequently, its very use calls forth the names of tribal-specific characters such as Weesegeechak, Nanabush, Raven, and Coyote, thus accounting for a specificity that goes beyond borders, and acknowledging that there are differences, contrary to the literary critical beliefs of the 1980's and 1990's, between U.S. and Canadian discussions, or manifestations, of “the trickster.”

Furthermore, these contemporary forms of “trickster,” in a somewhat dark and gothic way, account for the necessary updating required if Trickster is indeed expected to continue surviving his/her time on Planet Earth, “albeit a little the worse for wear and tear” (*Highway Kiss of the Fur Queen* Note):

picking the Trickster, that ancient clown, up from under the legendary beer table on Main Street in Winnipeg or Hastings Street in Vancouver, and [we]

will soon have her standing firmly up on his two feet so she can make us laugh and dance again (Highway, quoted in York ix).

Thus, in re-establishing the Trickster into the narrative with an element of liminality and cross-border, or on-/off-reserve contemporaneity, present-day narratives featuring a trickster figure successfully re-write him/her away from a “fixed and static Indianness” – also a constructed cross-border concept – and into a state of postindian empowerment.

Trickster stories, in essence, are ultimately aimed at liberating people’s minds. By being somewhat mischievous, Trickster provokes a reaction (often of outrage) that forces people into self-recognition and to confront knowledge. In this sense, traditional trickster stories that are rewritten into a contemporary context provide the “postindian warriors” with the necessary (discursive) power to rise up and fight against oppressive systems by undermining the literature of dominance. Part of this power to rise up and fight resides in the creation of what is often referred to today as writing ‘in the oral tradition’: a mode of writing that is parallel to and complementary with the oral tradition, and that works in the mode of dialogue, rather than monologue, thus enabling the continuous motion and necessary participation between the actors of the stories and their environment. This dynamic, performative nature of the oral tradition that writers such as Vizenor attempt to bring to their own stories enables them to explore “the resultant tension” with the written form. Such tension, or “torsion” as Vizenor has termed it, is one to be found “in the blood,” resonant with his own mixed-blood origins and can be, as Owens himself has said, “a source of creative power,” rather than solely a source of conflict:

I conceive of myself today not as an “Indian,” but as a mixed-blood, a person of complex roots and histories. Along with my parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, I am the product of liminal space, the result of union between desperate individuals on the edges of dispossessed cultures and the marginalized spawn of invaders. A liminal existence and a tension in the blood and heart must be the inevitable result of such crossing. How could it be otherwise? But the tension can be a source of creative power... (*Mixedblood Messages* 176)

This creative power that has emerged is that of a threshold perspective, from within the liminal zone: much like standing on the threshold of a door, one is neither inside the room, nor outside of it. But one has the vantage point of the two perspectives: “The descendant of mixedblood sharecroppers and the dispossessed of two continents, I believe I am the rightful heir of Choctaw and Cherokee storytellers and of Shakespeare and Yeats and Cervantes. Finally, everything converges and the center holds in the margins. This, if we are to go on” (*Mixedblood Messages* 177).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, in many contemporary Native American and First Nations works, the protagonists are very often faced with this dilemma of a socially- and linguistically-constructed, imposed identity, operative within the authoritative discourse of the non-Native world. The protagonists are ‘expected’ to conform to this imposed identity, but to conform would ultimately be to accept the label of the hyperreal simulation that is the ‘indian,’ which would mean to remain embedded in the colonial discourse of absence.

However, the threshold perspective need no longer be a compromise: though the language used may still be English, it is tinted red, with at its heart the issues that

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<sup>36</sup> Louis Owens was of Choctaw, Cherokee, Welsh, Irish and Cajun descent.

preoccupy the Native peoples of contemporary North America. It is a vantage point, directed towards the old center – but the center is no longer the belly button – turning against it, and writing back. For in the fight for self-identification and self-determination, this discourse of liminality is re-positioning the global point of view inculcated by the old narratives of conquest: the audience is finally seeing and hearing through and from the Indigenous perspective. This audience is looking, finally, towards (instead of from) its own literary and cultural heritage, now turned inside-out, and at the same time, looking at it from the margins. But these works are addressed to an Indigenous audience as well: these stories are also written for those who are still struggling to cope with and survive in the liminal zone – those who in schools were told that such stories were ‘nonsense’ and should not be believed. For, as Louis Owens wrote, “It is the artifactualization, the stereotyping, the damningly hyperreal “Indian” that makes it so difficult for actual living Indian people to comprehend survival and to adapt and change while holding to cultural identities, amidst the still colonialist, dominant Euramerican societies of the Americas” (*Mixedblood Messages* 18). This shift in perspective, which is present in many Native American and First Nations literatures, is a signature of postindian imagination and the liberation of the narrative from the discourse of dominance. There is, then, a notion of positive violence in the reappropriation and reclaiming of language, and that is to set things right. For instance, Tayo, in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, or Cole, in Louis Owens’ *The Sharpest Sight*, are but two examples of youngsters who have been brought up on the threshold of two cultures, interchanging between the two. Their sense of identity, though at first a source of

shame and unacknowledged, becomes clearer through the exhaustive explanations of an Elder, one who is still very much in touch with the stories but who is, ultimately, aided by Trickster. However, some form of violence always accompanies those explanations and the coming of consciousness. In this sense, the reclaiming of lost stories is indeed a recuperation of the individual's mind: he/she is "jostled" back into place through repetition, remembrance and foremost reconciliation. In this way, it becomes clear that, despite governmental and religious coercion, it is impossible to actually *lose* a culture; but one can *forget* it. The process now, then, is one of remembering.

In his preface to the 1999 edition of *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor concludes his discussion of how certain "diplomatic activities" (such as the creation of embassies as strategies of postindian presence) would be "a wise, humane measure of native sovereignty" (xvii), with the following consideration:

Five years later, since the first edition of this book, there are no native embassies in other nations; not yet, but recently the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe of Mount Pleasant in central Michigan purchased a mansion on Embassy Row in Washington. The Newhouse News Service reported that the new "Saginaw Chippewa Government House is an elegant three-story building surrounded by power and influence," and located near the Vatican Consulate, the embassies of Norway, Finland, and Belgium. The money for the "purchase and renovations came from the tribe's profitable Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mount Pleasant." Natives may throw some of their casino money back to elected and administrative officials over lavish postindian "dinner parties on Embassy Row" (xvii).

This statement, in trickster's ironic fashion, underlines a feature that runs throughout *Manifest Manners*, in the depictions of the ex-leaders of the American Indian Movement Russell Means, Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt: these men, amongst many others, are,



too, complicit of adhering to the ‘damningly hyperreal actualization’ against which Owens forewarns (*Mixedblood Messages* 18). They are, according to Vizenor, “warriors who turn simulations into prohibitions, rather than [into] liberation and survivance, [and] are themselves the treacherous taboos of dominance” (*Manifest Manners* 21). From “*postindian* warriors of simulations” to “kitschymen” of tribal manners and resistance (42), they simulate survivance. Such warriors, then, have not learned how to tease and to question, as they impose new (but nevertheless further) “abolitions and new identities” (20) that are, once again, responsible for the continuance of simulations of absent, empty figures and figurations of the ‘indian.’

“Our best stories,” Vizenor wrote, “must be heard in a trickster war, in the shadows, in a world of chance” (*Dead Voices* 135). If there is a war, it is, indeed, a language war, a “word war” as Vizenor has termed it. By hovering over “the ruins of tribal representations” and surmounting “the scriptures of manifest manners” (*Manifest Manners* 5), the *postindian* warriors may counter the “surveillance and literature of dominance”: in other words, it is by taking over/taking back the English language, by creating their own new stories, based on the old ‘real’ ones (and not the simulated narratives of conquest) and actualizing them, with open meanings and endings, that Native writers will open up the discursive space for a discussion on the presence, not the absence, of Native peoples. “Like tricksters,” argues Pulitano, “writers must constantly unsettle, contradict, and unglue the creeds of authoritative discourse. Like tricksters, writers have as their ultimate goal raising people’s consciousness by calling for their direct participation in the dialogue” (170). It is only

through this lengthy process that will be called forth “an invitation to the closure of dominance in the ruins of representation” (*Manifest Manners* 63) and that tribal survivance will be assured by means of trickster stories and hermeneutics.

**Part Three – Instances of Empowerment Through Cree and Innu Performance:  
Tomson Highway and Joséphine Bacon**

*“Before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed”  
(Lyle Longclaws; In Highway, Dry Lips 6).*

In the attempt to raise people’s awareness by having them read, as Owens wrote, “on our terms,” through Trickster stories that explore how different discourses of dominance and oppression converge, many writers are confronted with questions about the reclaiming and repossession of memory. I analyze this issue, which is close to the heart of many Native and First Nations people today, in my third Chapter. However, the question I seek to ask here, is not only “how does one reclaim memory?” but “how does one do so in the very language that is responsible for such diminishing, erasing and silencing?” According to Tomson Highway, it would be impossible to completely abandon English – what is important is the *use* one makes of the English words, which must rise out of one’s own understanding of the world; as Louis Owens has put it, to make the discourse “bear the burden of our own experience” (*Mixedblood Messages* xiii). In so doing, by using the colonizer’s language, the initial colonial discourse is thus upset, infected, and re-framed into a world-view in which, in effect, the mythical holds a crucial place. As Randy Lundy has suggested, language must be re-manipulated into a “transformative decolonizing tool”

(112), a language that not only reports and shows what has been done to the Native populations of North America, but that re-affirms and celebrates what is being done in numerous acts of artistic performance. These, in turn, underline discourses of continuity and resistance, rather than discourses of victimization and statutory grief.

It is the creation of these new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses that are part of the responsibility of the Native/First Nations writer and artist, spaces in which the mythical, the elusive, the in-between, can empower and transform, indeed, redefine the human condition and experience. As Jeannette Armstrong argued, in her essay “The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing,”

Our task as Native writers is twofold. To examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all our people in the future, arising out of the powerful and positive support structures that are inherent in the principles of co-operation.

... We must see ourselves as undefeatably pro-active in a positive sense... Lies need clarification, truth needs to be stated, and resistance to oppression needs to be stated, without furthering division and participation in the same racist measures. This is the challenge we rise to.

... The responsibility of the Native writer is tremendous in light of these times in which world over, solutions are being sought to address the failed assimilationist measures originating out of conquest, oppression, and exploitation, whether under the socialist or the capitalist banner. ... No one will desire or choose to hear these truths unless they are voiced clearly to people who have no way to know that there are good alternatives and that instead of losing control we can all grow powerful together (241-242).

Thus, the responsibility resides, on the one hand, in taking back the stories that were appropriated and written over by the conquerors’ stories. On the other hand, as I have

already discussed, it is about writing home as well, and underlining the importance of the continuity in stories. Tomson Highway demonstrates this quality of using the colonial language towards the reclaiming and repossession of memory, story, and, in particular, setting things straight. These acts of personal, artistic, and linguistic – and, ultimately, collective – performance underline, I argue, a discourse of continuity and resistance, rather than a discourse of victimization and statutory grief.

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, though Highway addresses the issues of sexual abuse and psychological trauma, rather than perpetuating a tragic, victimizing model already too present in literature, he teases out the implications, for both the individual and the community, by way of humour and trickster discourse. He takes what is impossible to express, what is buried away, and places it at the center of the stage, and in doing so, questions the normative sexualities and gender roles as expressed by the dominant discourse of the Church and mainstream society. However, Highway's work does not emphasize solely on gender concerns; rather, as Randy Lundy suggests, he explores "the ways in which interlocking systems of domination converge" (Lundy 110) and their effect on disrupting the individual's referential system. However, the particular importance of Highway's writing in general is indeed strongly indicative of how issues around gender and sexuality are still somewhat taboo in Indigenous writing, notwithstanding the work of authors such as Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, amongst others. In effect, her anthology *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, and her collection of poems entitled *My Heart is a Stray Bullet*, seek to reclaim, express, and celebrate the erotic "as an aspect of our humanity"

(“Erotica” 147). For, she says, “there were few positive, affirming portrayals of relationships... between Indigenous peoples in the arts or mass media” (146), which not only had a severe impact on a person’s self-image, but sustained a certain stereotype, and therefore created an absence of a true role model, in the eyes of the younger generation. In remedy, suggests Akiwenzie-Damm, “we need to see images of ourselves as healthy, whole people. People who love each other and who love ourselves. People who fall in love and out of love, who have lovers, who make love, who have sex. We need to create a healthy legacy for our peoples” (148). For, she says, the mainstream stereotypes that have not only maintained but nourished

[the] images of Indigenous men as violent, monosyllabic studs, abusers of Indigenous women and ravishers of White women or as noble savage type shamans, warriors and chiefs,... [and] of Indigenous women as promiscuous, drunken whores or sexless Mother Earth types[, all] of those stereotypes and images... make us less than the whole, complex, loving, sexual, spiritual beings we are (146).

Tomson Highway deals with exactly this issue in his play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. Patsy (who is also Nanabush) is raped by Dickie Bird with a crucifix (98): in this single, violent act, Dickie merges various forms of oppression – Christianity, patriarchy, misogyny – all of which are contributors to his silence, his inability to communicate and to function with both the white and Native societies, the symbols of which no longer hold any validity and are hence unworthy of respect or worship. More importantly, these oppressive measures are what led him to a sense of being belittled, emasculated by, and rendered impotent in the face of the colonial and genocidal machine

that has him act precisely according to the stereotype he wishes to negate. Moreover, it is in truth Nanabush, the Trickster, whose “role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence” (*Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Note) who is the recipient of Dickie’s anger, thus threatening, through an act of rape, “the core of Indian culture” (ibid.) to disappear forever.

In this sense, Trickster’s modes of intervention and exposure, though often humorous and performative, are, at times, violent and silent as well; let us not forget, trickster wars originate, and take place, in a particular zone, in the shadows. According to Louis Owens, it is a “crude zone of contact” that is “the frontier space of trickster and the shifting space of mixedblood identity,” the particular liminal space in which Trickster “brings the world close and directs [a] ‘comical operation of dismemberment’, laying bare the hypocrisies, false fears, and pieties and clearing ground ‘for an absolutely free investigation’ of wordly facts” (*Mixedblood Messages* 39). Tomson Highway has made use of suggestive silence precisely to lay bare the hypocrisies, and address the complex and still-tabooed issues of racism and sexual abuse in his works, thus placing them at the center of the discursive stage. Quoting Lyle Longclaws, he considers that “before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed” (In Highway, *Dry Lips* 6). If literature is a site of and for struggle, the works of Tomson Highway, for instance, through means of language reappropriation, challenge us to re-think in terms of the non-imaginable, the unacceptable, the unthinkable, by having the various systems of domination converge with, and within, the English language – “that coercive language of federal boarding schools”

(Vizenor “Native American Indian Literature” 227) that nevertheless becomes one of liberation. Indeed, he remarks,

Basically I write in Cree in my head and my heart because the characters I write, like for instance I write a lot about my parents, and my brothers and sisters and my family, my aunts and my uncles, who didn’t speak any English at all. All their communication was in Cree and so I write in Cree in my head and in my heart, and frequently on the pages as well, but I go through processes of simultaneous translation, which is a very difficult process, it drives me crazy everyday. It’s a daily challenge, but what comes on the computer screen is in English and frequently when I run out of language, I will express the term, whatever term, in Cree. (“Tomson Highway Talks About the Cree Language”)

The English language is, for Highway, “a sexually traumatized language” and a symbol of “the forbiddingness of anything to do with physical pleasure,” whereas Cree, he states, is “sexy.”<sup>37</sup> However, through “a process of translation,” the English language, informed by Cree-ness, truly becomes a delivery tool of sorts, a mechanism of which one learns how to undermine its very structures; and this process, this “distanciation” so to speak, renders it possible to express, expel even, the poison, and give voice, in whatever way possible, to the unspeakable, the repressed.

In effect, in his novel *Kiss of a Fur Queen*, Highway depicts the mental torment and shock of Jeremiah when he witnesses his brother being sexually abused at the residential school: “Jeremiah opened his mouth and moved his tongue, but his throat went dry. No sound came except a ringing in his ears. Had this really happened before? Or had it not?”

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<sup>37</sup> Conference by Tomson Highway, “Aboriginal Literature: What, When, How, Why.” McGill University, October 2, 2009.

But some chamber deep inside his mind slammed permanently shut. It had happened to nobody. He had not seen what he was seeing” (80). When the brothers eventually speak of the events that happened at school, during a vacation home, they speak in English, as if only English could encapture the seriousness of their secret, but also in order to preserve, even protect, their parents from this violent knowledge:

Jeremiah’s words, in English, were as cold as drops from a melting block of ice.

“Even if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur.”

Selecting one of the three Native languages that she knew – English would remain, for life, beyond her reach and that of her husband’s – Mariesis turned to Jeremiah. “What are you saying, my sons?”

If moments can be counted as minutes can, or hours or days or years, one thousand of them trickled by before Jeremiah was absolutely sure Gabriel’s silence would remain until the day they died. And then he said, his voice flat, “*Maw keegway.*” Nothing (92).

The choice made by the brothers to speak in English about their abuse recalls the difficulty found in the attempt to translate alien concepts.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, this choice is suggestive of using English – the violator’s language – as a distancing tool as well. The momentary happiness that the brothers experience at being back home, within a safe environment, cannot be tarnished, for the time being, by that other world to which they must eventually return. However, the vow of silence that they take, in silence, is heavy with repercussions, resulting in large part in a sense of “purgatory” (221) in which Jeremiah finds himself. However, it is within this very “purgatory,” this gap, this clearing space of

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<sup>38</sup> A notion that I develop in my discussion on Joséphine Bacon.



renegotiation, that resistance may take place. Highway explores at length the possibilities of this gap, which is reflected in the gap between the English and Cree languages, and their respective performativities – in the sense that each and every language has different levels of performativity, i.e. what and how it can suggest or accomplish, through the word, a specific intentional act.<sup>39</sup> Highway’s use of English, however, becomes informed, infected with the rhythms and intentionalities of Cree, lending it a sense of performative ‘Creeness.’

The convergence of oppressive powers of domination is exposed, as well as the tentative contamination of the Trickster and dream powers (286); only then, the two brothers are able to do away with the vow of silence that they had taken upon that first

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<sup>39</sup> My idea of ‘performativity’ and of the ‘performative’ power of literary and artistic interventions, as I briefly mentioned in the Introduction, stems from J. L. Austin’s theory of the performative utterance and speech acts. Namely, my interest lies in how making a statement – whether literary or other – unveils a “paradigmatic use of language,” in the sense that “there are *all sorts of things* we can do with words” (Bach; emphasis mine). Austin considers that every speech act is really the *performance* of several acts at once that are discernible according to the speaker’s intention. With regard to Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, this multiplicity takes place at different levels: within the writing itself of course (the literary act), but also in the other artistic acts/performances that are embedded in the narrative (the piano concerto, the final choreography), all of which, arguably, have different intentions – namely, Highway’s, Jeremiah’s and Gabriel’s – and how they wish to affect their audience(s) (the readers, the concerto audience, and the theater audience). These layers consequently create a sort of *mise en abîme* in which meaning is deferred, yet consequently affects the audience(s) in different, multiple, and concurrent ways. Moreover, according to Austin, “To be a performative utterance... is not *merely* to be a conventional expression of feeling or attitude (Austin 81; emphasis in the original); it serves “the special purpose of *making explicit* (which is not the same as stating or describing) what precise action it is that is being performed by the issuing of the utterance” (61; emphasis in the original). Beyond the literary act, Highway’s use of the visual through his protagonists’ artistic performances are highly purposeful in their successfully “unveiling,” and consequently making explicit, instances of oppression; which, then, in their blatant visibility, can no longer be denied or ignored.

return home. In the end, “to hide the rage and madness created by colonial process” is not only disastrously self-destructive, it is, in Barbara Godard’s words, “to collaborate in maintaining an equally powerful mythology of the Native as untouched by imperialism whether in an ‘originary’ tribal state or in peaceful assimilation to settler society” (“The Politics of Representation” 213). While our very existence seems to depend on dominant discourses and norms, there is space, after all, to renegotiate them, all the while that it is absolutely necessary, according to Lee Maracle, “to clear the norms that reduce us to seeing through some kind of collective fog, filtered through old standards” (“Oratory on Oratory” 61). Highway’s narrative indeed aids to dismember this “fog,” as well as the delicate issues of oppression, abuse, and self-destruction through suggestive silence, and manages to turn these memories that are in lock-down into acts of performative and transformative power.

The Trickster figure is present throughout this process in the novel, for instance in Jeremiah’s dreams: the Fur Queen appears as a Foxy Stripper Mageesees in a bar, as Evelyne Rose McCrae the long-lost daughter of Mistik Lake, and even as the twenty-seven months’ pregnant Madonna of North Main. Each and every one of them ultimately help him re-open his closed-tight mind, an *ouverture* culminating in the very performance of his piano concerto, and creating a sort of vision in which he reconnects with his past as his spectacular musical performance transforms itself into the same dog race his father won, a victory that led to his own conception. As Steven Hawley has described, “When the trickster acts in Native American lore, what is negated, repressed, subjugated, unmentionable, or unacknowledged in symbol systems, including metaphor and myth, is

often featured in tandem with the elegant, poignant and beautiful” (101). Jeremiah in effect embodies this tandem, clearing the grounds of the concert hall from their residue superstitions, assumptions and stereotypes, through the sublime of Rachmaninoff’s

*Preludes:*

Pale white faces hovered, staring, probing, judging him. Just who the hell did this cheeky brown man imagine himself to be, walking to the spotlight with such a graceless gait, such an unmusicianly trundle? For since his fluke acceptance into the final round one week earlier, controversy had raged.

It was said, among the judges – being from England, they had to be excused their ignorance of facts aboriginal – that he was a Commanche Indian whose forebears had performed the chase scenes in the movie *Stagecoach*. Others claimed he was Apache and therefore a cousin to that drunken lout Geronimo. Still others claimed that he came from the country’s most remote and primitive hinterlands, where his father slaughtered wild animals and drank their blood in appeasement of some ill-tempered pagan deity. And all because this tuxedo-clad, flowing-haired Indian youth – Apache, Commanche, Kickapoo – was about to perform Rachmaninoff. (211-212)

Though there is no actual closure at this point in the novel for Jeremiah’s ailments, there is a reconnection with his past, his family, and his people, and an acknowledgement of the events that occurred in the shadows, an acceptance that now, perhaps, a path towards healing may begin. But the following chapter opens with Jeremiah having become a social worker with the Winnipeg Indian Friendship Center Street Patrol, and wondering how much longer he will need to scrape drunks of the street in order to be let loose of what seems to be his “purgatory” (221). While the van drives back towards the Center, “taking client 2,647 off” with it, Jeremiah’s “fingers stiffened to claws, gnarled from the cold, [and]

the twenty-six-year-old Cree social worker gulped from a flask” (222). Though his path has inevitably made him aware of the necessity to live in the trickster warzone, he has yet to accept the role that he must play; a role he has rejected, because “Indians playing Chopin” (257) did not make sense.

His lover, Amanda Clear Sky, relentlessly seeks to reconnect him with what had been a passion, an escape, a source for transformational power: “You are born an artist. It’s a responsibility, a duty; you can’t run away from it” (259). This duty, this responsibility, of the artist, is to give voice to silence, to tell the story of *what* has happened, without necessarily saying *how* it happened – to make it, in essence, explicit, visible. In effect, Jeremiah will only come full circle once he accepts what actually happened, not only to his brother, but to himself, his own rape, and how his silence was, inadvertently, bought in exchange for a chocolate bar: “Now he remembers the holy man inside him, the lining of his rectum being torn, the pumping and pumping and pumping, cigar breath billowing somewhere above his cold shaved head. ...Back in bed, it was too dark to see what kind of chocolate bar it was. Sweet Mary? Coffee Crisp? Mr. Big?” (287) Ultimately, it is through the final theatrical performance, that Jeremiah is set free. By writing a play that recalls their years at the residential school, to be directed and performed by his brother Gabriel as the main choreographer, the two brothers are able to re-converge, and “expose the poison,” the final scene unveiling “the cannibal spirit shedding his costume at death, revealing a priest’s cassock” (285). Beyond the acknowledgement to himself of events occurred (his brother’s rape, as well as his own), it is through the act of performing, the telling of what ‘really

happened,' that Jeremiah will be liberated, enabling the "padlocked doors" (285) of memory to be opened, turning the non-imaginable, the unacceptable, the unthinkable, into a performative space of transformational power.

If, then, literature is a site of and for struggle, then through means of language renegotiation, Highway challenges us to re-think in terms of the non-imaginable, the unacceptable, the unthinkable. His works call for a serious investigation of the complicity of institutions – religious and governmental – those very entities that define what Canada is, with intermingling violent strategies of oppression against its Indigenous people. This puts us face to face with the realization that in such a society, initially constructed on making a sense of "home," and which prides itself for its participation in peacekeeping operations, there are things that should not happen; and when they do, they must be accounted for.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, though texts such as Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be considered, in this regard, for their pedagogical imperative, and may function as a form of decolonisation and contestation of past wrongs, it is necessary to underline the importance of the text's function on a personal level as well: namely, a way of working through the trauma of sexual and physical abuse. The individual – whether Tomson Highway or the characters in his novel – should not be effaced in the attempt to view the Indigenous text as a banner for action.

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<sup>40</sup> I will return to this notion of accountability in detail in Chapter 3, in relation to the Canadian government's responsibility in participating in the genocide of its Aboriginal people. While the Canadian government issued an official apology in June 2008 for the Residential Schools System, the question remains whether such an apology can be held valid if it is not followed by concrete actions, thus allowing a moving forward, rather than a dwelling in the past.

In his short story “Hearts and Flowers,” set in 1960, Tomson Highway recalls the importance of a time during which First Nations people were, finally, becoming empowered: “[With] the acquisition of the [right to] vote... Native people were finally able to move away from reserves, and to live as recognised human beings, so to speak, in so far as the status of being a human being is equated with the right to vote” (Shackelton & Lutz 75).<sup>41</sup> In the short story, Mr. Tipper, a guardian of some obscure sort, seems to go to great lengths to explain – or rather convince – the young Native Cree, Daniel Daylight, that if one cannot vote, therefore speak and choose, then one cannot be human. “You ‘vote’ for your leader. You decide how you want your life to be in your country. That’s what makes you a human. Otherwise you’re not” (188). Indeed, by prohibiting the right to exist, speak and choose, it was assumed that the Indigenous populations would eventually disappear. In a similar way, if silence may seem terminal to the act of storytelling, dance and performance, from a Eurocentric perspective, in the eyes of many Native and First Nations writers and artists, silence can work its way through modes of continuance and motion. For silence, as I have discussed, need not be understood as an absence of sound, but rather as the presence of something that is not sound (Maitland 28). It is within this space, this gap, that the Trickster figure arises, and questions that which is posited as authoritative, regardless of the authority that is behind it. The Trickster balances, challenges and mediates

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<sup>41</sup> However, this empowerment is far from total, to this day. In effect, under the *Indian Act*, before its 1985 amendment, Aboriginal people were forbidden to sit on juries. According to *The Canadian Press*, First Nations people are still being “systematically excluded from serving on juries in Ontario.” This has led to a request of the provincial government “[to call for] an independent review into the situation” (“Ontario calls inquiry into aboriginal participation on juries.”)

and, in Louis Owens' words, "will assume the guise of hypocrisy and even repression in comic roles, [but] as a trope, trickster abhors repression and hypocrisy and challenges us to reimagine the world and liberate ourselves in the process" (*Other Destinies* 250). This hypocritical duality is certainly at work within the character of Mr. Tipper in "Hearts and Flowers" – his attempts at explaining the Indian as non-human are closer to the ridicule, the obtuse, than they are to an authoritative voice. He nevertheless is the one that enables Daniel Daylight to partake in a piano competition. The language games, which take place during the drives from the Watson Lake Residential School to the little town of Prince William, where the little 'non-human' (Daniel) goes to rejoice in a very 'human' activity (playing the piano), alongside a perfect little 'human' (a little white girl), open up a space in which, as Highway terms it, the "universally transformational" can unfold and change the lives and status of its characters. In effect, the story ends with the winning duet piano performance, the music of which, in Daniel's mind's eye, travels far up North to his community, where he *wills* his parents to walk past the priest, enter the voting booth, and cast their first ballot – and thus a new myth is created: it is the story about the little boy who *played* his people into humanity.

This is, according to Highway, the power of art and, consequentially, the power of myth: the language game is embedded and embodied in the actual moment of performance; in the same way as, for instance, a minister or captain has the performative, authoritative power to proclaim two people married, simply by uttering the words, in expressing the repressed through writing, music, or any other sort of artistic performance, by means of an

upset, reappropriated language, the poison is expelled. This enables the creation of a proactive space of resistance, in which, again, the “universally transformational” may unfold and change the life and status of any individual. Performance, then, is the assurance of the continuity of stories, notwithstanding through silent and, at times, violent modes, and ensures that this transformational trickster space remains as such. Finally, this performative empowerment, and consequential ‘humanizing,’ is about, in Daniel Daylight’s words, making “a point” (195): that for all the collected stereotypes – that Highway explores and upsets – that pointed to the ‘indian’ as vanishing, those ‘indians’ were not only human, they were, according to Highway, half-divine as well, capable of victory, and part of a collective subconscious that needs not only to be healed, but celebrated, with all its sadness and joy: “Tears of sorrow are to be shed, yes, but tears of joy as well, tears of rampant celebration” (*Comparing Mythologies* 44). Tomson Highway, ever the optimist, considers that there has been enough pain and despair; nonetheless, there is much to celebrate, even Canada:

Is Canada a successful experiment in racial harmony and peaceful coexistence? Yes, I would say so, proudly... Well, it’s here, right here in Canada – my Canada. When I, as an aboriginal citizen of this country, find myself thinking about all the people we’ve received into this homeland of mine, this beautiful country, when I think of the millions of people we’ve given safe haven to, following agony, terror, hunger and great sadness in their own home countries, well, my little Cree heart just puffs up with pride. And I walk the streets of Toronto, the streets of Canada, the streets of my home, feeling tall as a maple. (Highway, “My Canada” 5)

Language, too, needs to be celebrated, whether it is “sexually traumatized” and violent like English, or “sexy” like Cree. For Highway, every language has its importance, its meaning, and its message:



[Cree is] a powerful language, extraordinarily beautiful language, and a magical language. And I think that it's [sic] really has important things to say. It has some important [sic], like every language in the world has wisdom contained in it you know? Like every plant on earth, there's wisdom contained in that plant. Like in secrets that have, that can, that yield information as to how to heal certain diseases you know? They say that every plant has a medicinal purpose. So does every language on earth. So to continue telling you the stories in that language, and continuing to assist in the effort whereby those languages and that wisdom can be conserved and passed onto future generations, I think that lies at the very bottom of not just this book, not just this story, but my entire life's work. ("Tomson Highway Talks About the Cree Language")

For Innu poet Joséphine Bacon, her life's work proves to hold a similar task. The only difference is that she writes in both her languages, Innu and French, and has published a bilingual collection, *Bâtons à message – Tshissinuatshtakana*.<sup>42</sup> Though she wrote for many years, this collection is the first to regroup most of her poetry. When asked whether having to learn French was a "necessary evil," – she was a student at the Uashat-Maliofénam Residential School from the age of four to nineteen – she replies: "La langue française est devenue importante quand j'ai commencé à travailler dans la culture, dans les récits, pour la diffusion de notre culture et de notre langue aussi" ("Interview" 32).<sup>43</sup> Her ability to switch between languages, in thinking and in writing, as well as her translation work, has enabled her to come across many Innu expressions that, she says, no longer exist today and belong to another, earlier, time; "*au temps du nomadisme*" (31). Though these

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<sup>42</sup> Although, since Bacon's publication (2009), Tomson Highway published last year (2010) the Cree versions of *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*.

<sup>43</sup> "The French language became important once I began working with cultural projects, with storytelling, as a means for the spreading of our culture and our language." (My translation).

expressions perhaps no longer exist, as such, in contemporary Innu society, the concepts they refer to are not empty, nor forgotten – just as new concepts and words have had to be brought into the language, therefore bearing witness to a language that is, to borrow from Lee Maracle, “alive and crowing” (“Native Myths” 182). Joséphine Bacon recognizes the extensive work that such continuous ‘updating’ requires: “Tout le monde disait: Dans 50 ans, aucune langue amérindienne va rester vivante; tu vois comme ils ont eu tort? Alors je continue d’aimer ce que je suis, ce que nous sommes, et il en faut des gens qui aiment, autant de fois qu’il en faudra pour ne pas se laisser mourir” (33).<sup>44</sup> The “necessary evil” of learning French became, for Joséphine Bacon, a tool towards personal liberation – and enabled her not only to be “the survivor of a story that is not told” (“*survivante d’un récit / qu’on ne raconte pas*” (82)), but to find the means for the story, finally, to be told, though through writing: “Nous sommes un peuple de tradition orale... Aujourd’hui, nous connaissons l’écriture. La poésie nous permet de faire revivre la langue du *nutshimit*, notre terre, et à travers les mots, le son du tambour continue de résonner... [Le] temps est au récit” (8).<sup>45</sup> Though it may now be time for words, therefore, in a way, a time to move beyond silence, it is also about what goes on within silence: “Silence,” writes Bacon, “You’ve told me everything” (“*Silence. / Tu m’as tout dit*” (56)) and “Kill me / if I remain silent / when one disrespects / my people” (“*Tue-moi / si je reste silencieuse / quand on*

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<sup>44</sup> “Everyone said: In 50 years, there will be no Native languages anymore; See how they were wrong? So I continue to love what I am, what we are, and we need people who love, as many as it takes to not let ourselves die” (My translation).

<sup>45</sup> “We are a people of the oral tradition... Today we know how to write. Poetry enables us to give life again to the language of *nutshimit*, our earth, and through words, the sound of the drum continues to echo... It is a time for storytelling.” (My translation).

*manque de respect / à mon peuple*” (84)). Though silence may also be understood as a statement, Bacon’s message is clear, as she explains that she writes “the history of Quebec in a different way than it is written in the school books” – her term for her writing process is “gentle politics” (“*politique douce*”) <sup>46</sup> – and she becomes, ultimately, what Leonard Peltier would refer to as “her own message.” <sup>47</sup> Silence, therefore, goes beyond being a voice of complicity – it becomes a responsibility as well.

Bacon explores a variety of genres in her participation of the transmission of stories: she tells, she writes, she shows. She indeed makes use of her two languages, both of which are informed by her different perspectives on the world – not only through her creative work, but through her translation and cinematographic work as well. Indeed, before publishing her poetry, Bacon, in the spirit of Innu storytelling, chose to tell stories through documentary: “J’avais déjà ce désir quand j’étais au pensionnat à Malioténam. On voyait beaucoup de films. Je me suis dit moi aussi, un jour, je vais faire des films. Je savais que je ferais quelque chose sur les peuples autochtones. Je voulais faire ressortir ce que nous

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<sup>46</sup> Conference given at a round table event at “Événement KÉBEK: La place des Premières Nations dans un Québec interculturel,” Université du Québec à Montréal, March 19, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Peltier’s poem, taken from his memoir *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sundance*, is truly beautiful and insightful:

Silence, they say, is the voice of complicity. / But silence is impossible. / Silence screams. / Silence is a message, / just as doing nothing is an act. / Let who you are ring out and resonate / in every word and every deed. / Yes, become who you are. / There’s no sidestepping your own being / or your own responsibility. / What you do is who you are. / You are your own comeuppance. / You become your own message. / You are the message (216).

sommes pour que les gens nous connaissent.”<sup>48</sup> With the growing silence amongst the Elders and between the generations, it became necessary to find a way to bring a voice to the “echo of the murmur [that the Elders have left]” (Morali 313). Her first important film, *Mishtikuashisht, Le Petit Grand Européen: Johan Beetz* (NFB 1996), was a tongue-in-cheek response to the many moviemakers producing films on ‘indians:’ so, she said, why not make a movie about a white man?<sup>49</sup>

Thus, whether in writing or in film, the importance of the transmission of stories is crucial for Bacon, as much for the new generation as for the Elders, since passing on the stories that she heard bears witness to the generosity that she feels she received, and that she owes to the future generations:

Ça fait au moins une trentaine d'années que je travaille avec les aînés, qu'ils me racontent des légendes, des vieux récits. Je trouve ça important. On commence à écrire la langue, à la lire, comparativement au passé, où tu apprenais ton histoire quand les aînés te la racontaient. Quand moi je vais vieillir, il y a des jeunes anthropologues qui vont venir me voir en me disant: grand-mère, raconte-nous. Je vais raconter en disant: "mon grand-père me racontait". Cela perpétue la tradition orale. J'essaie de transmettre beaucoup de ce que j'ai reçu, de ce qu'on m'a donné, de ce que j'ai hérité, de cette générosité. Il faut qu'à mon tour, je puisse le transmettre à d'autres qui sont intéressés à savoir. À l'occasion, je deviens conteuse. Je raconte comme une vieille Innue, comme on m'a raconté.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “I already had that wish when I was at the Malioténam residential school. We saw many movies. I told my self that I too, someday, would make movies. I knew that I would do something for Aboriginal peoples. I wanted to bring out what we were about, so that people may know us.” (My translation). Laure Morali, “Parcours d’une cinéaste.”

<sup>49</sup> Johan Beetz was a recurring figure in old hunters’ tales, a Belgian, who respected the ways of the Native trappers and paid them well for the furs they brought him (“Parcours d’une cinéaste.”)

<sup>50</sup> “I’ve been working with the Elders for at least thirty years, during which they’ve told me legends, and old stories. I find that important. We are starting to write our language, to read

Bacon's work and activism has inspired many young Innu to write, to voice their stories and concerns. However, despite her willingness and vigour to partake in the transmission of her peoples' stories, there is a frailty, perceptible in some of her poems, in being alone in the face of such a burden that has, she writes, "bowed down her back" (64):<sup>51</sup>

Toi qui m'as	Tshin ka minin
appris à être,	tshetshi taian,
toi qui m'as donné	tshin ka minin
le savoir,	tshetshi tshissenitaman,
toi qui m'as appris	tshin ka minin
à rester sur mon chemin,	tshetshi eka unishinian
dis-moi aujourd'hui	uitamui kashikat
où je dois aller	tanite tshe ituteian
afin de retrouver	tshetshi mishkaman
le sentier	meshkanat anite ka mitimeht
des anciens.	nimushumat.

Toi qui m'as faite	Tshin ka minin
gardienne de la langue,	tshetshi akua tutaman aimun,
toi qui m'as chargée	tshin ka minin
de poursuivre ta parole,	tshetshi tutaman aimun

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it, in comparison to how, in the past, you learnt about your history when the Elders would tell you about it. When I will be old, there will be young anthropologists who will visit me and say: Grandmother, tell us. I will tell them by saying: "My Grandfather told me..." That way the oral tradition will continue. I try to transmit as much as possible all that I have received, that was given to me, that I inherited, this generosity. It is my turn to transmit to those who are interested in knowing. On occasion, I become a storyteller. I tell stories like an old Innu, like they were told to me." (My translation; "Transmission des récits.")

<sup>51</sup> "qui courbe mon dos." (My translation)

je sais que tu me vois.

tshe patshitinaman,  
nitshisseniten tshuapamin ute etaian.

J'implore ton aide. (112)<sup>52</sup>

Tshinatuenitamatin tshetshi uitshin.

However, in *Nous sommes tous des sauvages*, a new collection of her poetry and that of Québécois poet José Acquelin, she finds a “twin” (“*jumeau*” 15) who can lend her his words (“*passe-moi tes mots*”). Through this collaborative work, this partnership, the burden becomes lighter, as they seek together “exchanges to breach from multiple solitudes. Exchanges to put words to territory and desire. Exchanges to name things. To move forward together. Facing the horizon. To overthrow the savage. To claim it and re-establish the truth of words.”<sup>53</sup> In effect, not only does this collaboration bring together the voice of a Native with that of non-Native, thus enabling a meeting point for dialogue between two cultures, in their task to “overthrow” and “reclaim the savage,” they put forth a definition of the act of reappropriation that is resonant with Gerald Vizenor’s dismissal of manifest manners by undermining the literature (or in this case, the words) of dominance. According to Louis Hamelin, who wrote the afterword to this collection:

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<sup>52</sup> “You who has / taught me to be / you who has taught me / to stay on my path / tell me today / where I must go / so that I may find again / the path / of the Elders. / You who made me / the keeper of language / you who has asked me / to pursue your word / I know you can see me. / Please help me.” (My translation)

<sup>53</sup> “Échanges pour rompre avec les solitudes multiples. Échanges pour mettre en mots le territoire et le désir. Échanges pour nommer les choses. Pour avancer ensemble. Face à l’horizon. Pour renverser le sauvage. Pour le revendiquer et rétablir la vérité des mots.” (My translation) Press Release for *Nous sommes tous des sauvages*, issued by *Mémoire d’encrier* in March 2011.

[le sauvage] tel que nous le rendent aujourd’hui Joséphine Bacon et José Acquelin: positivement connoté, de nouveau vierge et généreux, car libéré de la grandiose illusion civilisatrice comme du fieffé zèle des bons pères. Enfin libre, ce mot sauvage, de signifier tout ce qui peut maintenant contribuer à secouer le mépris accumulé en quelques siècles...(67) Parfois, au fil de l’histoire, un mot peut donner l’impression de se réapproprier lui-même à travers ceux qu’il désigne. Et on l’entend soudain qui s’avance, nu dans la plénitude de son expression, toute intention pejorative, toute tentative d’autocensure pulvérisées en beauté par l’explosion sémantique assumée de la langue poétique... Le locuteur en réenracinant sa langue triomphe du sens convenu (68-69).<sup>54</sup>

Hamelin further notes that Acquelin and Bacon successfully become “complimentary” (69), suggesting a complicity (in the French sense of *complicité*) in which tropes of a “would-be white poet” and that of “a real savage, now city-dweller” are equally undone in their both becoming the reclaimed “savage that we all are” (70). Nevertheless, in their co-written first poem that opens the book, they agree that “[they are] waiting for a beginning that cannot finish” (“*J’attends un commencement qui ne peut finir*” 9), suggesting that the task of reclaiming and reappropriating is merely at its beginning. The true beginning in Québec, perhaps, came with Laure Morali’s anthology *Aimititau! Parlons-nous!*, a collection that brought together a variety of writers and artists, Native and non-Native, who communicated by exchanging letters, prose and poetry. Bacon and Acquelin pursued their

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<sup>54</sup> “[the savage] is offered to us today by Joséphine Bacon and José Acquelin as: positively connoted, once again a virgin and generous, for liberated from the grand civilizing illusion as from the blatant zeal of the good fathers. Finally free, this word ‘savage,’ to signify all that which may now contribute to shaking away the contempt accumulated over a few centuries... (67) Sometimes, in history, a word may give the impression that it is reappropriating itself through those whom it refers to. And suddenly, one hears it, naked in the fullness of its expression, with all pejorative intentions and tentative censorship having been smashed by the beautiful semantic explosion of poetry... The speaker, in re-rooting his/her language, triumphs over conventional sense.” (My translation)

exchanges, resulting in the publication of *Nous sommes tous des sauvages* (another collaboration and resulting publication that stemmed from this original meeting is *Uashtessiu / Lumière d'automne*, co-written by Rita Mestokosho and Jean Désy).

However, for Bacon, every poem and every action seeks to make things right, as she writes, “time outpaced us, scaring away the past without warning us (*“le temps nous a devancés, faisant fuir le passé sans nous avertir”* (Morali 313)). To attempt to mend the intergenerational gap, beyond poetry and through music, she sought collaboration with Québécois singer Chloé Sainte-Marie, the resulting efforts of which have led to, amongst others, the show *Mishta Amun*, performed by Sainte-Marie, singing the songs written by Bacon. Proceeds from this show were given to the Maison Communautaire Missinak in Québec City, a resource center for urban Aboriginal women experiencing difficulties. In this way, through seeking collaborations with Québécois artists, Bacon also succeeds in expanding her audience – not only for her poetry, but also for the message she carries, which is to educate about, and to share, the richness and humanity of the Innu people and culture and, ultimately, that of all First Nations. In so doing, she not only “raises hope,” she “becomes the ancestor of [her] ancestors” (*“tu deviens l’ancêtre de tes ancêtres”*; *Bâtons à message* 126), and returns a voice to the “murmur [left by the Elders]” (Morali 313). On April 26, closing date of the 2011 *Pothucks littéraires* Festival in Montreal, a tribute was paid to Joséphine Bacon. As the organizers of the event made clear,

Le temps est donc venu pour cette importante poète d’être célébrée pour son courage, celui de fixer d’encre noire les *bâtons à message* de tous les siens, d’inscrire les voix d’avant, d’aujourd’hui et de demain de tout un peuple



dans l'ici et maintenant de notre conscience collective ("Hommage à Joséphine Bacon" Press Release).<sup>55</sup>

Thus, as with language, each individual, and each artistic performance, should be celebrated as well, as partaking in the necessary task of transmission, so that wisdom may be conserved and passed onto future generations.

### Conclusion

To completely abandon the colonial language is a concept that some First Nations writers have explored: to not write in French or English, but in their own language. This, of course, though being a very decisive statement, also implies the restrictiveness of the audience. But according to many others, such as Tomson Highway, Gerald Vizenor, Maria Campbell, Joséphine Bacon or Rita Mestokosho, to name only a few, it would be impossible to completely abandon the colonial language. In the end, what is important is the use one makes of the English and French words, which must rise out of one's own understanding of the world. In the words of Maria Campbell, on her own writing process:

I spent a long time exploring and learning to read my own language, and finding how to work with the rhythms that came from my own people. For a long time I couldn't write anything, because I didn't know how to use English. I'm articulate in English. I know it well. But when I was writing I always found that English manipulated me. Once I understood my own rhythms, the language of my people, the history of storytelling, then I was

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<sup>55</sup> "It is time for this incredible poet to be celebrated for her courage, that of marking with black ink the *bâtons à message* of all her people, to inscribe the voices of a people from the past, the present and the future with a sense of now and here for our collective consciousness" (My translation).

able to manipulate the language. And once I started to be able to manipulate English, I felt that was personal liberation (“Strategies for Survival” 9-10).

Bearing this liberation in mind then, opportunities for language renegotiation are close to infinite. For instance, some writers integrate words, expressions, and even whole sentences of their Native language into their English or French writing – at times without providing the reader with their translation. Tomson Highway, for instance, in his *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, integrates at the end of the work a detailed lexicon for the Cree expressions used. Others, such as Joséphine Bacon, Rita Mestokosho or An Antane Kapesh, have published their works in bilingual editions.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, questions of translation and voice come to the forefront and require new forms of renegotiation. Just as literature is a site of and for struggle, language – be it English, French, Innu, Cree, etc. – thus becomes one for and of revolution, as suggested previously by Brathwaite (“Nation Language” 281).

The reappropriation of language is, thus, an important strategy of intervention in the process, indeed the journey, of rediscovery, of regaining control. The initial colonial discourse is upset, infected so to speak, and re-framed into a world-view in which, in effect, the mythical holds a crucial place, as manipulation gives way to liberation. This liberation, as I have discussed, is not from language, but by language: through its instrumentalization, language is re-manipulated, reappropriated into a “transformative decolonizing tool” (Lundy 112), which not only reports and shows what has been done to the Indigenous populations of North America, but which re-affirms and celebrates what is

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<sup>56</sup> I discuss Rita Mestokosho’s work further in Chapter Four.

being done in numerous acts of artistic performance. In this then resides both the decolonizing process, as well as the pedagogical project, in that it is indeed one such intervention mode, or strategy of reappropriation, that bears witness to the unveiling and the exploration of the emerging, collaborative discourse, which aims to demystify prior assumptions and discursive expectations, as well as to denounce how different forms of exploitation and strategies of oppression converge. Language, then, becomes a liminal gap, a crossroads at which dialogue – across and beyond linguistic divides – may be achieved, within a shared performative space of renegotiation and resistance, a strategic location of positive resistance and transformational power.

Language reappropriation is the very tool of an emerging methodology that calls for a form of radicalism, and that is fuelled by critical pedagogy and collaborative research. The theoretical works of Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens, in this regard, provide critical grounds for these new forms of radical thought, which involve an exploration and an upsetting of previous norms, nomenclatures, and boundaries, both linguistic and intellectual. Beyond borders, it is about deliberation, growth, and transformation; but it is also about responsibility, and moving beyond the relentless reproduction of cultural bias, which includes recognizing a national discomfort in the face of events (positive and negative) regarding Indigenous peoples. Also, to recognize that the texts and works of art that they produce are, for the most part, performative in the sense that they generate upsetting; notwithstanding often comical, they are intentional interventions towards demystification and denunciation. Tomson Highway and Joséphine Bacon, in this sense,

address their artistic experience in having to write in a language (English and French, respectively) that is not their mother tongue (Cree and Innu, respectively), but through which they find ways to give voice to what has been left unspoken and repressed in earlier generations. For this process is also about recognizing a common history – be it sombre – and setting grounds for dialogue beyond cultural and linguistic gaps, within that new, shared strategic location in which resistance and renegotiation are sources for creative and transformational power. It is therefore indeed, now, a collective and collaborative process, involving the decolonization of institutions, communities and ideologies, as well as addressing questions of cultural appropriation, and the modes of response and/or resistance developed by, and through, an understanding of Native American, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artistic interventions. Finally, this process enables the creation of new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses, that account not only for the past and the present, but that work towards a possible future of understanding and interdependency.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESISTANCE: FROM GOVERNMENTAL WARDS TO RECLAIMING WARRIORS**

## Introduction

In my previous chapter, I concluded with the suggestion that, just like literature, language itself is a site of and for struggle, and in the process of becoming a space for and of revolution, a crossroads emerges, at which dialogue – across and beyond linguistic and national divides – may be achieved, within a shared performative space of renegotiation and resistance, a strategic location of positive resistance and transformational power. Similar to Trickster’s modes of intervention and exposure, that can be both humorous and performative, or violent and silent as well, within that “crude zone of contact” stems the notion of resistance as positive, by which the “operation of dismemberment” that involves “laying bare the hypocrisies, false fears, and pieties, and clearing ground ‘for an absolutely free investigation’ of wordly facts,” becomes, in effect, comical (Owens *Mixedblood Messages* 39).

In this chapter, I discuss how a practice of critical reading can, and should be, informed by different sites of positive resistance, be they political, legal or pedagogical interventions. In the first instance, because globalization and imperialism are often referred to as a ‘second colonialism,’ I look at how the theme of resistance is raised and discussed by Native and First Nations authors and activists, and their reactions to, for instance, Stephen Harper’s Apology, and Canada’s refusal for several years to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – in other words, “laying bare the hypocrisies, false fears, and pieties.” However, this discussion requires beforehand an analysis of certain governmental policies of genocide and assimilation – such as the (in)famous *Indian Act* in Canada (which held Indians as mere “wards of the State”), or the

*Termination Act* in the US – and how, though they have been removed or amended, these policies still maintain oppressive measures that, according to Ellen Gabriel, “prevent Indigenous peoples from prospering socially, culturally, politically and economically” (“Statement”). By the same token, I explore the implications of these governmental policies on the continuing discrimination and rise in violence, particularly against Indigenous women. I argue that the imposition of colonial and patriarchal values successfully devalued the traditional role of Native women within their communities and societies – to this end, I turn to the works of Paula Gunn Allen, her theoretical work entitled *The Sacred Hoop* and her novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. I also discuss the work of a woman’s movement, *Walk4Justice*, which has sought to address violence against Native women, particularly omnipresent in British Columbia, several elements of which can be read in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*. Finally, I explore how many writers are proposing new solutions to counter ongoing oppressive governmental processes, such as sovereignty, – which, in Mohawk (Kanien’kéha), means ‘to carry oneself’ – self-governance and, most importantly, how such transformations can only be achieved through community and individual healing. To this end, I work with Alfred Taiaiake’s *Wasáse, Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (that seeks to reappropriate the term “warrior”) in conjunction with Lee Maracle’s novel *Sundogs* and Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*.

In relation to my discussion of the aforementioned policies, I address the notion of accountability, which I raised in my first chapter, in relation to the government’s responsibility in participating in, and now not recognizing, the genocide instigated on its

Indigenous peoples. For instance, while the Canadian government issued an official apology in June 2008 with regard to the Residential Schools System, the question remains whether such an apology can be considered valid if it is not followed by concrete actions, thus allowing a moving forward, rather than a dwelling in the past. Consequently, I address the notion and discourse of guilt, also referred to in my first chapter in regards to my reading of Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and how it is tightly linked to the discourses of forgetting and forgiveness, discourses that are also found in the Government's instalment of and/or participation in different Reconciliation Commissions. As I remarked earlier as well, these discussions, which come out of the processes of reconciliation, tend to re-enact the very same colonial dichotomies that are in question; there is, then, a perpetual underlying violence in such discourses that needs to be addressed and effectively countered.

In this sense, if the current challenge is "to demystify, to decolonize" (Tuhiwai Smith 16) those very same colonial dichotomies that are in question, prior assumptions and discursive expectations, while still within a state of ongoing cultural and linguistic oppression, it is understandable why many Native American and First Nations writers consider the term 'post-colonialism,' when applied to their literary works, as a "luxury" (Maracle, "Post-Colonial Imagination" 204), and consequently resist it. For such theorization in yet another Eurocentric mode allows for little space and little possibility, if any, for working through processes of regaining memory, de-victimization and, most importantly, empowerment. Furthermore, although the *Indian Act*, to its last major amendment in 1985, no longer contains any notion of the non-human in its provisions, it



nevertheless is still greatly defined in a 'normative' way, an all-too inclusive and reductive 'normativity,' which is not, necessarily, mutually shared. In this sense, and to quote Maracle, there can be no resolution, nor renegotiations, as long as there remains any "quarrelling" (205). Indeed, no field of inquiry should be left unquestioned, nor taken for granted, if one does not want to be blind to how, in Judith Butler's words, the 'human' is, in effect, "being produced, reproduced, and deproduced" (36), a discourse that screams to be resisted. For 'being human' calls forth the necessity of a sphere of possibility: "The thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (Butler 31). A necessity, I argue, that must involve some form of resistance (such as blocking bridges, for instance), if one is to move from the sphere of mere possibility to that of attested actuality.

There is, of course, a lot at stake in the process of re-writing the Indigenous person into Canadian and American history, as human: for beyond accounting for unspoken voices and unveiling a sordid chapter in our collective consciousness, it is also, essentially, an offer of amends. It is to re-write the actions of perpetrators, followers, and governmental officials as well into a *necessary* narrative of *possible* forgiveness and reconciliation, if there is to be any concatenation. This new narrative, however, will still, and always, retain a marker of the acknowledgement of past (and present) wrongdoings that cannot be erased, but must be addressed and remedied. In this sense, to reinstate the human as part of an Indigenous counter-discourse of resistance is to break away from past discourses of

demonization and animalization, to move forward, and to re-inscribe the individual, the *person*, into a narrative of empowerment and belonging.

**Part One – Canada, *The Indian Act*, and Apologies: Governmental Policies of Assimilation and Genocide**

*“[The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Recognition commission] will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.”*

*- Prime Minister Stephen Harper, “Statement of Apology.”*

In my first chapter, I remarked on how “Even though [Canadian] laws did not explicitly state that Aboriginal people were not human, they were routinely excluded from society” (Clarkson 8). This “routine exclusion” was part of the Canadian government’s objective to solve the “Indian Problem”: this unspoken legislation was upheld from 1876 (when *The Indian Act* was implemented) to 1985 (when *Bill C-31, An Act to Amend the Indian Act*, was passed, following pressure coming from the United Nations). In order to proceed with a discussion on how Native/First Nations literatures seek to “lay bare the hypocrisies, false fears, and pieties” (Owens *Mixedblood Messages* 39), and consequently resist them, it is necessary to understand what exactly these writers and artists have to contend with. This exploration sheds some further insight on how having to learn English or French became a “necessary evil” (Bacon “Interview” 33) and how its reappropriation is an act of, ultimately, positive and proactive resistance.

It is within the years that Canadian poet Duncan Campbell Scott was head of Indian Affairs that *The Indian Act*, implemented in 1876, was amended in several ways to, literally, solve the “Indian problem.”<sup>57</sup> As Scott stated, in 1920:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that this country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. That is my whole point. Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department (Quoted in Neu 99).

This absorption through assimilation was intended to be the ‘civilizing’ mission of the government: it was to bring humanity to the dehumanized Indian, the primitive savage. As I discussed in my previous chapter, well before Scott, language was – and still is – a key tool in this ongoing process of civilization and assimilation. A first, very clear, reference can be found in the “Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs For the Year Ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1895.” I consider it extremely useful for my analysis to re-read the exact words of the policy, for it becomes clear how absorption, and consequent erasure, of ‘the Indian’ was to be successfully attained through the imposition of the English language and models of Western education – and clearly targeted first and foremost Native children. Furthermore, by severing the ties with their families and communities, a definite

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<sup>57</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947), at the age of only seventeen, was given a position as a copy clerk in the Department of Indian Affairs. He worked himself up to the highest positions within the Department: between 1906 and 1913, he was Superintendent of Indian Education, and from 1913 to 1932, he was Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, his own immediate superior.

breach between generations could be successfully created (which is clearly depicted in Kevin Papatie's short film *L'amendement*, as I discussed in my first Chapter).

#### ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE A NECESSITY.

To a certain stage in an Indian's advancement there exists but little doubt that he should be kept in communities; but as soon as that stage is reached, and it should be at an early period, he should be brought to compete with his fellow whites; but in order that this may be done effectually he must be taught the English language. So long as he keeps his native tongue, so long will he remain a community apart.

If the Indian has not had, with his white neighbours, the same chance to acquire industrial knowledge, he cannot be blamed for not having these qualities equally with us, and for all we do for him we must from the first consider the English

language quality, for without it he is permanently disabled, and from what Indians have said to me and from requests made by them, it is evident that they are beginning to recognize the force of this themselves. With this end in view the children in all the industrial and boarding schools are taught in the English language exclusively.

Of late years there has been a pretty well recognized and rational policy, and it seems most desirable that it should be carried into execution with as much vigour as possible, so that the results anticipated from it may be reached as speedily as possible.

If it be found expedient to educate Indian children, then surely the more who are so educated the better. If the schools be regarded as the chief factors of the great transformation that is being wrought, it would seem a natural and logical sequence to establish as many as the country's finances will admit of. It is, as already said, rapidly becoming easier to secure the attendance of children; and the work of education has gone sufficiently far to show beyond question the advisability of educating them to self-support. If it were possible to gather in all the Indian children and retain them for a certain period, there would be produced a generation of English-speaking Indians, accustomed to the ways of civilized life, which might then be the dominant body among themselves, capable of holding its own with its white neighbours; and thus would be brought about a rapidly decreasing expenditure until the same should forever cease, and the Indian problem would have been solved.

Duncan Campbell Scott further believed that “the happiest future for the Indian Race is absorption into the general population... The great forces of intermarriage and education will finally overcome the lingering races of native custom and tradition” (Quoted in Neu, 102). In effect, it is within these “great forces” of intermarriage and education, that Scott, amongst many others, saw their final solution.

While *The Indian Act*, first and foremost, singles out an entire segment of the population on the base of race, not only does it remove from these very people any rights to land and property, whilst giving to government officials intrusive as well as oppressive means to govern over the reserves to which they are, in a sense, confined, it literally strips them from any form of identity, whether cultural or political; in fact, it strips them of the very notion of personhood, thus dehumanizing them. In effect, until the first major amendment in 1951, the definition of “person” could be understood as “an individual other than an Indian” (Henderson). These “status Indians” (that is, people who were recognized and registered as Indians, under the definition of the *Indian Act*, on the basis of, as of 1876, male lineage only), were entitled to share certain rights, if and only if they lived on a reservation.<sup>58</sup> These rights equated to a minimal allowance, which was given by the

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<sup>58</sup> Neither the Métis nor the Inuit were under the *Indian Act* legislation. The Métis were under a different form of legislation, and were usually denied ‘Indian’ status although they were subject to the same types of oppression and violence as were the ‘Indians.’ They are referred to, however, in one section of the 1876 Act, as “half-breeds,” whose possibility of so-called enfranchisement was termed “The Half-Breed Lands and Money Scrip,” which entitled them to a certificate of “a one-time payment in money or land in exchange for their aboriginal rights in and to the land.” They were not, therefore, entitled to treaty rights (“The Indian Act, Past and Present: A Manual on Registration and Entitlement Legislation” 10). In 1885, Sir John A. Macdonald described the government’s position in these words: “If

government to the band councils to administer. Furthermore, status Indians were denied the right to vote, could not sit on juries, could not own property, could not live in another country, could not become clergymen or lawyers, and could not drink nor possess alcohol. It would appear that the possession of such rights, denied to ‘the Indian,’ were, according to mainstream society, part of being defined and, consequently, apprehended, as being human. Moreover, if an Indian wanted to regain these rights and opportunities, *he* (for women did not have this right) could give up *his* status and band membership: consequently though, if a man became enfranchised, so did, automatically, his wife and children. Interestingly, in order to apply for enfranchisement, the individual had to be able to read and write, either French or English, and had to show that he had no debts and was “sufficiently educated” (Article 86(1) of the 1876 version).<sup>59</sup> Because these features were not common nature among the population, enfranchisement, although voluntary, could be forced upon an individual – for example, a woman automatically lost her status if she married a non-Indian, or a non-status Indian, or if she was unmarried by the age of 21; children lost status if they were illegitimate and unrecognized.

By the same token, within the list of forbidden rights to Native people as displayed in the *Indian Act* was that status-Indians were not allowed to provide their children with an education; more specifically, a traditional education (thus discriminating once again against

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they are half-breed, they are [considered by the government to be] white.” This position was “maintained until September 2003, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Métis were entitled to the same rights as Aboriginal peoples” (“Aboriginals: Treaties and Relations” 27).

<sup>59</sup> Consulted sources: “The Indian Act, Past and Present: A Manual on Registration and Entitlement Legislation,” Indian Registration and Band Lists Directorate. 1991; and *Indian Act* (R.S., 1985, c. I-5).

women, with regard to their potential for motherhood). Rather, these children were removed from their homes, as early as the age of five or six, under the Minister's authority to educate them, and placed in residential schools. The Residential School System was operated, throughout Canada, between 1879 and 1986 (although the last school officially closed in 1996). Both the government and the church (since these two worked together as of 1874, although missionary schools predate Confederation) believed that this process would "assist with the integration of Aboriginal people into the broader Canadian society" (IRSRC). In fact, the Residential School system was nothing less than another tool towards the total eradication of the Native population. Through the removal of family and community contexts, children were severed from their cultural and traditional backgrounds. No effort was made to provide a smooth transition either: once the children set foot in the schools, they were forbidden to speak their Native languages or make any reference to their traditional backgrounds. If they did, they were severely punished. The children stayed in these schools up until the ages of 15 or 16, returning home only once a year during the summer, if they were lucky. No effort was made to help the children work towards continuing their education in further institutions (high school or university), the prospect of which was quasi forbidden to the girls anyhow. As many former students have said, upon finishing Residential School, they were simply cast off, with no direction:

When an Indian comes out of these places it is like being put between two walls in a room and left hanging in the middle. On one side are all the things he learned from his people and their way of life that was being wiped out, and on the other hand are the white man's ways which he could never fully understand since he never had the right amount of education and could not be part of it. There he is, hanging in the middle of the two cultures and he is not a white man and he is not an Indian. They washed away practically

everything an Indian needed to help himself, to think the way a human person should in order to survive (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill 11).

Interestingly, while missionary schools had been in operation since as far back as the arrival of the first French settlers, it is with the implementation of the Indian education policy, in 1880, that the government became truly involved in the education of Native children. The Residential School system was based on the American model, which was in operation since 1842. As noted in Barman, Hébert & McCaskill, *Indian Education in Canada, Volume 1: The Legacy*, the federal government commissioned in 1879 a report evaluating the American policy favouring separate Indian residential schools. The Americans believed that Native children were best prepared for assimilation into the dominant society if they were removed from the influences of home, family, and community. The Report approved American practice with the proviso that schools be operated so far as possible by missionaries, who had already demonstrated their commitment to “civilizing” Canada’s Indians. The Department of Indian Affairs accepted the proposal, listing the general guidelines to be followed in the operation of the schools: attendance would be ensured, and all aspects of life, from dress to use of English language to behaviour, would be carefully regulated. Curriculum was to be limited to basic education combined with half-day practical training in agriculture, crafts, or household duties in order to prepare the students for their expected future existence on the lower fringes of the



dominant society (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill 6).<sup>60</sup> Despite much evidence to prove the contrary, in 1967,

the Department still contended that the schools were ‘operated for the welfare and education of Indian children’ and that it worked each year ‘to develop improved services for children’ so that ‘the best possible care should be given to these young people.’ The actual record is no longer effaced, however; it is clear that the schools have been, arguably, the most damaging of the many elements of Canada’s colonization of this land’s original people and, as their consequences still affect the lives of Aboriginal people today, they remain so (Milloy xiii-xiv).<sup>61</sup>

Evidently, Duncan Campbell Scott’s belief in “the great forces” of intermarriage and education as a solution to rid Canada of its ‘Indian Problem’ was partially successful. In effect, the former students of the Residential School System are not the only ones to have suffered: Anger, hatred, pain and racism are transmitted from one generation to the other.<sup>62</sup> According to Richard Kistabish, Vice-President of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, “institutionalized racism” is today maintained by a society that either ignores or is indifferent to the continuous discriminations taking place in our very own back yards (“Les Pommes du Québec (PQ)” 76). However, as a consequence of the uprising of Native resistance and of several trials in the 70s and early 80s, *Bill C-31*, also referred to as *The*

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<sup>60</sup> It is worth mentioning that there are some more positive accounts of residential school experience; see for instance Basil Johnston’s *Indian School Days* (1988).

<sup>61</sup> Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary *Richard Cardinal: Diary of a Métis Child* seeks to address some of these discrepancies. In effect, it is the first documented account of child abuse amongst Métis and First Nations children in Canada. His story was brought to the attention of the media because the last family who cared for him did not want his story to be just that of “another dead Indian.” Taken from his home at the age of 4 due to family problems, he spent the rest of his 17 short years moving in and out of a total of 28 foster homes, group homes and shelters in Alberta.

<sup>62</sup> I discuss the notion of “intergenerational haunting” in Chapter 3.

*Act to End the Indian Act*, was adopted in April 1985. This major amendment came into effect following the United Nations Human Rights Committee having “found that the [Indian] Act discriminated on the basis of sex, and other ongoing violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Henderson).<sup>63</sup> *Bill C-31* thus went on to remove many (though not all) of the discriminatory provisions, especially those against women, and enabled the reinstating of those who had previously lost status, as well as their children. While *Bill C-31* enabled several of these positive steps towards a national reform, status, individual rights and territorial claims are still far from resolved.

On June 11<sup>th</sup> 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an official apology regarding the genocidal experience of First Nations Peoples in the Residential School System. In his apology, Harper said, in reference to the primary objectives of the residential schools system, that some sought “to kill the Indian in the child.” What he neglected to say, I believe, is that what was sought was ‘to dehumanize the Indian.’ To re-quote Adrienne Clarkson: “Even though our laws did not explicitly state that Aboriginal people were not human, they were routinely excluded from society” (8). While such an apology was long overdue, and that the very act of apologizing is symbolically important, many still feel that any apology is meaningless, vacuous even, if not followed by concrete

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<sup>63</sup> Decision rendered based on the findings of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). The WGIP was created in 1982. It is this Working Group that began the drafting of the Declaration in 1985. The first draft was completed in 1993, and approved in 1994 (as “Résolution 1/2. Groupe de travail de la Commission des droits de l’homme, chargé d’élaborer un projet de déclaration conformément au paragraphe 5 de la résolution 49/214 de l’Assemblée générale, en date du 23 décembre 1994.”) That same year, the United Nations General Assembly launched the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004) “to increase the United Nations’ commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide.”

action – beyond monetary compensation – to better the lives of First Nations Peoples, for example, by funding educational and social services, correcting the oppressive measures still present under the *Indian Act*, and overall supporting opportunities to rebuild strong and prosperous nations. In his response to the apology, Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, asked:

Is there a need to remind that the residential schools are part of a comprehensive strategy of assimilation, whose master piece is the *Indian Act*, a law which is still in force today? The values behind the system of residential schools are very much present today in the actions of the Canadian government who has been trying all this time, to control all the angles of our way of life, from birth to death, not to mention the education aspect (“Declaration of the AFNQL Chief”).

I contend that what is needed today is a demystification of underlining political rhetorics, as well as attention to the challenges that Indigenous people continue to face. For, lest one forget, an apology’s performative power lies in the concrete actions towards change that accompany it.<sup>64</sup> Though much of First Nations literature emerged from a site of contestation, through strategies of literary intervention and language reappropriation, this counter-discourse, I argue, has enabled a stepping outside of the initial, solely reactive mode, into a discursive proactive space, a “strategic location” – a location of positive resistance and transformational power, in which new forms of critical thought and modes

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<sup>64</sup> Austin remarks that to fail in the operative part of the performative utterance (as if one were under contract) is to render the performative “unhappy” (15-16) – in other words, powerless. In relation to my discussion here, although Harper’s intentions might have resided in the right place, it is questionable, I contend, whether he holds the proper capacity to perform his promise (intention and capacity are two of the requirements (out of six) that are needed for a performative utterance (such as an apology) to be “happy”).

of collaborative learning may emerge, enabling an active participation in the process of reconciliation.

As I discussed above, a tentative and complete absorption through assimilation into the body politic of Canadian society was to be the ‘civilizing’ mission of the government – an extension and institutionalisation of earlier forms of religious assimilation: these methods consisted in bringing ‘humanity’ to the dehumanized, and soul-less ‘indian.’ Ironically, this notion of total absorption into the body politic can be found, still, a century later, in Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s 1969 *Indian Policy*, otherwise known as *The White Paper* – in which he stated that if the Indian communities were “disadvantaged and apart” from other Canadians, it was because they had benefited from “special treatments” from the government (in other words, treaties). These “special treatments” had left the Indian “different,” “lacking power” and “without those feelings of dignity and self-confidence that a man must have if he is to walk with his head high” (CDIAND “Statement” 3). *The White Paper* further proposed to completely eliminate “Indian status,” thus erasing any ‘problems’ in relation to treaty rights and land claims, and that “the doors of opportunity [may be open] to *all* Canadians” (6). The particular time at which this policy was issued could not have been more ill-conceived – First Nations peoples had just been given the right to vote, in 1960 (though in Québec, it was 1969) and in 1968, the House of Commons elected its first Aboriginal member. Thus, *The White Paper* appeared during a highly militant and activist period, also during which several land claims were under investigation. Needless to say it was badly received nation-wide; in 1970, a response known as *Citizen Plus*, or *The Red Paper*, was written by Harold Cardinal and the Indian Chiefs of Alberta,

according to whom, “Indians should be regarded as ‘Citizens Plus’. In addition to the rights and duties of citizenship, Indians possess certain additional rights as charter members of the Canadian community.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, in 1982, and still under the leadership of Trudeau, native rights, specifically ancestral rights, were recognized in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In effect, by dissociating the individual from his/her specific context, and having him/her enter into the body politic as a ‘Canadian citizen’ and thus be treated ‘equally,’ Trudeau’s *White Paper* was nothing more than another instance of ridding Canada of its Indian Problem.

With this history in mind, it is understandable that, in reaction to Stephen Harper’s June 2008 apology, many First Nations spokespersons have underlined how several of these rights are still not a given. Consider the following: September 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, date of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was not only a historic day for Indigenous Peoples around the world, but also for International Law as a working system. The Declaration, according to International Lawyer Paul Joffe, is the first such instrument to deal with “collective rights [as opposed to individual] and within a

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<sup>65</sup> Some of the key points of the *Red Paper* included: “that the recognition of Indian status is essential for justice”; that “the only way to maintain Indian culture is for us to remain as Indians. To preserve our culture it is necessary to preserve our status, rights, lands and traditions. Our treaties are the bases of our rights”; that “all reserves and tribes need help in the economic social, recreational and cultural development”; that “it is neither possible nor desirable to eliminate the Indian Act. It is essential to review it, but not before the question of treaties is settled. Some sections can be altered, amended, or deleted readily. Other sections need more careful study, because the Indian Act provided for Indian people, the legal framework that is provided in many federal and provincial statutes for other Canadians”; that “there will always be a continuing need for an Indian Affairs Branch. The Indian Affairs Branch should change to a smaller structure closely attuned to the well-being of Indian people” (*Aboriginal Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, no. 2, 2011: 188-281).

specific context, that of Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>66</sup> Ghislain Picard, the AFN Regional Chief of Quebec and Labrador, sees this document as a “reference guide,” not only as an instance for the interpretation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, but also of “the obligations of States towards them.”<sup>67</sup> However, Canada’s stubborn opposition to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples made the apology seem hollow and, as Ellen Gabriel of the Quebec Native Women’s Association said, “their opposition to the [Declaration] perpetuates the insidious, archaic Indian Act that continues to discriminate and deny Aboriginal nations their rights” (“Statement – Response to the Government of Canada’s Residential School Apology”). The Government of Canada, according to Cree jurist Romeo Saganash, amongst others, maintains that such an instance is ‘impractical’ within the Constitution and does not echo the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (“L’internationalisation des droits des peuples autochtones, vers un réseau Autochtones Sans Frontières”). Regardless that Canada finally decided to support the Declaration in November 2010, it indeed still considers that to adhere to it is a kind of “violation” of the Charter, as reported in the Statement issued on November 12, 2010:

In 2007, at the time of the vote during the United Nations General Assembly, and since, Canada placed on record its concerns with various provisions of the Declaration, including provisions dealing with lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate

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<sup>66</sup> Ellen Gabriel, “Interview with Paul Joffe, International Lawyer.”

<sup>67</sup> Ghislain Picard, “2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Canada is Still on Board!” Press Release, Quebec City, September 13, 2009.

balance between the rights and obligations of Indigenous peoples, States and third parties. *These concerns are well known and remain.*<sup>68</sup>

Out of the four countries that initially did not vote to support the Declaration, the Government of Australia revoked its decision and on April 3, 2009, joined the other 144 countries that had supported the Declaration back in September 2007.<sup>69</sup> New Zealand followed on April 19, 2010. Finally, on December 16, 2010, President Obama announced during the second White House Tribal Conference that the United States would also sign on to the Declaration. It should be noted that to date, the Quebec National Assembly has not adopted a particular motion to support the Declaration either, notwithstanding the numerous invitations it has received by organizations to do so, including the Coalition for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Quebec, “whose main objective is the adoption of a motion of support to endorse the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the National Assembly of Quebec” (Gabriel, “Open Letter”).

Unfortunately, the position that Canada adopted, and maintained for three years regarding its non-support of the Declaration, not only sent forth a message of total indifference regarding its Indigenous Peoples, it further flouted International Law and undermined the very concept of human rights and dignity – matters in which Canada has

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<sup>68</sup> Canada Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. “Canada's Statement of Support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” (Emphasis mine)

<sup>69</sup> Out of the 192 U.N. Members, 159 attended the session; the Declaration was adopted by the Human Rights Council on June 29, 2006, and then by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007, with a majority of 144 members; 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, United States and New Zealand) and there were 11 abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russia, Samoa and Ukraine).

often promoted itself, and been historically recognized, as being a leader. More importantly, it all but negated the performative content of the act of apologizing. For in order to have performative power (thus, to be “happy,” in Austin’s words), an apology not only needs to be accepted, it must bear a certain content: not only must it convey remorse for the behaviour one is apologizing for, it should promise never to repeat that behaviour, and attempt to undo, as much as possible, the damage – for instance by seeking different venues for acceptable redress. Thus, amidst the politics and rhetorics of apology, it is important that one does not forget that moving towards reconciliation demands more than just willingness: it calls for accountability, and concrete actions of goodwill and change.

In November 2008, Ghislain Picard sent out an open letter entitled “Qu'est-ce que ça va prendre?” Clearly, more than just apologies – but apology seems to be in fashion nowadays, and the concept itself requires thorough investigation. On April 28<sup>th</sup> 2009, Pope Benedict XVI expressed “sorrow” to a delegation from Canada's Assembly of First Nations, regarding the abuse and “deplorable treatment” that students suffered at residential schools run by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>70</sup> While he said it did not amount to an official apology, the former Leader of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine, said he hoped the expression of regret would “close the book on the issue of apologies for residential school survivors” (“Pope Expresses ‘Sorrow’”). Indeed, to “express sorrow” does not have

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<sup>70</sup> “Pope expresses ‘sorrow’ for abuse at residential schools.” CBC News, April 29 2009. While the Anglican Church in 1993, the Presbyterian Church in 1994 and the United Church in 1998 have all already officially apologized, The Catholic Church, who administered three-quarters of the residential schools across Canada, has yet to actually apologize for the rampant abuse suffered by many of the approximate 90’000 former students still alive.



performative power, though it does have empathetic content. However, the incapacity of the Catholic Church to express that it is actually sorry is resonant with the elements of evasion in Stephen Harper's apology regarding the Government's genocidal and criminal actions. It is expected that such an official statement was carefully prepared ahead of time. Harper refers in his apology to "the treatment of children in Indian residential schools" as "a sad chapter in our history," without realizing, perhaps, how those very acts that sought to "kill the Indian in the child" were acts that, according to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, are the very definition of genocide.

Interestingly, this sub-section of the Convention can no longer be found in Canada's Criminal Code. Rather, the word "genocide" is solely referred to under the section on Hate Propaganda (sections 318 and 319 specifically), and is defined as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part any identifiable group, namely, (a) killing members of the group; or (b) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction" (section 318. (2)). Though it could be argued that (b) might be sufficient to allegedly accuse Canada of the crime, it is disturbing to notice that definitions (a) and (b) are all that the Criminal Code retain from the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In effect, Article 2 of the latter defines "genocide" as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;

- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

And finally, according to Article 3 of the Convention, “the following acts shall be punishable: (a) Genocide; (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide; (d) Attempt to commit genocide; (e) Complicity in genocide.” Again, none of these points is raised in Canada’s Criminal Code. All that is stated is that “every one who advocates or promotes genocide is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years” (318. (1)).

These discrepancies between Canada’s Criminal Code and the Convention are extremely troubling, and even more so if one considers that the points omitted in the Criminal Code gradually disappeared. In their article “An Historic Non-Apology, Completely and Utterly Not Accepted,” the authors<sup>71</sup> indicate that:

The current convention is a watered-down version of the proposals of Raphael Lemkin (the man who coined the term “genocide” in 1944) ... when it came time to implement the Genocide Convention in Canada’s criminal code (which was what each nation of the United Nations was supposed to do), Canada omitted entire subsections of the UN Convention (by 1970, (b), (d), and (e) were gone ... No less an authority than eventual Prime Minister Lester Pearson had suggested that surgery had to be performed on the UN Genocide Convention, or otherwise Canada and its churches would be in violation of it ... Finally, sometime in the late 1990’s, Canada quietly, surreptitiously, and without ceremony removed genocide as a chargeable

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<sup>71</sup> Roland Chrisjohn, Andrea Bear Nicholas, Karen Stote, James Craven (Omahkohkiaayo i’poyi), Tanya Wasacase, Pierre Loiselle and Andrea O. Smith (no page numbers).

offense from its criminal code, leaving mention of it now solely in the provisions against hate crimes.

Clearly, the gradual elisions and then excision of the term coincides with rising awareness and activism – none the least to mention, of course, the Oka Crisis in 1990 – thus creating a national sense of discomfort and worry in the face of being held accountable of the past.<sup>72</sup>

Evidently, the manipulation that has taken place around the word ‘genocide’ within the Criminal Code leads to the following consideration: the intentional avoidance of the use of a word is language manipulation, one that closes off any other modes of seeking redress, and negates the sincerity of the apology. While recognizing the failure and guilt of the Canadian Nation, of its participation in the Residential School System and, though unofficially, in the genocide of its Aboriginal peoples is a crucial step, the fact remains that many obstacles need to be dealt with in order to fulfill the intention inherent in any apology.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, if there is to be a space for renegotiation, such discourses of dominance and transparency need to be continuously resisted.

This discussion on the notion of genocide, and the different laws surrounding it, is important to my dissertation in several ways. First, it supports my analysis that in order to

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<sup>72</sup> I discuss how 1990 marks the turning point during which Indigenous people are no longer considered by mainstream media and overall consciousness as “vanishing indians,” but as “warriors,” in the third section of this Chapter. 1990 also coincides with Phil Fontaine’s going public as the first Aboriginal leader to tell the story of his own abuse in residential school – the first of many, many others to follow.

<sup>73</sup> In July 2011, the federal government decided to cut its financial support for the Wapikoni Mobile Project. This decision has basically forced the project to come to a halt, and has left many young people in remote communities disappointed. I discuss this case further in Chapter Three, but it is worth noting here that this latest act underlines that Harper’s promises made during the apology in 2008 are still empty of any true willingness to work towards the bettering of the lives of First Nations people.

proceed with a discussion on how Native/First Nations literatures seek to “lay bare the hypocrisies, false fears, and pieties” (Owens *Mixedblood Messages* 39), and consequently resist them, it is necessary to understand what exactly these writers and artists have to contend with. Contending with a history of language imposition, residential schools, sub-class citizenry, and ultimately genocide, is no easy task. However, in addressing face-on questions of cultural appropriation, inhumanity, and power control, all the while building different modes of response and/or resistance developed by, and through, an understanding of Native/First Nations artistic interventions, the intergenerational bridges that the government sought to destroy are gradually being built back. This in turn generates empowerment, agency, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of pride, as well as healing and celebratory discourses that transform, indeed, redefine the human condition and experience.

Secondly, this discussion raises questions of intergenerational haunting and narratives of survival, which I address in the next Chapter. As I argued in Chapter One, there is a gap in the transmission of stories and knowledge – which, rather than entailing a discontinuity, suggests a silent continuity. This gap is largely due to the decades of shame and assimilation, the generations of parents who would no longer share their stories because of the sense of overwhelming guilt, simply for *being* ‘indian,’ that was ingrained in them as children in residential schools. Loss of language and educational brainwashing fostered the widening of this gap, making it impossible for Elders to communicate with their grandchildren, as demonstrated in Papatie’s film *L’amendement*. Thus, there is a sense of urgency to set things right – to rewrite and resist discursive expectations and narratives of

conquest featuring the ‘indian,’ and to inculcate a process of decolonization and empowerment.

Finally, discussing “genocide” lays a ground for the discussion of “gynocide,” which I address in the next section. As previously stated, the *Indian Act* not only targeted a specific section of the Canadian population, i.e. First Nations, it further sub-divided them by imposing specific discriminations against Native women. The result of this was a ‘double stigmatization’: that of being not only Native, but a woman as well – which, in turn, made them ‘easy targets’ (Radek and Williams). However, notwithstanding the 1985 amendments to the *Indian Act* that enabled many women to regain some of their rights and their status, decades of resistance and activism have enabled Native women to ascertain and re-affirm their position within the society as “Strong Women” (Anderson & Lawrence), and no longer as “Stolen Sisters” (Amnesty International).

## **Part Two – From ‘Stolen Sisters’ to ‘Strong Women’: Accounting For Gynocide**

*I do not call myself a feminist. I believe in the power of Indigenous women and the power of all women. I believe that while feminists and Indigenous women have a lot in common, they are in separate movements. Feminism defines sexual oppression as the Big Ugly. The Indigenous women’s movement sees colonization and racial oppression as the Big Uglies. Issues of sexual oppression are seldom articulated separately because they are part of the Bigger Uglies. Sexual oppression was, and is, one part of the colonization of Indigenous peoples (Ouellette 40).*

In my first chapter, I discussed, in relation to Tomson Highway’s works, how interlocking systems of domination – Christianity, patriarchy, misogyny – converge, and their effect on disrupting an individual’s referential system. Also, how acts of violence merge various forms of oppression (as depicted in Highway’s *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*),

and erase the human from the individual. All of these elements have contributed to silence, and a general inability, for some, to communicate and to function within either the white or Native society. Traditional symbols no longer hold any validity and are hence unworthy of respect or worship. This, I argue, is what happened to Native women – a total devaluation and loss of respect towards them within their own communities. This is in great part because of the *Indian Act* and its imposition of patriarchal values, but also because of people's interiorizing, and repeating, negative behaviours and stereotypes. As reported in the Quebec Native Women's 2008 Report, even after the 1985 amendment, the federal law, still operative under *The Indian Act*, continues to marginalize Native women: "Women are simultaneously the objects of discrimination based on various grounds, such as gender, race, culture, residence and marital status. They are doubly marginalized as women within their community and as Indigenous persons within society" (7). But before considering the double stigma, it is necessary to look at the first: being 'indian.'

If one considers the lengths to which the Canadian government went to dehumanize an entire section of its population, and effectively strip any notion of the human away from them, making them feel ashamed, it is crucial to understand that when one asks the question: "what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable?" one is most certainly speaking "from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice" (Butler 17). Indeed, how can a country such as Canada, from the very point of distributive justice, get away with the *injustice* it exerted upon its Native population? Simply put, it would be because the lives of 'indians' were neither, to use Butler's terms, "valuable" nor "grievable"; they were not establishable "within a legal framework

ensconced in liberal versions of human ontology” (20). In such a gendered, hierarchical and rule-oriented ontology, the principle of *inhumanity* delimited methods according to which the ‘humans’ could get away with dehumanizing an entire section of the population, the ‘indians’: the latter were expected to exist (barely) solely on the lower fringes of the dominant society. In maintaining this necessary, erasing distance between them and the white population, the persecutors would not have to see the necessity to question the im/morality of their actions. According to Tuhiwai Smith,

The principle of ‘humanity’ was one way in which the implicit or hidden rules could be shaped. To consider indigenous peoples as not fully human, or not human at all, enabled distance to be maintained and justified various policies of either extermination or domestication. Some indigenous peoples (‘not human’), were hunted and killed like vermin, others (‘partially human’), were rounded up and put in reserves like creatures to be broken in, branded and put to work (26).

Furthermore, the erasure of any form of agency made, literally, the body of the ‘indian’ solely a “public dimension” (Butler 21), but without its vulnerability – for vulnerability, as emotion and desire, is a human characteristic, that allows a person to function within a social community, to be apprehended as a person among other persons, capable of interaction and, most importantly, as having healthy, ‘human’ relations. In effect, the Residential School System’s objective was to violently cut off children from such family and community ties, thus, in essence, dehumanizing them.

To exert violence upon the individual and, as a consequence, erase his or her humanity can only be, “a touch of the worst order, a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over,

without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another” (22). Is not the very violence that was unleashed upon, for example, Jeremiah and Gabriel, in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the exact kind against which one is warned here? The will of the children is given over, taken over, by that of an authoritative figure, a guardian, who, upon completion, leaves a trail of emptied lives and will-less children in his aftermath. He even leaves some of them *bodiless*, such as Jeremiah: “He clamped his eyes shut, swallowed hard, and willed his body dead. It existed no longer; from this day on, he was intellect – pure, undiluted, precise.” (205) This type of violence is committed against, in Butler’s words, “those who are not ... quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death” (25). It is a violence that can only be justified/justifiable by the dehumanizing distancing of the perpetrator from the no-longer subject that is being erased.

Highway, as I discussed in Chapter One, addresses the still-tabooed issue of sexual abuse, but he does not focus on it in a tragic mode – for the tragic might not tease out all of the implications for the individual as well as for the community. Instead, he addresses it through the questioning of so-called ‘normative’ sexuality, against which everyone is measured. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, while Jeremiah clamps his body and desires down tight, Gabriel seems to soar purely by and with his body, to his brother’s disbelief who yells, “How can you let someone do what that disgusting old priest did to you? How can you seek out... people like that?” (207) The *how* is indeed the question: Highway takes what is impossible to express, what is buried away, and places it at the center of the stage.



Gabriel's body is, in Butler's sense, "something more than, and other than, [himself]" (25).

Indeed, he wonders,

What was wrong with the essence of femaleness, as unabashedly illustrated by the dozen young women around him, that it should leave him cold as stone? He could hear Father Bouchard's words drifting through the sun-streaked Eemanapiteepitat church: the union of man and woman, the union of Christ and his church (125).

Gabriel's confusion clearly results from the tension between his own desires and those that he 'should' have, in terms of the church's statement on 'normative' gender roles and sexual appropriateness. Moreover, Gabriel resides within a liminal space in which this confusion is contaminated, by the priests' discourse on the one hand, and the acts of rape that they themselves commit on the boys on the other.

However, as Randy Lundy has suggested, Highway's work does not emphasize only gender concerns: rather, as I already noted, he explores "the ways in which interlocking systems of domination converge" ("Erasing the Invisible" 110) and their effect on disrupting the individual's referential system. Highway, in this sense, "returns the [sexual] violence depicted to its proper context, namely the violence of colonial genocide" (121), the Church being one of its instruments. In Gabriel's breach of the sexual 'norm,' one can find Butler's call for "posit[ioning] possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself... [by] taking the body as a point of departure for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is" (28). With this Butler opens a space into which 'non-normative' kinds of bodies may too enter the political scene and address the question of what, and who, and according to whose terms and definitions, a person is

deemed ‘human.’ While it is true that our very existence depends on these norms, there is space, after all, to renegotiate them, and it is within this gap that resistance may take place. I discussed in Chapter One how the English language is coercive and, according to Highway, “sexually traumatized.” Indeed, the problem of using a *gendered* language with *non-gendered* concepts needs to be overcome. Highway’s works clearly emphasize his concern about gender – yet another imposed, societal norm – as well as the resulting confusion this binarism creates. The exploration of such concerns should be understood, again, in terms of “the ways in which interlocking systems of domination converge” (Lundy 109) and hence must be taken into the task of decoding colonial and imperialist discourses and practices.

To return now to the notion of ‘double stigmatization,’ I argue that while the *Indian Act* successfully annulled any sense of humanity from the Native population, it particularly succeeded in the complete erasure of the figure of the Native woman. Lee Maracle equates this erasure as “the denial of Native womanhood[, which] is the reduction of the whole people to a subhuman level. Animals beget animals” (*I Am Woman* 17). Indeed, a consequence of the erasure of Native women is the absence of Native motherhood, which was, in essence, denied to ‘indian’ women. These points are systematically raised by Highway when given the chance: if he could, he would ask the Christian God, “Why are you alone? Where is your wife? And where is your mother?”<sup>74</sup> Very pertinent questions, I would say. Nonetheless, these erasures and absences underline the fact that an unbalanced,

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<sup>74</sup> Questions raised during his conference “Aboriginal Literature: What, When, How, Why.” McGill University, October 2, 2009.

hierarchical and patriarchal model replaced the initially balanced and equal ‘gender’ roles – although it is very important to note that ‘gender’ is, for many Native people, an empty concept, and sexual hierarchy as Westerners know it is completely absent. Following this model, the portrayal of the Native female body became solely that of an object of desire, a “squaw,” which contributes further to the negation of any form of agency and, consequently, of humanity, in the ‘indian’ woman.<sup>75</sup> This has led to, according to David Hugill, “a pattern of predatory violence” (9), through which ‘indian women’ become nothing more than prey – which reinforces Maracle’s use of “animal” – and, essentially, suggests that (certain) men can get away with it.<sup>76</sup> Once again, it is about violence that can only be justified/justifiable by the dehumanizing distancing of the perpetrator from the no-longer subject that is being erased.

As presented in Amnesty International’s 2008 Summary “Stolen Sisters,” there is an “official” estimate of 500 reported missing Native women, the majority of which are in the Western provinces – this number, according to Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams,

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<sup>75</sup> The word “squaw” was originally derived from the Algonquin meaning that is, quite simply, “woman” or “wife.” However, today, the word cannot be used in any sense without being offensive, a consequence of the derogatory attitudes of the past towards Native women.

<sup>76</sup> Amnesty International, in “Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada,” has listed the main causes to these behavioural trends as:

- Racist and sexist stereotypes deny the dignity and worth of Indigenous women, encouraging some men to feel they can get away with acts of hatred against them.
- Decades of government policy have impoverished and broken apart Indigenous families and communities, leaving many Indigenous women and girls extremely vulnerable to exploitation and attack.
- Many police forces have failed to institute necessary measures to ensure that officers understand and respect the Indigenous communities they serve. Without such measures, police too often fail to do all they can to ensure the safety of Indigenous women and girls whose lives are in danger.

founders of the *Walk4Justice* movement, is actually above 3000 nationwide.<sup>77</sup> Most of these cases are not being investigated either by local or federal authorities, leaving people to contend with the situation themselves. Radek and Williams, for instance, founded *Walk4Justice* in January 2008 “to raise awareness about the plight of the far too many Missing and Murdered women across Canada.”



*“Highway of Tears.” August 2008. Photo by Sarah Henzi*

For instance, Radek’s niece vanished from the “Highway of Tears” in 2005, just out of Prince Rupert. The “Highway of Tears” is the nickname given to Highway 16, the Yellowhead Highway, in particular to the portion between Prince Rupert and Prince George, B.C., following the numerous disappearings and deaths of young Aboriginal

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<sup>77</sup> Radek, Gladys & Williams, Bernie. “Walk4Justice Summary 2010.”

women that took, and still take place on, or around, the 720km stretch of the highway. The nocuous trend of disappearing women is not localized to Highway 16 – as Williams and Radek have said, it is “nationwide.”<sup>78</sup> Though their movement was founded in 2008, Williams has been, since 1986, “an advocate and voice for the women who have been forced to live on the streets of Canada’s poorest postal code [in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside], the DTES,” where her own mother and two sisters were murdered.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, she says, beyond carrying the ‘double stigma’ of being Native and a woman, other factors, such as prostitution and homelessness, or having to hitchhike, contribute to these women being ‘easy targets’ to those who hunt them.<sup>80</sup> Essentially, when women are in positions of vulnerability or dependency, they do become prey to “predatory violence.” Debi Smith, who lives close to Highway 16, remarks, in an article she submitted to *Hiway 16 Magazine*, that “a disturbing pattern of disappearances was first noticed between 1988 and 1995. Young girls mostly aboriginal in origin and aged 15 to their early twenties vanished after being seen hitchhiking [which is sometimes a necessity for young women living in remote

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<sup>78</sup> It is beyond nationwide, as numerous similar events occur just across the border, in the United States.

<sup>79</sup> Williams has also been an advocate “for the victims and family members of the Pickton Farm in Port Coquitlam, B.C.,” most of which disappeared from the DTES.

Robert Pickton was arrested in 2002 and charged with murdering two of the reported missing women from DTES. After further investigation, by 2005, he was charged with 26 counts for first-degree murder, although police records showed that there were 69 women who had gone missing since 1986 until Pickton’s arrest. However, the Crown “was instructed to proceed initially with six charges of first-degree murder” (Hugill 13). He was sentenced in December 2007 to life in prison, on account of 6 charges of *second*-degree murder. The remaining 20 charges were stayed in 2010.

<sup>80</sup> I return to the notion of homelessness in Chapter Three, in relation to Richard Wagamese’s novel *Ragged Company*.

communities] along the highway.” Many have noticed,<sup>81</sup> and I must agree, that this trend of targeting young women, whether in Downtown Vancouver, on Highway 16, or elsewhere, *within* the specific age group where they could be potential mothers, is a tool that perpetuates the attempt at genocide of Native people. Additionally, since it specifically targets women, it is also gynocide.

It is clear, then, that the imposition of colonial and patriarchal values successfully devalued the traditional role of Native women within their communities and society, and the resulting institutionalized racism, chronic impoverishment, and failure to institute the necessary measures to ensure the safety of Native women and their children, have all contributed to burrowing this stereotype further in the ground. Thus, I consider it therefore a matter of urgency, that in this field of enquiry, it is necessary to address, and decolonize, the implications of governmental policies on the continuing discrimination and rise in violence instigated particularly against Native women. The point of departure to this, according to Bernie Williams, is that Native women have to change the ways in which they think of and see themselves – in essence, to resist the discourse of dominance and overthrow stereotypes, and shed the empty image of a ‘traditional indian’ woman who is silent and obedient to male authority, all of which contributes to the image of a voiceless woman whom Dawn Martin-Hill calls “She No Speaks.” To transform their status from servants back into leaders, and reclaim a new sense of strong womanhood. This objective,

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<sup>81</sup> Williams and Radek raised this point during a panel discussion entitled “Stolen Sisters: A Critical Discussion about Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women in Canada,” McGill University, March 10, 2011.

Andrea Smith also discusses this notion specifically in her chapter “Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide” (In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*).

however, is two-fold: it is not only about countering state violence and hierarchical systems of oppression, it necessitates resistance to violence at a horizontal level as well, which originates and develops within the communities themselves. It must be understood, according to Andrea Smith, that “attacks on Native women’s status are themselves attacks on Native sovereignty” (138). There is, then, an undeniable connection between colonial and gender violence within Native communities themselves: the patterns of “predatory violence” are everywhere. The urgency here is, to re-quote Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, the “need to see images of ourselves as healthy, whole people. People who love each other and who love ourselves” (148).

These facts and considerations are, of course, not new. But how may they be addressed through an analysis of literature, and more so, through an analysis of resistance in literature? Many have sought to address these issues, as early as the 1970’s and 1980’s, through writing, which has proven to be, as I have discussed, an essential tool in giving voice to experiences of trauma. The most prominent example is certainly Maria Campbell’s memoir *Halfbreed*, published in 1973, which she wrote, “to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” (8). *Halfbreed* covers 33 years of Campbell’s life, in which she seems to have experienced everything: Road Allowance, the main caregiver for her brothers and sisters after her mother passed away, marrying a white man at the age of 15 thinking this would be her way out, experiencing domestic abuse from her alcoholic husband, being thrown out onto the streets and having to place her child at a monastery, getting hooked on drugs and alcohol and involved in prostitution, and quasi homeless in

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.<sup>82</sup> Her trauma against "Indians in suits" (37) follows her throughout her years of anger against, and hatred for, "[her] men" who had given up instead of fighting back (123). She writes,

I realize now that the system that fucked me up fucked up our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief, combined with the ancient Indian recognition of the power of women, is still holding back the progress of our people today... The pain I feel [today] is without the bitterness I felt as a young idealistic Native woman, and I don't blame [our men]. I can only hate the system that does this to people (144-145).

Campbell's blame, anger, and ultimately, pity for "her men" is suggestive of what writers such as Andrea Smith and Paula Gunn Allen, amongst others, have remarked: "Many people believe that Indian men have suffered more damage to their traditional status than have Indian women, but I think that belief is more a reflection of colonial attitudes toward the primacy of male experience than of historical fact" (Allen, quoted in Smith 138). Smith adds, however, that "by narrowing analysis solely to the economic realm, [these people] fail to account for the multiple ways women have disproportionately suffered under colonization – from sexual violence to forced sterilization" (138). In effect, it is not the individual that should be abhorred or attacked (e.g. "the men"); rather it is the systems and processes that are responsible for these discourses and patterns of violence that should be.

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<sup>82</sup> It is worth noting that Maria Campbell has done more than just write about her experiences on skid-row, as an addict, and as a victim of abuse; an activist and advocate, she was a founder of the first Women's Halfway House and the first Women and Children's Emergency Crisis Centre in Edmonton.



Paula Gunn Allen's major first work, *The Sacred Hoop*, published in 1986, was the first of its kind to address gender issues (amongst others) from a Native American perspective. She grounds contemporary oppression and violence against women in colonialism rather than, like other feminists, in sexual oppression and inequality only (in effect, sexual oppression becomes a component of the colonial machine). Though her methodology has been questioned and deemed inappropriate by other theorists (such as Greg Sarris, Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens),<sup>83</sup> she did succeed in opening up a new kind of discursive space (that has been since taken up by others, such as Andrea Smith) that acknowledges not only Native women but all the women of the world (on an equal level). For, in Smith's words,

all women of color, including Native women, live in the dangerous intersections of gender and race... when a woman of color suffers abuse, this abuse is not just an attack on her identity as a woman, but on her identity as a person of color. [Hence] the issues of colonial, race, class, and gender oppression cannot be separated (150-151).

The essays that comprise *The Sacred Hoop* collection are, in form and in essence, structured like narratives, with which Allen plays and mixes a variety of discourses – mythological, spiritual, academic, feminist, lesbian, and biographical. It is this very

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<sup>83</sup> Greg Sarris, in *Reasoning Together*, remarks that Allen's tribal-feminist interpretation is reductive in its call for commonality. Allen, he suggests, "does not acknowledge her own methodology nor does she question it... she replicates in practice what she sets out to criticize" that is, "she silences Indian women" – there are no direct quotes, no individual voices (55-56). Gerald Vizenor, in *Postindian Conversations*, argues that Allen "seems to have converted a Native sense of survivance into a rather modernist notion of gender." This type of revisionist culture, he suggests, is a culture of nurturance: gender issues obscure, once again, the presence of Natives (163).

combination of voices that brings to Allen's essays their particular force, and lays out her way of grounding them in Native American tradition and culture, and, most importantly, in storytelling – the latter being a necessary tool in the creation of positive stories, as says Akiwenzie-Damm, ones that will “create a healthy legacy for our peoples” (“Erotica” 148). For this reason, and to better understand the complexity of the devaluation of the traditional role of the Native woman, I argue that Allen's critical works provide an important background, not only to traditional stories, but also to how these stories were appropriated, infected, and have led to those one reads about in the newspapers.

Storytelling, or the oral tradition, Allen argues, is modelled on (or is a model to) an egalitarian structuring of society, itself a characteristic of tribal society. To put it simply, not only do all individuals (whether human, animal, vegetal, spiritual) have their specific place and function on earth (that is regarded as the larger community), so too each individual person has his or her specific function within the community. Hence an equal distribution of value is primordial to the smooth continuity of such a society. Allen sees this performative, responsible role of the individual mirrored in the performative function of the story: language does not only reflect reality, it reshapes it, and words not only become conveyers of meaning but they acquire a certain “power to create, alter, and even destroy” (Pulitano 22). “Each tale,” Allen argues, “must be understood in its singular significance as well as its interworkings with the others” (“American Indian Fiction” 2). Furthermore, stories have a particular role, which is in general to convey a certain knowledge (often from the spiritual world to the human world) that is deemed necessary to the rehabilitation of an element that has come out of balance, and that has consequently created disequilibrium in

the natural order of things. Thus, the transmission of stories not only conveys a sharing of knowledge, but it conveys a further element of how knowledge has been shaped through those who have lived with and along it. That is, the mode through which this knowledge is conveyed enables a re-shaping, a re-adapting of the content of the stories to fit the need to which they are put. This also acknowledges how many tribal stories, once transmitted orally, are now being brought to paper: the merging of the oral with the written (without giving preference to one or the other) is a further form, according to Allen, of the possibilities of language's performativity and the flexibility of storytelling.

Leslie Marmon Silko, for example, sees this act of storytelling as “communal survival,” a common theme that underlines her stories in her collection *Storyteller* (1981). The old, traditional stories are thus not deemed static: rather, they incorporate elements of the times in which they are being told. This flexibility is characteristic of the oral tradition and, according to Allen, of tribal society as a whole, partially inherited too from the forced displacements due to colonialism:

They [the Indigenous people] took themselves with themselves on that entire, long, centuries-long journey. So it's not that they've lost that Native tradition; they just moved. And they have re-moved. I mean if you look at the oral traditions, which is what we must look to if we are going to do accurate and responsible criticism, we can see that these things actually happened. We see that abduction narratives were a very important part of Native American traditions... What they did was they took the abduction narrative and shifted it to contemporary situations, so that all that happens is that the oral tradition gets reframed, but it's the same story. It's just got a different setting. Different costumes, same story. (Purdy 3)

Silko's story “Yellow Woman” is a wonderful example of this shift – not only is Silva, Whirlwind Man, wearing jeans, but the narrator herself remarks on how she cannot be

Yellow Woman, “[b]ecause [Yellow Woman] is from out of time past and I live now and I’ve been to school and there are highways and pickup trucks that Yellow Woman never saw” (*Storyteller* 56). Silko’s Yellow Woman’s disbelief goes further to underline the fact that traditional stories are important to the construction of a sense of self (as Native) within society (whether traditional or not). The character’s initial inability to understand, to grasp the events and their significance (and consequently her own significance) depicted in the story draws attention to how there have been and still are gaps in the process of storytelling, and in the transmission of knowledge. For, Allen argues, this non-understanding of one’s “position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost – isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life” (*The Sacred Hoop* 209-10). To no longer be in touch with one’s sense of self means to no longer be in touch with tradition and memory, the loss of which creates the very roots of oppression (210). In this resides, according to Allen, the key to her vision of community survival, “for without that memory, which implies continuance rather than nostalgia, we are doomed to engulfment by a paradigm that is fundamentally inimical to the vitality, autonomy, and self-empowerment essential for satisfying, high-quality life.” (214)

Allen’s notion that it is in continuance rather than in nostalgia that traditionalists’ (among others) root their war against oppression (both colonial and patriarchal) not only attempts to respond to the criticism that she has often encountered that her views call up a romanticized image of the ‘indian,’ it further creates an important link between her notion of storytelling and her approach to critical theory – a fervent admirer of the New Critics

(Purdy 8), “it’s all in how you use it,” she comments. The key trick in theory, much like in storytelling, is to have a base that is then altered, re-shaped, indeed re-appropriated to fit accordingly to the situation and that will, ultimately, convey information and knowledge about that very situation. I contend that this is the very ‘stuff’ that comes out of the multiple attempts of the colonized to seize the colonizer’s discourse, and turn it upon the colonial center. It is a negotiation of different traditions and ways of understanding that Natives, says Allen (and which many other Native critics would back), are “dealing with” (Purdy 5). But in this, Allen also draws a line: while it is true that Native issues are closely related to those of other oppressed people, it is important and – she deems – necessary, to separate these struggles. In academia, she continues, it is important to acknowledge that this discourse is distinct from other similar discourses found in the field of what she calls “Ethnic Studies”: “Our big problem now,” she says “is to get ourselves out of that minority literature ‘The Oppressed People Garden,’ which I find entirely irrelevant. It’s not multi-cultural literature... Our situation, the Native people’s situation, is quite different. We don’t belong in Ethnic Studies” (Purdy 3).<sup>84</sup> However, in underlying specific narrative structures concomitant to the oral tradition and addressing theoretical issues from a not-so-theoretical

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<sup>84</sup> Rather, she says, Native literature belongs in American literature, which itself is an ethnicity due to its roots from all over the world and that should itself be a discipline distinct from English (Language) Studies. Here Allen seems to be alluding solely to the US. However, one would need to raise a similar question in relation to Canadian Aboriginal Studies within (or not) Canadian literature. Allen never mentions this. Furthermore, I would argue that, rather, the field of Native (Literary) Studies is, by means of questioning, upsetting and recontextualizing, forcing traditional literary scholarship away from the comfort zone, in which indigenous texts are being regarded solely from the perspectives of Canadian and American literature, into a liminal zone, in which Native and First Nations Studies become and affirm themselves as a literary discipline of, and on, its own, while effectively borrowing from and crossing over other disciplines.

perspective, Allen is creating a new space in which Native issues and aesthetics may be addressed adequately, using tools that are not inherited solely from Western literary analysis. For, she says, “[w]hen the story is analyzed within the context to which it rightly belongs, its ... content becomes clear” (*The Sacred Hoop* 239).

Ironically, Allen’s views on theory and her own dealing with theory have been at the heart of often-negative theoretical criticism. Allen’s particular form of voice and discourse is one of the problematic issues raised by authors, such as Greg Sarris and Gerald Vizenor, who claim that Allen’s style seems “monolithic, essentializing views of spiritual forces and the ‘feminine’ in American Indian traditions” (Keating 97). Others, however, such as AnaLouise Keating, see rather in Allen’s particular discourse a “transformative epistemology” in that it “deconstructs all such notions of unified, stable identities” and enables not only “alliances across differences but generates new forms of commonality” (5). Indeed, the type of critical theory that Allen seems to advocate and move towards is one that other women of color have explored, such as Gloria Anzaldù, one that “will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries – new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods” (Pulitano 19). Such a theory does not necessarily annul all past theories; rather it recuperates, indeed reappropriates them: Native American critics have begun to take up elements of existing theories, but have adjusted them to a Native perspective (Vizenor for instance, as I discussed in Chapter 1).

However, in the discussion on commonality that acknowledges difference, what is in the background is, essentially, an underlying similar form, but which in content is

malleable. For instance, the commonality between all women that Allen calls forth (that is resonant with her calling forth a commonality between all oppressed people, but that the differences in their discourses need to be acknowledged) is grounded also in an underlying necessity that differences be accounted for. Evidently, the “invisibility” with which Native women’s issues have been shadowed (by feminists in particular and others in general) calls for a new system of thought that is neither predominantly white nor male, but also that is distinct (while not separate) from black or women-of-color feminism. For, as Grace Ouellette has put it,

there is a conflict of views between Aboriginal women and feminism, mainly to do with the way Aboriginal women perceive their roles as women... Aboriginal women perceive themselves as givers of life, as necessary for the continuation of future generations. Feminist theories tend to degrade women’s roles in society, especially reproductive roles (Ouellette 88-9).

Ouellette further accounts for this discrepancy between feminism and Native women’s views as stemming from the holding of different key elements for determination and reliance; the former rely uniquely on a history of male dominance and the cultural construction of gender roles and categories, while the latter rely on “oral tradition and oral history to reinforce their [traditional] roles as women” which ultimately are “the cornerstones for the preservation of [their] cultural roles” (89). To put it differently, while the former consider, so to speak, ‘old stories about old women’ as derogative, the latter consider them as strong and worth continuing. For example, at the extreme opposite of Allen, Monique Wittig considers matriarchy just as bad as patriarchy (in a heterosexual, oppression-oriented sense) in its being not only biologically and historically grounded

(rather, entrenched), but in that it further generates and continues gender “identities,” which she and others deem unfounded in that they are nothing more than cultural constructs: “not only” she argues, “is this conception still imprisoned in the categories of sex (woman and man), but it holds onto the idea that the capacity to give birth (biology) is what defines a woman” (2015). As if in response, Allen, on the other hand, comments:

I am not talking about matriarchy, and I won’t use that word. It tends to mean that women dominate, because patriarchy means that men dominate. So to avoid triggering that idea in people’s minds, I use the term gynarchy or gynocentrism, meaning that femaleness or femininity is the central cultural value (Quoted in Balassi, Crawford & Eysturoy 97).<sup>85</sup>

She further adds that while it is true that the importance of woman as “giving shape” in a physical sense is crucial, it is only part of her role: “Your mother is not only that woman whose womb formed and released you – the term refers in every individual case to an entire generation of women whose psychic, and consequently physical, ‘shape’ made the psychic existence of the following generation possible” (*The Sacred Hoop* 209).<sup>86</sup> Evidently, the discrepancy between Allen and Wittig’s discourses is a result of their differing perspectives, from which each of these (social) actors is speaking, and in this they are determining: while Wittig, and many other (poststructuralist) feminists deconstruct what they see as “biological, essentializing” definitions of ‘woman’ *because* they themselves are speaking from a society that has only acknowledged as valid patriarchy (with its inherent

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<sup>85</sup> Allen provides a short overview to her theory of gynocentrism in her Introduction to *The Sacred Hoop*.

<sup>86</sup> One should not forget that Thought Woman, “mother to all people,” first created her two daughters by thinking and singing them to life – “birth” is thus associated with thought and language, and not with intercourse or procreation. Her daughters too, afterwards, “gave birth” to all the things of the different worlds by thinking and singing them to life.



superior discourse over women), Native women, and Allen in particular, seem to be speaking from a perspective, even if “long ago, far away” (again, she states, because of colonialism) in which gynocracy (and not matriarchy) was, as Allen puts it, “the norm” (*The Sacred Hoop* 212).

Allen solidly anchors all her theory in this prevailing notion of gynocracy as a norm across *all* original tribal societies, the other aspect for which she has been thoroughly criticized, first and foremost because what she affirms so defiantly has not, and perhaps will never be, proven. Or rather, in the eyes of Native writers, the only possible evidence for such societies resides, on the one hand, in the oral tradition that has been, as noted above, filled with gaps and misunderstandings, and on the other hand, in written accounts by white men. Devon Abbott Mihesuah, who offers an extensive (but certainly not exhaustive) account of the importance of women in certain tribes (but not all, as Allen states) occupying roles of decision-makers, tribal and spiritual leaders, holders of agricultural goods, comments:

How much prestige and power women actually held will never be known. Most observations of Indian women in traditional societies were written by Euro-American men, who judged them by the same standards that they judged women of their own societies. Many non-Natives misunderstood tribal kinship systems, gender roles, and tribal spiritual and social values. Their observations also reflected their biases and, perhaps, their desire to manipulate reality to accommodate their expectation that Native women were held in lesser regard in their tribal societies because women were subservient to men in European societies. As Paula Gunn Allen has stated, this lack of proper documentation, including ignoring women’s prominent roles altogether, “reinforces patriarchal socialization among all Americans” (Mihesuah 45).

As has been common practice with colonial accounts of pre-contact societies, it is in this mode of “speaking for” that perversions have indeed taken place – according to Allen and several other Native writers, the accounts made by white, male authors about Natives in general, and Native women in particular, have had the result of significantly altering conceptual structures and modes of tribal people, as I outlined above. Allen argues that in this resides “the turn toward authoritarian, patriarchal, linear and misogynist modes” and the roots to the rise of violence against women, “an unthinkable event in older, more circular, and tribal times” (*The Sacred Hoop* 237). Thus, according to Allen, not only is it essential for Native people to reclaim their original conceptual modes and oral tradition in that they may regain their sense of self and lineage, it is furthermore necessary to re-center tribal society around women, in which they would hold equally important roles as they once did, thus enabling a society in which “the distribution of goods and power would be egalitarian, the elderly would be respected, honored, and protected as a primary social and cultural resource, the ideals of physical beauty would be considerably enlarged” (211). Allen expands her somewhat utopian, ideal re-structured society to that of American society at large (and, to an extent, the earth) in that such a political and philosophical system would bring balance and harmony to all people and their environment, if it were to be adopted and used as “a primary organizing principle of human society.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This final, all-encompassing ideal social structure has been, too, thoroughly criticized for its being too adept at commonality and erasing differences, and its calling forth once again a romantic, nostalgic stereotype of the ‘indian’ at peace with his/her environment, one in which the abuses of colonialism have been erased or, to an extent, forgiven.

Despite this call for a ‘happy’ ending on the path towards community, and notwithstanding that events regarding Native issues have changed since the publication of *The Sacred Hoop*, the effects of colonialism that Allen reports are still taking place today and, in particular, issues of gender violence are still not sufficiently addressed. The original accusation that Allen makes against colonialism, in its repeated attempts to remove, indeed erase all forms of gynocratic societies (which she terms “cultural gynocide”) and implement patriarchal hierarchies, is still being taken up by authors today, as I remarked earlier, who are attempting to shed light on the discrepancy between discussions of the oppression of Indigenous (on a global scale) people in general and that of Native women in particular. In effect, the increase of physical and psychological violence against Native women, and the continuing debasement with which society tends to regard such issues, has been termed as, and is nothing more than, the legacy of colonialism (in Fanon’s sense) and its present-day continuous oppression against people who are not part of a national *élite* class.

Earlier in this section, I argued how it is necessary to address, and decolonize, the implications of governmental policies for the continuing discrimination and rise in violence instigated particularly against Native women. A point of departure to this, I argued, is that Native women have to change the ways in which they think of and see themselves: in essence, to resist the discourse of dominance and overthrow stereotypes, and shed the empty image of a ‘traditional indian’ woman who is silent and obedient to male authority – all of which contributes to the image of a voiceless woman whom Dawn Martin-Hill has dubbed ‘She No Speaks’ (107). Indeed, while the violent stereotypes instigated by

colonialism continue to hold fort, they open up an unfortunate space for the creation of new ones – such as ‘She No Speaks,’ the gendered counterpart to the ‘Vanishing Indian’:

The perversion of traditional beliefs strips women of their historical roles and authority, transforming their status from leaders into servants. In pre-contact culture, we were regarded as Sacred Women and shared in the spiritual, economical and political authority of our societies. But under colonialism... we were devalued and lost our authority and voice.

... The fragmentation of our cultures, beliefs and values as a result of colonialism has made our notions of tradition vulnerable to horizontal oppression – that is, those oppressed people who need to assume a sense of power and control do so by thwarting traditional beliefs.

The emergence of an Indigenous “traditional” woman who is silent and obedient to male authority contributes to the image of a voiceless woman whom I call She No Speaks. The stereotype of She No Speaks is a construction born from the tapestry of our colonial landscape. Her image emerged from our darkest era, similar to the infamous “end of the trail” warrior – defeated, hunched over, head down and with no future.

Who is She No Speaks? She is the woman who never questions male authority. She never reveals her experiences of being abused by the man who is up there on that stage, telling the world about the sacredness of women and the land. While New Age women – the middle-class white women who seek out Indigenous spirituality – flock to soak up the traditional man’s teachings, She No Speaks serves him coffee. She is the woman who knows about sexual abuse, since it happened to her from her earliest memories. She is quiet, she prays, she obeys, she raises the children, she stays home, she never questions or challenges domination – she is subservient (107-8).

This somewhat lengthy quote is important to my analysis, for Martin-Hill raises several important issues which, in a way, not only complement but bring up-to-date Allen’s original ideas on gynocracy and the effects of colonialism. First, Martin-Hill underlines the fact that while women held important positions within tribal societies, she also notes that power was equally distributed between women *and* men (she also notes that in certain

tribes, women held no importance except that of keeping the hearth). While Allen does refer to this equal distribution of power, it is overall invisible under her repeated efforts at placing women as the sole centers of pre-contact tribal societies. Secondly, Martin-Hill refers also to the yoke of colonialism and its having succeeded in perverting notions that are today labeled “traditional,” but that have no relation whatsoever to the original Great Law. She refers to horizontal oppression (a perhaps far more dangerous form of violence, since it originates from and defuses within the community, as opposed to being of an exterior source, which can be countered), a term that Allen does not use directly but that she refers to continuously in her denouncing of how conceptual modes of tribal society have been altered, in particular regarding the treatment of women. This alteration has taken place so slowly, suggests Allen, that it has mostly gone unnoticed; only its effects are visible today and seem, to some, irreversible.

Finally, Martin-Hill raises a question that was perhaps not as pertinent in the 80’s as it is today: that of campaigns and movements of solidarity and support to Native sovereignty and other key political and social issues, but that are essentially constituted of non-Natives. This, of course, calls forth the question “Who is entitled to speak for Native people?” Such movements have raised both satisfaction and anger among the Native populations, due to their having helped open many eyes to Native issues, but these have also succeeded in re-creating another stereotype of the Indian-who-loves-nature-and-lives-in-harmony (Grey Owl was one of the earliest, most famous contenders).<sup>88</sup> Moreover, while

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<sup>88</sup> Darrell Dennis, in *Tales of an Urban Indian* (which I discuss further in Chapter Three) offers a hilarious contemporary insight into this love affair with the ‘indian’ stereotype:

‘She No Speaks’ is featured as a ‘new’ stereotype as well, resulting from horizontal oppression rather than direct colonialism (although its indirect influence is impossible to ignore), Martin-Hill is careful to make it clear that such a construction stems first and foremost from anger, as she quotes Ward Churchill: “From the margins of colonialism emerges an anger, even a hatred, for the people who oppress, exploit and commit crimes of genocide and who remain steeped in denial, or worse, benevolence” (106). This is the type of anger, for instance, that is omnipresent throughout most of Maria Campbell’s book.

Allen’s multi-voiced discourse throughout *The Sacred Hoop* is not resonant with anger – rather, she says, hers is a Native literature of spirit and ritual (Purdy 5). She is adamant that it is nevertheless political and engaged, but that it is not a literature, in essence, of protest or oppression. However, if there is any traceable rage in Allen’s work, it is perhaps to be found in Ephanie, the protagonist in Allen’s novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983), who also reveals those sensations of loss and disconnection to

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Alistair, “a Marxist-Leninist, pseudo-Anarchist, Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarian, tree-planter” falls in love with Tina (the mother of the main protagonist, Simon) – or rather, he falls in love “with her status card” (11). After three years of Alistair’s friends relishing in his girlfriend’s exoticism, he becomes frustrated with her “urban and cliché wardrobe,” and her “beautiful red complexion [that] is turning an off-yellow colour” (14). When he remarks that her attitude is “not very Aboriginal,” and that he is “very disappointed” in her, she explodes: “You’re disappointed!?! How am I supposed to look? You want me in a little buckskin mini skirt!?! Wearing furs? My hair in braids? You met me a little too late Alistair. You would have loved me back in the sixteen-hundreds! You don’t want a real Indian woman; you want a primitive sexual fantasy. Well I ain’t acting like Pocahontas for you, ‘cause the only thing she got from her white man was dead. All you do is drink and smoke up, but when I want to join the party you turn into Bill W. You condescending, racist, hypocrite! Simon and I aren’t little Indian dolls you show off to your friends. I don’t act Indian, because I *am* Indian! This is what we are Alistair. This is what we’ve become. Deal with it! We live in a city, for Christ sake! How do you expect me to get close to Mother Earth! SHE’S COVERED IN FUCKING CONCRETE, YOU ASSHOLE!!” (15)

tradition and memory as discussed above. In this sense, Ephanie is very similar to Campbell in *Halfbreed*. Echoing Martin-Hill's "New Age women," Ephanie reflects after having had a fruitless encounter with some well-intentioned friends of her friend Teresa: "The people who use Indians to demonstrate their own personal nobleness are just as dangerous to us as the ones who rip us off in more direct ways. More dangerous, maybe" (143).

One of the issues that Allen's novel raises that I deem important to comment upon in light of my reflections on her theory, is how the novel unfolds and the implications this carries. More importantly, it is also of particular importance in that it is resonant with Allen's theory and critical mode of thinking, and her notions of storytelling and gynocentrism. Ephanie is isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from, and within, her own life. While Allen has pointed out the importance that any sense of self is first and foremost conveyed by, and through, the mother (in both the physical and psychic "shapes"), Ephanie knows nothing of who her mother is and was, except that she herself was estranged from the community. In consequence, she is herself estranged from her own children in that she deems herself incapable, at various moments of her life, of taking care of them; although she tells them some tribal stories and takes them to powwows, the connections remain unclear and unfinished.<sup>89</sup> She seems to be doomed to that "engulfment by a paradigm that is fundamentally inimical to the vitality, autonomy, and self-empowerment essential for satisfying, high-quality life" (*The Sacred Hoop* 214) that Allen has called forth as the result of alienation from tradition and memory, from nostalgia of

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<sup>89</sup> These elements are also present in Campbell's memoir.

something that has supposedly come and gone. However, Ephanie will learn, it is not in nostalgia, in the come and gone, in the “jump and fall” (a thread-memory which runs throughout the novel, the meaning of which is only revealed at the end), but in continuance, that the stories remain. Ephanie is, she finally realizes, part of an older story, she is Kochinnenako, she is Sky Woman, she acknowledges and understands that, indeed, everything is inter-connected: the story is the same, always the same, even though the settings and the people in it have been modified accordingly. Hers is a modern-day Yellow Woman tale:

In the patterns before her eyes, within her mind, that pulsed and flowed around and through her Ephanie found what she so long had sought. The patterns flowed like the flowings of her life, the coming out and the going in, the entering and the leaving, the meeting and the gathering, the divisions and separations, how her life, like the stories, told the tale of all the enterings, all the turning away. Waxing and waning, growing and shrinking, birthing and dying, flowering and withering. The summer people and the winter people, that ancient division of the tribe. The inside priestess and the outside priest. The mother who was the center of their relationship to each other and to the people, the things of the earth. What was within went without. What was without, went within. As Kochinnenako returning home stepped four times up the ladder, each time calling, “I am here.” And on the fourth step, at her words, her sister had cried with relief. And Kochinnenako vanished, could not therefore return. Ephanie understood that Kochinnenako was the name of any woman who, in the events being told, was walking in the ancient manner, tracing the pattern of the ancient design (208-9).

As part of the story, her role thus becomes that of a storyteller; her place “in the great circling spiral [is] to help in that story, in that work. To pass on to those who can understand what you have learned, what you know” (210). As a woman, Ephanie (and to an extent, Allen) must assume her role to ‘shape’ those in need of knowledge, and what to do with it. But this ‘authorial’ role is not one bearing a so-called authoritative voice; rather, it



is to be understood as complementary to all the voices that came before hers. As Allen has put it, stories are to be understood in their interconnectedness. Similarly, knowledge can only be passed on by and to someone who is “ready” to understand, someone who has “endured,” who has “tried to understand” (210), as Ephanie has.

In a sense, Ephanie’s journey towards her understanding of the pattern of stories, and their necessity for the survival of the community, for her own survival, is the journey that Allen calls for throughout her theoretical work in *The Sacred Hoop*, one in which key elements must be remembered (in fact re-membered) and acknowledged, if one is to work towards the recuperation of a proper tribal society, based on egalitarianism and balance, one which can only be, ultimately, woman-centered. It calls for a new horizon or perspective, grounded in traditionalist thought but open towards contemporary discourses, in which the two complement, rather than annul each other; consequently, a new language in which performativity and flexibility are seen as fundamental, in which the oral and the written may mingle. Most importantly, it calls forth the acknowledgement of mistakes made, and how, if possible, they can be remedied, however rooted they may be within society. As I have argued throughout this section, it is necessary to address these issues of oppression and gender violence, before attempting to re-build this same society. For it is the women, in essence, according to Allen and the other theorists I have referred to (who not only take up Allen’s theories but complement them accordingly to fit present-day conditions), who have suffered most from the consequences of the legacy of colonial genocide, colonial gynocide, and contemporary oppression and who, consequently, have

lost their sense of self and place within the community, of which they are, in the end, the cornerstones.

Ephanie comes to realize that “For the measure of her life, of all their lives, was discovering what she, they, were made of. What she, they, could do. And what consequences their doing created, and what they would create of these” (212). It is within this “could/can do” that resides the solution to subverting participation in a discourse of victimization in which the Native woman is merely an object: as Bernie Williams has made clear, “Native women have to change the ways in which they think of and see themselves.” Once the initially gendered and hierarchical colonial discourse is exposed at its crudest and is consequently upset, re-framed into a world-view in which, in effect, the mythical holds a crucial place as part of the healing process, then it will be possible for voices and stories to be heard as those of ‘Strong Women.’

### **Part Three – 1990: When the ‘Vanishing Indian’ Reclaimed the Warrior**

*“So much history can be lost if no one tells the story - so that's what I do.  
I tell the stories. This is my way of fighting for social change.”  
- Alanis Obomsawin (In Monk 80).*

Alanis Obomsawin is perhaps the quintessential Strong Woman Warrior. She would certainly agree with Paula Gunn Allen that it is essential for Native/Aboriginal people to reclaim their original conceptual modes, and their oral tradition, so that they may regain their sense of self and belonging. Indeed, her priority has been to advocate for social change, and to bring the voices of Aboriginal peoples to the forefront:

The basic purpose is for our people to have a voice. To be heard is the important thing, no matter what it is that we're talking about – whether it has to do with having our existence recognized, or whether it has to do with speaking about our values, our survival, our beliefs, that we belong to something that is beautiful, that it's O.K. to be an Indian, to be a native person of this country (Alioff and Schouten Levine 13).

Obomsawin speaks, and films, towards the reappropriation of a sense of pride. Her work through film, like others through literature, goes beyond a site that is simply of and for struggle, in the sense that film too may open up a space for and of revolution: a crossroads appears, at which dialogue – across and beyond linguistic and national divides – may be achieved within a shared performative space of renegotiation and resistance. She is, according to Adrian Harewood, “a formidable force when challenged, [belying her gentle, nurturing nature]” (13). She is, in the way Allen’s Ephanie is, someone who has “endured,” who has “tried to understand” (210); and ultimately, who has regained (her) control:

I never believed what I was told I was. I knew that there was a lot of wrong there. Every time I tried to do something they would tell me, ‘Oh you can’t do this, you’re an Indian!’ The more they said that to me, the more I said, ‘Well I am going to do that anyway.’ I was just a fighter. I just wanted to make changes (Harewood 14)

This way of thinking of oneself is the kind that Radek and Williams have called for, as the point of departure towards addressing, and decolonizing, the implications of governmental policies on the continuing discrimination and rise in violence instigated against Native women.

However, Obomsawin does more: she also addresses the stereotypes around men; in particular, in her documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, Mohawk men, and

how a new stereotype, equally harmful, was created at the height of the Oka Crisis in 1990: the warrior. I say equally harmful as to, perhaps, the derogatory connotation that is now attributed to the word “squaw” – both words, in their original, tribal sense, are positive words, and denote respect and pride. Both, then, have equally been tarnished, misappropriated, and essentially ridiculed by mainstream discourses of dominance.<sup>90</sup> This translation from ‘the indian’ to ‘the Warrior,’ follows a renaissance period, or sense of renewal, that took place in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, greatly in part due to N. Scott Momday’s winning the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *House Made of Dawn*, which essentially put Native American literature “on the map.” Another factor was the formation of AIM, the American Indian Movement, in 1968. Members claimed that the movement gave them back “[their] worth, [their] pride, [their] dignity, [their] humanity” (*Red Power* 69). Unfortunately, this period of reclamation and revival was also one of terror: “Throughout the three years after Wounded Knee II – long referred to by local Native Americans as the “Reign of Terror” – the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) carried out intensive local surveillance, as well as repeated arrests, harassment and bad faith legal proceedings, against AIM leaders and supporters at Pine Ridge” (“The Reign of Terror”). This is perhaps the decisive moment for the translation: it was no longer ‘indians’ that were the targets of termination, it was ‘indian *activists*’ – in other words, warriors.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Granted, the word “squaw” certainly denotes far worse things than does the word “warrior,” given its sexual connotation - but both words suggest crude violence, and a form of inferior savagism.

<sup>91</sup> Once again, the events around Native issues and resistance that occur in the United States highly inform those that happen in Canada – albeit, generally, with a time discrepancy of 10 to 15 years.

To borrow a notion raised by Butler, which I referred to earlier in this chapter, the ‘Warrior,’ as depicted by the mainstream media, was confined essentially and solely to a “public dimension” (Butler 21). However, Obomsawin succeeds in reinscribing a sense of *vulnerability* in these men, which removes them, in the eye of the viewer, from that unattached, unemotional “public dimension.” For vulnerability, as I have discussed, suggests those human characteristics of emotion and desire, that allow a person to function within a social community, to be apprehended as a person among other persons, capable of interaction and, most importantly, as having healthy, ‘human’ relations. Indeed, Obomsawin goes to great lengths in her documentary to show their humanity, to show them as loving fathers, caring husbands, and ultimately, guardians of their territory. They are, she says, “good men.” In this effort, she attempts to reappropriate the Warrior, and re-inject it with its original, positive meaning – one that accounts for the men’s vulnerabilities. Her depictions of the Mohawk men, then, counter that of the mainstream media, which labelled them as fierce, aggressive, intimidating, and violent. Perhaps as famous as Edward Curtis’ photograph *The Vanishing Race*, the image that was to represent the climax of defiance during the Oka Crisis, featuring a young “baby-faced” Canadian soldier face-to-face with Warrior Brad Larocque, nicknamed “Freddie Kruger,” is certainly unfortunately highly suggestive of the media’s influence on the collective Canadian psyche.



Photo: La Presse Canadienne / Shaney Komulainen

In the same way as Obomsawin, Taiaiake Alfred, in his book *Wasáse, Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* sets out as well to reappropriate the term ‘warrior’ and re-attribute it its original, Indigenous meaning. In effect, he explains how the word is “European in origin and quite a male-gendered and soldiery image in most people’s minds; [but] it doesn’t reflect real Onkwehonwe notions” (78), such as that both men *and* women alike can be warriors – this characteristic in itself annuls the mainstream idea of who is (or can be) a warrior. Indeed, at the outset of *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, the police and soldiers are shocked that it is the Mohawk women who guard the barricades; this, however, for the Mohawks, is part of the normal role of their women.

In translation, there are different origins of the word that – perhaps for simplicity’s sake – were equated with the English word ‘warrior,’ notwithstanding the inappropriateness of this choice. For instance, Alfred shows, “the most common English-Kanienkeha

translation for the word “warrior” is *rotiskenhrakete*, which literally means, “carrying the burden of peace.”” On the other hand, according to the Elders with whom he spoke, the warrior is a “sacred protector,” “they are anonymous shadow warriors in a secret society whose duty it is to protect the [long]house” (79). The consequences of colonialism, such as shame, grief and disunity have resulted, according to Alfred, in an alienation with the original, spiritual (in the sense of sacredness) meaning of the warrior, his/her duty and necessity to the community. In order to revitalize this philosophy, Alfred suggests that it “begins with attitude:”

If we find a way to shed the defeatism of colonial identities and take on instead the outlook of the proud warrior, we would be able to regenerate ourselves as free people... [There are] two important lessons on being a warrior: the importance of *belief*, which provides emotional stability in the face of constant conflict and danger, and the necessity of consistency between belief, thought, words, and behaviour. Warriorism is a way of life and a philosophy that is capable of carrying our people through their lives in resistance to the sources of their pain and discord, no matter where and who they are... (85-86)

Thus while an important link with the traditional and spiritual meaning is necessary, the concept of the warrior is given its contemporaneity by being injected and revitalized with intellectual and political activism. However, and in light of the two requirements for Warriorism as pointed out by Alfred – belief and consistency – there have been instances of what Jeannette Armstrong has termed “negative activism” that, by actually serving the purpose of the cultural imperialism practiced on [Native people]” (Armstrong “Disempowerment” 241), participates in keeping abreast the image of the warrior as represented by the press. Vizenor as well has made note of this, in his criticism of the ex-

leaders of AIM, whom “have been recast by the media as... [the] kitschymen of tribal manners and the simulations of capitalism... the kitschymen of resistance enterprises and industries... of reservation capitalism... [and] of liberal bounties, foundation monies, criminal justice, and resistance enterprises in the name of tribal children” (*Manifest Manners* 42-43). In their public portraiture as ‘warrior indians,’ these individuals participate in “a virtual world of perspectival simulacra” (18). They do not adhere to the principals of belief and consistency, as advocated by Alfred; instead, they misconstrue “simulations into prohibitions, rather than liberation and survivance, [they] are themselves the treacherous taboos of dominance” (21). Vizenor gives the following example:

Russell Means, for instance, posed with other radical leaders of the American Indian Movement at the occupation of Wounded Knee and landed in motion pictures and a laudable postindian simulation, a studio production of a silk screen portrait by Andy Warhol.

“How about the *American Indian* series? Asked Patrick Smith in *Warhol: Conversations about the Artist*. “Was there any particular Indian?”

“Yeah. That was Russell Means,” said Ronnie Cultrone who was, at the time, a studio production assistant to Warhol. “He was involved with the Wounded Knee Massacre, which I don’t really know too much about, to tell you the truth. But I think he’s still in court. I don’t know. Something like that.” Indeed, the studio production is a simulation in three dimensions, the absence, presence, and portrait of the militant leader of the American Indian Movement.

This portrait is not an Indian. (17-18)

Representations such as these participate as well in the mis-education of the audience: how could one, indeed, mistake the *occupation* of Wounded Knee (in which Russell did participate) with the *massacre* at Wounded Knee (which occurred on December 29, 1890)?



While AIM, founded in 1968 in Minneapolis, successfully lead the way for Native American resistance, the year 1990 marked an important turning point for both Canadian and Aboriginal history and activism. In an interview, Taiaiake Alfred asked Ray Halbritter, from the West Coast First Nation, “If I mention the words “indigenous resistance,” what comes to mind?” Her reply is straightforward and crucial: “Oka 1990.” She continues, “The most important thing about Oka for us was that it made our people aware that you can be militant, that there are other options to being complacent, and that they include standing up for yourself” (*Wasáse* 123). From a literary studies perspective, post-summer 1990 revealed a sudden, almost compulsive interest on the part of many Canadians to know more about those ‘indians’ that had so monopolized the news for several months. Indeed, the falling through of the Meech Lake Accord and the Oka Crisis are crucial moments in the active re-shaping of the already-encoded relation between imperial powers and indigenous societies. Cree Elijah Harper is most certainly, in the Vizenorian sense, a “word warrior” – indeed, the performative power of his “no,” with regard to the Meech Lake Accord, exemplified the growing political influence of First Nations peoples across Canada. Eagle feather in hand, Elijah Harper cited the lack of adequate participation by Aboriginal people in Canada’s political process as his reason for blocking the accord – for beyond the recognition as participants in the Canadian process, there is also the recognition of Aboriginal Peoples as part of the founding peoples of the country. His “no” was also a stand of principle, on behalf of Aboriginal people; in his words, “it is the first time that we have an opportunity to publicly state that we are disappointed and angered in terms of the outcome of the First Ministers’ conference on Aboriginal issues” (“Constitutional Discord: Meech Lake”).

Lee Maracle's novel *Sundogs* explores the notion of taking an individual stand, and the repercussions that it has upon a community: "Elijah's small "no" may have shaken us from a deep sleep, but we still have a distance to travel, not the least of which is to alter our perception of ourselves. ... This is just the beginning, ... Oka is just a beginning" (200). On an individual level, Marianne, the narrator in *Sundogs*, finds herself liberated by Elijah Harper's anti-constitutional stance: "If Elijah upset Canada, he upset me more. His message to us was profoundly simple; we are worth fighting for, we are worth caring for, we are worthy" (77). As she performs the Run for Peace – the goal of which is to run an eagle feather, a pipe and a drum across Canada into the town of Kanehsatake, as a means of support for the Warriors, as well as to draw media attention away from the reactive events at the standoff, towards the proactive engagements of Aboriginal People across Canada – Marianne grieves for her solitude, the lack of her family's Native language, the childlike innocence that has shielded her, but most importantly, her state of besiegement, and the aggression upon her humanity. This aggression climaxes on Day 33 of the Run, as an angry crowd, "bearer of hate," hurls rocks at the runners, "whisper[ing] epithets at my humanity [but] los[ing] theirs in the process" (182). This highly tense moment in the novel, and the emotions that rise within Marianne and her fellow runners, mirrors a similar event that occurred during the Oka Crisis: when a convoy of 75 cars (carrying Mohawk women, children and elders who chose to leave the reserve in fear of a possible advance by the Canadian Army) left the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, and crossed Montreal's Mercier Bridge, they headed straight into an angry (white) mob that pelted the vehicles with rocks. Alanis Obomsawin's documentary *Rocks at Whiskey Trench*, the fourth in a

series on the Oka Crisis, reveals close-up footage of the aggression, and one can hear in the background “bande d’indiens sauvages,” and other, worse, insults. However, as did the drivers at Whiskey Trench, Marianne pushes through, adamant to continue running, despite the rocks, “for squaws, feathers, small things and great love” (181). In this moment, Marianne is a Strong Woman: to pick up from Andrea Smith, the attack that Marianne sustains, on her body, is not only on her as a Native woman, but it most certainly is an attack on Native sovereignty as a whole (138). However, she does not buckle: she resists the rocks, the hatred, and the possibility of victimization, which leave her and the other runners, empowered, capable of facing anything, of affirming their sovereignty: “We alone face the stones. We alone will face any further stones... We, the runners, came through the gambit of raining stones. We divide ourselves from all else. We are the run” (183).

Many victims, interviewed by Obomsawin, mention that the one thing they will never forget were the “angry faces” shouting at them. Similarly, Marianne “look[s back] at the images of twisted pain-wracked bodies of the boys whose stones aimed hate at my own wreckage” (182), and remarks on the senselessness of it:

In their pain they lash at me. They miss the source of pain – the origins lost to them forever. Hate is the end result of squeezing pain small, compressing it into dangerous locked cellular movement at the height of youth’s vigor... Hate wants expression... Hate must be expelled. These boys don’t know how to expel hate, so they indulge it and retrieve it at the same time. In their frenzy they can only cling to hate (182).

Marianne seemingly excuses them, for they are only “boys” which, of course, they are not, they are all adults, but they are trapped within a state of twistedly innocent, yet highly violent, ignorance, which can no longer account for, or recall, the source of their hatred, for

it is intergenerational. This source, however, needs to be remembered and recognized, not veiled over. This confirms the absolute necessity to educate, not only Aboriginals, but non-Aboriginals as well, an objective that Obomsawin has had for many years: “That was my fight from the very beginning, to fight for changes in the educational system concerning our people, and I wanted to see our history being taught and to try and do our own programs and get it in there as part of the curriculum” (Tallon 12).

However, and this question serves somewhat as a green line to this thesis, when attempting to reclaim and repossess memory, to re-educate and do away with ignorance, whether in writing or in film, one necessarily must ask, how does one reclaim, not only memory, but humanity, and in the very language that is responsible for its diminishing, erasing and silencing? For instance, Marianne runs “for squaws”; but how can “squaw” be reclaimed to assert its original, positive meaning? Indeed, Marianne, who was never taught either of her parents’ Native language, “loathe[s] English, [and] feel[s] imprisoned in its dry and cold delivery of pain and truth” (68). Nonetheless, it is once again Elijah Harper’s words that let her see beyond the dry functionality of the language, which opens up into a space in which his larger message is unveiled:

Three generations of us glued to the words of a little man whose command of English is connected to some other language, some other rhythm... His English in translation is free of the dry cold pain. Graphic and gentle, polite, free of the bullshit hierarchy, he drives on relentlessly, but not noisily. He carefully chooses each word so as to sound as unobnoxious as he possibly can, while he articulates, documents and advances the most obnoxious and despicable thing a Nation can do – attempt genocide on a people (68).

Marianne’s mother, throughout *Sundogs*, endlessly accuses the television newscasters of

that very conspiracy, the cultural genocide of the Indigenous people, which at first enervates, even embarrasses Marianne. Much like the Trickster, who abhors repression and hypocrisy, Elijah Harper's expelling and translation of grief, into a new language and into a new form of life, challenges Marianne, her family, a whole people, to question authority, resist the discourse of dominance echoed by the television, and indeed "reimagine the world and liberate ourselves in the process" (Owens *Other Destinies* 250). Marianne's own prejudice and sense of disconnection – instilled in her by the shielding silence of her mother and family, in the hopes that "Baby" would not have to wage as well in the endless struggle against history (205) – lifts with every step that she performs on the Run. For ultimately, and in Joan's words, "the individual has an obligation to cooperate. Everyone is obligated to speak their piece" (202). To partake in the Run is, in a sense, for Marianne, to partake in the struggle, to assert her place, her voice, as a Strong Woman, within that silent, dividing struggle; to participate in the lifting of "the weight of grief unrelenting [that] kept us all standing still," (206) to upheave an intergenerational paralysis of watching in "silent horror," and transform it into the courage "to move beyond grief and take up the business of living" (206).

## **Conclusion**

Jeanette Armstrong, in her article entitled "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment through Their Writing" outlines the responsibility of the Native/First Nations writer as having to "continuously [resist] cultural imperialism and [seek] means toward teaching co-operative relationships, [to] provide an

integral mechanism for solutions currently needed in this country” (241). The task of resistance is certainly a complex and controversial one, perhaps more so in the field of Native/First Nations writing, for it contains many layers that need to be contended with. While much has been achieved in the past fifty years (since being granted the right to vote), the seemingly everlasting, “damningly hyperreal” stereotype (Owens *Mixedblood Messages* 18) of the ‘indian’ as either vanishing, drunk, or somehow incapacitated, still holds fort, sadly, in many minds and institutions. Such an anchored social narrative, produced centuries ago and fueled by mischievous bureaucracy and fake representations, has had as an effect the internalization of the stereotypical aspects by the people themselves, as they experience their sense of individuality and community through the so-called ‘norms’ that surround them. This, as I have shown, has led to violence at a horizontal level, which originates from and festers within the community. Thus, in order to effectively question, and afterwards upset, the complexities and constructions of such blind doxa, it is necessary to first expose its intricacies. In effect, an analysis of governmental policies of genocide and assimilation – such as the *Indian Act* – renders clear a gruesome background upon which further acts of abuse, violence, oppression, and termination become, as I pointed out, justified/justifiable by the dehumanizing distancing of the perpetrator from the no-longer subject that is being erased.

However, the authors I have discussed in this chapter address, face-on, these complex and still-tabooed issues, such as racism, sexism, and abuse. By placing these themes at the center of their discursive stage, they expose and overthrow the ‘indian norm’ that has been at work for generations, the consequences and effects of which are still felt

poignantly today amongst Native/First Nations peoples. Additionally, in shedding their past status of governmental wards, they reclaim a sense of Warriorness, for they too “carry the burden of peace” (*Wasàse* 79): they retain the consistency “between belief, thought, words, and behaviour” (86), despite the mainstream media, and participate in the restoring of more traditional roles, which can inform contemporary struggles and claims. This unveiling, however, forces one, as reader and literary critic, to face the fact that there is a pervasively dark and highly political aspect of Canada’s history that needs to be taught, and that is the manner in which the government, in conjunction with the churches, conducted a deadly assimilation program in the hope of, in the infamous words of Duncan Campbell Scott, getting rid of the “Indian problem.” However, writers such as Highway, Allen, Maracle, and Campbell create a liminal space in which this discourse is addressed and upset, in an attempt to dissolve the polarities between ‘indian’/‘non-indian’ and ‘human’/‘non-human.’ Adding to this literary discussion are other works as well, such as the documentaries of Alanis Obomsawin, for whom,

film [is] a ‘place’ where native people can talk to each other about their losses, their memories of injustice, their desire to share what is good about their way of life, and with that sharing [with] viewers... perhaps arrive at a better appreciation of how the dispossessed, dislocated, and disoriented try to come out of the abyss... film must attempt to transform people and society; it must be an artifice of social reform.” (Houle 207)

Thus, with each act of positive, performative resistance – whether writing stories, searching streets, running across the country, or making films – it is the discourses of continuity and resistance that are underlined, rather than those of victimization and statutory grief. In these new, whole, and healthy discourses, stories of “people who love each other and who love

[each other]" (Akiwenzie-Damm "Erotica" 148) are created, and are waiting to be told.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MEMORY: HOW TO LIVE WITH GHOSTS**

## **Introduction**

In the first Chapter of this thesis, and in particular through my analysis of Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, I discussed how the reclaiming and repossession of memory is an important element in Native and First Nations literatures. Specifically, how through the act of performing, the telling of what 'really happened,' one may be liberated, thus enabling the "padlocked doors" (*Kiss* 285) of memory to be opened, turning the non-imaginable, the unacceptable, the unthinkable, into a performative space of transformational power. This is made possible through a positive writing process that I referred to as 'writing home,' which opens a space of empowerment and agency; one that revitalizes communal knowledge and affirms, rather than merely restores, a sense of collective memory. This process is a strategy of intervention that looks towards emphasizing the importance of continuity in stories, and this is made possible through memory, which insures that stories cannot be silenced, even if they are silent.

Memory is linked to notions of haunting and home and, by extension, to homelessness. I argue, in this chapter, that these three notions all refer to a similar condition, which enables the keeping and – where necessary – the restoration of memory, whether collective or individual. This, in turn, participates in establishing a sense of situatedness; one, I argue, that does not necessarily invoke that of 'home' in the traditional sense. To be haunted suggests there is a gap in the continuity of memory, a gap in the stories that link one memory to another, a necessary foundation to an individual's sense of belonging. Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* explores the possibilities of living with these gaps, these "ghosts": if one does not, it may lead to some form of contamination,

festering, and, eventually, to some form of explosion; if one does, it opens up possibilities to make use of them, and reclaim the stories that had been forgotten.

The homeless are also haunted by memories, they are “shadowed ones”: as Bernie Williams explains, many of the homeless were once successful people, but then, “something happened.”<sup>92</sup> I explore the link between memory and homelessness in relation to Richard Wagamese’s novel *Ragged Company*, and a section from Robert Majzels’ *City of Forgetting* – the latter, though written by a non-Native, raises interesting tropes of tribal stories and haunting chants that shake up the solid foundations of Montreal, all of which is witnessed by the ghost of De Maisonneuve. Also, in relation to Canada’s history of genocide vis-à-vis its Aboriginal peoples, the notion of transgenerational haunting is interesting to explore, which I do in relation to Darrell Dennis’ play *Tales of an Urban Indian*. Through these texts, then, I discuss how themes of guilt, dislocation, trauma and colonization are addressed and complicated by various forms of haunting and homelessness, and account for the need to record, transfix and transcribe the narratives of those that survived. This need, however, is not only about a growing fear of forgetting (as is in the case with Holocaust narratives), it is about mending bridges, filling gaps, and restoring memory. In addressing questions of cultural appropriation and the modes of response and/or resistance developed by, and through, an understanding of Native/First Nations artistic interventions, intergenerational bridges are being built back, generating empowerment, agency, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of pride. Finally, I show

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<sup>92</sup> Williams raised this issue during a panel discussion entitled “Stolen Sisters: A Critical Discussion about Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women in Canada,” McGill University, March 10, 2011.

how the reappropriation of memory, by means of language reappropriation, and the use of fiction, myth and story, are tools towards reclaiming and restoring a sense of belonging, of 'home.'

### **Part One – Healing Memory By Conversing With Ghosts**

*“Stones hold our tribal words and the past in silence, in the same way that we listen to stories in the blood and hold our past in memories.”*  
- Gerald Vizenor (*Heirs of Columbus* 9).

In Chapter One, I discussed how the 'indian' was, as stated by Gerald Vizenor, simulated to be an absence, which led to the imposition of the figure of the Vanishing Indian. This figure still, in effect, haunts not only Indigenous people, but the Canadian psyche as well. Earle Birney, in his 1962 poem "Can.Lit," referred to Canada's "ghostlessness" in relation to a sense of Canada's "lack" of history. Indeed, the line "it's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted" (l.10) reflects a national anxiety towards an "absence" of historical roots in Canada, in the sense that Canada had been, in the eyes of the settlers, prior to their arrival, an unoccupied space, void of presence, a clean slate upon which to inscribe the building of a new nation. This, consequently, fueled a massive cultural and literary production to create national sense of identity and belonging. However, underlying this is perhaps a far greater sense of nervousness: that of hidden truths, specters, in danger of being unearthed – it is never wise, so the saying goes, to disturb the dead. The tropes of haunting, specters, and things unaccounted for, as raised by Birney, continue to be important in relation to Canada and Canadian Literature, as Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul suggest in their "Talking

With Ghosts: Haunting in Canadian Production”<sup>93</sup>: “Despite or perhaps because of Birney’s suggestion that Canadians are haunted by a lack of specters, contemporary Canadian authors, artists, and filmmakers are obsessed with ghosts and haunting... [and] have taken great pains to map the intricacies of haunting” (645). This “obsession” stems from a need to revisit the original, national myths that had been created “to ‘fill up’ the emptiness” and which needed to be rewritten, or complemented, by a “unifying thematic for Canadian literature,” one that “sought to challenge the narrative of Canada’s ‘pastlessness,’” and acknowledged how Canadian literature was indeed haunted by “knowledges, bodies, and histories previously excluded by Western, European aesthetic paradigms” (647). However, this recognition of the present haunting of the past was, in effect, never adequately acknowledged: stories of trauma, dislocation, and colonization had yet to be accounted for. Thus, the selective use of haunting, as a trope in Canadian literature did not, in the end, maintain a sense of unity: rather, it depicts Canada as a fragmented entity, an entity that needs to tend to its “unfinished business” (648), and question its overwhelming sense of guilt. One might ask, for instance, if Canada is not haunted, why is it systematically apologizing?

“To haunt” is to be persistently, and disturbingly ‘present’ in a place, in the mind of someone; etymologically, it is something “distantly related to home,” while “to be haunted” is, for a place, to be “frequented by a ghost;” for a person, it is to show signs of “mental anguish and torment” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). Birney reflects upon a

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<sup>93</sup> This article is the introduction to a special issue devoted to haunting in Canadian Literature, underlying the continued importance of these tropes to our literary discourse and history (*University of Toronto Quaterly*, Volume 75, Number 2, Spring 2006).

kind of rashness in “Can.Lit,” depicting a regret for lack of roots in one’s own land, having been “too busy bridging loneliness” (1.5). This setting, that had become the Canadian context of study, had stemmed from the need to compensate for the sense of being lost, displaced in foreign, endless territory: settlers had to write in their existence, create a trope, a literary landscape in which they could feel “at home,” and in which their presence had meaning. Early on, it was necessary to write Canada out of its state of being a colony, and into that of being a country. Unfortunately, faced with a clear, clean slate to write upon, there was also a lack of commitment to such a barren land, a lack of perception in the implications of being given such ‘freedom’ to write history.

At the time of the poem’s publication, 1962, the silent “civil war” (1.7) between English-Canada and Québec that was taking place not only on the political scene but in the field of literary studies as well, contributed to set them further apart. This was accentuated with the advent of the Quiet Revolution, enabling a transformation of the nationalist discourse in Québec. At the same time, echoing that of Red Power movements in the U.S., activism among First Nations throughout Canada was on the rise, in response to reinforced governmental assimilation policies (further implemented in the amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 which, in effect, did very little to increase the concepts of self-governance and self-determination, as I noted previously). Thus, if only in light of these two major, internal conflicts – for one must bear in mind the other forms of literary participations, be they minor, diasporic or multicultural, and their independent claims for a literary space in the vast field of CanLit, as well as their own political struggles for social acceptance – it is difficult to ignore the overwhelming presence of a ‘hidden’ historical agenda in Canada: as

Kamboureli has put it, “The closer Canada came to developing a sense of its ‘identity’ as a nation-state, the more fiercely it articulated, and officially so, its rebuffs of blacks, First Nations peoples, and those it cast as ‘Orientals,’ people from the Middle East, Asia, and Southern Europe” (*Making a Difference* 2). Nevertheless, in its rebuff, the national policy eventually permitted there to be, be it within (or confined to) the anglophone and francophone spaces and languages, a space of expression for those ‘multicultural voices’ to challenge, perhaps, the national project. However, as Goldman and Saul note, “In Canada, the spectral presences of North America’s Indigenous peoples and the Québécois repeatedly unsettle the imaginary, unified vision of an Anglo-Canadian nation-state,” (648) thus further contributing to Canada’s state of anxiety. Indeed, can one imagine a figure more haunting than the “Vanishing Indian,” who never actually vanishes?

This latter question brings me to the main purpose of inquiry for this chapter: to borrow one of Goldman and Saul’s questions that helped initiate the discussions for their special issue, “How do works by First Nations authors and artists interrogate Canada’s supposed ghostlessness?” (245) I hold that these works do not only interrogate this supposed ghostlessness, they upset it, and return their voices to the unseen faces that *do*, in effect, haunt Canada – thus making Canada, rather, *ghost-full*. This process, in turn, reinstates a space in which conversing and living with ghosts may be regarded, I argue, as potential, rather than trial, and may become a tool towards growth and transformation. However, if ghosts are signals of anxiety, repressed secrets, and lost stories, how does one reinstate them into memory, and more so, into text? How does this upset the safe space in which Canadians have settled, their sense of belonging, of ‘home’? How, on the other hand,

has silence and secrecy enabled marginalized communities to maintain a sense of communal memory and inheritance?

Haunting, as a trope, is very present in First Nations literatures – the writers and artists who are, in essence, the protagonists of this “hauntology.” This is a state (as coined per Jacques Derrida) in which ideas of reality are haunted by what is excluded, that is, the pitfalls of a nation, such as colonialism, genocide, slave trade, residential schools, or other forms of repression. Indeed, as Colin Davis suggests, Derrida’s “rehabilitation of ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry has proved to be extraordinarily fertile. Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive” (373). Attending to the ghost, he says, is “an ethical injunction,” one that calls for the necessary task of accounting for that which is “not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness *we are responsible for preserving*” (373; emphasis mine). In this responsibility to preserve, I argue, resides the key to the sustainability and the continuity of memory: indeed, one must learn to accept one’s inheritance of history as spectral, and act responsibly towards it.

Thus, if one considers the specter to be ‘something’ ineffable, endlessly postponed, a residue of hidden violence, then one must acknowledge that it is necessarily inscribed in the psyche, that it is transported through generations, and that, in the end, specters are what constitute both the individual’s memory and the collectivity’s imaginary. The potentiality of this specter, which is thus not ‘physical,’ but affect, is to be able to return to the point of trauma, loss, or violence, and act upon it: as opposed to melancholia, the state in which



mourning and sadness is endlessly deferred, the specter is source of transformative power, out of which one may voice the unspeakable, rewrite the event of trauma, and recuperate the repressed. This, in turn, opens up new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses that empower and transform, indeed, redefine the human condition and experience. It is a lesson in living with ghosts.

Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* is indeed such a lesson in living with ghosts. Learning to live with ghosts, according to Jodey Castricano, is "to use them instrumentally and, in turn, whether one knows it or not, [to accept] to be used by them" (801), by precisely, using them to return to the point of trauma, loss, or violence, and account for it, rather than repress it. The novel's protagonist, Lisamarie Hill, will have to learn both these features, especially the second one: for in her attempt to do away with her 'gift' – seeing ghosts and receiving nightly visits by an eerie little leprechaun-like man who warns her of bad events to come – she learns that to force something into silence, to erase it, to repress it, can only lead to some form of contamination, festering, and result, eventually, into some form of explosion that will, ultimately, account for absence and address the unspeakable. In this sense, there is harm, and damage, that needs to be undone. But to do this is to upset a little further the narrative of 'psychological colonialism,' in which rationality leaves no space for psychological neurosis, for conversing with and learning from the supernatural, and that which cannot be accounted for.

*Monkey Beach* is an extended version of an earlier short story that Robinson wrote, "Queen of the North," published in the collection *Traplines*. The narrator in the short story is Adelaine "Karaoke" Jones, whereas in *Monkey Beach*, it is Lisamarie Hill. Lisa's

brother, Jimmy, who is also Adelaine's boyfriend, links the two. The short story ends with Jimmy leaving off for sea with Josh (Adelaine's uncle), who had not only abused her repeatedly over the years, but got her pregnant as well. A looming, eerie premonition comes with the end of the story, that Jimmy embarked upon the trip to kill Josh. *Monkey Beach* opens with Jimmy's disappearance, and closes with what happened on the boat; the latter becomes clear in Lisa's vision, at the end of the novel, when she nearly drowns in the same waters where her brother disappeared:

The waves have washed the blood from the oar tip but he can see the dents in the wood where he hit Josh – first on the hand as Josh gripped the side and screamed, trying to put one leg in the seiner as Jimmy kicked him and hit him. For what he did to Karaoke, he knew that Josh deserved to die. (369)

Other elements are made clear by reading the two stories side by side – such as how the pattern of violence exerted by Josh is related to, but not justified by, the abuse he himself suffered in residential school (“Queen of the North” 212), so that there is something not quite “right” about him (*Monkey Beach* 58). The consequences from residential school, the endured damage and violence, haunt several of *Monkey Beach*'s protagonists, but are never truly explored in the novel. However, Mick's outburst of anger when his sister Edith starts to say grace before dinner, is highly suggestive of the abuse and injustice he himself suffered:

They were after numbers! That's all they wanted! How many converts they could say they had. How many heathens... You look at your precious church. You look at what they did. You never went to residential school. You can't tell me what I fucking went through and what I didn't... You don't get it. You really don't get it. You're buying into a religion that

thought the best way to make us white was to fucking torture children (109-110).

Mick and Josh depict two very different responses to surviving their experiences at residential school. Mick's anger is equivalent to Josh's damage and inability to break away from an intergenerational pattern of violence; rather, gruesomely, he embraces it, and repeats the same acts of abuse, both mental and physical, upon his own family. Josh nurtures, in this sense, a notion of horizontal violence – one that originates and festers within the community itself. Mick, on the other hand, through his involvement with AIM, wants to fight oppression, and reclaim a sense of pride and respect; however, through this fight against hierarchical oppression, he also fails to admit to his own participation in horizontal violence – violence, however, that he instigates upon himself, through carelessness and alcohol (62-63).

*Traplines* is a collection of short stories featuring mainly contemporary urban youth that remain purposely without any type of ethnic characteristics, for, as Robinson remarks in an interview with Suzanne Methot, “People assumed I couldn’t write anything that wasn’t native because I’m native. But I’m fascinated with serial killers, psychopaths and sociopaths. I wrote about non-native characters [in *Traplines*] just to show them I could” (12). After publishing *Monkey Beach*, on the other hand, Robinson was dubbed “the first Haisla novelist. Ever” (12). In the same way, Kit Dobson has argued that “[c]oming to *Monkey Beach* with a knowledge of Indigenous writing in which the ellipses of the text are evocative of literary engagements with colonial violences perpetrated against Native peoples, gives one a different experience of reading the novel than if one does not come to

it with such knowledge” (63). Nevertheless, it has been made clear that Robinson’s novel resists categorization, precisely from the slippages, or ellipses, that occur; and in Robinson’s own words “I’m a very selfish writer. The best stuff I write comes when I’m not thinking about an audience, when I don’t think about who’s going to read this, what market it’s going to” (Methot 12). There is nonetheless, on the one hand, “an anxiety about how [the novel] will be recognized as either a representative “Native” text or as a more universal/Western novel aimed at a mainstream audience” (Dobson 56). On the other hand, it features as well a distinct anxiety about what to commit to the page and what to keep only as oral tradition, since at the onset of her research for *Monkey Beach*, Robinson was told by village elders that one is not supposed to write down the oral stories: “General ideas I feel very comfortable using, but I feel uncomfortable [detailing specific native traditions]. I kept some scenes more or less true as they would happen, but I reworked stuff and made certain parts up [...] I wrote about a feast, and I found out later that you’re not supposed to write about feasts in Haisla culture” which, she confesses, annoyed the village guardians of cultural integrity (Methot 12).

Beyond a partial unspeakability of traditional Haisla, there are numerous, silent suggestions in the narrative that require that readers extend their reading beyond their contextual knowledge. These gaps are, I argue, nonetheless necessary to the flow and construction of the narrative, and call for an extended participation of the reader – in this sense, they are suggestive of Ruby Slipperjack, who said in an interview with Hartmut Lutz, “I cannot tell you why this and this and that happens, you figure that out yourself” (Lutz, *Contemporary Challenges* 209). The reader, then, is left to either ignore the ellipses

in the text, or work towards “figuring out” their hidden meaning, and consequently participate in the unveiling of the unspeakable, however ugly. For there is, according to Dobson, throughout *Monkey Beach*, “an ever-present but unspoken trauma” (61), which at times relates to Lisa’s own childhood and growing up, while at others it refers to a history of colonization and its impacts upon the Native population. For instance, Lisamarie’s many questions to Ma-ma-oo, or to her parents about their people’s history often remain unanswered.

“Is there a village here?”

Mom shook her head. “Used to be.”

“What happened?”

She looked down at me. “Most of the people died.”

“How?”

“They just died,” she said, her lips thinning.

Which meant that she wanted me to stop asking what she called my nosy questions (100).

Lisamarie is not told here the full story of entire populations being decimated by illness and epidemics.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the referral to her questions as being “nosy,” is suggestive of both the breach in storytelling and the urge to shield the younger generation from the shame their parents went through. This is reminiscent of Lee Maracle’s *Sundogs*, and Marianne’s own prejudice and sense of disconnection that is instilled in her by the shielding silence of

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<sup>94</sup> According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, “Epidemics and endemic diseases brought by Europeans reduced [the Haisla] population, and after the 1918 influenza pandemic, fewer than 300 survived. The decline slowed around 1930, and by 1986 the population of the combined bands had reached 1100 and by 1996 the Kitamaat population was 1364.”

her mother and family, in the hopes that Marianne, “Baby,” would not have to wage as well in the endless struggle against history (*Sundogs* 205). Lisamarie’s uncle Mick, on the other hand, deems that “she’s got to know about these things” (68) – namely governmental oppressive policies, colonial history, and lies told within the classroom. But he too is careful not to divulge too much – such as his experience at residential school (109), why he was shot (53), or how his wife died (309). For Mick, it is a duty, a responsibility, to give voice to silence, to tell the story of *what* has happened, without necessarily saying *how* it happened.

Indeed, the emphasis placed on “the unspeakable” in the novel appears not only in the haunting figures, but also in the many silences that occur throughout. These silences are, as I said, necessary to the flow and construction of the narrative: in this way, the use of suggestive silence marks the contribution of First Nations writings to the issue of Canada’s supposed “ghostlessness.” Ghosts, in effect, insure the uninterruptedness in the transmission of story, and in this sense they are potential, rather than trial: they are not to be endured, they are to be made use of to connect the different moments of repressed memories. For to return to the point of trauma, loss, or violence, is *to act upon it*: providing a voice to the unseen becomes a tool towards growth and transformation. As I discussed in Chapter One, while on the one hand, silence is indeed the place where oppression takes place, where the silenced are controlled by the silencers, and from which one escapes only through a coming to voice and language, it is also a creative warzone. Much like ghosts, one has to learn how to live with silence, and how to use it; but also, one has to accept to be

used by it. For to force something into silence, to erase or repress it, can only lead to some form of contamination and festering, and result, eventually, in some form of explosion.

While *Monkey Beach* certainly forces silence upon the narrative, it also divulges the potential of residue and contamination, specifically through the portrayal of violence, which indeed inadvertently explodes. Lisa's narrow escape from the white men in Terrace (249) – a notoriously dangerous transit point on Highway 16, a.k.a. “The Highway of Tears” – only to be raped by her own friend Cheese a few days later after he drugs her at a party (258) holds an uncanny and appalling logic: although she circumvents an act of top-down violence, she falls victim to an act of horizontal violence. The rape is eerily alluded to and left in suspension in the actual text, mimicking Lisa's blurbs of consciousness. This moment in the novel is also the turning point of the little man's visits, when, in the morning after, Lisa tells him “If you couldn't stop it, what good are you? Don't bother coming again” (259). This dismissal of the little man marks the first occurrence of the spirit world asking for meat, as if accounting for the wrongful dismissal of her gift. When she goes back to the forest to burn the clothes she had been wearing the night before, not wanting “any reminders” (261), she hears something in the trees, “Bring us meat,” the first voice whispered. “And we'll hurt him” (262).

*Monkey Beach* is truncated by narrations of the present: as she rides her boat to Namu to help in the search for her brother, Lisa recalls all the instances of the little man's visit, and Ma-ma-oo's teachings of living with ghosts, and the ultimate ‘gift’ that Lisa inherited: “You have a dangerous gift,” she says. “It's like oxasuli. Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you” (371). When she stops for a break – from her journey and her

thoughts – on Monkey Beach, she recalls her last visit there with her brother, one year before (296). As she recounts their stay, their discussions, and everything that has happened within a year, the time she actually spends on the beach seems to come to a standstill – something is preventing her from leaving the beach, somehow paralysing her, though she remains vaguely conscious that she should continue on to Namu: “I stand by my boat, my forgotten bailer in my hands. I’m soaked. I don’t know what time it is, and don’t want to lift my arms to check. ‘We can help you,’ a voice says. ‘Give us meat’” (336).

I can’t move.

“Lisa,” they say.

“Come closer,” the first voice says.

“Just listen to us. Come over to the trees.”

They’ve been calling to me, but I don’t know for how long. I know I should leave. If I stay any longer, I’ll be at Namu tomorrow morning and Mom and Dad will worry. But if the things in the trees can help me, maybe Jimmy can keep his happy ending. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad, just this once. I reach into my bag and dig around until I find my knife. When I pull it out, the voices hiss into silence. A crow begins to caw.

[...] I tilt my head upwards. “I don’t have any meat. But I have blood.”

I wait, but nothing answers (360-1).

[...] The cut I make in my left hand is not deep. The skin separates and the blood wells up and spills down my palm. For a moment, there is no pain, and I wonder if I’m dreaming this, then the cut begins to burn, to sear. I hold my hand up to the trees and the blood runs down under my sleeve and down my forearm. I turn around in circles, offering this to the things in the trees, waiting. When I’m about to give up and go back to my speedboat, I hear a stealthy slither (365-6).

[...] I wake. The moss is soft and wet against my back. There is a dull, aching pain in my hand. I lift it, and the cut is raw, but has stopped bleeding, and all the blood has been licked away. Its tongue was scratchy, like a cat’s.



“You said you would help me!” I yell, but my voice cracks, and I don’t know if they heard me, so I yell it again.

They snigger.

I push myself up with my right hand, cradling my left hand against my chest. The bushes rustle.

“More,” a voice says from the shadows.

I stand. “You tell me where Jimmy is first” (368-9).

It thus takes several “feedings” for Lisa to find the answers she is looking for; amongst which the realization and – more importantly – the acceptance of the power she has inherited, the power “to speak with ghosts.” In finally confronting “the things” that have haunted her since childhood, the voices calling her from inside the trees demanding for meat (261) and blood (361), which she offers in exchange for the story of her brother’s death, she regains possession of her gift.

Interestingly, the point of contact, so to speak, can only take place in moments between wake and sleep, between life and death, as if for ghosts to visit, they require a liminal zone, when one’s guard is down. She struggles half-awake to get away from “the thing [that] waits in the shadows” and wants “more,” and gets to her boat, only to slip and fall; “Speedboat does enough of a spin to gently knock my head and push me underwater” (370). In her search for truth, Lisa has gone “too far” into that liminal other world (372): in her final vision, she witnesses a dance, “a farewell song” that Mick and Jimmy and others are singing “about leaving and meeting again” (374). Her time has not come, as Ma-ma-oo’s ghost coaxes, for Lisa has still to act upon the powers she has inherited, now that she has taken the first step, that is to accept them, use them, and be used by them. Ghosts are,

after all, nothing to be afraid of (265); they merely account for absence and address the unspeakable, the invisible. Then, Jimmy's ghost leads her back to shore, where she awakes – with the end of the novel – with “in the distance... the sound of a speedboat” (374).

The notion of responsibility that comes with Lisa's gift – and which Ma-ma-oo sought to teach her – is what makes *Monkey Beach* a resisting novel. It makes use of the trope of haunting to upset “the Western psychological model of the ‘delusional’ or ‘immature’ mind that comes undone when Lisa reads against the grain to understand things differently” (Castricano 809). Lisa not only participates in voicing ghosts from her individual past (her brother Jimmy, her uncle Mick, and Ba-ba-oo (367)), she converses with the spirit world of her Haisla inheritance. It is in this sense, then, that Robinson's novel contributes to the discourse that counters that of Canada as being “ghostless”: she unravels the trope of “psychological colonialism” and enables a conversation between what Castricano calls the “cultural intersections of and clashes between certain European and First Nations epistemological, ontological, and spiritual paradigms” (811) – paradigms which are, inevitably, haunted by one another.

## **Part Two - Tropes of Haunting and Homelessness: What is Home?**

*‘Home’ has become such a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travails.*  
- C.J.S. Wallia

Though my research focuses on Native American and First Nations literatures, there is one novel written by non-Native Canadian author Robert Majzels to which I would like to refer for its important contribution to my discussion on haunting as a trope in First Nations

literatures. In effect, I argue that the ‘inter-haunting’ of the Canadian and First Nations paradigms is further explored in Majzels *City of Forgetting*. Not only are the protagonists actual ghosts, there is a clash between two versions of history that enables a returning back to the moment of trauma, that of territorial appropriation in the name of religion, with the symbolic planting of the cross upon Mount Royal. One necessarily wonders, what brought these ghosts to be trapped in the liminal Purgatory of Downtown Montreal? Lianne Moyes has suggested that “making historical characters present in the city of Montreal asks readers to attend to forgotten histories and, at the same time, to grapple with the actuality, the contemporaneity of the conflicts in which the characters are embroiled” (174). Furthermore, their depiction as homeless,<sup>95</sup> not only calls forth the actual etymology of ‘haunting,’ in the sense that they are disturbingly ‘present’ in Downtown Montreal, it also associates them with the abject, that which does not make sense, is not rational, and will not be acknowledged by the mainstream or by the mind, and hence must be rejected, for it is dirty, contaminated: “The ‘recycling’ of urban refuse, garbage, and debris renders the homeless residual, abject, and marginal. Consequently, their vagrancy is equated with crime, disease, political unrest, and the unruly frenzy of the crowd” (Beneventi 116). These “vagrants,” nevertheless, know all about the psychological refuse of the “civilized” that is done away with in a trash can, as if that could erase the guilt that comes with repressed memory; similar to Christie, the scavenger in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*, who comments: “What is strange is that some people think I don’t see what goes into the bins

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<sup>95</sup> Majzels has explained that each character is inspired by an actual homeless person living in Downtown Montreal, with whom he spoke when writing the novel (Comment made during a reading at Université de Montréal, November 12, 2006).

outside their back gates. They put it in and that's the end of it to them. But I take it out, do you see?" (86) Ghosts, like garbage, are residue with potential.

On the other hand, the criminalization of the homeless puts them into a state of exile, rewriting the notion of being dis-located within a hostile landscape – in this case urban – where one does not belong, and where one is rendered invisible by the well-groomed, civilized occupants. These marginalized, trespassing, undesired occupants of the city, their “spatial practices, bodies, and histories that circulate in the city are effaced from public discourse” (Beneventi 109). However, it is precisely these voices that one should learn to listen to: perhaps a somewhat romantic and all-too-easy equivalence, the homeless person knows his/her city/landscape far better than the businessman/woman; as did the Native, when the colonizers arrived. In this sense, in the character of De Maisonneuve, Majzels reverses the original oppressor/repressed dichotomy: having not listened to the voices of the Native Mohawks and participating in their silencing, De Maisonneuve finds himself not only haunting the purgatorial grounds of genocide, he is haunted by the voices of the Iroquois:

What? What was out there, beyond the palisades? Beyond the parameters of his mission? What voices that frightened him because they were unlike the voices he had heard all his life? Voices outside his mission, outside the Church. Only the wind. Strange wind in a strange land. A whispering prayer, almost inaudible, but somehow drowning out his own prayers to the Virgin. *Kontìrio, Otsi'tén':a, Ohonte'hson':a, Okwire'shon':a. The animals, the birds, the green plants that heal and feed us, and the trees of the forest. Ratiwe:rahs. The Thunder Grandfathers charged by the Creator to put fresh water in the rivers and lakes. And the water. Kahnekaronnion. Always the whispering prayer calling down more water. Kahnekaronnion. Drowning out his own prayers (74).*

A ghost haunted by ghosts, the fear experienced by De Maisonneuve towards these voices is resonant with the anxiety and state of uneasiness of Canada: the specters of the past are pointing their fingers at “the uncanny status of Canada as a settler-invader society” (Goldman & Saul 653). The voices that De Maisonneuve hears are from “outside the Church,” “beyond the parameters of his mission” (in a dual sense), indeed outside the institutions that so carefully forged the safe enclosure that enabled Canada to construct its grand narrative, which was possible only in the silencing of its marginal voices. The fact that De Maisonneuve is haunted by these voices in contemporary Montreal, as Moyes suggests, is proof that the Mohawk “systems of belief [came] before and continue after the moment of European settlement on the island” (186). This residue, then, holds once more potential energy: it establishes that First Nations people retain a collective memory that goes beyond the ‘contact point,’ the moment of trauma – a notion defended by, amongst others, Thomas King: “our traditions ... have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization” (“Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial” 185).

Though it may appear that the Mohawk voices “remain embedded as silent trace in the urban landscape” (Beneventi 119), Majzels takes the act of reappropriating voice a step further by allowing an “exhaustion of grand narratives,” enabling marginal cultures to “make up their own story of Montreal” (Majzels “Interview” 129), stories that inevitably clash in the naming of oppression, as Robinson’s Lisamarie suggests: “Names have power. This is the fundamental principle of magic everywhere. Call out the name of a supernatural being, and you will have its instant and undivided attention” (181). The silent spectral force, accumulated for over 500 years, called forth by no other than De Maisonneuve, sends

the city of Montreal into apocalypse, and resuscitates it as Tiontiakwe. In the midst of the dead and dying, “the shattered glass of Place Montréal-Trust,”

De Maisonneuve sees, again, the face with eyes full of intelligence and strength he knows is not his own. The face of the one whose name must not be spoken, the one whose face Aionwahtha the man-eater saw reflected in the surface of his hearth pot. The Peacemaker. The mountain has grown, thrust by the quake up and over the city, so that it now curves like the heel of some menacing boot, and there, still standing at the apex, bigger than ever: the cross, his cross, burning in a sheath of blood-red flames.

*Ha! Ha! Hail! Hail! Hail! We bring the wishes of the Great Peace. Kaianereh'kowa: The Great Law, The Way of Great Splendour. Gaiwoh: justice and the desire for justice. Skenon: the peace which comes when the spirit is healthy and the body is cared for. Gashasdenshaa: the strength to apply justice and the will of the Creator... Onkwehonwe. We are the people come together* (138).

Such a demonstration of the potential force of the specter echoes once again the idea that while being able to “speak with ghosts” is a ‘gift,’ it must be used responsibly: for, to echo Terry Castle, to return to the moment of trauma, inasmuch as the return is to set things straight, there is a danger that “one’s inmost thoughts might at any moment assume the strangely externalized shape of phantoms” and “lead one out of oneself into madness” (165). De Maisonneuve, indeed, has experienced a vision of incredible power that has “clouded” his mind; but “suddenly there are no signs of the earthquake’s damage, no smoke or wreckage, no cross or flames or voices; he is alone inside the windowless blue [police] van, a broken soldier with his stinking dog” (140). His reality of being homeless, in the eyes of the authority, overshadows the importance of the prophecy he has just witnessed. Like many a prophet, conversing with the supernatural is merely a sign of madness, which must be obscured, repressed, and hidden. However, as I have argued, in forcing something

into silence, there is the inevitability that it will, someday, explode, and account for absence and address the unspeakable. The final words that De Maisonneuve heard, “we are the people come together,” resonates with an unacknowledged force, lying in wait at the periphery of Montreal: in a way, the Mohawks of Kahnawake and Kanehsatake, since the Oka Crisis, haunt the citizens of Montreal with a sense of general unrest: might they take control of the Mercier Bridge again?

There are certainly other texts I might have considered instead of, or in conjunction with Majzels’ novel. However, my choice for discussing this section of *City of Forgetting* in this context is two-fold: on the one hand, I consider Majzels’ fictional depiction of the ‘inter-haunting’ of the Canadian and First Nations paradigms very insightful, in the sense that de Maisonneuve’s accounting for the voices of the displaced Natives – a displacement of which he was responsible with the creation of Montreal – suggests he remains haunted and unsure, perhaps, about the validity of his past actions; an ethical question, I argue, that should continue to be raised in any discussion involving colonial history. However, while the voices attest to a powerful Native presence that remains and resists despite the city, they also suggest a physical absence, which I consider somewhat problematic in light of the specific Native aspect of homelessness in Montreal – an issue that Majzels fails to raise, despite the research work he did in consulting with actual homeless people. On the other hand, this latter element is nevertheless interesting to consider in comparison to Wagamese’s depiction of the homeless in *Ragged Company*: his concern lies in the fact that they are first and foremost *people*, regardless of whether they are Native as well or not. The omission – whether conscious or not – on Majzels’ part opens a space for the discussion of

the “incidental” nature of ethnicity and its relevant importance – or not – in the discourse around homelessness.

The stigmatization forced upon the homeless puts them, as I remarked, into a state of exile, thus rewriting the notion of being dis-located within a hostile landscape – in this case urban – where they do not belong, and where they are rendered invisible by the ‘civilized’ occupants – they are truly “effaced from public discourse” (Beneventi 109). This form of neo-colonial urban jargon reflects further on the double stigma caused to those that are not only homeless, but Aboriginal as well.<sup>96</sup> In effect, a diversity of reports show that anywhere between 5 and 35% of the homeless people in major Canadian cities are Aboriginal – with a dire concentration in the cities of Vancouver, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Toronto, and Montreal (Webster 33). In 2006, non-governmental sources estimated Canada’s true homeless population (not just those living in emergency shelters) to be between 200’000 and 300’000 (Laird 4). The discrepancy between surveys and facts is due to the distinction that has to be made between what is referred to as “absolute homelessness” and “hidden homelessness”:

Homelessness has *absolute* and *hidden* dimensions. Absolute homeless exists when a person has no address, no home, and no shelter except what might be obtained as temporary relief. Absolute homelessness is the easiest type of homelessness to measure through methods such as surveys, counts, and analysis of shelter caseload statistics... Hidden homelessness is generally a problem that the government and charities can ignore. It is not a problem to social services as long as hidden homeless people do not seek (or are not sent for) assistance from shelters and related services. They can generally be ignored so long as they “sleep rough” without making demands

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<sup>96</sup> This is resonant with the notion of double stigmatization I raised in Chapter Two, in relation to being Native and a woman; Homeless Aboriginal women, consequently, face, literally, a triple stigmatization.



for services... Not every homeless person can be enumerated in a census because not everyone who is homeless is “visible.” Since the “hidden homeless” tend not to be counted, the actual number of homeless persons reported to be living in any community is always underestimated (Webster 148-149).

This distinction is important to my analysis, because these invisible, hidden homeless are those who fall in the “holes” of the city, and whom are the protagonists of Ojibway author Richard Wagamese’s novel *Ragged Company*. These holes are “where the lonely go, the lost, the displaced, the forgotten... [they are those] that daylight’s legerdemain makes vanish so that we come to think of the geography of the city as seamless, predictable, equal” (162). Indeed, the homeless are a contamination of the city, and must be made invisible so as not to upset the taxpayers and the tourists: they are “a menace to the established order, by their own marginality, but even more because street life goes against dominant values and the dominant use made of public space” (Bellot 20).<sup>97</sup> Moreover, I would add, they are rendered invisible so as not to make the wealthy feel guilty or unsafe. By and large, whatever the percentage, it is understood that Aboriginal people are grossly over-represented in any statistic on homelessness. The question I seek to analyze here, however, is why, and how, there is such a majority, not only of Aboriginal homeless people, but of homeless people in general throughout Canada, as has been noted by the UN:

In May 2006, Canada made some unusual headlines. After deliberations in Geneva, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR) delivered a firm but harsh rebuke of Canada’s record on poverty and homelessness. The Committee urged Canadian governments to

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<sup>97</sup> “L’itinérant apparaît ici comme une menace pour l’ordre établi, certes du fait de sa marginalité, mais bien davantage encore parce que la vie de rue irait à l’encontre des valeurs dominantes et de l’usage dominant de l’espace public.” (My translation).

address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency,” and sternly noted Canada’s repeated failure to meet its international treaty obligations in providing basic policy and resources to protect a growing population of disadvantaged citizens (Laird 11).<sup>98</sup>



*Photo taken during the Pied Piper Rally Against Homelessness, October 2007, Vancouver BC.<sup>99</sup>*

<sup>98</sup> “Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: CANADA,” United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Thirty-sixth session, May 19, 2006. The UN committee’s comment on homelessness reads:

“The Committee reiterates its recommendation that the federal, provincial and territorial governments address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency by reinstating or increasing, where necessary, social housing programs for those in need, improving and properly enforcing anti-discrimination legislation in the field of housing, increasing shelter allowances and social assistance rates to realistic levels, and providing adequate support services for persons with disabilities. The Committee urges the State party to implement a national strategy for the reduction of homelessness that includes measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms, in keeping with Covenant standards” (Laird 90).

<sup>99</sup> Photographer’s name unknown (pseudonym “Blackbird”). Image retrieved February 2011 from: [[http://www.flickr.com/photos/blackbird\\_hollow/1558450328/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/blackbird_hollow/1558450328/)].

Arguably, it is not difficult to assert that the alarmingly high numbers of Aboriginal homeless people are, once again, a direct consequence of a history of colonial violence, gender oppression, and unrefuted, continued stigmatization. Furthermore, it is also a distinctive reminder that Canada, once again, fails to meet, as per the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, its obligations vis-à-vis its Aboriginal people, as well as its promise to work towards reconciliation and equality. Once again, it is left to the people themselves, to contend with the situation and seek solutions.

However, this enquiry goes beyond the Aboriginal question – an element that is predominantly important in Wagamese’s novel. *Ragged Company* is not about statistics, it is not a novel about Aboriginal homelessness; rather it is about seemingly different people coming together during duress, need and loss, and making the best of what they have, or do not have. Wagamese seeks to upset the stereotypes around the homeless, the drunk, the ‘indian,’ and to reveal his protagonists as nothing else but human beings. Granite, Wagamese’s “Square John” counterpart, remarks,

When the four ragged people appeared beside me I was surprised, to say the least. Some lives have borders that we’re never meant to touch. When the bent old native woman spoke to me, it was only the rigidity of manners that allowed me to speak. I could have forced myself to move away entirely but I stayed, determined, I suppose, to display class and dignity although we were the only the only five in the theatre. When the bottles came out, I expected it, just as I expected drunken babble that would force my moving. But they became engrossed and not a word was said between them, and when they walked out into the lobby sober afterwards I was impressed (35).

Within a discourse of dominance, the homeless person is not ‘supposed’ to inspire a positive impression, just as they are not ‘supposed’ to attend, and enjoy, the movies. For in

the homeless person, there is an almost *spectral* position in his/her (lack of) situatedness – in particular in the hidden homeless. These “invisible ones” are citizens too, but without clear identities, they are effaced and become unrecognizable as they merge into the cracks and holes and abandoned warehouses of the city and by consequence, haunt the streets. It is no surprise then that the dedication in the opening pages of *Ragged Company* reads “For all the invisible ones in all the cities.” Like ghosts, the homeless – much like other marginalized individuals – are left at the periphery, are forgotten, and are rendered invisible. They are dismissed coldly, as they are assumed to be transient. While their presence and participation are acknowledged, they remain on the periphery of the national project, ghosts to the city. In the short movie “From Homeless to Home: Stories from Ottawa,” directed by Jason Gondziola, a former homeless woman says that in the eyes of the city, being homeless is like “the pigeon problem”: if one stops feeding the pigeons, they will eventually go away. Again, the homeless are equated with contamination, spreaders of disease who eat out of garbage cans: they are, almost, inhuman. What is needed, then, is a new narrative on being homeless (as well as being homeless *and* Aboriginal), one that counterbalances the all too many representations of the homeless injected into mainstream imagery, and that accounts for their *human* condition and experiences. A narrative that is a reclamation of language, a re-reading of historiography through metanarratives and a ‘writing back’ at both forms of civil alienation and psychotic silence. A narrative that works towards unraveling the stereotypical aspects internalized by the people themselves, ingrained through pounding guilt, as they experience their sense of (or lack of) individuality and community through the so-called ‘norms’ that surround them. *Ragged Company*

explores the complexities and constructions of this anchored social narrative, fueled by mischievous bureaucracy and incomplete representations in the media. Though the homeless may be a form of residue, Wagamese shows that they are residue with potential. For the space they occupy is, in a way, palpable and full, a source of potential transformative power yet to be seized.

*Ragged Company* tells the story of four homeless “rounders” (known as “chronic homeless”), who, by sheer luck, stumble upon a winning lottery ticket. This luck, however, proves to be trying and rather than make their lives easier, it complicates them. For their sense of self has become inscribed within the urban con/text, through movement, routine, and “being street,” as Amelia, a.k.a One For the Dead, remarks: “I choose to be here. I choose to live the way I live. I don’t know how to be any other way than street. Tried it years ago but it just didn’t take. I guess it’s how it’s supposed to go for me and I don’t have an argument with it. This is my life” (41). However, Amelia also remains on the street to take care of “the shadowed ones on the street that no one ever sees, the living dead. The homeless” (17). Like a mother figure, she nurses and helps the sick, and listens and supports those in need; she is the node that holds her little group of rounders together, “as close to a definition of family as any of [them] had ever reached” (40). Wagamese’s novel indeed explores a deeper meaning of family, of belonging, and of home, and offers a particular rhetorics of the protagonists’ sense of situatedness, regardless of whether they own a ‘home’ or not. *Ragged Company* is written from a portion of Wagamese’s reality, as he himself was homeless, but it is not autobiographical. In an interview with Chris Cornish, Wagamese remarks, “When I was a younger man, I had no narrative other than the one I

created to survive ... I had to get to the point where I didn't want to hurt or cause any more hurt, to see my life as other than misery and bleakness" ("Richard Wagamese and His *Ragged Company* Come to York"). Wagamese's way out was not, indeed, a lottery ticket, but the help that he found in the Ojibway Elders' guidance. "They brought me into the circle and they showed me. They saw in me what I didn't. They told me the roots, rules and framework to tell stories" – to write a story "for story's sake, to write not for the self but to affect change in others" (Cornish). To write a story for the story's sake, according to Wagamese, still follows the traditional code of storytelling:

Traditionally, there are certain rules that apply, one of them being that you tell a story for the story's sake, without curlicues or window dressing at your whim or discretion. You tell a story for a story's sake, without interpreting. You give it the way it came to you. Along with that goes the principle of humility. To offer that story up with the kind of honesty and integrity in the way that it came to you requires a great degree of humility on your part because everyone wants to go for the laugh, or they want to get the emotional response, or they want to win an intellectual point. It's all built into the system. But in the traditional framework, what the oral tradition is built on, you try to forget all that and just very humbly tell the story. And the story itself gives you tools. It gives you humor. It gives you pathos. It gives you drama. It gives you wild fantasy. It gives you morality. It gives you a value structure (Schorcht 77).

But, he adds, he uses "all of that storytelling tradition in a different form" (77). Firstly, when writing, he is "performing the function of the storyteller in a different medium": the novel. Writing becomes a sort of "process of translation between modes of expression." It is merely the form that makes Wagamese a writer, beyond being a storyteller. In the case of *Ragged Company*, this performance is revealed through the five separate, and very distinct,

first-person voices. The characters, says Wagamese, are all “parts of me – who I’ve been – at some point in my life” and in a sense, his writing process is still very much cathartic:

I’ve been homeless ... I know something of the mindset that happens when you, yourself, by your own choice and decisions, minimize your world. I’ve lived in situations in my life where my whole physical reality was six blocks in the city. Everything that I did, everybody that I knew, was six blocks, on a street-level kind of association ... And, in a way, I’m letting that go now because through these characters I’m working my way through how that might have happened to me (80).

Wagamese is also in Granite, the journalist, who is “jaded and bitter and doesn’t want to tell stories anymore” (80). As a former journalist as well, he says, he has been “that guy” too. The individual stories, then, are each and all about recovering a sense of equilibrium through a process of disconnection from, transformation of, and finally re-connection to “one another as human beings and with the physical world of which they are [ultimately] a part [of].” For, he adds, the “ultimate human right is the ability to know who you are” (84).

Secondly, he says: “I had to appropriate [the English language] at the highest possible level that I could, so that I could function in that language system as best as I could at a professional and publishable level.” As I argued in Chapter One, this (re)appropriation is a strategy of positive resistance that emerges from silence as well as from the colonizer’s language. The strategy is about taking control, and taking *ownership* of that language. It takes over a language of demonization and animalization, and re-inscribes a sense of personalization and humanization into an Indigenous counter-discourse of resistance; and, I maintain, into the homeless persona as well. It opens a space of empowerment and agency, in which are operative both the acts of ‘writing back’ against the methods of assimilation

and colonial abuse, as well as that of ‘writing home’ – by revitalizing communal knowledge and affirming, rather than merely restoring, a sense of collective memory. To reappropriate the English (or other colonial language) is not only about resisting past and present forms of colonization; it is also about restoring traditional knowledge and attempting to harmonize it with present-day societal preoccupations. The elements that Wagamese uses from traditional storytelling thus could not be directly transferred, but rather “incorporated” into the new venue (the novel), and brought to the same kind of level. It is, most evidently, indeed part of that ability to know, and say, who you are.

But to write a story for the story’s sake can be understood also in a further way, one that is resonant with how Eden Robinson views her writing process. For Wagamese, that which drives the story should not be “the ethnicity or the background of the major characters, but the story itself” (83). By this he means that he wishes to be recognized for his skills as a writer, and not necessarily as a *Native* writer, and for his stories not to be automatically filtered through a specific lens. In effect, he says, in *Ragged Company*, there are five characters, “only two of whom are recognizably First Nations people” (88) – Amelia One Sky (a.k.a. One for the Dead), whose ethnicity we are introduced to at the onset of the novel, and Double Dick Dumont, of whom we only find out that he is “Indian too” two-thirds through the novel (287). Digger, whose mother was Metis, admits as well to having “a thinned-out fraction of rebel blood,” but, he says, “[that] don’t make me Metis, don’t make me half-breed, don’t make me Indian” (115), rendering his ‘indianness’ completely unimportant to his character. For Wagamese, the fact that some of the characters in his novels are Native is rather “incidental” (88); what really counts is the



fictional journey that they undergo towards some kind of resolution. This is, in essence, what Native literature should be about, according to Wagamese: “not to create stories reflective of our people because the characters are Native, but stories that are reflective of our people because they are people” (88). Wagamese goes as far as to say that to write in such a way – i.e. to think of the characters as Native, before thinking of them as people – is a type of disempowerment, “because we’re not allowing ourselves to imagine ourselves as anything else” (90). By this, I argue, he means to partake in a form of complacency, similar to that which Jeannette Armstrong alluded to in “The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing”: that there are on-going systems and processes through which the dominating culture continues to affirm itself, and where “negative activism actually serves the purpose of the cultural imperialism practiced on [Native people]” (Armstrong 241). The task of the Native writer, initially, had been to move away from discourses of victimization and statutory grief, to be “pro-active in a positive sense” (241), giving way to discourses of celebration and cultural affirmation. I argue that writers like Richard Wagamese and Eden Robinson are now suggesting a new task, and that is to move beyond the restrictive borders of self-imagination – to borrow from Wagamese, to move beyond “selling [oneself] short” (Schorcht 84). The disempowerment, here, is not being allowed (or allowing oneself) to imagine oneself as anything else than what a particular discourse – be it victimizing or celebratory – depicts its characters to be.

*Ragged Company* goes to great lengths to show this. Each of the characters in the novel is indeed self-contained in a specific world – in a physical sense and in an emotional

sense – as well as within the social narrative of what it means (or appears to mean) to be homeless. The way they see each other, for instance, is very different as to how the “Square Johns” (the non-homeless) see them. To each other, they are a “family” (40); to Amelia, the three men are like her “boys” (55), her “children” (68); between the men, they are each others’ “wingers” and finally, to the men, Amelia is “the old lady” (21), the one who looks out for each of them. Each of them are, also, haunted by their past lives: as Bernie Williams has suggested, many of the homeless were once successful men and women, but then “something happened.”<sup>100</sup> However, in the novel, something else “happens” – namely, their winning of the lottery. The irony of this is how, at that very same moment, they become once again “visible”; they become special, “just like that” (91). However, not special enough: for in order to cash in the prize, they need to produce identification, which none of them have. Digger remarks on this second ironic twist by saying, “Fucking Square John bullshit... A moment ago we were ‘special.’ Now we’re just a buncha fucking loogans with a useless piece of paper” (93). Ironically, it is the lack of another “piece of paper” that stands between them and their prize; they must seek help from the very institution that denies (or ignores) their very existence in the city, to prove that they do, in fact, exist. All the same, through an unseemly alliance, the rounders find help in their “Square John” friend, Granite, whose own past and pain has haunted him to the point of becoming, his friends will learn, “as friggin’ homeless as [they were]” (213). Granite, the former journalist, hates the way the reporters take advantage of his friends’ “specialness” during

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<sup>100</sup> Williams raised this issue during the panel discussion entitled “Stolen Sisters: A Critical Discussion about Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women in Canada,” McGill University, March 10, 2011.

the press conference when they receive their prize: indeed, coming from an unenvied minority (homeless), they have become an envied minority (the filthy rich), both of which get their fair share of insults, belittling, and inadequate media attention (139).

Each of the rounders goes through his/her own trial as they individually learn to accept, and live, their fortune – as well as their misfortunes. The money does enable them to piece back certain memories, and to find a sense of closure to “what happened” to them, that resulted in them ending up on the street. However, as Digger acknowledges, “All the loot we had still couldn’t make it any easier to live... Not for the ones with woe. The shadowed ones. Haunting the world while they’re still in it” (215). Double Dick’s death is suggestive of this, as well as his dying the same way as his nephew (the death of which he was responsible). These open-ended stories, however, are perhaps “better left hanging in the wind. The flapping is what makes them memorable” (284). Closure is not what is necessary, though acknowledging the presence of the unspeakable is, as well as learning how to live with it. And “just like that,” Amelia, like Robinson’s Lisamarie, “saw the way [the shadowed ones] could become a part of you if you let them. Saw the way their stories made your own richer, more meaningful, less a burden at times, all because you listened. That’s all they ever wanted, the shadowed ones, to have their stories heard, to be made real” (371).

At the onset of this chapter, I insinuated that to be haunted suggests that there is a gap in the continuity of memory, a gap in the stories that link one memory to another. On the contrary, I argue, in light of how Wagamese’s novel meanders its way through the gaps of its protagonists, to be haunted opens up possibilities by which to explore living with

these gaps, these “ghosts,” that in effect create a thread in between disparate memories. This, in turn, suggests a potential to make use of them, and reclaim the stories that had been forgotten. Ghosts are, by their very ‘undying’ nature, a sign of the uninterruptedness in the transmission of story, albeit that they need someone, like Amelia or Lisamarie, to “make them real,” to account for them, and for the memory of the people they once were; someone whom they can inhabit. In this sense, being ‘home,’ then, is not about ownership or wealth or security; it is, in Timber’s words, about “inhabiting your place in the world. Regardless. It was about being seen, visible, real. It was about the great fact that some of us get to realize: that home is not about a place, not about a building, not about geography or even a time; home is belonging in someone else’s heart. Just the way you are. Warts and all” (321). In Wagamese’s words, “home is a *feeling* and not a destination and how our common humanity redeems us (emphasis mine).”<sup>101</sup> The restoration of individual memory, in this sense, is ultimately linked to the restoration of collective memory, thus making the individual an inherent and necessary part of the community – no matter that individual’s status.

### **Part Three – Accounting for Transgenerational Haunting**

*“Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch.”  
- Theodor Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft” (30).*

Goldman and Saul have suggested that “a politics and poetics of haunting” may be of great use to the process of healing from trauma, for it necessarily “demands an engagement with

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<sup>101</sup> Author’s website.

questions about the form and content of national and transnational inheritance, of memory and forgetting, and of justice” (654). Beyond engaging, it enables us to reconsider and redefine notions such as the abject, psychological neurosis, urban refuse, national debris, and instead of doing away with them, take them up and, like Margaret Laurence’s *Christie*, see what one may divine from them, in an effort to make amends with troubled pasts, and deal with “unfinished business” (648). The nation-state is far from any sense of being “unified and unifying”; however, this may be a good thing: fragmentation and uncertainty need not be a source of anxiety. Rather, like ghosts, who need not be frightening or menacing, these teachings may be sources of instruction and, ultimately, reassurance. Whether Lisa on Monkey Beach or De Maisonneuve at the foot of Mont-Royal, each attempts to rewrite the spectrality of their individual histories as participatory in the residue of a nation “without roots” and that may result, perhaps, to borrow from Sylvia Söderling, in a “ghost-national” reassurance (“Ghost-National Arguments” 673). However, beyond attesting for the necessity of ghosts as witness to the uninterruptedness in the transmission of story, how else might tropes of haunting and homelessness be taken into the project of rewriting memory, and rewriting a Canadian (or US) history, “Indigenous-style,”<sup>102</sup> that accounts for its ghosts?

In Chapter Two, I raised the issue that governmental policies of assimilation and, by means of a hidden agenda of erasure and extermination, have had the severe consequences of creating intergenerational haunting and narratives of survival. Lisa Appignanesi, in her

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<sup>102</sup> I’m borrowing this from Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, and her article entitled “Erotica: Indigenous-Style.”

book *Losing the Dead*, refers to the former as “transgenerational haunting”: survivor-parents often pass on, inadvertently, to their children a sense of being haunted, for “the child inhabits the texture of these fears and habits, without knowing they are memory” (8). Narratives of survival entail writing about memory and experience so that one may retain a minimal sense of linearity and continuity with the past. This, however, not only bears witness to survivors’ stories, but the writer, inadvertently, becomes a participant in the growing sense of melancholia that comes with dealing with the material and the act of testimonial transmission of memory. Nevertheless, I argue, the narratives that stem from this type of experience, namely from within a Native/First Nations literary context, are not just narratives of survival – they are narratives of *survivance*. The difference lies in that unlike other narratives of survival, which seek first and foremost to record, transfix and transcribe the stories of those who survived, out of a fear of forgetting (as is the case in Holocaust narratives), narratives of *survivance*, in addressing face-on questions of cultural appropriation, inhumanity, and oppression, seek to mend the intergenerational bridges that the government sought to destroy. This act of reappropriation generates empowerment, agency, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of pride, as well as healing and celebratory discourses that transform, indeed, redefine the human condition and experience. In this sense, they are narratives of resistance as well, and move beyond the notion of transgenerational haunting as a trope of victimization: conversing with and learning from the protagonists of this very hauntology is transformational liberation. Atikamekw poet Charles Cocoo has described this process as an “intellectual disintoxication,” that will lead

to a “communal path towards healing ... away from that frontier of despair.”<sup>103</sup>

However, there are also some similarities with other narratives of the sort: firstly, there is a similar sense of urgency to (physically) write down, in order to counter other written-down histories that are still held to be the authoritative ones, for instance in the classroom; indeed, to proceed with an “intellectual disintoxication.” As Eden Robinson explores, through the eyes of Lisamarie:

[My teacher] forced us to read a book that said that the Indians on the northwest coast of British Columbia had killed and eaten people as religious sacrifices. My teacher had made each of us read a paragraph out loud. When my turn came, I sat there shaking, absolutely furious.

“Lisa?” she’d said. “Did you hear me? Please read the next paragraph.”

“But it’s all lies,” I’d said.

The teacher stared at me as if I were mutating into a hideous thing from outer space. The class, sensing tension, began to titter and whisper. She slowly turned red, and said I didn’t know what I was talking about.

“Ma-ma-oo told me it was just pretend, the eating people, like drinking Christ’s blood at Communion.”

In a clipped, tight voice, she told me to sit down.

Since I was going to get into trouble anyway, I started singing “Fuck the Oppressors.” The class cheered, more because of the swearing than anything else, and I was promptly dragged, still singing, to the principal’s office (68-69).

This passage is highly suggestive of the urgency to set things right, to rewrite and resist discursive expectations and narratives of conquest featuring the ‘indian,’ and to inculcate a process of decolonizing institutions, communities and ideologies. A different type of

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<sup>103</sup> Keynote address at the CIÉRA Annual Colloquium, “Éducation et formation autochtones: *Enjeux et perspectives d’avenir*.” Université Laval, April 12-13, 2007.

hi/story needs to be taught in the classroom, one that accounts for injustice, devaluation and misrepresentation. However, works like *Monkey Beach* or *Kiss of the Fur Queen* are well on their way to participate in the re-education not only of Canadians, but of Aboriginals as well. These works, in effect, not only reinstate ghosts into memory, they reinstate them into the text of Canada's past: thus attesting for the fact that Canada is, indeed, ghost-*full*, and that we are, also, haunted by what has been excluded. According to Goldman and Saul, "readers must come to grips with the possibility of a spirit world and examine the consequences of Western culture's drive to eradicate 'superstition' or 'mysticism' in the name of psychology" (654) – to which I would add, by forcing on another form of similar 'superstition' or 'mysticism' that has, as Lisamarie remarks, people "drinking Christ's blood at Communion" for redemption (69).

Secondly, there is a similarity between narratives of survival and narratives of survivance in the urge to record and transcribe, which has to do with there being less and less Elders who can still account for their traditional knowledge and language. In this type of rewriting, there is the urge to mend the gap in the transmission of stories and knowledge – which, however, as I have suggested, does not entail a discontinuity, but suggests a silent continuity. This gap is largely due to the decades of shame and assimilation, the generations of parents who would no longer share their stories because of the sense of overwhelming guilt, simply for 'being indian,' that was ingrained in them as children in residential schools. Loss of language and educational brainwashing fostered the widening of this gap, making it impossible for Elders to communicate with their grandchildren, as I discussed in Chapter One in relation to Kevin Papatie's short film *L'amendement*. Narratives of



survivance, then, not only work towards mending the intergenerational gap, they seek to restore and reaffirm a proud memory to the current, living generations, one on which to build and strengthen in view of the future generations. In this sense, many of these accounts feature an Elder, or an older person, whose presence is at times acknowledged as a source of knowledge and wisdom, but who is also, at times, written off as the old and silly – thus attesting for the breach in respect that the youth are supposed to hold for their Elders. For instance, in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, she insults her chaperone, Sophie, despite her being “so proud of [her]... almost as if she had invented me”:

During intermission, I was standing near the door with Karen when a girl from school came over and asked loudly, “Is that woman your mother?” Everyone started to snicker and I looked at her and said, “That old, ugly Indian?” and laughed until I saw Sophie’s face. She looked so rejected as she walked to a bench and sat down that I felt shame and hatred for her, myself and the people around me. I could almost see Cheechum standing beside me with a switch saying, “They make you hate what you are” (90).

Though Sophie is not actually related to Maria, and that the latter does not insult her out of meanness, but rather out of peer pressure and a desire to fit in, this passage attests to a successful attempt at ‘dividing and conquering’ as a means to breach the youth from their traditional families and roots. However, it is only partial, for Maria has great respect for her own grandmother, Cheechum, as does Lisamarie for Ma-ma-oo. These examples, however, show the type of quandary with which the younger generation is faced, and the complexities that are raised in the process of bridging the gaps of intergenerational haunting.

It is clear that the imposition of colonial and patriarchal values successfully devalued the traditional role of Elders. In a sense, in order to address, and decolonize, this breach of respect, the younger generations need to change the ways in which they think of and see themselves – similar to Bernie Williams’ advice to Native women. In essence, the younger generation must rise and follow in the footsteps of the writers, artists, academics and activists that are working to resist the discourse of dominance and overthrow stereotypes, and shed the empty image of a ‘traditional indian.’ This, however, involves not only countering hierarchical systems of oppression, it necessitates resistance to violence at a horizontal level, the kind that originates and develops within the communities themselves (and that attests, for instance, in the loss of respect for others). Darrell Dennis, in his one-man play *Tales of an Urban Indian*, raises many of these points, in particular that suggested by Maria Campbell, “they make you hate what you are.” Dennis remarks, in the prologue, that his “story is based on memory so it’s not entirely accurate, or fair” (6), in the sense that one inadvertently chooses which memories to hold on to in particular – and, just as inadvertently, those that one chooses to exclude inevitably haunt us. He also affirms that his is a tale of survival, though I would argue that it is a strong example of a narrative of survivance; for he does far more than merely survive, as Lee Maracle attests to in her introduction to the play:

Mr. Dennis’ story is not unlike the stories of many young people: he owns the resentment, the anger, the feeling of absurdity of many youth who are expected to be spiritual icons, elegant near noble savages, at the same time, young people endure very real obstacles to simple being... (iv)

What is different about this play is Darrell Dennis’ courage in challenging himself in good Secwepemc fashion. If the journey is “harrowing” it is partly

because Mr. Dennis made it so. Despite the difficulties his life presented, Mr. Dennis was never a victim and we all need to know that. Despite the journey, Mr. Dennis stood up and took advantage of the opportunity to strengthen his character at every turn... (v-vi)

Lee Maracle underlines here an important trope that runs throughout the play: the importance of choice. Kye7e, the Elder in the play, tells her daughter-in-law Tina that “choice is the one thing you never lose” (11); Tina will later remind her son Simon about this, in the sense that the only one he can blame for his condition is himself: “You made your own choices Simon. Like Kye7e used to say, ‘choice is the only thing you never lose’” (54). Indeed, as his mother drops him off at the treatment center, and he is finally left alone to confront his hauntings, he realizes “what this place was. A second chance. Or at least a chance at a second chance... A chance most people never get” (55). With this realization, he chooses to see his situation as potential for getting better, and no longer as “an excuse for laziness” (49). Beyond the disintoxication of his body, he may proceed, finally, with intellectual disintoxication as well. In this sense, then, Dennis’ play is not only about survival, it is about resistance as well – and thus it becomes a narrative of survivance. Moreover, the fact that Dennis performs his play, creates a sort of *mise en abyme*: similar to Jeremiah and Gabriel in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Dennis is set free through the actual theatrical performance. The reader, however, is included in this dual projection by means of following the stage directions: reading the play is to actually see, or envision, the performance, and its healing motive to embrace choice. To indeed “find freedom,” as Maracle suggests:

We re-experience our own journeys and realise that “oppression” itself is a modern myth. Even during the long period of cultural prohibition and removal from our communities to residential schools we had choices. As humans we are expected to find freedom in the context we inherit – no matter how terrible, conflicting or tragic the context might be (v).

Simon’s context is indeed extremely conflicting and complex; he is constantly going to great lengths to squirm his way through different stereotypical labels and, most importantly, to deny his true identity – up to the point when he realizes, upon meeting his (white) girlfriend’s parents that “*who* I was didn’t exist. It’s just *what* I was that mattered. I would never be just me. *Indian* would be the adjective that superceded all others. A reserve Indian, a drunk Indian, a well-spoken Indian, a performing Indian, a lying Indian. I would always carry that title: Simon Douglas – *Indian*” (44; emphasis in the original). This realization marks a turning point in the play: up until this moment, he had been living two lives, one of “debauchery,” that included alcohol, drugs, and parties on Hastings Street, his “secret life” of being a street Indian; the other, more conventional, in which he works as an actor and has his (white) girlfriend. Once he realizes that he will never escape the suffix ‘indian,’ he embraces, so-to-speak, with an evil logic, his life as the street Indian, thus falling (indeed, *choosing* to fall) victim to stereotype, and using them to his advantage. Failing to get money out of an ATM, to which he yells, “Give me my money. This is my land. You owe me!” (46), he rages against a bank operator who attempts to explain that Revenue Canada seized his money due to unpaid back taxes, yelling “I don’t have to pay taxes. I’m Indian. Read the treaties. You took our land, so I’m tax exempt. Now give me my money! I’m a distinct society goddamn it!” (47) He further delves into self-pity and

mockery – postures he uses to his advantage – when faced with his new processing agent at the welfare office, claiming that his “chronic unemployment is a government plot to eradicate the Indian Nation from the planet” and he is a “victim of racism” and “unemployed because [he’s] Indian, plain and simple” (48-49). The agent, Stephanie – “the epitome of Native Canadian, Aboriginal, First Nations, Indian beauty... who was proud to be an Indian woman” (48) – contrary to her predecessor, does not fall for his story and retorts: “Mr. Douglas, our people have enough *real* problems as it is. The last thing we need are people like you using race as an excuse for laziness. You are a handsome, well-spoken, intelligent, able-bodied, young man. Take this card and go to this Aboriginal employment agency. You are officially cut off until further notice” (49). In effect, the only thing to which Simon truly falls victim to, in fact, are bad choices – including that to believe in the “mythical” forces of oppression. The extent of this irony is depicted in his conversation with God (during what seems to be an alcohol-related coma):

SIMON, AGE 22: Lord, why has though forsaken me?

GOD: Why are you talking like that? Speak like yourself for once. Your whole life you’ve tried to be something you’re not. Try being you!

SIMON, AGE 22: But I’m lost, God. I don’t know who I am anymore.

GOD: I’ll tell you who you are. You’re a schlemiel. Look at you. You have all your working parts, you’re not so ugly to look at, what more do you want?

SIMON, AGE 22: Why did you make me an Indian?

GOD: Do you know how many people would love to be Indian? You have high cheekbones, healthy brown skin, thick hair. You would be perfect if only I didn’t forget to make you with a “toches.”

SIMON, AGE 22: If we're made in your image, then how come you don't look or sound Indian? And how come we're not even in the bible?

GOD: *Oy gevalt!* I don't look like you because I'm not your God, you schmuck! I'm someone else's God! Get your own God! Your grandmother knew this. She tried to tell you – but, oh look, what a surprise – you didn't listen. And as for the bible, you've never even read it! You people have your own bible. In your songs, and stories, and land. It works for you; use it. Save the bible for those it belongs too (52-53).

On his last day at the treatment center, Simon prays, though not to the God he conversed with; rather, he says, in the way his Kye7e did. Through this act, he closes the circle that had taken him away from his Elder, through his own foolishness; following a car accident in which he was involved with two friends, all of them dead drunk, he recounts, “I stumbled into our house. Kye7e was waiting for me, gripping her fly swatter of fury. I could imagine what was going to happen next” (30). But what happens next is far worse: he mocks his grandmother, yelling as if she were already hitting him, “Ow-wie! Ow-which! Ow-wah! Ow! Ow! Uncle! Uncle!” Similar to Sophie, in Campbell's *Halfbreed*, silence blankets over the shame and ridicule, and the damage is left unspoken, unaccounted for: “Kye7e was just staring at me. Then, she slowly shook her head, and walked away. It was the worst thing anyone ever didn't say to me. I just stood there and watched her shuffle into her bedroom, and then close the door” (30). When Simon leaves the treatment center, seven years have passed since this occurrence. The reader is not told whether Kye7e is still alive or not, hence giving Simon a chance at mending things with his Elder. However, a relation is established in his prayer, not only between him and his grandmother, but between the Elders and the future generations as well, that are symbolized through his wish for, one day,

a [Native] child that will live its entire life without ever once feeling alone on its own land. That will live its entire life without ever once spitting on its own reflection. And on its very last day, I hope the child hold its head high, and shouts towards the sky, in the child's own language – *Kukstacow Kel7kukpi!* – Thank you creator! Thank you for letting me be born an Indian! (55-56).

Through the type of testimonial that Dennis delivers with *Tales of an Urban Indian*, he successfully shows that change, or a second chance, is possible – it is, in the end, about choice. In essence, Darrell suggests, the younger generation must learn to see itself under a different light, one that involves an active participation within the community itself to re-establish bridges between generations. In this sense, by first addressing and unpacking the types of violence that occur at a horizontal level (loss of respect for self and others, teenage alcohol abuse, suicide, and homophobia), and creating, to re-quote from Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, a “healthy legacy for our peoples” (“Erotica” 148), it becomes possible, as a community with a sense of collective memory and self-esteem, to better work towards countering hierarchical systems of repression, and de-mythicize the forces of oppression that continue to haunt and infect individual memories.

Many authors and artists are continuously looking for new ideas and solutions to further infuse a sense of empowerment and agency amongst the younger generation, opening up different avenues for projects. In 2007, for instance, former NHL player Joe Juneau launched a hockey program in Quebec's far north “in an effort to improve recreational facilities and help keep kids in school.” In order to have access to the practices, the children “have to attend school and get good grades;” the program thus attempts to reverse the sad statistics on school drop-out and high suicide rates, by essentially keeping

the children busy and with an objective. For, Juneau comments, despite that “children are a cherished part of Inuit culture... they are in a vicious circle of crime, drugs and family violence... If the kids are left alone, they end up in the streets, and that’s when things go wrong.”<sup>104</sup> Similarly, in 2004, in the hope of countering the sense of isolation that many First Nations youth in Québec have to contend with, filmmaker Manon Barbeau, in collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador and the Atikamekw National Council, created the Wapikoni Mobile Project and Vidéo Paradiso. The travelling video and sound studios, which go from one community to another, enable Aboriginal youth

to express themselves through film and music productions. By encouraging emergent talents, [the project] facilitates exchanges and communication between young people, and contributes to their openness to the world. It enables them to be known, to go beyond their habitual daily living, and to be outstanding both within their communities and elsewhere in the world.<sup>105</sup>

Kevin Papatie’s short film *L’amendement*, which I discussed in Chapter One, for instance, came out of the Wapikoni Project, and won in 2008 Best film in a Native language at the ImagineNATIVE Festival in Toronto. It was featured as a preliminary program to Denys Arcand’s film *L’âge des ténèbres*, which was projected in over 80 cinemas. Since 2004, 47

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<sup>104</sup> All quotes taken from the interview in “Former NHLer Juneau Spreads Gospel of Hockey Among Inuit.” *CanWest News Service*.

<sup>105</sup> “Le Wapikoni mobile donne aux jeunes des Premières Nations l’occasion de s’exprimer au moyen de réalisations vidéo et musicales. Tout en encourageant l’émergence des talents, il facilite les échanges et la communication entre les jeunes et contribue à leur ouverture sur le monde. Il leur donne l’occasion de se faire connaître, de sortir de leur cadre de vie habituel et de rayonner autant dans leur milieu que dans le monde.” (My translation). Wapikoni Mobile Objectives Website.



prizes and awards were presented to young Aboriginal filmmakers, thus putting Québec's First Nations artistic productions most definitely "on the map."<sup>106</sup>

Clearly, each of these acts and projects that work towards the empowerment and agency of Aboriginal youth partake in the necessary task of the transmission of knowledge and memory, so that wisdom may be conserved and passed onto future generations, and ought to be celebrated and encouraged. However, in July 2011, the federal government decided to cut its funding for Wapikoni Mobile. Manon Barbeau told Christopher Curtis, a reporter from *The Gazette* that "while the \$490,000 it receives from Ottawa represents about half of the program's annual budget, the cut will make it nearly impossible to keep the project alive."<sup>107</sup> André Dudemaine, director of the Montreal First Peoples' Festival, which every year screens the newest films of the Wapikoni Mobile Project to a wide audience, commented on the severity of the budget cuts:

This project addressed what is likely the poorest communities in Canada, where they had the highest unemployment and suicide rates and so this doesn't make sense at all to cut there. If you call yourselves Human Resources Canada, you are supposed to invest where the difficulties are the worst to help people get over those numerous problems that keep them in unemployment and poverty and that is exactly where they have chose to cut.<sup>108</sup>

Following the government's decision, Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (one of the collaborators to the Wapikoni Mobile Project) sent out an open letter to Stephen Harper, in which he states,

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<sup>106</sup> A list of prizes and awards can be found on the Wapikoni Mobile Project website: <http://wapikoni.tv/univers/honneurs/>.

<sup>107</sup> "Travelling Film School Victim of Budget Cuts." *The Gazette*.

<sup>108</sup> "Feds Call a Wrap on Wapikoni Mobile." *The Nation*.

Without questioning your sincerity and that of your government when presenting the apology, it is reasonable to ask, three years later, how, by its inaction, your government continues to threaten the future of yet another generation of First Nations youth. The chronic underfunding of our schools and of our educational resources has been repeatedly demonstrated, proven and denounced by many experts, including the Auditor General of Canada, and continues to wreak havoc... One also has to wonder what motivates your government to put to death, with the stroke of a pencil, an effective, educational, and well-recognized initiative such as the Wapikoni mobile, which has contributed for several years to train the young people of our nations in the field of video production. How many of our young people have found hope through Wapikoni mobile? Why now shut the door? (“Lettre ouverte”).<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, despite Harper’s “kind words” (“*belles paroles*”), the decision made to cut funding to the Wapikoni Mobile Project underlines the fact that the promises that were made in 2008 are still empty of any true willingness to work towards the bettering of the lives of First Nations people. The federal government justified its decision by stating that they would “rather see the funding go to projects that had better employment creation prospects.”<sup>110</sup> Rather, I argue, this decision reflects that Canada, it seems, is once again attempting to silence the voices that might counter its history of being ghostless and,

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<sup>109</sup> “Sans mettre en doute votre sincérité et celle de votre gouvernement au moment de prononcer ces excuses, on est en droit de se demander, trois ans plus tard, pourquoi par son inaction votre gouvernement persiste à mettre en péril l’avenir d’une autre génération de jeunes des Premières Nations. Le sous-financement chronique de nos écoles et de nos ressources pédagogiques, maintes fois démontré, prouvé et dénoncé par de nombreux experts, incluant la vérificatrice générale du Canada, continue de faire des ravages... On peut sérieusement se demander aussi ce qui motive votre gouvernement à condamner à mort, d’un trait de crayon, des initiatives éducatives efficaces et reconnues telles que le Wapikoni mobile, qui contribue pourtant depuis plusieurs années à former des jeunes de nos nations dans le domaine de la production vidéo. Combien de nos jeunes ont retrouvé l’espoir grâce au Wapikoni mobile? Pourquoi maintenant leur fermer la porte?” (My translation).

<sup>110</sup> “Feds Call a Wrap on Wapikoni Mobile.” *The Nation*.

consequently, faultless. For the issues that are dealt with in several of the Wapikoni Mobile projects include loss of language, culture, traditional knowledge, poverty, poor education, poor housing, and a general lack of prospect for the future. These issues, in turn, are being seen by a much larger audience – an audience that might become critical towards the government’s lack of involvement and utter indifference vis-à-vis its Aboriginal people, despite its having promised to make amends. Consequently, if there is to be a space for renegotiation, such discourses of dominance and transparency need to be continuously resisted. The ghosts of Canada’s past, as well as those of the present, need to be continuously accounted for.

### **Conclusion**

At the outset of this chapter, I made use of Goldman and Saul’s question, “How do works by First Nations authors and artists interrogate Canada’s supposed ghostlessness?” (245) as a thread for my analysis, and suggested that these works do not only interrogate this supposed ghostlessness, they upset it, and return their voices to the unseen faces that *do*, in effect, haunt Canada – similar to what the young filmmakers of the Wapikoni Mobile Project do: they give voice and face to what goes on inside their communities, the good and the bad. They are, too, narratives of survivance.

Eden Robinson, Richard Wagamese, and Darrell Dennis ‘story’ up very different, individual experiences, that are partly autobiographical, partly fictional. They each account, however, for a form of haunting, and the journeys that their protagonists must follow in order to find a sense of situatedness, and learn how to live with, and use, their ghosts. By

accepting an inheritance of history as spectral, and learning how to act responsibly towards it, those residues of hidden violence are, ultimately, what constitute both the individual's memory and the collectivity's imaginary. The different legacies of violence, such as the Residential School System, intergenerational haunting, or patterns of predatory and horizontal violence, are part of a *collective* subconscious that needs not only to be acknowledged, but built upon and learned from, in order to create a "healthier" legacy. This, in turn, opens up new spaces for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses that empower and transform, indeed, redefine the human condition and experience.

These literary works not only address a history that is, indeed, ghost-full, they also account for "the shadowed ones," those who disappeared before their time, "whose spirits can never leave this earth, the ones tied here by a sorrow, a longing stronger than life and deeper than death" (*Ragged Company* 16); the derelict, the forgotten, those whose story had not been accounted for. Walter and Edna, in *Tales for an Urban Indian*, are shadowed ones; "after twenty years on skid row, [they] were gone. Two days later, so was their memory" (42). An unlucky death, as Digger would term it (18); not worthy, or remarkable enough to make the news. Would the shooting in Downtown Montreal of Mario Hamel, a 40-year old homeless man with mental problems, have made the news, had an innocent bystander not been shot by a stray bullet?<sup>111</sup> As I argued, the criminalization of the homeless puts them further into a state of exile; they are marginalized, trespassing, and the undesired occupants of the city. Effaced from the public's eye and discourse, they are parasitic ghosts on the periphery of the city's "holes." There is, however, potentiality in these specters, as depicted

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<sup>111</sup> Sidhartha Banerjee, "Montreal Police Kill Homeless Man, Innocent Bystander."

in Wagamese's novel, for they can be a source of transformative power, out of which one may voice the unspeakable, rewrite the event of trauma, and recuperate the repressed. However, it is crucial to keep in mind the dangers of idealizing the lived reality of the homeless: for in making an argument of resistance based on their suffering, it is important not to forget to acknowledge the lived, actual distress of the homeless' quotidian. Nonetheless, sometimes, one of them can be given a second chance, a purpose: One for the Dead, in *Ragged Company*, chooses to return to the streets at the end of the novel, to help those in need; with her money, she opens up a center for women in difficulty. She sheds and rewrites what Bernie Williams would call a "3-stigma" – Aboriginal, woman, and homeless<sup>112</sup> – and reinvents her condition as one of power and healing. She becomes the storyteller, an Elder so-to-speak, of the street and its people: she bares witness to all the untold stories and in this sense, by hearing them, she makes them real.

Tropes of hauntology and homelessness are thus taken into the project of writing (or filming) a sense of belonging, a site of home – one that is, ultimately, affect rather than physical, and that accounts for the individual's position in and relation to his/her surroundings. This, inevitably, underlines a discourse of continuity and resistance, one in which accounting for ghosts becomes a necessity to the restoration of memory, whether collective or individual.

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<sup>112</sup> Williams used this expression in reference to herself as being Aboriginal, woman, and gay during the "Stolen Sisters: A Critical Discussion about Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women in Canada" panel, held at McGill University, March 10, 2011.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PLACE: INDIGENOUS POACHING AND ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP**

*Nos droits sont notre mémoire et notre mémoire est notre territoire.*<sup>113</sup>  
- Yves Sioui Durand (*Porteurs 14*)

## **Introduction**

Huron playwright Yves Sioui Durand provides me, in this quote, with the link that brings me to the final chapter of this dissertation. Although, as I discussed in Chapter Three, in relation to *Ragged Company*, that ‘home’ is rather a feeling than a destination, Yves Sioui Durand raises the issue that while memory can account for one’s sense of situatedness, so does the notion of place – an important trope in Native/First Nations writing, as it ultimately points to questions of territorial claim and sovereignty. Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized the importance of reclaiming language and memory. Of equal importance, I argue, is the reclamation of place – a place from which to express, firmly rooted, cultural affirmation and overture towards new avenues for artistic, individual and pedagogical expression and performance. The establishment of place, then, is to give up the belief of powerlessness and to shed the status of the silenced and oppressed subaltern as portrayed in the dominant discourse of Canadian literature. Consequently, to learn how to subvert participation in a discourse of victimization into the claiming of self-location. It is, essentially, to *impose* oneself, but without violent conquest; albeit, however, within “occupied territory.” There are, however, I argue, many instances of resistance, instances of “poaching” as Simon Harel names them, from within this “occupied territory,” that destabilize any sense of situatedness or control: for the actual space in which Natives are

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<sup>113</sup> “Our rights are our memory, and our memory is our territory.” (My translation)

poaching is beyond the territorial – there are, I argue, instances of linguistic and intellectual poaching as well.

In the first instance, by drawing parallels between Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Simon Harel's *Braconnages identitaires*, I lay the grounds for an analysis of civil alienation as countered by acts of Native (more precisely, here, Mohawk and Blackfoot) citizenship and claim for sovereignty, which I then discuss in relation to Thomas King's short story "Borders," and a dispute that occurred in June 2010, following Canada's stubborn refusal to admit within its borders a Mohawk delegation on their Haudenosaunee passports, despite their having left the country with the same documents. As Audra Simpson shows in her forthcoming book, *Mohawk Interruptus*, questions of citizenship formation are crucial not only in the face of imperialist forces such as Canada or the U.S., but to the individual's sense of allegiance, duty, and belonging – all of which, I argue, are essential in the claiming of self-location, and the reappropriation of place. This, however, raises a delicate quandary: in Simpson's words, "How does one assert sovereignty and independence when some of the power to define that sovereignty is bestowed by a foreign power?" (5)<sup>114</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to maintain a sense of balance between recognition of and antagonism to the State – a balance that becomes highly volatile in cases of territorial claims, as I show in relation to Mort Ransen's documentary *You Are On Indian Land*.

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<sup>114</sup> I am extremely grateful to Prof. Audra Simpson for sharing with me an unpublished excerpt of her forthcoming book. This excerpt was given as a talk during the *Regards autochtones* Colloquium, held at Kahnawake on June 18, 2010. Page numbers refer to the pages of the unpublished article.



On the other hand, this balancing act is a source of power and control: by exploring the particular case of the Mohawks of Akwesasne, I argue that there is great potential in having the choice between what Simpson refers to as a “citizenship of convenience,” and a “primary, feeling citizenship” (12), a potential that is made clear in Courtney Hunt’s movie *Frozen River*. This potential is reflected on the reserve itself – in this case Akwesasne, though I maintain it can be reflected on any reserve – since the community’s straddling of the Canada-U.S. border suggests an “unofficial” space for taking advantage of its particular liminality. Furthermore, I argue, it opens up a space in which the reserve, once a dark spot on the periphery, becomes the center itself: from this new perspective, the reserve is regarded as both a physical and spiritual ‘home,’ a proactive *place* from which to assert sovereignty. In this sense, after decades of degradation and shame, rather than looking onto a sense of self or onto a communal “ghetto” as elements to fuel that chagrin, the power to take control enables the awakening and assertion of feelings of pride, creativity, and self-worth, which consequently become worthy of narration and embellishment. Rita Mestokosho, whom I discuss in the final section of this chapter, successfully rewrites, indeed reclaims, the reserve-ghetto into a ‘home,’ however controversial and at times difficult it may be. This reappropriation of place as a community rejoins Jeannette Armstrong’s concept of “Sharing One Skin,” the final literary piece I turn to, in the scope of this analysis. To “share one skin,” ultimately, is what bounds individuals and their communities, through solidarity, respect, and lest one forget, memory.

## Part One – Mapping Territory, Occupying Space

*Exiled in the Land of the Free.*  
- “Exile,” *Blackfire*.

In Chapter Three, I discussed how Canada’s sentiment of being “ghostless,” that is, that it had to contend with an “absence” of historical roots, resulted in a massive cultural and literary production to help create a national sense of identity and belonging. In 1972, Margaret Atwood wrote that “writing Canadian literature has been historically a very private act” and that “teaching it, however, is a political act” (*Survival* 14). The question has expanded in importance today, if one decides to look at, and analyze, Canadian literature from, for instance, a postcolonial perspective, in the sense that it necessarily entails a questioning of how Canadian writers and critics (including Atwood) have participated in the construction of a national imagery, or “how the canon of Canadian literature came to be constituted and disseminated, but also in view of the assumed borderlines of nation-space and the myriad delineations thought to traverse and define the nation’s people and the national *zeitgeist*” (*Sugars Home-Work* 5). There is a certain irony, in this context, to make use of the word “zeitgeist,” the etymological combination of which includes the notions of time passing and ghosts – it begs the question, then, how can one even conceive of a “ghostless” history? Evidently, and in light of my prior discussion on haunting, one necessarily wonders, what harm, such a construction has brought about, and how complicit one is still, today, in the perpetrating of these constructs.

In this questioning, then, resides the contemporary political act, the “academic activism” as Len Findlay would term it, that, as critics and teachers, one must think about

repositioning our engagements, otherwise one runs the risk of being “screwed again inside and outside the academy by muscular careerism and the cultivated sneer... serving two imperious masters, the United Kingdom and the United States” (Findlay “Is Canada a Postcolonial Country?” 299). However, the task of re-thinking and, consequently, re-writing the fleeting figure of a national identity – that has remained beyond the eye’s reach, in search of a permanent place, still and perhaps forever under negotiation and transformation – not only attempts to refigure new means of reading a national literature in global contexts, it also proposes that rather than doing away with old concepts – such as identity and nation – one may not put them to a new use, thus rethinking the study of literature – whether Canadian or other – “beyond older forms of nationalism and internationalism, and toward multiscaled visions of *place* – local, regional, national, and global – each imbricated within each other... in ways that complicate understandings of where and how the nation fits. They [writers and critics] are not transcending nation but resituating it” (Brydon “Metamorphoses” 15; emphasis mine). In relation to Native/First Nations literature, this resituating is taking place, I argue, not only within the field of study, but in the text itself: the undoing of a national grand narrative, through a process of language reclamation, rewritten by a multiplicity of metanarratives, enables the setting straight of falsehoods and constructions, and the reinstatement of silent voices and other experiences that have partaken in a ‘Canadian’ (or ‘American’) existence.

Certainly, this type of (postcolonial?) approach both enriches and limits the possible critical engagements a critic may have with particular texts, for instance in the case of First Nations literature, since this might prove to be insufficient and further complicate,

negatively, the stance of First Nations writers in (or not) the field of Canadian literary studies. However, I am interested here in coupling this approach, which has been rather successful in the field of Canadian studies, to my enquiry on place as a trope in First Nations literatures. For if Canada is “constantly under negotiation,” then this most certainly extends to its Aboriginal inhabitants. Notions such as place, territory, frontier, border, take on, therefore, a different meaning in this field of enquiry since they are, indeed, constantly under (re)negotiation. With these questions in mind, it is interesting to make a brief literary detour of sorts through some examples of classic Canadian literature, so as to better show how some of these tropes were created, and how they need to be problematized as they have partaken in the creation of a national imagery in which the “Native” – the Aboriginal person – has been erased, indeed “exiled in the land of the free” (Blackfire “Exile”). In effect, to understand what harm these constructions have brought about, and how complicit one still is, today, in the perpetrating of these constructs.

As I argued earlier, Canada, wedged between the great vastness of the North (which today has become a rich site for political attention and struggle for rights involving the Northern Passage) and the suffocating proximity of the American neo-imperial machine, indeed, could not feel otherwise than marginal, and without a sense of self, of belonging; for in the midst of nowhere, there is only space for the realization of one’s insignificance. This trope is depicted in many Canadian novels of the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Sinclair Ross’ *As For Me and My House*. In the words of Mrs. Bentley,

The wilderness here makes us uneasy. I felt it first the night I walked alone along the river bank – a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us. A Main Street is such a self-sufficient

little pocket of existence, so smug, so compact, that here we feel abashed somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the unheeding way they sleep. We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. The river slips past, unperturbed by our coming and going, stealthily confident. We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude – we think a force or presence into it – even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us – for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all (131).

Indeed, the simple, safe little nest of a “Main Street,” or of a vegetable garden, is often sufficient to mark upon the land the stamp of conquest, of taming, thus putting the mind to ease (albeit temporarily): as Henry Kreisel has discussed, “To conquer a piece of the continent, to put one’s imprint upon virgin land, to say, ‘Here I am, for that I came,’ is as much a way of defining oneself, of proving one’s existence, as is Descartes’ *cogito, ergo sum*” (260). The irony here, of course, is that this land was never ‘virgin’ – in these earlier narratives, the ‘true’ Native, is erased not only from the landscape of the mind, but from the landscape itself. In this sense, the constitution of this early canon of works as creating a sense of belonging, of home, is exceedingly harmful – for to justify one population’s sense of occupancy, it was necessary to do away with another’s.

In true spirit of conquest, each of the barren, ‘wild’ elements – climate, landscape, Native – was taken into the national project of writing place and, one by one, fashioned into a picture where everything has its place – or non-place – thus modeling not only a sense of belonging, a site of home, but mapping out the territory and, more importantly, indicating the subject’s position in it, and his/her relation to the surroundings. Literature, therefore, becomes “the map,” instrumentalized in such a way as to turn the feeling of sublime (in its terrifying sense) helplessness into one of control and power. The Native, in turn, is erased

out of the landscape, leaving an empty space for the newcomer to settle in, to claim as his own. As Barbara Godard has explained,

Identity for this white person is acquired through this encounter with alterity, knowledge of the self attained through the wisdom of the not-I, an identity both personal and national. For it is through this encounter with the Other who is Native to this land, that a ‘totem’ transfer occurs and the stranger in North America ‘goes native’ to possess the land, to be Native (“Politics of Representation” 190).

The marginal newcomer, colonized at first by the vastness of the new land, turns the rhetoric around into one of situatedness, empowering him into the role of colonizer, naming the land that he has taken “mother country,” and of which he becomes the new “native.” In this manner, in this appropriative naming and writing of the Canadian landscape, the birth of Canadian literature as such becomes one of purposeful documentation and instrumentalization towards the construction and delimitation of a sense of national selfhood. This original appropriation in itself justifies, as I will argue shortly, the urgency for a *reappropriation* of place and occupancy, through a constitution of a specifically Indigenous ‘canon’ of literature.

Once Canada had gained control and centrality upon the vastness of the landscape, it became necessary to face the other oppressive force crushing it into a presumed state of marginality: the United States. Finally rid of the British and French colonial powers, the fear of being swallowed up and becoming a colony of the U.S. further fuelled the construction of a specifically ‘Canadian’ identity, one that was distinct from Britain or France, but which nevertheless borrowed from its colonial heritage a romantic sense of

savoir-faire and respect for nature; all of which the Americans, supposedly, did not have.

This is suggested on numerous occasions, for instance, in Atwood's novel *Surfacing*:

The Americans had rounded the point. Two of them in a silver canoe; they were barging towards us. I assessed them, their disguises: they weren't the bloated middle-aged kind, those would stick to powerboats and guides; they were younger, trimmer, with the candid, tanned astronaut finish valued by the magazines. When they were even with us their mouths curved open, showing duplicate sets of teeth, white and even as false ones.

... They had a starry flag like all of them, a miniature decal sticker on the canoe bow. To show us we were in occupied territory (121).

Despite their being in desolate northern Quebec, the awareness of being "in occupied territory" is present throughout the novel. The theme of the inevitable American influence upon Canadian society, and hence participation in this viewing of the territory as occupied, is explored through the protagonist's realization of her own co-option in such a system, of having let herself become an occupied territory. Atwood's protagonist comes early on in the novel to the realization that the forms of patriarchal oppression and colonialism are all around her; it is not silence that entraps her, rather it is the constant whine of a society trying to mould her into its acceptable borders. Her rejection of the system results in her ultimate separation and alienation from the outside world: "I have to be more careful about my memories, I have to be sure they're my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said" (73). It is in this coming to awareness, and the subsequent acting upon it, that enables her to recuperate her voice, in effect her agency: "This above all," says Atwood's protagonist, "to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that, I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I'm powerless and because of

it nothing I do will ever hurt anyone” (191). To give up the belief of powerlessness is to shed the status of the silenced and oppressed subaltern (and, in this case, female), as portrayed in the dominant discourse of Canadian literature. Following a process of decolonization, and in re-writing her condition as an individual (postcolonial?) subject, she subverts her participation in a discourse of victimization into a claiming of self-location, yet without imposing, without violent conquest: “I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, *I am a place*” (181; emphasis mine). Resonant with Timber’s reflections in *Ragged Company*, it is about “being there. Inhabiting your place in the world,” being “seen, visible, [and] real” (321): subverting the discourse of dominance and claiming one’s sense of self-location and necessity in the participation of a place, a community.

Though one might re-read in Atwood’s novel the recurrent themes of survival and victimization as tropes in Canadian literature, what is at work here goes beyond the passive state of reaction, and it is in this sense that this analysis may successfully inform my considerations on Native/First Nations literatures as a tool towards the assertion of self-location and communal sovereignty: indeed, no matter how deeply entangled (Canadian/American) literature may be in the meanders of a national imagery (and, indeed, imaginary), it can be resisted. What is needed, then, is a form of resistance, which implicates critique, questioning, and agency, that may “counter the narratives produced by what [Gayatri Spivak] describes as ‘a time and place that has privatized the imagination and pitted it against the political’” (Brydon “Metamorphoses” 14). This, in terms of a Native/First Nations literary production, can be achieved, I argue, through the reclamation



of language, and a re-reading of historiography through metanarratives and a “writing back” at both forms of civil alienation and psychotic silence: to recognize the inevitable influence of Canadian (or American) society, and account for one’s ultimate participation in this viewing of the territory as occupied, one’s own co-option in such a system, and possibly having let *oneself* become an occupied territory.

Simon Harel has explored the notions of being in occupied territory and of civil alienation from a Québécois point of view, and how this might relate, in a certain way, to that of First Nations peoples as still being – actually – occupied and alienated. Harel writes, in his *Braconnages identitaires: Un Québec palimpseste*, that the province of Québec has been “usurped” of its territory:

Le Québec est malade d’une identité volée, d’un territoire usurpé. Cette vieille rengaine nous obsède. La perte et la dépossession sont nos fantaisies, notre trésor mélancolique. Autrefois, nous avions le territoire. Aujourd’hui, il ne reste plus rien. Notre mélancolie est sans objet (21).<sup>115</sup>

Inasmuch as a Canadian identity had to be constructed as distinct from that of the U.S., Québec continuously seeks to distinguish itself from the oppressive forces of Anglo-Canada, which threaten to swallow it up. *Bill 101* is but an example of how, some might suggest, the fear of a Québécois cultural alienation has produced legislative instances to prevent this from happening. As Harel comments, “We have ‘governance,’ and ‘concertation,’ but we do not have the country” (“*Nous avons la ‘gouvernance,’ la*

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<sup>115</sup> “Québec is ill from having its identity stolen, its territory usurped. We are obsessed by the same tales of woe. Loss and dispossession are our fantasies, our melancholic treasure. Once we had the territory. Today, nothing remains. Our melancholy is without object.” (My translation).

*'concertation, ' mais nous n'avons pas le pays'*" 21). While it is often mentioned (especially in Montreal) that the Québécois feel as if they are occupied, indeed "colonized," by the Anglos, and that in this sense their struggle is similar to that of First Nations peoples, I strongly disagree with this parallelism. Granted, the notions of being usurped, occupied, and dispossessed are valid in both cases; but the meaning that they convey is extremely different. In linguistic terms, it could be said that though the signified (*signifiant*) is the same, the signifier (*signifié*) is utterly different.

Furthermore, in no way do First Nations people in Québec have either governance or political concertation, in the sense that the Québécois do. Quite the opposite, since the Québec government has repeatedly sought to further usurp First Nations people of their own cultural landmarks, and to erase differences so as to better incorporate them into mainstream society. Most recently, as I remarked in Chapter Two, the Québec National Assembly has not yet adopted a particular motion to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, notwithstanding the numerous invitations it has received by organizations to do so. An important landmark in this attempt to assimilate was in 1978, when the Québec legislative government put forth its *Bill 101*. The Mohawks strongly defied it, declaring that it was an infringement to their sovereignty, and that it treated them as immigrants on their own land (Grenoble and Whaley 87):

Bill 101 was a direct violation of the Two Row Wampum Treaty. It attacks the sovereignty of the Mohawk people. The Mohawk people felt that if they signed the application for a license for an English education, they would be recognizing the right of the provincial government to legislate culture and education for native peoples. This was unacceptable to the people (Kahnawake Survival School, quoted in Grenoble and Whaley 87).

Indeed, is it not rather obtuse to expect of those who were forced in 1895 to adopt the English language as their sole means for communication, as per the “Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs For the Year Ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1895,” to then *have to* switch to yet another foreign language? In effect, *Bill 101* would have severely restricted services and education to Indigenous peoples: had they been available mostly in French, it would have “limited access to English-language schools to indigenous children, *though many of these children’s parents had attended English-language schools*” (Grenoble and Whaley 87; emphasis mine) – indeed, subjecting them to the same rules as immigrants. Evidently, the establishment of the Kahnawake Survival School was a direct response to *Bill 101* and, as Grenoble and Whaley suggest, an ironic turn of events: the legislation that aimed at strengthening French led to a strong revitalization movement of the Mohawk language (88).

This instance of Mohawk resistance is clearly the type of act, as I suggested above, of language reclamation, a re-reading of historiography through metanarratives and a “writing back” at both forms of civil alienation and of psychotic silence. It is a form of what Simon Harel has termed “braconnages identitaires” (14) – “identity poaching” – the very encroachments and appropriations that structure Québécois culture. “To poach,” he writes, “is to encroach on a territory that one no longer owns” (“*Braconner, c’est empiéter sur un territoire qu’on ne possède plus*” 55). Evidently, beyond the sole Québécois context, and in light of my discussion above on resistance from within an occupied territory, I argue that this notion helps to shed light on, for instance, the stance that the Mohawks achieved in the creation of the Kahnawake Survival School, and their dismissal of *Bill 101*. For the

actual space in which the Mohawks were/are poaching here is beyond the territorial: this space is that of language, of cultural assertion, and of the sovereign right and need to educate, and be educated, as one sees fit. A space that had been removed, indeed usurped, in light of the 1895 Acquisition of the English Language Clause and by the 1876 and 1951 versions of the Indian Act, and forceful removal of children from their homes. Is there not, indeed, already sufficient history in Canada (and Québec) of the imposed education of Native children of a foreign language?

This notion of “poaching” is extremely resourceful and pertinent to my analysis – keeping in mind that there are differences between Harel’s use in relation to Québec, and the types of poaching that may apply to Native/First Nations issues. Indeed, I contend, beyond the territorial (and therefore the political), the acts of poaching that can be found in instances of Native/First Nations literary and artistic performances are essentially linguistic, intellectual and, to an extent, ethical as well – in the sense that they address face-on the moments in which conventional Eurocentric ‘normativity’ encroaches upon an individual’s or a community’s liberties. In this sense then, “poaching,” as I make use of it here, is a performative act of defiance; it is an instance of positive violence that remains tightly connected to notions of place and situatedness. In terms of my analysis on the reappropriation of place, this poaching, then, is a strategy, an intentional intervention, in the exact sense that Atwood’s protagonist in *Surfacing* claims that she *is* a place: the self-location at play here is indeed of the type “*in which* the trees and animals move and grow” (Atwood 181; emphasis mine). This type of *braconnage*, then, is one of “muted violence”

(Harel 18) and “violently human” (Harel 55), and re-writes the individual within a larger project.

## **Part Two – Border Crossings and Acts of Citizenship**

*I sit down with my plate to eat  
 You're Indian aren't you?  
 Yes  
 What tribe are you?  
 Menominee  
 What?  
 Menominee  
 What?  
 Me Nom I Nee  
 Is that your name or your tribe?  
 - Chrystos "Table Manners" 73*

In *Across Cultures, Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures*, the authors, Paul DePasquale, Renate Eigenbrod and Emma LaRocque, sought to publish a new anthology of critical writings to be used alongside the texts they taught in university courses on Aboriginal literature (9). Furthermore, the anthology contributes new material to the field, in the way that prior anthologies did, such as Jeannette Armstrong's *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature* (1991) and Armand Garnet Ruffo's *(Ad)dressing Our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures* (2001). Of interest to my discussion here is that the authors raise the issue of having included Native American authors in a collection that was intended to contain only Canadian authors. At first, they remark, “we felt strongly opposed to this recommendation [from Broadview Press] at first because it seemed to the editors that scholars south of the border, even Native American literary scholars, rarely paid attention to Canadian

Aboriginal issues, never mind literary subjects” (11). There is a slight familiarity here in the discourse that recalls the original fear of scholars of Canadian literature raising similar concerns, in order to better distinguish themselves from being subsumed into the larger field of American literary studies. Nevertheless, the two other anthologies mentioned above – considered to be models in the scholarship and often proudly dubbed “Canadian” – also included scholars from the U.S (in the case of Armstrong) and from Australia (in the case of Ruffo), thus “[reflecting] a North American and even an international orientation” (11). It is difficult, I believe, in a field that pertains to “Canadian” Indigenous issues, to not call upon works by other Indigenous critics, regardless of their origin. For instance, Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) comes to mind (her discussion of “being human,” in conjunction with that of Butler’s, was extremely useful in my reading of Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* in Chapter Two); or the works of Gerald Vizenor which, as I suggested in Chapter One, are theoretically crucial to an understanding and proper analysis of contemporary Indigenous writings. The end result is, truly, what Paul DePasquale wrote in the introduction: that “researchers of Aboriginal literature have a moral and ethical obligation to consider Aboriginal knowledges, perspectives, and values not just as a supplement to but perhaps as more important than (or sometimes in place of) European knowledge and belief systems” (10). To which I might add, the obligation to consider *all* Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives.

Furthermore, the authors of *Across Cultures / Across Borders* contend that “the Canada-US border itself is often perceived by Aboriginal people as an arbitrary, foreign

imposition, maintained and regulated today through colonial and neo-colonial attitudes and laws, was reason enough to include US material [to the anthology]" (12). It is for this same reason that in this dissertation I cross both national, international, and even linguistic borders – by crossing over the current conventional tendency to separate Native American and First Nations writings according to their place of origin (Canada or the U.S.) and the language in which they are produced (English or French). Nevertheless, in the process of upsetting national constructs and linguistic borders, it is crucial to account for the underlying differences within the text, so as not to subsume the complexities of these literatures into a single narrative. Ultimately, by moving away from these paradigms of classification, my research aims to contribute in the moving away from institutional analysis, and moving towards collective knowledge, local activism and pedagogical approaches that underline the importance of interconnectedness.

A true classic in depicting the ironic non-sense (and nonsense) of the U.S-Canadian Border is Thomas King's 1991 short story "Borders." Told from the boy's viewpoint, thus perhaps lacking some understanding of the unfolding events and of the larger picture, the innocent quality of the tale also gives it an endearing simplicity, which in itself is problematic, and very ironic. The duty-free store owner's remark, "You'd think they [the border guards] could handle the simple things" (144) reflects as well a partial ignorance as to what the bigger picture is – a lack of understanding of how questions of identity are crucial to a person's ability to come and go as they please. It is interesting to note that Mel's own citizenship is not disclosed, nor is it a matter of importance for his ability to

come and go, despite his working in the liminal space of the duty-free shop, between the two border exits.

There is actually nothing simple in the story's implications, and upon closer examination, this impression fades away. The two unnamed main protagonists in the story live in Standoff, Alberta, which is part of the Blood Tribe (part of the Blackfoot Confederacy) Reservation, as set by Treaty 7 in 1877.<sup>116</sup> The town is situated 91 km away from the Coutts/Sweetgrass USA Border Crossing. Interestingly, the land set out for the reservation in 1880 by Chief Red Crow went as far south as the Canada-US International Boundary. But it was significantly cut back, without consultation with the Blood Tribe, following two resurveys of the reservation area in 1882 and 1883. On the other side of the border, the Blackfeet entered into the Lambull Treaty with the Americans in 1855. The Blackfoot Confederacy's original territory, before encounter, was bordered on the north by the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta, south by the Yellowstone River in the State of Montana, west by the Rocky Mountains, and east by the Sand Hills in Saskatchewan. Needless to say, this is but one example of how the Canada-U.S. border has split communities and nations into distinct parts that are actually part of the same whole. Another example that comes to mind, and which I will discuss further below, is the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne, the territory of which straddles the intersection of international (U.S. and Canada) and provincial (Ontario and Québec) borders.

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<sup>116</sup> Information and sources regarding Blackfoot and Blood Tribe was retrieved from the Blood Tribe-Kainai website [[www.bloodtribe.org](http://www.bloodtribe.org)]



The mother in King's short story "Borders," upon wanting to enter the United States with her son to go visit her daughter in Salt Lake City, is forbidden passage when she refuses to state her citizenship – that is, the citizenship that she is supposed to state, ie. American or Canadian. Instead, she keeps on repeating, when asked the question "Citizenship?" "Blackfoot" (137). The same thing happens when, after being told they could not enter into the U.S., they drive back up to the Canadian border. In order to (re)enter Canada, they are asked, once again, "Citizenship?" – to which, of course, the mother answers "Blackfoot" (141). "I know," said the [Canadian border guard], "and I'd be proud of being Blackfoot if I were Blackfoot. But you have to be American or Canadian" (141). The emphasis placed by the border guard on *having to be* American or Canadian is of course suggestive of what the authors of *Across Cultures / Across Borders* mean when the border is referred to as being a "foreign imposition, maintained and regulated today through colonial and neo-colonial attitudes and laws" (12). Based on the premise of the border guard, if one is neither Canadian nor American, one cannot exist; citizenship is *required*. Ironically, this is the same (albeit different) position held by both Canada and the U.S. with regard to their indigenous populations some seventy years ago, in the sense that they were not *allowed* to be citizens (unless they gave up Indian status). By extension, for some individuals, citizenship today is not a *desirable* attribute; whereas when it was not a given – like the right to vote – it could be.

The notion of citizenship is an extremely difficult one to analyze and pinpoint. What is more difficult, however, is what it means to an individual. In the case of First Nations and Native American peoples, the very late granting of citizenship and the right to vote can

be regarded, at the very least, as an assault on an individual's rights and status within his or her own country. On the other hand, it further complicates issues of self-identity and belonging, as well as unresolved land claim issues and territorial disputes.

Both First Nations and Native American male individuals could be granted citizenship before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but only if they accepted to give up their tribal affiliations (in the U.S. in 1887 under the Dawes General Allotment Act) or accepted to become enfranchised (in Canada as of 1857 under the Gradual Citizenship Act). In the U.S., it was not before 1924, with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act, that Native Americans were granted citizenship (and the right to vote). In Canada, the right to vote was not granted before 1960 (to both men and women). Additionally, it is interesting to consider that white women started to get a right to vote on a provincial level in Canada in 1884 (Ontario being the first) and on a federal level in 1917. Before that, white women were equally treated as "children" without rights, as were First Nations peoples under the Indian Act (who were considered, up until 1985, as being "Wards of the Crown"). Now this of course implies, once again, that Indigenous women were (and have been) doubly discriminated against – both for being indigenous, and for being women – the consequences of which can still be found in the ongoing violence and abuse against Indigenous women, as I discussed in my second Chapter.

Daniel N. Paul, Mi'kmaq Elder and author of *We Were Not the Savages*, was asked by a Halifax non-Native Education group to be a member on a panel of experts at a forum held at Nova Scotia's Government House on October 20, 1999. He writes that his

“responsibility was to specify the benefits that First Nations Peoples have derived from Canadian citizenship.” The following was excerpted from his talk:

In spite of exclusion, but caused primarily by the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, the quality of life for First Nations Peoples in Canada has improved measurably in the past 50 years. The Declaration forced the country to begin the process of cleaning up its act and stop discriminating openly against Natives [...] This did not, however, mean that legislation was immediately introduced to repeal well entrenched apartheid laws that were enacted to oppress “Indians.” When trying to pinpoint a date when the easing of apartheid laws allowed First Nations Peoples to escape from “Wards of the Crown status,” to third class Canadian Citizenship status, the water is very muddied. The repeal of some apartheid laws in 1951 wasn’t the watershed. The fact that it took governments fourteen years after the Canada Citizenship Act was proclaimed on January 1, 1947, to extend to us, August 10, 1960, the right to vote in federal elections clouds the matter further. Other apartheid laws were so well entrenched that it took another 25 years, after the government had graciously given us the right to vote in 1960, for it to repeal the majority of the worst ones. [...] Up until 1985, if a Registered Indian wanted to be enfranchised, he/she had to sign a declaration containing this paragraph: “...and certify that I am capable of assuming the responsibilities of citizenship.” From this we can conclude that if, in fact, First Nations Peoples held Canadian citizenship, it was badly tainted. However, the language seems to indicate that we were still viewed as “Wards of the Crown in 1985” (“First Nations Peoples Canadian Citizenship: Second Class at Best!”).

With this history in mind, it is understandable that the mother in “Borders” refuses to adhere to having to be American or Canadian. If being granted citizenship is regarded by government officials as a gift generously bestowed on indigenous peoples (in the same way that Trudeau’s *White Paper* would have provided equal opportunities to “all Canadians,” thus erasing the “special governmental treatments” that had left the Indian “different,” “lacking power” and “without those feelings of dignity and self-confidence that a man must have if he is to walk with his head high” (“Statement of the Government of Canada on

Indian Policy 1969” 3)), in the eyes of others, it can be seen not only as a bitter reminder of the ailments of history (being a non-citizen, thus a non-human), but also as a further violent imposition, regulated by neo-colonial laws, and a continuous denial of an individual’s original right to belong, on his or her own terms, to his or her homeland. What I mean by this is that in the same way that the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article 15, states that “(a) Everyone has the right to a nationality, and (b) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality,” so too, for instance, should the “Citizenship of Haudenosaunee Kanienkehaka Mohawk Peoples” be considered on equal grounds. In effect, a very similar, and true, story to the one in King’s “Borders” is that of a Mohawk Delegation from Kahnawake to the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia in Spring 2010. As reported in the June 1, 2010 edition of *Iorì:wase Kahnawake News*, upon their traveling home from Bolivia, first via Peru and then El Salvador, they met very little trouble apart from curiosity questions, upon presenting their Haudenosaunee passports – they were, after all, “Indigenos,” passing through Indigenous land.<sup>117</sup> But upon arriving at the customs

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<sup>117</sup> About the Haudenosaunee passport, Thomas Deer, a technician with the Haudenosaunee Documentation Committee, says: “In contemporary times, a national passport exists as the ultimate expression of identity. When Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh was dispatched to the League of Nations in 1923 to press for our rights in the international arena, the Haudenosaunee understood that if he traveled on documents belonging to the Dominion of Canada - it would surely undermine our claims of sovereignty. Likewise, in 1977 when the Haudenosaunee Delegation traveled to the United Nations in Geneva, the Grand Council of Chiefs felt it once again needed to travel abroad as sovereigns in order to demonstrate its integrity as a sovereign people. Since 1977, the Haudenosaunee Passport has been mass-produced for all of its citizens. The Haudenosaunee Passport is a non-violent expression of our distinct identity as a sovereign people. While both Canada and the United States claim us as their citizens, the Haudenosaunee Passport is a constant reminder that our people have

inspection to board their final flight for Toronto, and having had to explain once again what the documents were, they are told by the security officer:

“Let me make a call and I’ll see if you can get on,” [Tyler] Hemlock recounted. ‘So he calls the Canadian Embassy. The security officer explained that there was three guys carrying Haudenosaunee passports and asked if they should be let on the plane. And the word came back from Canada that you don’t let them on the plane with those documents. [...] All the airline needed was confirmation from Canada that the three Mohawks would be allowed into Canada. The confirmation could be a phone call or a letter. Meanwhile, Canada’s position was that they had to go home using the emergency travel document [which amounts to an emergency Canadian passport]. “We said we can’t do that,” Hemlock said. “We can’t compromise who we are because we left on these passports; we’re not Canadian; we’re not American; our political stance has always been that. We are not Canadian or American – we are Haudenosaunee.”

Much like in King’s short story, the situation evolves rather quickly once the media, lawyers, and different governments (El Salvadorian, American and Canadian, as well as the Haudenosaunee) get involved.<sup>118</sup> In the short story “Borders,” after a morning of interviews with the mother, questions “about how it felt to be an Indian without a country” (145), and reporters going back and forth between the two border checkpoints, the television vans actually escort the mother and son back to the American border, where the border guard, though “his fingers patting the butt of [his] revolver,” finally lets them through (146).

When the three members of the Mohawk Delegation leave El Salvador, it is not, however, to Canada: they were granted the right to travel on their Haudenosaunee

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never acquiesced our citizenship as Haudenosaunee people. It also provides our people an alternative to acquiring Canadian or U.S. documentation” (“Canada prevents Mohawks from returning home on Haudenosaunee passports”).

<sup>118</sup> A simple Google search about this case comes up with no less than 900 hits: [<http://www.google.ca/search?hl=en&biw=1497&bih=842&q=Canada+prevents+Mohawks+from+returning+home+on+Haudenosaunee+passports&aq=f&aql=&oq=>]

documents to the U.S., via Miami and then Plattsburgh (despite the US having initially made the same request, that they apply for an emergency American passport – which turned out not to be necessary, with help from individuals at the American embassy), from where, finally they go on home, presumably by road (this is not mentioned in the article, though it is interesting to point out that since the instigation in June 2009 of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), which is “a U.S. law that requires all travellers, including U.S. and Canadian citizens, to present a valid passport or other approved secure document when entering the United States from within the western hemisphere,”<sup>119</sup> the Canadian entry requirements have not changed as a result. Hence, Canadians “returning home” need not show a passport to re-enter Canada, and pertaining to the story here, a Certificate of Indian Status is sufficient (Canada Border Services Agency).<sup>120</sup> What I consider particularly interesting here is how the two stories (one real, one fictitious) relate a victory for Indigenous sovereignty, as much for the individual as for the community. They also underline the fact that many issues remain unaddressed and unresolved. As Thomas King has made clear,

These are questions that still need exploring. Treaty rights in Canada, Native tax status and who decides how Native communities are organized and run—these are still live questions. I engage them in my novels because it is an ongoing debate. It’s a dangerous debate. People out there might not like it. But I try to present sticky issues from all sides. These questions still plague us. They are important issues. The Canadian government has no interest in Native rights. It doesn’t matter who is in power. There is a lethargy. No—that’s too kind a word—there is a turning of the political back to Native people... I engage in these kinds of debates, like a nasty little black

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<sup>119</sup> *Canada Border Services Agency*. “Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI).”

<sup>120</sup> *Canada Border Services Agency*. “Safety and Security – Admissibility.”

fly buzzing around. In person I am sweet and shy, but if you put a computer in front of me, I become a bit of a radical (Hyde 5-6).

Holding one's stance in the face of oppression is the important message that both these stories convey. The stories themselves, in a way, are "nasty little black flies," for they do not allow for the repressed to remain unspoken. The three members of the Mohawk Delegation held steadfast onto their one and only citizenship – Haudenosaunee – despite knowing that, as Tyler Hemlock concludes, "we knew that the easiest thing would have been to sign those documents right at the get-go. But that's not what we were sent out there [to Bolivia] for. That's not who we said we were. We knew, coming home, we were still representing our people and we acted accordingly" ("Canada Prevents Mohawks From Returning Home"). This act of reclaiming citizenship is indeed an act of *ethical* "poaching," for it restores, *despite* governmental jurisdiction and regulations, a sense of belonging, a site of home. Furthermore, it maps out the territory according to the individual's stance within it, and, consequently, indicates his/her position and relation to the surroundings, in effect the community to whom s/he feels allegiance.

In a similar way, the mother in "Borders," through her stubborn – and justifiable – defiance, is poaching rather than stepping down: as the boy remarks, "it would have been easier if my mother had just said 'Canadian' and been done with it" (137), and he even attempts to resolve the situation by telling the border guard "that we were Blackfoot and Canadian, but she said that that didn't count because I was a minor" (139). While the boy is clearly too young to understand the implications of his mother's stance, her plight, as I discussed, was mediatized and did have an outside effect as well, if only, we are led to

believe, on her daughter Laetitia. The relationship between mother and daughter in King's story appears to be a difficult one. When Laetitia left the reserve to cross the border to go live in Salt Lake City, she did not get her mother's blessing (133) and the awkwardness of their farewell at the border is felt in the gap represented by each choosing to speak a different language:

“You can still see the mountain from here,” my mother told Laetitia in Blackfoot.

“Lots of mountains in Salt Lake,” Laetitia told her in English. (135)

Laetitia's flight from her mother and the reserve is suggestive of a desire to escape from everything traditional, familial, and boring, to a city where there was a temple, a downtown, a zoo, and skiing in the mountains (139). Nevertheless, the boring, sedentary image that Laetitia has of her mother changes with her witnessing on television what happened at the border: “Laetitia said that she saw us on television the night before and, during the meal, she had us tell her the story over and over again” (146). Clearly the mediatization of the mother's defiance at the border and her stubbornness in the face of officials to stand her ground incurred a sense of pride in Laetitia, which, as a result, has Laetitia thinking of moving back up to the reserve (147). As Robert Nelson has suggested in his article “Place, Vision, and Identity in Native American Literatures,” “‘identity,’ correctly speaking, is not an attribute of either the individual or of the context – the environment, including cultural traditions – in which the individual is embedded. Rather, identity is an event that takes place in the creation of the *relationship* between individual and context” (265-266). In this sense, the mother's self-location is rooted in the



performative event of her defiance, in the act of poaching itself, which underlines a discourse of continuity and resistance. Laetitia's final sense of belonging and desire to go home is a direct consequence of this: seeing her mother thus empowered, Laetitia experiences how it is possible to see oneself as a living part of the living place where one's life takes place; in this case, Blackfoot culture and territory.

Thus, the reappropriation of place entails necessarily to take a stance: to reclaim a place from which to express, firmly rooted, cultural affirmation and overture towards new avenues for artistic, individual and pedagogical expression and performance. Stories such as the two just analyzed are, in essence, narratives of survivance. The establishment of place, then, is to learn how to subvert participation in a discourse of victimization into the claiming of self-location. It is to impose oneself, through defiance, but without violent conquest. It is to claim sovereignty, but a sovereignty beyond that which is commonly understood. As Ann Charney noted, "in Mohawk, the word for sovereignty translates as 'carrying ourselves'" (133). However, in this desire to "carry oneself" there resides also a sense of urgency.

In terms of desire, Audra Simpson (Mohawk), in her forthcoming book *Mohawk Interruptus*,<sup>121</sup> discusses questions of Mohawk citizenship formation and its importance in the face of imperialist forces such as Canada and the U.S. Following a set of interviews with people from Kahnawake, she describes the difference between a "citizenship of

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<sup>121</sup> As noted in the introduction to this Chapter, I am extremely grateful to Prof. Audra Simpson for sharing with me an unpublished excerpt of her forthcoming book. This excerpt was given as a talk during the *Regards autochtones* Colloquium, held at Kahnawake on June 18, 2010. Page numbers refer to the pages of the unpublished article.

convenience” and “primary, feeling citizenships”: though the latter, she suggests, may not be “institutionally recognized,” they are “socially and politically recognized in the everyday life of the community and [...] people get called out on them” (14). To partake in the “citizenship of convenience” – in this case, Canadian – is indeed to acknowledge participation in a pre-defined set of norms and expectations; on the other hand, to partake in this “for simplicity’s sake” (12) is not, I believe, a form of co-option. Rather, it should be understood as subversive participation. As the interviewee in Simpson’s article states:

That [, Mohawk from Kahnawake,] is my *primary* citizenship, that is my main citizenship – Canadian citizenship is sort of an ancillary citizenship which I invoke to avoid hassle. I don’t consider myself, “Canadian,” as I said I am a Mohawk of Kahnawake and I feel that that is where my citizenship lies. (13; emphasis in the original)

In emphasizing that it is in his Mohawk citizenship that lies his sense of allegiance, belonging and, assumingly, duty, it is clear that much like in the case of the Mohawk delegation to Bolivia, being “Canadian” is not a matter worth fighting for, nor does it bear the urgency of obligation or a recognition of duty – whereas being Mohawk does. This attitude, then, fully subverts and rewrites the clause to which Daniel N. Paul alluded (quoted above), that upon enfranchisement, prior to 1985, a Native person had to sign a declaration containing “...[I] certify that I am capable of assuming the responsibilities of [Canadian] citizenship.” Thus, these alternative “narratives of citizenship,” according to Simpson, “are laden with desires that want in some ways, to effect the differentials of power that underwrite notions of nationhood and citizenship away from the politics of recognition *and into a space of their own*” (15; emphasis mine). To claim (and thus impose,

but non-violently) oneself as Mohawk first and foremost indeed subverts, defies – poaches – the various structures of governance that seek to implement the rules of the state and encroach upon an individual’s liberties. Finally, it emphasizes narratives of belonging and ultimately, of the right to sovereignty. Indeed, as Simpson points out, “although Indigenous peoples now have [Canadian citizenship], [it] is still co-existent and co-terminous with the *Indian Act*” (4). To adhere to a citizenship of convenience, not out of consent but, rather, out of refusal (4), is a strategy that permits to see beyond the restrictive borders of the *Indian Act*, which continuously “limits Indians to both the spaces of reservations and bodies of certain substance and practice” (4). In effect, the limitations set out by the original *Indian Act* provided for the erasure of any form of agency and thus made, literally, the body of the ‘Indian’ solely a public dimension, a wardship, something to be owned and that called for protection and safe-guarding. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain this co-existence, be it of convenience, all the while continuing to negotiate different forms of recognition. For, as Simpson argues, “How does one assert sovereignty and independence when some of the power to define that sovereignty is bestowed by a foreign power?” (5) In effect, much like the right to citizenship, the power to grant independence lies in the hands of the state in power, in the case here, Canada or the U.S. It is thus necessary to withhold a balance between recognition of and antagonism to the state.

It is worth mentioning here two examples of how difficult it can be to maintain this delicate, and highly volatile, equilibrium between recognition and antagonism; a case study of sorts of the self-satisfying love-/hate-affair between Canada and its First Nations. Firstly, there is the case of the Northwest Passage. Indeed, the controversial question of

sovereignty, as viewed by the media, becomes increasingly important: Does the Northwest Passage belong to Canada or to the world? Currently, there are discussions as to whether this passage should become an international strait, in which case Canada would no longer be sovereign (it is important to note that, in comparison, the Northeast passage remains under iron-tight Russian sovereignty, who have no intention on giving up this status). I would like to raise the issue that those who will be most affected, and indeed should be included in any discussions, are the Inuit communities that live along the Passage and in the main ports (for instance, Iqaluit, Pond Inlet and Tuktuuyaqtuuq). Furthermore, one should consider that Nunavut, being now an independent territory under Inuit governance, might face some serious challenges from the Canadian government, now that those forlorn territories hold a particular global interest.

Secondly, and of similar concern, there is Quebec Prime Minister Jean Charest's "Plan Nord." As reported by both the *Globe and Mail* and the *Montreal Gazette* on May 9, 2011,

The economic proposal, Plan Nord, involves a (1.2 million square kilometre) [plan to develop Quebec's remote northern] region north of the 49th parallel... [that] covers more than 70 per cent of the province's territory. The proposal involves \$80-billion in public and private investment over the next 25 years, Mr. Charest said. In return, he said, it will generate an estimated \$14-billion in revenue over the same period and contribute \$162-billion to the province's gross domestic product.

... Already, 11 mining projects are planned... The region contains deposits of nickel, cobalt, platinum, zinc, iron ore, lignite, gold, lithium, vanadium and rare earths. ...Forestry development in the plan would create about 15,000 jobs... In energy development, the Plan Nord calls for developing 3,500 megawatts more in hydroelectric projects (including the 920-megawatt Eastmain-Sarcelle-Rupert dam on the North Shore; the 1,550-megawatt La

Romaine dam on the North Shore; and the 1,200-megawatt Petit-Mécatina dam, also on the North Shore)... (“Charest’s Controversial Plan Nord”)

Aside from obvious preoccupations concerning the conservation and preservation of landscapes, forests, and water resources, it appears that the *Plan Nord* has led to a clear division amongst First Nations communities. For instance, within Quebec’s large Innu nation, some Innu communities signed on to the Plan Nord while others did not – which is understandable given that, for instance, the Innu community of Uashat Malietenam has been fighting against the project to build four dams on the Romaine River for several years now.

Ghislain Picard, Chief of the AFNQL, in response to Charest’s European trip to “seductively” promote the Plan Nord, remarked that “even though the majority of the communities concerned by the project have yet to be genuinely consulted, it seems that the priority is currently focused on seducing the investors rather than the First Nations!” (“When Will a Seduction Operation...”). He also points out how the *Plan Nord* “excludes more First Nations than it includes. And yet, by virtue of the Canadian Constitution as well as decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada, the Quebec government is obligated to consult and accommodate all of the First Nations concerned by the *Plan Nord*. It must also respect the obligations anticipated by the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada has recently endorsed” – and that Québec has yet to recognize and respect – in particular Article 32 of the Declaration, which stipulates that “States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed

consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.” Of course, dialogue need not only take place in order to gain approval for the project – given that the project will expand over 25 years, it is crucial to begin discussions and negotiations on the sharing of eventual wealth and royalties, as well as practices for co-management.

With these two examples, the Northwest Passage and Charest’s Plan Nord, I argue that despite the crucial necessity of retaining ‘friendly relations’ with a state that has the power to bestow independence and sovereignty (like Canada and Québec have to Nunavut and Nunavik respectively), the state still retains the power to possibly revoke its decision, based on, for instance, the importance of retaining Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. There can thus only remain a constant state of anxiety – rendering the delicate balance between recognition and antagonism highly volatile.

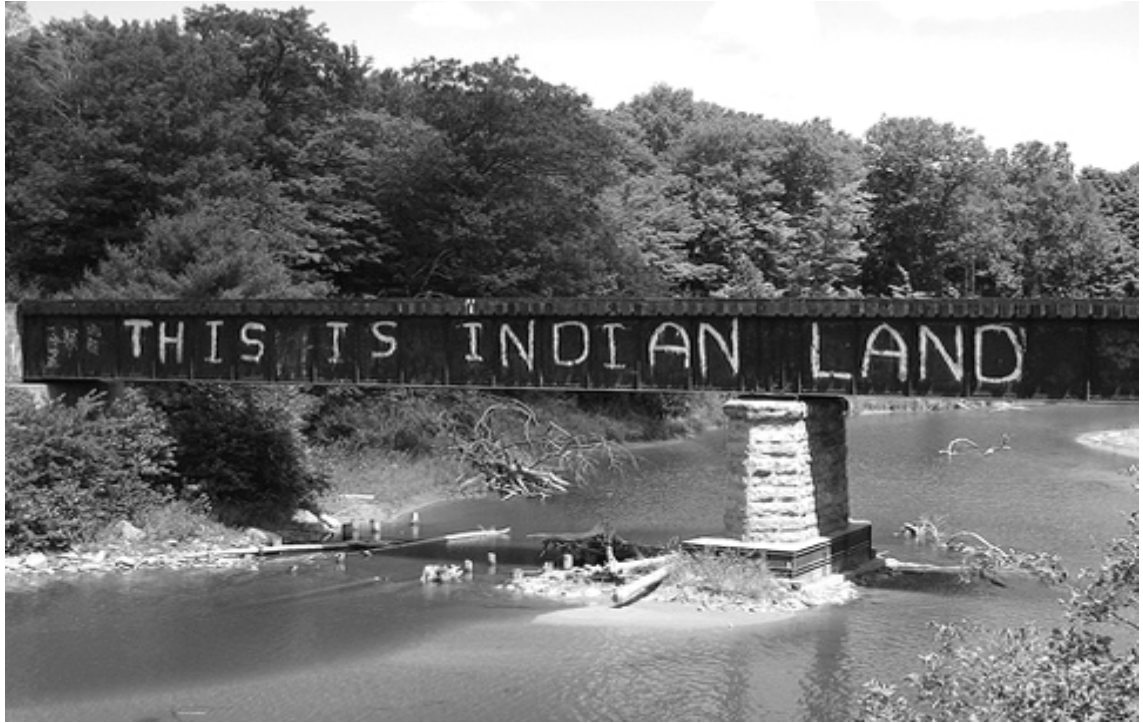
### **Part Three - Rewriting the Reserve as ‘Indian Land,’ as Home**

*The future of that wilderness and, of course, the future of all life depends upon whose stories we listen to: the stories that tell us we are bound in a timeless and inextricable relationship with the earth which gives us life and sustains us, or the stories that tell us the earth is a resource to be exploited until it is used up... There is an important and invaluable message in this knowledge, for whereas a society may well mine the heart out of something called a natural resource, one does not violate one’s mother (Louis Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*, 211).*

Claims to territory, whether they be for the vastness of the Arctic, for the lands, or for the reserves, set aside by the government for the “exclusive use of registered or status Indians” (Canadian Encyclopedia), are of equal importance and need to be recognized in order to

further negotiation and collaboration between states and indigenous peoples. Louis Owens' question on whose stories one chooses to listen to continues to bare its importance today, especially with regard to territorial claims, both for land already allotted, and land to be retrieved. The most evident example is that of the reserve, and how it is perceived (or in other words, how its story is told): on the one hand, reserves have been viewed as ghettos or enclaves; by removing them, Aboriginal people would be forced to assimilate into mainstream society. This aspect was one of Trudeau's proposals in his *White Paper*, as I discussed above. In this sense, the reserve is regarded as a dark spot on the periphery, to be ignored or, even better yet, to be erased. But for many, the reserve itself has become the center; it has become a physical and spiritual home – one need only look at how the Mohawks of Kanehsatake took to arms in the summer of 1990 to defend their ancestral burial grounds, as an example – one that will be defended against intruders.

There have been numerous similar battles that have occurred across Canada and the U.S.; clearly the causes for uprising are always different, both in scale and in nature, but in all cases they are related to a form of desecration and lack of respect. However, while the reserve was once thought of, to quote A.M. Klein, “a grassy ghetto, and no home” (“Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga”), it has nevertheless become – after decades of Native resistance – a proactive space from which to assert sovereignty. The reserve has become “Indian Land,” and the ghetto a community.



*Garden River First Nations, from the Trans-Canada highway in northern Ontario, Canada.*<sup>122</sup>

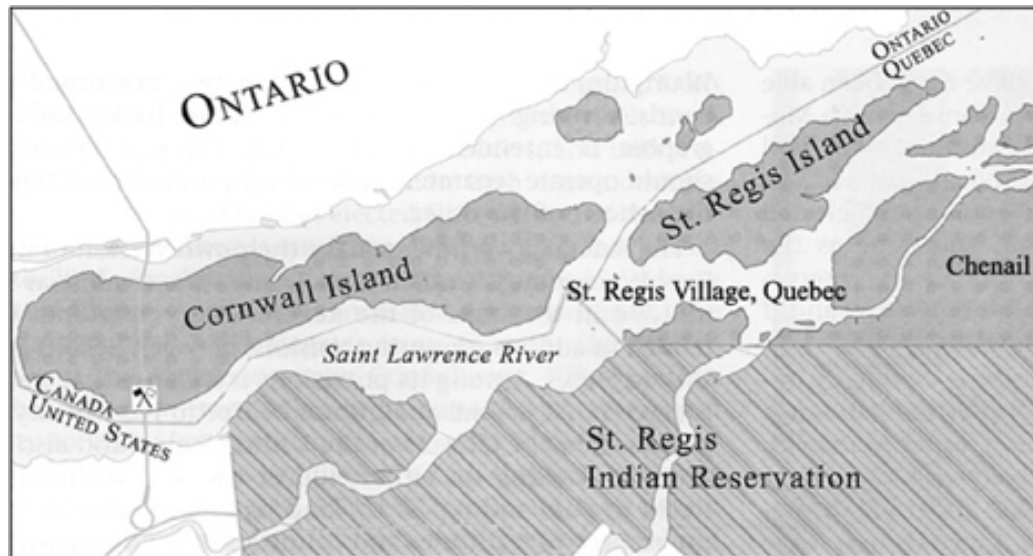
In effect, disputes regarding land claims and border crossings have helped to reinscribe the reserve as a space from which to assert sovereignty and elements of territorial control, as depicted in Mort Ransen's 1969 documentary, *You Are on Indian Land*, (the focus of which is the "confrontation between police and a 1969 demonstration by Mohawks of the St. Regis Reserve [Akwesasne] on the bridge between Canada and the United States near Cornwall, Ontario" (NFB "You Are on Indian Land" synopsis)). The reserve of Akwesasne is indeed a very interesting case, and worth exploring here, as it is a pertinent example of how the Canada-U.S. border has split communities and nations into distinct parts that are

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<sup>122</sup> Source: [<http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com/2008/11/20/political-graffiti-12-this-is-indian-land/>] Retrieved June 27, 2011.



actually part of the same whole. In consequence of their communal lands having been bisected by the Canada-U.S. border in 1783, the Mohawk community of Akwesasne is split into two equal Canadian and American sectors, the territory thus straddling the intersection of international (U.S. and Canada) and provincial (Ontario and Québec) borders.



*Courtesy of Akwesasne.ca*

This very particular situation of the community brings an entirely new definition to being in a state of liminality, creating, according to its residents, somewhat of “a judicial nightmare”:

Granted dual American and Canadian citizenship, Akwesasne residents require dual paperwork to secure employment and benefits in the United States or Canada. “I have Social Security on both sides of the border and health benefits on both sides,” [Cultural Resource Coordinator for the Haudenosaunee Cultural Resource Protection Program] Curtis Lazore says. “I am a citizen of the traditional Mohawk Nation here, but dual citizenship makes it easier to get a bank card, credit cards, and a driver’s license. When border guards say that a tribal ID isn’t enough and ask what side of the border I’m from, I just pull out all my cards. I could choose not to be an American citizen. The Mohawks, after all, have an alliance with the U.S., not allegiance to it. And some natives have renounced American citizenship,

but then it is hard to get a job.” The duality in national government matters is also reflected in local government. In Akwesasne, every local governmental service has a Canadian and a United States counterpart in the respective districts. [...] To supervise the delivery of all these services, the governments of the United States and Canada set up two Tribal Councils, one on either side, with the members elected by popular vote (Allen “Homeland Insecurity”).

In effect, the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne is an interesting example of how the balance between recognition and antagonism is an extremely difficult, and highly volatile, status to maintain. For instance, in 1969, much like during the 1990 Oka Crisis, the Akwesasne Mohawks managed to draw public attention to their grievances by blocking the International Bridge that traverses their communities. Their grievance was that they were prohibited by Canadian authorities from duty-free passage of personal purchases across the border, a right, they claimed, that had been established by the Jay Treaty of 1794. However, according to the Aboriginal Rights and Research Office of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne,

There are two popular misconceptions concerning the Jay Treaty, leading many people to assume that when Aboriginal Peoples speak of border crossing or trading rights, across the U. S. – Canada border, that it is the Jay Treaty that gives those rights. That is not the case. The Jay Treaty is not a Treaty with Aboriginal Peoples and it is not a Treaty which gives border crossing rights to First Nations People. It is however a Treaty which confirms those rights and which adds to the constitutional protection of those rights (*Akwesasne.ca*).

In effect, as Attorney Bryan Nickels remarks, “development and recognition of this right [of “free passage” across the U.S.-Canadian border per the provisions of the Jay Treaty] have taken decidedly different courses: while the U.S. has treated the right very liberally

under statutory codification, the Canadian government has opted to develop, and restrict, the right under their courts' common law" (313). The current problem, according to Nickels is that "the Canadian system never codified the Jay Treaty free movement provision" (337), whereas the United States did.<sup>123</sup> The codification of the provisions means that "Native Indians born in Canada are therefore entitled to enter the United States for the purpose of employment, study, retirement, investing, and/or immigration."<sup>124</sup> This, however, is not reciprocal. In consequence, Nickels argues,

The restrictive Canadian treatment, balanced against the liberal American treatment, potentially exposes interested individuals (members of native groups attempting to cross the U.S.-Canadian border) to wild disparities in the law. Movement into the U.S. is highly deferential, and Indians enjoy great respect for prehistoric rights; however, movement into Canada essentially places the Indian individual on the same level as any other entering alien, despite his group's occupation of the same borderlands for thousands of years preceding Great Britain's establishment of the Canadian territories. (338)

Ransen's documentary, *You Are On Indian Land*, makes several of these elements clear. As I mentioned above, the reserve has become, after decades of Native resistance, a proactive space from which to assert sovereignty and, indeed, a home that will be defended against intruders. When in 1969, the Mohawks of Akwesasne wanted Ottawa to acknowledge their grievances – not only for being unable to freely come and go across the border (yet, at the same time, within the limits of the reserve), but because the Canadian government was not respecting its own law of no trespassing, given that both the International Bridge and the

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<sup>123</sup> Provisions codified into U.S. immigration law as Section 289 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

<sup>124</sup> *Embassy of the United States*, "Requirements for the Entering the U.S."

Canadian Customs office had been built on reserve land, without the prior approval of the Band Council and the residents of Akwesasne/St. Regis – the protestors “poached” the federal notice “This is an Indian Reserve” from Canada’s own Department of Indian Affairs as the very foundation for their argument, as well as the justification for the Mohawks’ desire, and *legal right*, to defend their land.



Courtesy NFB.ca

This assertion of defiance and reappropriation goes to show how though the reserve was intended to constrict and ghettoize, and the notice designed to keep people out, it becomes, in the eyes of Mohawk resistance, a tool to prevent intruders from coming in and further desecrating their territory, their home.

The case of Akwesasne is still, to this day, highly volatile and unresolved. In 2009, another dispute erupted in response to Canada’s decision to arm border services officers

with semi-automatic handguns. While on the one hand, as reported in the *Ottawa Citizen* on July 13, 2009, “the geography of the Akwesasne reserve, which reaches into Quebec, Ontario and New York, makes for a jurisdictional nightmare in policing the reserve and controlling smuggling [and] the area has become the heart of the illegal cigarette trade in Canada” (“Akwesasne Primer: A History of Confrontation”),<sup>125</sup> on the other hand, CBC reported that “the Mohawk protesters [were] angry about guards being allowed to carry guns, because they say it violates their sovereignty, and increases the likelihood of violent confrontations” (“Border Authorities Shut Down Akwesasne Crossing”). Of course, the ongoing debate around the cigarette trade is in itself extremely delicate, since, according to Ann Charney, the Mohawks “are aiming at nothing less than economic, cultural and territorial sovereignty... [By] invoking the force of ancestral tradition and combining it with contemporary Western know-how, [they] are going about the business of building an independent Mohawk republic, capable of defending itself” (144). Though she is saying this with regards to the Mohawks of Kahnawake, it certainly applies to Akwesasne, and to any other Mohawks that are using similar ways to assert sovereignty. Charney comments that, ironically, “the Mohawks take a certain wry pleasure in the fact that tobacco, a substance the Indians gave to the white man and which has enriched the coffers of provincial and federal governments through taxation, has been reclaimed for their own benefit (155). This “gross national product” (115), as the Mohawks refer to it, is once again

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<sup>125</sup> “About 12 factories on the U.S. side of Akwesasne produce cigarettes for \$2 a carton, before they are shipped across the St. Lawrence to warehouses on the Canadian side. In 2006, the RCMP seized 472,000 cartons of illegal cigarettes, each containing 200 to 250 cigarettes, 90 per cent of which originated from the Akwesasne reserve” (“Akwesasne Primer: A History of Confrontation”).

the result of a productive, yet offensive strategy of reappropriation, which is not only about resisting past and present forms of colonization; it is also about restoring traditional knowledge and attempting to harmonize it with present-day societal – and in this case economical – preoccupations.

Courtney Hunt's 2008 movie *Frozen River* is an interesting intrigue that makes use of the specific liminality of Akwesasne, and considers the act of smuggling from a different perspective, though in this case, cigarettes are not what is being smuggled. The two main characters, Ray Eddy and Lila Littlewolf, both single mothers who are struggling through economic hardship, begin trafficking illegal immigrants from Canada into the United States across the frozen St. Lawrence River. What is interesting in this movie is, first, the fact that Lila is Native (Mohawk) and Ray is not; this reveals a crucial aspect of the movie's construction and plot, and highlights some of the controversial aspects with regards to Akwesasne, citizenship, and the freedom of movement that I have discussed so far. Secondly, the specific place where they are able to cross, an "ice bridge," is representative of both the liminality of the community as well as of the arbitrariness of the "official" border between Canada and the U.S.

The two women meet upon Ray finding her car that had first been abandoned by her runaway husband, and then retrieved by Lila for her operations. Threatening to call the state troopers about the "stolen" car, Lila remarks that they have "no jurisdiction on Mohawk land." Thinking her husband is in the trailer as well, she yells for him to come out, and eventually shoots a hole in the trailer door – though her husband is not there, Lila comes back out saying that the "tribal police doesn't like people shooting holes in other people's

houses,” to which Ray retorts that “this is New York State.” Understanding that Ray needs money, Lila mentions a friend of hers who would buy the car for well over its worth, and they travel for the first time across the frozen river. When Ray seems hesitant, mentioning the border and, on the other side, Canada, Lila responds that there is no border, and that it is all Mohawk land. Indeed, since the women’s route takes them back and forth between the Indian reservation on the U.S. side and the Indian reserve on the Canadian side, they hope to avoid detection by local law-enforcement; they of course double their chances by crossing the river over an “ice bridge,” the frozen St. Lawrence, and not using the International Bridge.

As the two women pull into the friend’s drive, a barking dog distracts Ray and Lila gets hold of Ray’s gun. It is then that Ray understands she was fooled; Lila was not bringing her to a friend to buy her car, but to conduct business. After loading their first illegal passengers into the trunk, Ray voices her concern over the illegality of smuggling, to which Lila retorts that it is not a crime, “it is free trade between nations.” To which Ray will later respond, “You people can call it what you want.” Indeed, during one of their runs, Lila discloses how she used to participate in the smuggling of tobacco with her husband – which indeed falls under the notion of free trade between nations, as per the 1794 Jay Treaty, as I discussed above. Lila however uses the same discourse of “free trade” in reference to smuggling immigrants, once it became far more profitable than smuggling cigarettes.<sup>126</sup> Early on in the movie, discursive assumptions about the opposition between

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<sup>126</sup> Today, however, Akwesasne has become notorious for drug smuggling, as reported by the CBC: “Multiple tonnes of high-potency marijuana are smuggled through the St. Regis

Native and non-Native are made quite clear, along with an underlying antagonism. For instance, when Ray returns home after the first run, she tells her son T.J. that “some Indian chick tried to steal your father’s car.” Upset by his father’s disappearance and the turn of events, his response is to go to the reserve and “kick some Mohawk ass.” Similarly, when Ray seeks out Lila to do some more runs, Lila retorts, “I don’t normally work with whites.” On the other hand, Ray being white is perceived as a bonus to Lila, since whites are less likely to be stopped by the state troopers.

Nevertheless, a complex type of friendship develops between the two women, during their conversations as they go to-and-fro across the ice bridge. They each learn of the other’s vulnerabilities and dire situation. However, in this relationship, there is also a shift of power and control between the two women. Lila is originally the one in charge of the smuggling operation, and it is through her connections on the reserve that she gets the deals. The two women remain cautious, and somewhat spiteful towards one another. Yet when they take a Pakistani couple across, everything changes. First, Ray refuses to take them across because “They don’t look Chinese. I don’t just drive anybody over.” For Lila, it remains business. Ray’s clear weariness towards the immigrants’ country of birth (Pakistan) has her search their bag, and later dump it, for fear of it containing weapons or

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Mohawk Reservation, located on the U.S. side, each week by native American groups that are supplied by Canada-based gangs, an operation that also smuggles ‘multi-thousand tablet quantities’ of ecstasy into the United States... The shared international border and geography of the reservation make it conducive to cross-border drug trafficking activity while also inhibiting law enforcement interdiction efforts... at least \$1 billion US worth of drugs are smuggled through the area every year from the Canadian side, and criminals have smooth sailing straight to New York City... [the] nebulous border area where jurisdiction overlaps with native self-government ‘creates this absolute nightmare’ for law enforcement on both sides of the border” (“Akwesasne area an ecstasy smuggling hotbed”).



“nuclear power,” for which she says, “I’m not going to be responsible for that.” Only at the drop-off point do they find out that there was a baby in the bag, and they drive back over the ice to find it. Thinking the baby dead, they drive back in silence, but upon their arrival, the baby is miraculously revived. This leaves Lila spooked, and she announces that she is done with the smuggling operation. However, Ray, needing just one more crossing to finance the down payment on her mobile home, coerces her into joining her for one last journey, by telling her she will help Lila get custody of her baby back from her mother-in-law. But that last run goes wrong, and having to abandon the car that partially went through the ice, the women take refuge at the Indian reservation. However,

Because the police are demanding a scapegoat, the tribal head decides to [expel] Lila for five years [from the reserve] due to her smuggling history, which involved the death of her Mohawk husband. Surprised then saddened by the news, Lila gives in to Ray’s pleas to go free for the sake of her children. However, running through the woods, Ray has a fit of conscience and returns. She gives her share of money to Lila with instructions for taking care of her sons and seeing through [the] purchase plans for [the] trailer home. She and the illegal immigrants are surrendered to the police and a trooper speculates she will have to serve four months in jail (IMDb “Synopsis: Frozen River”).

This synopsis, however, fails to account for Lila’s winning back her son, by triumphantly storming into her mother-in-law’s house and taking him. While Ray is convincing in her role as a single mother, Lila, as commented by Jill Dolen, “is perhaps a bit of a stereotype, as the unemotional, inexpressive Native American who nonetheless observes and comments dryly but perceptively” (“Frozen River”). In retrieving her child, however, she sheds her apparent passivity, and takes control of her life beyond the smuggling operation, to care not only for her child, but for those of another woman as well. This somewhat

sudden state of empowerment, despite her having been expelled from her community, is as much a surprise as Ray's decision to come back and surrender, who proves throughout the movie to be lacking in empathy towards anyone but herself. Ray's gesture, however, of offering Lila a place to stay now that she has been expelled, is somewhat tarnished by her asking her to care for her children as well. In the end run, Ray got everything she wanted, and will be free in a few months. But what will happen to Lila thereafter, who cannot return to her community for five years? The movie concludes with Ray's son being reprimanded by the Mohawk police for having tricked an old woman over the phone into giving him her credit card information. There is a strong illogicality between T.J.'s punishment, which simply involves apologizing to the old woman, and the harshness of Lila's being expelled from her community. As Hunt's movie reveals, there are numerous difficulties within the space of the reserve that undermine smaller acts of healing and forgiveness.

To return now to the idea that the reserve itself has become a center (as opposed to a dark spot on the periphery), as well as a physical and spiritual home, a proactive space from which to assert sovereignty, it seems necessary to also consider the reserve from beyond a perspective of border disputes, restraint of movement, and confrontations – from a newer perspective, in which acts of personal and collective liberation, as well as artistic and linguistic performance, underline discourses of continuity and resistance, rather than discourses of victimization and grievance. Indeed, even though life conditions on many reserves still include extreme poverty, insufficient housing, social, and health services (not

to mention the lack of electricity and running, potable water in many communities<sup>127</sup> or those in close vicinity to polluting sites,<sup>128</sup> such as tar sands), the specific space that is the reserve enables the nurturing of traditional values and kinship affiliation that contribute to Aboriginal people's sense of identity and belonging. The 'safety' of the reserve as space enables the nurturing of a place that can then become a source for creative inspiration, a home.

I am the product of liminal space, the result of union between desperate individuals on the edges of dispossessed cultures and the marginalized spawn of invaders. A liminal existence and a tension in the blood and heart must be the inevitable result of such crossing. How could it be otherwise? But the tension can be a source of creative power... (*Mixedblood Messages* 176)

While Louis Owens specifically refers, in this passage, to his sense of self as “a mixed-blood, a person of complex roots and histories” (176), to conform to either the socially or linguistically constructed, imposed identity of being “Indian” or being “confined to the ghetto-reserve,” is to accept the label of the “hyperreal simulation” that is the ‘indian,’ which would mean, ultimately, to remain embedded in the colonial discourse of absence.

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<sup>127</sup> For some interesting cases, see these websites:

“B.C. Native Community Finally on Electricity Grid.” *FNBC News*. November 11, 2010 [<http://fnbc.info/bc-native-community-finally-electricity-grid>]

“Filthy Water Sickens Native Communities.” *IPS News*. November 3, 2005  
<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=30872>

<sup>128</sup> See in particular the cases of Fort McMurray, Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan, all located downstream from the tar sands development on the Athabasca River basin (“Tar Sands: Environmental Justice, Treaty Rights and Indigenous Peoples”).

Warren Cariou, professor of Aboriginal Literature and Canada Research Chair at the University of Manitoba, in collaboration with Neil McArthur, recently released a documentary on this subject as well: “Land of Oil and Water: Aboriginal Voices on Life in the Oil Sands” (2009).

Being inside the reserve, however, is now a vantage point, directed towards the old center (the city, the urban, civilized space), from which a discourse of liminality re-positions the global point of view inculcated by the old narratives of conquest, in a fight for self-identification and self-determination. The audience is finally seeing and hearing through and from the Indigenous perspective; this audience is looking, finally, towards (instead of from) its own literary, cultural, and social heritage, now turned inside-out, while at the same time, looking at it from the margins.

Several authors have written about this shifting in vantage point, the reclamation of a sense of place, both real and imaginary. For instance, amongst First Nations writers in Québec, Yves Sioui Durand calls for the necessity of “an artistic process founded on Amerindian spirituality and the quest for drama that dares to explore the roots of our culture,” in order to reappropriate “the ancestral imaginary territory of First Nations People” (*“réappropriier le territoire imaginaire ancestral propre aux Premières Nations [au travers d’]une démarche artistique fondée sur la spiritualité amérindienne et la quête d’un théâtre qui ose explorer les racines de notre culture”* (“Lettre ouverte”)). It is this daring to explore that has enabled the stepping outside of a solely reactive mode and into a discursive proactive space, that “strategic location” of positive resistance and transformational power. Dramaturgy, for Yves Sioui Durand, is “an instrument for taking control” (*“un instrument de prise en charge”*) and enables “escaping the loss of the soul” (*“échapper à la perte de l’âme”* (*Porteur* 15)). This is resonant with Randy Lundy’s concept of language as a “transformative decolonizing tool,” which I discussed in my first chapter: it does not only report and show what has been done to the Native populations of

North America, it re-affirms and celebrates what is being done in numerous acts of artistic performance, thus underlining discourses of continuity and resistance, rather than discourses of victimization and statutory grief.

Like Yves Sioui Durand, Rita Mestokosho makes use of poetry to “take control.” Mestokosho is an Innu poet from Ekuanitshit (Mingan), which means, “Take care of the place where you are” – which she does. Through both her writing and her activities in her community as Band Counsellor, she promotes “a specific environmental message because the Innu communities are fighting for the preservation of the natural environment that remains a fundamental element to their identity” (“Entretien avec Rita Mestokosho”).<sup>129</sup> Therefore, and after decades of degradation, rather than looking onto a sense of self or onto a communal space as elements to fuel that shame, as was ‘expected,’ in the act of “taking control,” those very aspects awaken feelings of pride, creativity, and self-worth, and become worthy of narration and embellishment. In his 2008 speech of acceptance of the Nobel Prize, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio dedicates the prize to different authors, including Rita Mestokosho, whom he refers to as the Innu poet “who makes trees and animals speak” (“*qui fait parler les arbres et les animaux*” 11). “Literature,” he continues, “is a means for men and women of today by which to express their identity, to claim their right to speak, and to be heard in their diversity. Without their voice, their call, we would be living in a silent world” (“*la littérature est un des moyens pour les hommes et les femmes de notre temps d’exprimer leur identité, de revendiquer leur droit à la parole, et*

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<sup>129</sup> “Nous avons aussi un *message environnemental* spécifique car les communautés innues se battent pour la préservation du milieu naturel qui demeure un élément fondamental de leur identité.” (My translation)

*d'être entendus dans leur diversité. Sans leur voix, sans leur appel, nous vivrions dans un monde silencieux*" 7).<sup>130</sup> But, to recall Gerald Vizenor's words, "Silence is the tricky start, not the end of our stories" (Vizenor and Lee 142): as I discussed in Chapter One, the imposition of silence was perhaps the very fuel in the creation of these literatures of resistance. There is, ultimately, the notion of a positive resistance that is put in motion, one that emerges from silence as well as from the colonizer's language – one that takes over a language of demonization and animalization, and re-inscribes a sense of personalization and humanization into this indigenous counter-discourse of resistance.

Mestokosho, like Joséphine Bacon, whom I discussed in Chapter One as well, makes full use of her bilingualism in her poetry. Her collection *Comment je perçois la vie, Grand-mère – Eshi Uapataman Nukum*, was first published in 1995 by Les Éditions Piekuakami, and then reprinted by Beijbom Books in 2010.<sup>131</sup> The latter, however, is slightly different, in that the first section features the poems in both French and in Innu (whereas the initial publication was only in French). With the poem in Innu on the left page, and its French counterpart on the right, her works, in this bilingual edition, clearly reveal how the "necessary evil" of learning French can be perceived as a tool towards personal liberation. "To write," she says, "so as not to forget" ("*Écrire pour ne pas oublier*" 71). Indeed, on the back cover of the initial publication, the editors wrote: "Take a taste of a few intense moments in which is lived, on a daily basis, an important split between a

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<sup>130</sup> This section of Le Clézio's speech is also retranscribed in the *Épilogue* to Mestokosho's *Comment je perçois la vie, Grand-mère*.

<sup>131</sup> It is interesting how in spite of Mestokosho having been recognized as an important Francophone Native writer in Québec, it took a Swedish publishing house to finally reprint her collection.

people's millenary history and the contemporary reality of opening up to another world" (*"Goûtez à quelques instants d'intensité où se vit quotidiennement un déchirement important entre l'histoire millénaire d'un peuple, et la réalité contemporaine de l'ouverture sur un autre monde."*) Language, though a tool of conformity and consent, can become one of change and emancipation at the same time. According to Mestokosho, it is about "taming": "French is not my mother tongue. But destiny put it on my path, and we tamed each other" (*"Le français n'est pas la langue de ma mère. Mais le destin l'a mise sur ma route, et nous nous sommes apprivoisées"* 71). Writing in French, she comments, is a necessity, as it enables the diffusion "of our preoccupations to a vast audience, through a poetic language" (*"pouvoir diffuser à un vaste auditoire nos préoccupations dans une langue poétique"* 71). Once again, then, the reappropriation of the colonial languages within First Nations contemporary literatures both subjugates and liberates, and enables the retelling and reclaiming of Indigenous Peoples' histories and rights for sovereign governance.

For instance, Mestokosho successfully rewrites (indeed, reclaims) the reserve-ghetto into a home, a place in which to simply *be* – however controversial and difficult. In her poem "J'imagine," she writes "That to live in a community / That is to learn day after day / What is my true identity / In the hope of a better day... My reserve, my ghetto, my home / it doesn't matter what name I give you / You bury a part of me / You hide a part of my person." (*"Que vivre dans une communauté / C'est apprendre jour après jour / Quelle est ma véritable identité / Dans l'espoir d'un meilleur jour... Ma réserve, mon ghetto, mon chez-moi / Peu importe le nom que je te donne / Tu enfouis une partie de moi / Tu caches*

*une partie de ma personne*” 57). “My reserve, my ghetto, my home:” no matter what it is called, the reserve, she writes, is also a *community*: it suggests a safe space for continuity, unity, and sovereignty, from which to learn, and in which each individual has his/her place. As Mestokosho points out, “every human being has a particular place, we have a *collective vision of life* and never an individual approach” (“*Chaque être humain a une place particulière, nous avons une vision collective de la vie et jamais une approche individuelle.*” “Entretien avec Rita Mestokosho”; emphasis in the original). The final two lines of the poem, “*Tu enfouis une partie de moi / Tu caches une partie de ma personne*” are of particular interest as well: the use of the word “*enfouir*,” which I have perhaps loosely translated as “bury,” can mean any of the following: hide, conceal, cover, enfold, engulf, tuck, cup, sink, or enshroud (Oxford Dictionary). The intricacy of how the reserve can both hide and enshroud the individual is suggestive of the very history of the word: at times a ghetto, at times a home; it is both a protection and a prison, as is clear, for instance, through Lila’s experience of it.

Similarly, the word ‘community’ is heavy with meaning, and goes against the notion of the vanishing, dying ‘indian’ – those who were put into reserves, not to commune, but to eventually disappear or assimilate. What Mestokosho’s poem achieves, then, is to depict the complexity of the reserve: it is no longer the same space as when they were set aside for the use of ‘indians,’ a vacant, lifeless space upon which to pile lean-tos and build cheap housing. It is a complex, multi-faceted place, from which to assert belonging, sovereignty, and power. It is understandable, then, how forcibly removing people and children from this shared ghetto-space created an even larger breach in the



transmission of knowledge and familial ties. However, as I argued through my analysis of “Borders” and what happened to the Mohawk delegation, the present acts of claiming belonging and allegiance to an alterNative citizenship not only underwrite the dominant discourse of nationhood and citizenship, they rewrite, indeed reinstate a sense of duty and accountability towards the community, and no longer towards the nation-state. For to belong to a community, to borrow the expression from Jeannette Armstrong, is “to share one skin”:

In a healthy whole community, the people interact with each other in shared emotional response. They move together emotionally to respond to crisis or celebration. They ‘commune’ in the everyday act of living. Being a part of such a communing is to be fully alive, fully human. To be without community in this way is to be alive only in the flesh, to be alone, to be lost to being human. It is then possible to violate and destroy others and their property without remorse.

... I do know that people must come to community on the land. The transience of peoples criss-crossing the land must halt, and people must commune together on the land to protect it and all our future generations. Self-sustaining indigenous peoples still on the land are already doing this and are the only ones now standing between society and total self-destruction. They present an opportunity to relearn and reinstitute the rights we all have as humans. Indigenous rights must be protected, for we are the protectors of Earth (“Sharing One Skin” 17).

To “share one skin” is the Okanagan way to say “extended family.” This, evidently, resonates with the importance of the act of “writing home,” which I discussed in Chapter One: by revitalizing communal knowledge and affirming, rather than merely restoring, a sense of collective memory, to ‘write home’ is a strategy of intervention that looks towards emphasizing the importance of continuity and belonging. Reappropriating the reserve, the community, one’s *place*, then, is not only about resisting past and present forms of

colonization. It is also about ‘communing’ traditional knowledge and attempting to harmonize it with present-day societal preoccupations. It enables the creation of a space in which the ghosts of the past may be exposed and dealt with, and in which collective awareness, local activism and pedagogical approaches underline the importance of interconnectedness.

However, as both Armstrong and Owens remark, the reserve, albeit small, remains connected to the greater vastness of the land on which it is settled, the future of which “depends upon whose stories we listen to” (Owens, *Mixedblood Messages* 211). As noted above, Louis Owens’ question on whose stories one chooses to listen to continues to bare its importance today, especially with regard to territorial claims, both for land already allotted, and land to be retrieved. “To share one skin,” explains Armstrong, not only “refers to blood ties within [the] community and the instinct to protect our individual selves extended to all who share the same skin” (17). This sense of solidarity, she adds, is also that “of peoples bound together by land, blood and love.” Unfortunately, she continues,

Land bonding is not possible in the kind of economy surrounding us, because land must be seen as real estate to be ‘used’ and parted with if necessary. I see the separation is accelerated by the concept that ‘wilderness’ needs to be tamed by ‘development’ and that this is used to justify displacement of peoples and unwanted species. I know what it feels like to be an endangered species on my land, to see the land dying with us. It is my body that is being torn, deforested and poisoned by ‘development’. Every fish, plant, insect, bird and animal that disappears is part of me dying. I know all their names and I touch them with my spirit (17).

The continuous desecration of both space and place must be addressed if there can be any true form of negotiation and collaboration between states and Indigenous peoples (and I

reiterate how, most recently, Québec's Prime Minister Jean Charest failed in this respect with both the creation and promotion of his Plan Nord). Every author I have addressed so far in this work (and many more) has written on this subject, and stresses the importance of its being acknowledged. For inadvertently, notions of language, memory, resistance, are all interwoven with what happens to the actual place from which one speaks.

### **Conclusion**

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, at a press conference during the G20 summit in Pittsburgh in September 2009, asserted that Canada had "no history of colonialism." Shawn Atleo, the national Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, issued the following statement on October 1, 2009, in response to Harper's highly inappropriate comment:

The effects of colonialism remain today. It is the attitude that fueled the residential schools; the colonial *Indian Act* that displaces traditional forms of First Nations governance; the theft of Indian lands and forced relocations of First Nations communities; the criminalization and suppression of First Nations languages and cultural practices; the chronic under-funding of First Nations communities and programs; and the denial of Treaty and Aboriginal rights, even though they are recognized in Canada's Constitution.

... The Prime Minister's statement speaks to the need for greater public education about First Nations and Canadian history. It may be possible to use this moment to begin bridging this gulf of misunderstanding. The future cannot be built without due regard to the past, without reconciling the incredible harm and injustice with a genuine commitment to move forward in truth and respect ("Shawn Atleo Criticizes Stephen Harper Over 'No History of Colonialism' Remark").

At the time of this response, Canada had not yet officially vouched to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a further element that Atleo

raised in his statement. Notwithstanding that Canada has since decided to support it (in November 2010), Atleo's remark on "the need for greater public education about First Nations and Canadian history" remains valid and still a great source for concern, as I have pointed out in this Chapter, as well as in the previous ones. Canadians have, indeed, much to learn, for as Lee Maracle remarked, "at this time in history, Canadians are unable to face themselves, and so the concatenation between us is limited" ("Oratory on Oratory" 69). Furthermore, she coaxes, "We need to draw upon the tangled web of colonial being, thread by thread – watch as each thread unfurls, untangles, shows its soft underbelly, its vulnerability, its strength, its resilience, its defiance, its imposition, its stubbornness – rediscover Canada and First Nations people" (68). This "soft underbelly" is the matter of concern here – for it is that which one does not want exposed, and it is the reason why many still contend that Canada's history is "ghostless."

In rewriting, indeed reappropriating the allegiance to citizenship, community, and self-location, a specific place is created – one in which the individual is "seen, visible, [and] real" (*Ragged Company* 321) – from which to express, firmly rooted, cultural affirmation and overture towards new avenues for artistic, individual and pedagogical expression and performance. In so doing one gives up the belief of powerlessness and sheds the status of the silenced and oppressed, as has been portrayed in the dominant discourse of Canadian literature. In imposing oneself through acts of defiance and poaching, albeit, however, within "occupied territory," it becomes possible to create narratives of survivance that reach beyond the territorial, the linguistic, the intellectual, or any kind of border. This, furthermore, opens up possibilities to (re)educate the greater public to both Canadian and

Indigenous histories, enabling the audience to see and hear through and from the Indigenous perspective – from inside the reserve. The reserve, in turn, becomes the center for literary, cultural, and social heritage, from which there is much to learn, if one seeks to instigate “concatenation” – across and beyond linguistic divides – within a shared performative space of renegotiation and resistance, that strategic location of positive resistance and transformational power.

**CONCLUSION**

**THIS IS ONLY A BEGINNING**

I always thought, and have often said so to my students, that the introduction is the hardest to write – not true: it is the conclusion. At the same time, peculiarly, it is also the easiest, since it seeks to bring together the summary of one’s findings. And in this sense, finally, it is perhaps the moment most dreaded: with its finality it marks an ending. However, and as I have argued throughout, there is always potential: indeed, the potential to see an end as a beginning, an opening of avenues towards new research, albeit always an extension of what one has learned so far as well. With regards to this sense of finality, or – to borrow Frank Kermode’s expression – the sense of an ending, it is merely an illusion. The decision, or rather, the responsibility of saying “I’m done” is the exact moment as well when one realizes that one is never truly done – nor should one be. For instance, in teaching an introductory course to First Nations contemporary literature in Fall 2011 – which was largely based on my chapter Three on memory, haunting and the idea of “home” – the resulting discussions with my students gave me more new insights on elements that one perhaps tends to no longer see when one is immersed in the writing process. It is thus necessary to take a step back from time to time, and – to quote Craig Womack – question one’s own methodology. As much as teaching that course allowed me to gain confidence in that, so to speak, “I know my stuff,” the fresh perspectives of the students were extremely enriching.

In the same way, as I remarked in my introduction, there was (is) simply no end to the works that could be integrated into this project, those that needed to be interpellated, or that screamed to be included. But again, this is neither a comparative nor a recapitulative project. Rather, it is a progressive, conjunctive one: indeed, the conjunction of Native

American, First Nations, and Métis texts, written in English and French, as a strategy, enables me to approach the discussions around Indigenous literary productions from different perspectives, which, I argue, complement, indeed inform, each other. The mixed and continuous corpus of this field of study, by its very heterogeneity, cannot be subsumed under a single narrative – as cannot the Trickster, as I argued in Chapter One. In accounting for elements of liminality and cross-border, or on-/off-reserve contemporaneity, present-day Indigenous narratives successfully question, upset, and re-write the constructed, fixed and static state of ‘indianness,’ into a state of postindian empowerment. This “troubling” (to borrow from Morra & Reder) strategy is important not only for my analysis but for the field as a whole, for it concretely achieves to open a space in which scholars may discuss the complexities, specificities, and differences within Native/First Nations literatures in relation to their respective and particular sociological, historical, political, and economical contexts, while accounting for the similarities in the provocativeness, the violence, the humour, and the denouncing of injustices embedded in these narratives.

Evidently, as I forewarned in my introduction, it is impossible to account for every literary and artistic project – within the scope of this thesis, or within the scope of any one analysis. However, I contend – and in this lies the beauty of the task – the analysis that I undertook in this dissertation opens different avenues for further study: at the very least, it has led me to the fashioning of a postdoctoral project which, while it is informed by my findings here, seeks to address other genres than those that chiefly make up the field of analysis today, i.e. the novel, dramaturgy and poetry. In this new project, I explore different contemporary modes of storytelling, such as the graphic novel, fantasy, speculative fiction,



and science fiction. Additionally, I explore how these literary productions inform film production, whether the feature film or the short film/animation, and how there is sense of emergency at stake, in that these works need to be given a critical reception, for some of these genres are transitory and ephemeral. Indeed, conventional theories of literary and/or cultural studies do not account for the historical and political specificities of these types of artistic productions. Thus, drawing upon conceptual tools that arise from the already-existent critical theory around Indigenous artistic projects – such as that which I developed in this dissertation – I seek to examine the continuities and discontinuities between the literary and the visual, while straddling languages, genres, media, and generational artistic practices.

Certainly, there remain questions with regard to addressing such a diverse – both linguistically and nationally – corpus as I did here. However, through this cross-border approach, my analysis succeeds in taking into consideration not only the fallacy of cultural and colonial constructs – the linguistic and national borders – that have shaped this field of enquiry; it further justifies and accounts for the fact that the works that make up the field of Native/First Nations literary studies, despite their being similar in the questionings of history, intergenerational gaps, colonial violence, and horizontal patterns of abuse, in no way foster the illusion of being a homogenous whole. Societal preoccupations have become so complex and opaque that it is impossible to address them via a totalizing practice of critical reading. Rather, political, legal and pedagogical issues must necessarily inform such a practice – as I have underlined through my discussions and deconstructions of political and governmental agendas. These literary interventions, then, are performative in their

recognition and reappropriation of dominant discourses, and their unceasing quests to account for, upset, and restore the hidden truths of colonial inheritance. They are performative in the sense that as interventions, they contain a specific intentional action, which is to proceed with the re-education of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as a means to end the “quarelling,” as Lee Maracle has termed it, that continues to exist and prevents avenues of reconciliation, renegotiation, and redress.

Moreover, each and every author I have discussed explores different modes to proceed with this re-education, or this unveiling of hi/story, through a diversity of discursive strategic interventions, which further underlines their heterogeneity despite their similar pursuits. If writing is a transformative decolonizing tool, an instrument for taking control, the writers I have analysed make use of it in different ways: for Joséphine Bacon and Rita Mestokosho, their tool is poetry; for Darrell Dennis and Yves Sioui Durand, it is dramaturgy; Alanis Obomsawin makes use of film and documentary; and Tomson Highway, Lee Maracle, Paula Gunn Allen, Gerald Vizenor, Louis Owens, Taiaiake Alfred, Maria Campbell, Eden Robinson, Thomas King and Jeannette Armstrong make use of fiction, short story, autobiography and theoretical or political essays. Each has sought to perfect their genre, all the while consciously intermingling them with elements of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous thought and beliefs. In this way, they become, in part, self-reflexive journeys, the fictionality of which contains autobiographical elements: through language games, trickster meddlings, conversations with ghosts, and artistic performances, the protagonists in each of these works reinvent themselves through a process of remembrance and resistance.

Why is the reappropriation of language, then, so crucial, so important? Because every instance of resisting a dominant discourse has to be done, precisely, in the language of the oppressor. Having to learn the colonial language, however, has become, as I have argued, a “necessary evil” – for in order to account not only for the past, but for the present as well, a new language had to be invented, one that would transform a legacy of grief and shame into one of healing and celebration. This new language, according to Tomson Highway, is that of mythology:

the dream world where exist, where thrive men with wings, horses with wings, creatures half-man and half-horse once walked this Earth, beings walk about who are half-man and half-goat just like the god Pan, or who are half-woman half-fish, half-man half-coyote, just like the Native Trickster, or who are half-woman and half-spider, again like the Native Trickster, snakes talk to women (but not to men), women give birth without having had sex, dead men rise from the grave. And men – and women, too – are human and divine at one and the same time (*Comparing Mythologies* 49).

Rewriting the human into what had been, for generations, the non-human, in the very language that caused the discourse of inhumanity in the first place, can only be, in this sense, an act of mythical proportions. In this sense, not only does the reappropriation of language become a tool and methodology towards reclaiming and reaffirming (rather than merely restoring) a sense of collective memory and communal knowledge, it enables the transformation of the initial violence of language and its resulting tensions into a source of creative power. Rather than being mulled upon, the colonial language is exploited in terms of humour, parody and exaggeration; and this upsetting is crucial to the formation of a Native/First Nations critical theory, and the conceptualization of a collaborative research

that seeks to partake in a discourse of reconciliation (or concatenation, as Lee Maracle would term it).

Furthermore, what was once a source of shame becomes a source of pride: in shedding the archaic label of ‘the indian,’ and claiming a “primary, feeling citizenship” (Simpson), indeed re-claiming a sense of Warriorness, the point of reference for both text and context shifts upon itself: the reserve, the community, and the individual are rewritten as tokens of empowerment and agency in a process of mutual participation. The community further attests to the individual’s self-location (even if this community is merely a feeling), while the individual partakes in defining the community (whether rural or urban) as a site for home. The cyclical nature of this mutual influence corroborates the idea that there is (and always has been) a continuity in storytelling, despite the silences. Rather, as I have argued, these silences are heavy with meaning, and account for the unspoken; they are the thread that holds the different specters of the past together, and brings them into the present. They are what makes up memory: as One For the Dead, in *Ragged Company*, attests, “time disappears inside us. It becomes real through memory, recollection, and feeling. Then, only then, can it last forever. When it becomes a part of us, a part of our spirit in its never-ending journey” (322). The potentiality of this specter resides in its being a source for transformative power as well: to return to the point of trauma, loss, or violence, is to act upon it – in this sense, providing a voice to the unseen becomes a tool towards growth and transformation. Moreover, it also becomes a tool for resistance: the specter confounds the notion of transparency, and upsets discourses of ghostlessness, of the attempted absorption into the body politic, and of tentative erasure.

The shifting of the point of reference extends beyond the text, to the writer, as well, as it opens up the possibility for the author to write about something other than Native issues or characters. Eden Robinson admits to liking to write about psychopaths and sociopaths in *Traplines*, while Richard Wagamese tackles the difficult narrative of being homeless in *Ragged Company*. They do, of course, write about Native characters as well; in *Monkey Beach* for Robinson, and in *Keeper'n Me*, amongst others, for Wagamese. The paramount and common point between these different texts is the importance of staying true to the story, whatever the story; as Wagamese has said, “Changing the world one story at a time.”<sup>132</sup> In this sense, the story works towards unraveling the stereotypical aspects internalized by the protagonists themselves (whether they are homeless, poor, Native, abuse victims, residential schools survivors, etc.), as they experience their sense of (or lack of) individuality and community through the so-called ‘norms’ that surround them. The story becomes, then, one of resistance, or narrative of survivance as I termed it in Chapter Three: for it involves a reclamation of language, a re-reading of historiography through metanarratives and, finally, a ‘writing back’ at forms of civil alienation and psychotic silence. Only then can one ‘write home’ and revitalize communal knowledge and affirm, rather than merely restore, a sense of collective memory.

By the same token, by upsetting the traditional points of reference, and offering new ways of thinking about these literatures, without them being constrained to or by fictitious frontiers, I argue that there is, then, a form of radicalism in the suggestion and, ultimately, the creation of a new methodology: one which combines interpretation and literary analysis

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<sup>132</sup> “Richard Wagamese: Ojibway Author/Storyteller.” Author’s website.

with critical pedagogy and collaborative research, and which forces traditional literary scholarship away from the normative ‘comfort zone’ of regarding Native/First Nations literatures solely from the perspectives of Canadian or American Lit, into a liminal zone in which the field becomes and affirms itself as a literary discipline of, and on, its own, while effectively borrowing from and crossing over other disciplines. This academic impetus is about deliberation, growth, and transformation. It is also about responsibility: an act of moving beyond the relentless reproduction of cultural dichotomies and racialized bias. The analysis of literary and visual texts is imperative to an emerging criticism in this field. However, this analysis is also about recognizing a common history – be it sombre – and setting grounds for dialogue beyond cultural and linguistic gaps, within a new, shared strategic location in which resistance and renegotiation are sources for creative and transformational power, and for alternative, healing and celebratory discourses; discourses that account not only for the past and the present, but that work towards a possible future of mutual understanding, within a shared space of renegotiation and resistance.

Finally, I contend that the reappropriation of place and language, through positive resistance and reaffirming collective memory, are inter-related and continuously work together in a transformative process, which is as much at the core of most Native/First Nations literatures and artistic events, as are political actions and legal claims. All of which underlines the importance, the urgency, of collaboration and collective deliberation, to not only address, but find solutions to the recurrent threatening themes of domestic and predatory violence, substance abuse, homelessness, intergenerational haunting and shame, and alarmingly high suicide rates. Literature can, and does, inform the political, for it

unveils the rhetorics of transparency, empty promises, and indifference – all of which, ultimately, may be addressed through the tropes of language, resistance, memory and place, insofar as these concepts are reappropriated according to, to quote Louis Owens, “our terms” (*Mixedblood Messages* 7).

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## ANNEXE 1

### FURTHER READINGS

Throughout my research, I have been compiling a bibliography – some of the texts below are featured in my main bibliography, while others are not, for the simple reason that it became impossible to include everything I initially wanted to. However, each of these texts was, in one way or another, an inspiration, and of particular interest to me, to my project. By compiling them here I can, at the very least, share them with anyone who may find them interesting, as well as keep a reminder to myself that I would like to, eventually, address them as well.

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