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Indigenous Refusal and Settler Complicity: Listening Positionality and Critical Reorientations in Helen Knott's *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience*

Deanna Henderson

> I have sat with women who have had to untangle the mess that a lifetime of stereotypes and racism leaves behind. I have held space for the sisters who have had to weep and wail away the colonial harm. I have held space for the sisters whom we have lost to violence. I know that acts of violence against Indigenous women and girls are being perpetuated every single day.
>
> I remember you, sisters.
>
> I wrote this for you. (Knott, *In My Own Moccasins* xv)

> I was told that this book will be a good tool to educate people who do not understand the impact of violence, racism, and colonialism in Indigenous women's lives. I was told there would be people who will gain insight from this book.
>
> I did not write this for you.
>
> I did not write this book so that people can learn how to humanize Indigenous women and gain context for the violence that seems to fill our lives. (xv-xvi)

Prophet River First Nation author and activist Helen Knott's memoir *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience* (2019) not only embodies the difficult and determined work of healing and its interconnections with voice but also amplifies listening, a little-discussed facet of voice, as equally integral to its political and ethical projects. Etymologically, "to listen" is "to pay attention," "to make an effort to hear," "to give heed," "to allow oneself to be persuaded" ("To Listen"). The connotations of receptivity and responsiveness are indicative of the ways in which listening reconfigures how one not only relates to[1] but also comes into relation to the narrative of another and the sur-

rounding discourses. As will become apparent, in this article I attend to the politics and ethics of how settlers engage with Knott's memoir and how this engagement is (in)formed by the discourses of truth and reconciliation and those of murdered and missing Indigenous women. The two excerpts that open this article are suggestive of how her memoir shapes and challenges how one comes into association with these discourses through a politics of refusal that both calls attention to the listening positionalities of the text and grounds Indigenous sovereignties in the presencing[2] of Indigenous women. As Knott asserts, her narrative of addiction, sexual assault, and resilience speaks to "all the women who held space for [her]" as well as the Indigenous women whom she "has held space for . . . to weep and wail away the colonial harm" (xiv, xv). In her introductory remarks, Knott draws a series of interconnections among writing, storytelling, and healing. These interconnections are indicative of intersubjectivities in which healing is a personal, communal, and political act. In claiming kinship with other Indigenous women, she summons "a refusal to be on the other end of Patrick Wolfe's critical, comparative history — to be 'eliminated'" (A. Simpson 22). In this iteration, refusal is more than denunciation. Instead, refusal is knitted to sovereignty as well as the political actions of resistance and resurgence. Refusal is "generative and strategic, a deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another" (McGranahan 319). To refuse is also a "rejection of status quo conditions" and "marks the point of a limit having been reached: *we refuse to continue on this way*" (McGranahan 320). Knott's forthright assertion to non-Indigenous readers — "I did not write this for you" — marks such a limit, which might create distance but not disconnection as it demarcates critical, political, and ethical reorientations.

Taking critical cues from the introduction to *In My Own Moccasins*, in this article I venture into the reorientations required of settlers[3] to become more attuned listeners. One aspect of becoming a more attuned listener is to attend to the resonances and reverberations of refusal with respect and humility and to assume a "critical posture"[4] in which complicity becomes a critical point of encounter. As a white settler who occupies and practises my scholarship in the lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat, I am committed to the processes of critical and "disciplinary redress" (Robinson 11). Emphasizing the work of Indigenous authors and scholars and interrogating and dislodging the centrality

of settler positionality on personal, critical, and structural levels are integral to these processes. In considering how Knott's memoir employs a politics of refusal and how this politics intersects with settler complicity, it is important to bear in mind Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice's comment that "Indigenous texts are by and large responsive, not reactive. They are at least as concerned with developing or articulating relationships with, among, and between Indigenous readers as they are with communicating our humanity to colonial society, if not more so" (xix). Refusal should give settlers pause and prompt further discussion of the efficacies of their listening positionality — mainly the questions of how to address complicity without recentring settler subjectivities or to use it "as a critical trump card" to distance themselves from colonialism (Probyn-Rapsey 70). Instead, as Fiona Probyn-Rapsey proposes, what if complicity is reconceptualized as "a methodology, as a practice and theory of ethical engagement with others and in relation to present encounters with the past" that situate settlers in proximity to colonialism (65, 76)? In which case, how might complicity be reframed to address settler responsibility and accountability (Patel 7)?

Published the same year as *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019), and four years after the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015), *In My Own Moccasins* instills a sense of dissonance among forms of recognition, telling, and listening that have become normalized within discourses of truth and reconciliation in Canada. As I will discuss in more detail later, these discourses value some narratives and disavow others, such as discourses of murdered and missing Indigenous women. Aware of how non-Indigenous people might take up her narrative and overlay it with a problematic form of humanizing in which the pain and trauma of another becomes the primary point of engagement, Knott evokes refusal as "a political alternative to 'recognition'" (A. Simpson 11). She refuses the recognition that casts Indigenous peoples within discourses of deficiency and actually dehumanizes rather than humanizes them. In particular, Knott foils expectations that an affective encounter with her memoir by a settler is itself reconciliatory and all that is needed to redress colonial legacies of racialized gender violence. The politics of recognition, Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard critiques, is highly problematic because of how it is deployed by the state to "serve the interests of colonial power" (25). Citing Frantz Fanon's observa-

tions about "situations where colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence," Coulthard elaborates how colonial rule is dependent instead on "the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on them or granted to them by the settler state and society" (25). Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson similarly outlines how "democratic inclusion" actually extends settlement since this kind of inclusion "is only performed . . . *if* the problem of cultural difference and alterity does not pose too appalling a challenge to norms of the settler society" (20). Refusal, however, is a "political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one's distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized" because "Refusal comes with the requirement of having one's *political* sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing" (11). Nishnaabeg author and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson contends that refusal is rooted in "resurgent thinking" (qtd. in Robinson 22). This means, Simpson explains, that refusal is "not concerned with dismantling the master's house, that is, which set of theories we use to critique colonialism," but "with how we (re)build our own house, our own houses" (qtd. in Robinson 22). A parallel may be drawn to Kanaka Maoli scholar Maile Arvin's notion of "regenerative refusals" that "recognize violence and pain, but not to make that the center of indigenous identity; rather these refusals highlight the importance of envisioning and enacting different futures that are suffused with more love, humor, connection, and freedom" (qtd. in Patel 9). Knott exercises this kind of refusal. By explicitly addressing who is her primary addressee and who is not, and consequently determining how one is interpolated into the text, she mobilizes her political and creative agency to guide how meanings are accessed, derived, and actualized.

Commenting on Indigenous refusal of and "resistance to the reconciliatory gaze" and how the "sanctioned performance of Reconciliation is foundationally distorted," Métis scholar and artist David Garneau stresses the necessity of "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" (23, 27). These are "intellectual spaces that exist apart from a non-Indigenous gaze and interlocution" (26). These spaces are significant because they not only indicate to non-Indigenous people that intellectual work is taking place "without their knowledge" — in both the figurative sense and the literal sense — but also foster a space in which Indigenous "people

simply are," where they are not required to perform in a certain way under the settler gaze (27). As Garneau clarifies, "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" are not those in which the identities of Indigenous peoples are "suddenly resolved and constant" (28). Instead, "These are sites of epistemological debate" where "Participants engage in a continuous assessment of their status and other meanings, but these negotiations are performed in relation to like others" (28). The boundaries of these spaces, however, are not absolute since the work of anti-racism requires "settlers to learn more about their hosts and hosts to know more about their guests, to move through proximity" (28-29). If settlers are invited into these spaces, then they must be "respectful guests which in turn allows Indigenous peoples to be graceful hosts" (29). Settlers who have become "respectful guests" are those who have become "unsettled — who are aware of their inheritance and implication in the colonial matrix, who comprehend their unearned privileges and seek ways past racism" (29).

In his 2020 work *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, xwélmexw (Stó:lō) scholar Dylan Robinson models how these politics are to be followed and respected in regard to a textual space. In two introductions — one meant for a general audience and the other exclusive to an Indigenous audience — Robinson welcomes the non-Indigenous reader to engage with his work but also places limits on that welcome. He instructs the non-Indigenous reader not to read the introduction dedicated to Indigenous people and to rejoin the discussion at the first chapter (25). Respecting this boundary calls on the non-Indigenous reader to "affirm Indigenous sovereignty" (25). Notably, a sense of trust is integral to this affirmation — trust that non-Indigenous readers will honour and respect the terms and allow those terms to guide their engagement. Knott similarly calls on settlers to be respectful guests. "I understand," she states, "that your learning will be a by-product of these words, and that is a good thing. We must understand each other in order to change the world. I invite you into this space with an open heart and with the requirement that you burn your pity and bury your judgements" (xvi). In taking up her narrative, settlers must exercise humility in considering their connections in terms of complicity, accountability, and responsibility: in other words, to reflect on and contend with how they are not isolated from but implicated in the histories and realities represented and critiqued.

This reorientation must be foregrounded by questioning what Robinson aptly describes as "the normative and unmarked forms of listening privilege within *settler colonial listening positionality*" as well as "understanding how the 'settling' of settler positionality functions" (10, 39). This interrogation begins by framing listening and its asymmetries[5] within the discursive terrain of discourses of truth and reconciliation. On the one hand, listening to the testimonies and narratives of Indigenous peoples is depicted as yielding transformative potential and being essential to address historical and socio-political injustices and inequalities. On the other hand, listening is embroiled within systemic and hegemonic forms of settler "listening privilege" such as denial. In the final report of the TRC, "Canadians from all walks of life" are urged to take "action on reconciliation in concrete ways" (185). Imbued with transformative potential, the act of listening is intertwined with these processes, and it is how substantive change can occur. For instance, Vitaline Elsie Jenner, an Indian residential school (IRS) survivor and a child of survivors, states in the final report that "I'm quite happy to be able to share my story. . . . I want the people of Canada *to hear, to listen*, for it is the truth" (13; emphasis added). One non-Indigenous woman who witnessed survivors' testimonies remarks that "By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change" (21). These comments accentuate how part of listening's transformative potential is its dialogical appeal in which reconciliation is "an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (16). In this regard, listening also acknowledges that others have the "capacity to give an account of their lives that is reflexive and continuous, an ongoing, embodied process of reflection" (Couldry 580). Such an understanding of listening is also grounded in Emmanuel Levinas's notion of responsiveness as an "ethical or face-to-face relation wherein, above all else, the subject is responsible for the other" (Thill 540). Within this framework, responsibility has dual meaning and purpose: it refers "to the capacity of the self to respond to the desires and needs of the other . . . and the ethical obligation to do so" (Thill 540).

However, an assumption that undergirds the TRC's mandate is that "testimonies will be heard and recognized by settler Canadians in a politically meaningful way" (Cook 5). The question of *how* settlers activate listening guides the work of settler scholar and former residential schools claims manager Paulette Regan. "What if," she asks, "we were

to embrace IRS stories as powerful teachings — disquieting moments in which we change our beliefs, attitudes, and actions?" (13). Regan also reminds us that "*how* we listen can be transformative or can simply reinscribe the patterns of colonialism" (191). One mode of listening that risks reproducing colonialist patterns is "the stance of the colonizer-perpetrator who listens to survivor testimony with the empathy of a spectator" (230). Regan proposes that settlers listen to move beyond expressions of "violent innocence" such as "moral indifference and denial" (35). Instead, she argues, settlers must "attend to our unsettling responses to testimonies as important clues to our own decolonization" (230). She implores settlers to turn their gaze inward as a way to draw closer associations with settler colonialism. Ultimately, this turn inward entails learning to listen in a way that engages "our whole being, using silence not to deny but to welcome the transformative possibilities of the stories we don't want to hear" (191-92). What emerges from this conceptualization of listening is that listening in and of itself is not inherently transformative, but the work of listening can be. Central to this work is recasting the question of settler innocence — "Why weren't we told?" — to one of implication: "Why weren't we listening?"

With this question in mind, the phrase "the stories we don't want to hear" warrants closer examination as part of the work of listening because it gestures to a problematization of the assumed positive efficacy of listening as an easy remedy. Particularly problematic is the extent to which expressive agency is bound to and potentially limited by those who are not listening or listening selectively. Justice points to this dynamic in how truth and reconciliation are (mis)understood in a settler nation such as Canada. "[I]t's telling," he comments, "that the singular term 'reconciliation' has become the shorthand form of what was originally conceived as the compound 'truth and reconciliation'" (158). Omission of the term "truth" from discourses in settler Canada is grounded in a legacy of national historical amnesia and illustrates that, "for the Canadian government and many Canadians, reconciliation was a one-time process" (158-59). Without truth, reconciliation loses accountability and becomes a platitude of the status quo (158). Justice's observations stress that the position of privilege settlers hold in a settler state informs receptivity and responsiveness, especially when such actions entail recognition of settler complicity. These observations also amplify that a refusal to listen or "not being able to listen on one's own

terms" should not be conflated with an inability to listen or an inability to speak (Tracy 42).[6]

A case in point are the criticisms of Indigenous scholars, artists, and activists who have long been skeptical of state-sanctioned forms of reconciliation and interrogate how the discourses of truth and reconciliation are affirmed or disavowed within settler society. Of particular note is how these discourses narrowly focus on the IRS system in such a way that the terms of engagement are palatable and resonate with settlers (Corntassel et al. 144). Following the Indian Residential Schools Agreement in 2005, the IRS system came "into public view for most non-Indigenous Canadians in direct association with stories of sexual and physical abuse and men labelled as pedophiles" (Henderson 16). Already restricted by "the constraining definitions of injury, liability and damage" in private law, media representations confined the trauma and violence of IRS to crimes between individuals rather than situating them within more long-range, systemic, and socio-political issues (Henderson 7-8). Indigenous scholars such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk), and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee Nation) alert us to how these issues are inextricably linked to settler colonialism's land seizure project and the "logic of elimination"[7] that guides it. If reconciliation is to be substantive and more than just mere "window dressing," in Simpson's words, then systemic changes must occur ("Land and Reconciliation"). As Alfred makes clear, these changes must include "massive restitution" (qtd. in Corntassel et al. 144). For Simpson, change also means "respecting when Indigenous peoples say no to development on our lands," "dismantling land claims and self government processes that require us to terminate our Aboriginal and treaty rights to sit at the table," "being accountable about the collective damage that had been done and is being done, and supporting the regeneration of languages, cultures, and political systems" ("Land and Reconciliation"). These criticisms accentuate that confronting colonialism requires more than turning to the past. As Corntassel, Chaw-win-is (Nuu-Chah-Nulth), and T'lakwadzi (Kwakwaka'wakw) argue, it also requires facing "an ongoing process" (144). By decontextualizing the IRS system from the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, settlers do not have to contend with being implicated in the broader structures of state violence and colonial policy.

Failure to account for the violence directed at Indigenous women is one of many "'irreconcilabilities'" that is "integral to the selective and

historically revisionist discourses by which reconciliation is currently configured" (Hargreaves, *Violence* 145). A decade after the settlement for IRS survivors was reached, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's response to demands for an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women was that "we should not view this as a sociological phenomenon" but as a crime (qtd. in Henderson 7). As Jennifer Henderson notes, "the category of *crime*" connotes "the law's dealing in the finite and certain" and disregards the "sometimes invisible social and historical forces that constitute the 'sociological phenomenon'" (7). In 2019, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's remarks on the use of the word *genocide* in the final report, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, mimicked the logic and rhetoric of the Harper government. Stating that "it is a bit more appropriate to talk of a cultural genocide" (qtd. in Hébert), Trudeau sought to relegate the discourse to a term that has been enfolded into the settler imaginary as a regrettable part of the nation's narrative, yet he also resisted contending with systemic racism and colonial violence.[8] With doubt cast on the veracity of the word *genocide*, discussion of how "hard words" are needed "to address hard truths" was eschewed in settler society (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 6).

As mixed-race Cree scholar Robyn Bourgeois explains, "while 'missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls' is generally understood as a contemporary phenomenon, violence against Indigenous women and girls isn't — the seeds of this contemporary injustice have been planted over the course of settler colonial history in Canada" (66). Indigenous women, Bourgeois continues, "have unanimously identified settler colonialism as the root cause of all forms of violence committed against Indigenous women and girls" (68). Andrea Smith delineates how the oppression of Indigenous women is integral to settler colonialism, which must impose and naturalize race and gender hierarchies "in order to colonize peoples whose society was not hierarchical" (qtd. in Bourgeois 69). In her essay "Violence and Extraction: Stories from the Oil Fields," Knott similarly comments on how the power traditionally held by Indigenous women "needed to be undermined and usurped" for settlers to "acquire power and full ownership over the land" (153). She traces how these realities manifest through the partnering of government law, policy, and capitalistic ventures in resource extraction. Knott connects increased violence toward Indigenous women in her traditional homelands in northeastern British Columbia and Treaty 8 territory to the establishment of gas and oil industries and the accompanying

"man-camps, which then foster environments that can lead to violence against women" (150). "Thus," she states, "sexism, patriarchy, and sexual violence have been entrenched in colonialism and cannot be separated from the pursuit of sovereignty" (153). Citing Muscogee (Creek) Nation scholar and lawyer Sarah Deer, Knott elaborates that "'it is impossible to have a truly self-determining nation when its members have been denied self-determination over their own bodies'" (153).

For Knott, the pursuit of sovereignty is inextricably linked to the processes of healing that quell the silences engendered by colonial violence and trauma. "Silence," Batchewana First Nation scholar Cheryl Suzack observes, "is an antagonist Knott's memoir struggles against even as she conveys how deeply rooted silence is within Indigenous communities" (2). Citing moments such as when Knott's friend bangs her head against the table when she learns that Knott was raped, when Knott's mother turns away as she confesses that she and Knott's father suspected that Knott was molested by a family member as a toddler, and when Knott herself howls when she is told that her cousin was raped, Suzack notes that, "As silence finds its way into other relationships, we realize the magnitude of its power" (2). She delineates silence as a loss or absence of language. However, also worth considering is how silence surfaces in relation to other forms of expression. When Knott learns that her cousin was raped, for example, she is not silent but howls. Although Knott's friend banging her head on the table and Knott's mother turning away do not involve speech, these are forms of bodily expression. These instances suggest that silence is not a substitution for the inexpressible but indicates when truths are kept from articulation. Knott elucidates that silence and, by extension, colonial violence are not unidirectional but unfold in complex ways and occur on multiple registers. As indicated by her engagement with and use of different genres — essay, memoir, poetry — silence and colonial violence must also be addressed on multiple registers. So too must settlers pay attention to the various ways in which they are complicit as well as how Knott's use of different genres indicates that, though colonial violence and settler colonialism appear to be totalizing structures, they are not absolute.

By engaging with these different registers, Knott evokes an important facet of refusal: restructuring the relationship from one between speaker and listener to one between the "listener and the listened-to." As Robinson argues, "from Indigenous perspectives, the act of listening should attend to the relationship between listener and the listened-to"

in which the listener is not the sole subject (15). Knott's rendering of listener and listened-to necessarily reshapes receptivity and responsiveness. Here we may return to her assertion that "I did not write this for you" marks a limit. Knott draws boundaries between the narrative *I* and *you*, the settler audience. These boundaries offer a model of engagement in which *I* and *you* and their implied differences cannot be collapsed into one another since they are suggestive of different historical, political, and ethical positionings. The shift of *you* from the introduction to the opening pages of the memoir complicates and decentralizes settler positioning because Knott addresses Indigenous women and not settlers:

> You wince.
>
> You attempt to display no signs of your internal reactions to the shame that gets caught in her throat, but every hesitation in her story proves that silence can be a tangible beast as it forcibly pulls your head to a lowered position. You feel every struggled sentence as she speaks, or maybe you have to be a mother to feel it? Or maybe you have to be a mother who once neglected her own to feel it.
>
> They almost lost me that time.
>
> I almost lost myself. (*In My Own Moccasins* 3-4)

The intimate connection between the pronouns *you* and *I* in this passage is apparent in the reciprocal responses and how they are shaped not so much by listener and speaker as by listener and listened-to. In this instance, the processes of disrupting silence do not prioritize speech in and of itself. Instead, they privilege listening to and for the various resonances and articulations in order to consider how to respond to them. Affected by "the tone of her words," the listener winces, not necessarily in avoidance of pain but in recognition of it: "You feel every struggled sentence as she speaks." Just as voice is embodied, so too "silence can be a tangible beast." Joining the adjective *tangible* with the metaphor of the beast shifts the affects and effects of silence from the abstract into the realm of material realities and lived experiences. This point is pronounced in the final two lines, which echo the reciprocity between listener and listened-to as loss is connected to both the individual and the community. Similar signification resounds in the repetition of "*almost* lost" (emphasis added). On the one hand, the word *almost*[9] signals nearness to what Anishinaabe scholar Maya Ode'amik Chacaby describes as the "tenuous space *between* Being Missing and Being Murdered," a

space in which Indigenous women and girls are "caught up, hooked in, counted, catalogued, and fixed as objects" (126). On the other hand, the word *almost* conveys "not quite." Alluding to the proximities of both nearness and "not quite-ness," the exchange between listener and listened-to is shaped not only by the shared reality of their pain but also by the shared reality of healing and resurgence.

The injunction "I did not write this for you" locates settlers outside this exchange. To identify completely with or insert one's self into this exchange presumes that to read or hear about the pain and healing of another is to know what it is like to be that person.[10] This presumption disregards the differences in historical and socio-political positioning within the colonial state: mainly, the position of privilege that settlers occupy because of the dispossession and disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples. In her memoir, Knott implicitly marks this privilege and its dysfunctions when she gives an account of her family's "proud and strong history" and how "Life in the colonial state has been our great unknowing" (171). The circumstances and consequences of this "great unknowing" are oppressive and pervasive, from the Indian Act, which did not make her great-grandfather or "his children white. It just made them lost" (177), to the IRS system, which "almost broke" her family (179), to her mother's fear that her children will be seen as "'dirty Indian kids'" (40), to the aforementioned silence that entangles her relationships. Knott is more explicit when she addresses settlers directly for the second time. "Again," she states, "if you don't know anything about residential schools and thought that they were something that happened a couple of hundred years ago, please educate yourself. It should no longer be the responsibility of Indigenous people to do the work for you" (295). This change in address jolts settlers from total immersion in her telling — what might have been a fixated, albeit complacent, listening — as the privileges of settler listening positionalities are brought to the fore. Herein lies one of Knott's requirements of settlers who listen to her narrative. Embedded in her refusal to teach is a demand that settlers take on the responsibility of learning their colonial inheritance and violence. Even though Knott recognizes that settlers will learn from her memoir, she also directs them to move outside her narrative with the request to "please educate yourself." In this regard, that request becomes an ethical imperative for settlers not only to acquire knowledge about colonial histories and legacies, but also to question their positioning within those structures.

One way Knott reaffirms that her responsibility is to Indigenous women and holds space for them is through poetry. Recalling her use of multiple genres to refuse the different registers of colonialism, the content of her poetry echoes the content of her memoir and vice versa. The resonances across poetry and prose in *In My Own Moccasins* convey the interconnections that Knott draws among herself, other Indigenous women, and healing. For example, in the poem "The Things We Taught Our Daughters," Knott articulates how their "great unknowing" shapes racialized gender violence by rupturing forms of knowledge and protection: "Somewhere we learned blind eyes / and buried skeletons / provide just enough relief" (276-77). Consisting of thirteen stanzas, the poem is one way in which Knott holds space for Indigenous women. Located in the third and final section of the memoir, titled "The Healing," the poem brings together individual and communal healing. Knott explains that it is a "culmination of [her] healing journey, countless conversations, and reflection on violence in Indigenous communities both rural and urban" (275). The poem as a form of expression and informed by expression offers a response to silence and its corrosive effects. Recalling her earlier assertion that she did not write her memoir for settlers to glean violence and suffering, the poem is not a catalogue of pain. Settlers are not meant simply to bear witness to the harm and displacement that colonialism causes. Instead, settlers must move beyond seemingly benevolent recognition by addressing complicity in terms of how they are accountable for their cultural and individual embodiments of settler colonialism. This deliberation is necessary if settlers are to attend to how their modes of listening affect those of inquiry and interpretation, especially in regard to shaping knowledge, recognition, and responsiveness (Hargreaves, "*Finding Dawn*" 94).[11]

Knott poignantly rejects, for instance, pity as a response. Not only must settlers disabuse themselves of assumptions about being the primary addressee; Knott also tells them to "burn your pity and bury your judgements." Her joining of the words *pity* and *judgment* signifies the ways in which pity, delineated in terms of race, privilege, and power, is voyeuristic and divisive as it distinguishes between those who suffer and those who do not (Birmingham 50-51). Contained within Knott's refusal of pity is also a problematization of empathy as a response to suffering, especially when that response is projected as humanizing. Pity is a sentiment generally spurred by the suffering and pain of others. Because of these associations, pity is often conflated with empathy

(Balaji 65), both of which problematically assume the possibility of feeling the pain of another. However, unlike empathy, which unfolds through the assumption of close association, pity functions from afar, creating structural, spatial, and temporal distances. The implication of this distancing is that pity can also be understood as an undertone of denial because it entails a denunciation of events, contexts, and subjectivities. Pity focalizes, to use Eve Tuck's words, "damage-centered narratives" of Indigenous peoples and communities in moments of crisis, highlighting conditions as not only dire but also inevitable (415). Pity replicates colonialist understandings of Indigenous lives as those to be "cast as outside of a hegemonic frame for recognizing what makes [them] human" (Amber Dean, qtd. in Savarese 162). Ultimately, pity displaces accountability and justice with abnegation and even indignation.

Recalling that she once "begged to be seen as human," Knott promises herself that "I would never again beg for what is mine" (*In My Own Moccasins* xvi). The premise of this assertion is eloquent: Indigenous lives are human lives. So too is it an eloquent expression of refusal as resistance and resurgence. It is with this conviction that Knott rejects the de/humanizing project that recentres settler learning of Indigenous people's humanity, especially when that learning occurs solely through the lens of abject violence and harm. Implicit in her conviction is an understanding and enactment of refusal that imagines and works toward futures different from those inscribed by settler colonialism. One example of this kind of refusal is Knott's presencing of her unnamed friend as well as the decision to refer to her friend as "Her" throughout the memoir. The decision not to name her friend bears several implications. One is that Knott reiterates the limit of the welcome. Withholding details such as her friend's name hinders full access to her narrative as much as to Knott's. It also conveys a nearness of identification between Knott and "Her." By not naming "Her," Knott alludes to the ambiguity that surrounds loss and disappearance that does not necessarily have a specific location, that "tenuous space *between* Being Missing and Being Murdered." However, Knott also articulates this nearness as intersubjectivity rather than interchangeability with "Her." When Knott first introduces "Her," for example, she describes their friendship as a finding of both companionship and shared vulnerabilities: "Yet she and I found shades of grey inside of us that even we didn't know how to communicate. We were two little Native girls, both of us settling into our post-puberty bodies. Both pretty" (60). "But," Knott qualifies,

"no one told us being pretty and Native was a dangerous combination" (60). Knott continues to describe how they were able to disclose to one another the abuse that "suffocated" them (60). As she states, "We only had to look into each other's eyes to know that we were both drowning, but in different ways. It didn't need to be said out loud. This knowledge — even through silence — provided a life preserver back then" (61). The description of how the shared knowledge of their abuse is communicated between them "even through silence" suggests an intimacy and a strength in their friendship forged by the complexities of lived experiences that lie outside settler forms of recognition such as the pity that accentuates "damage-centered narratives."

Even when Knott later discovers that her friend might completely disappear into her addiction and must endure the pain of realizing that the two of them will not be sober or age together (288), she focuses on the need for finding and presencing by emphasizing love and care. "I wanted to find Her," writes Knott. "Not to tell her that she needs to sober up and take care of herself. . . . I wanted to find her to tell her that I loved her, that I have always loved her and that I always will" (288). Finding "Her" is Knott's assertion of love and selfhood. Knott reasserts her commitment a few pages later: "I carry Her with me. / I carry Her into the Sweat Lodge. / I carry Her with me as I dip my toe into different seas. / I carry Her with me into each new opportunity" (290). The endurance of "always" resonates in the repetition of "I carry Her," signalling that she remains present and that Knott, as she recalls one of her professors stating, is "'a thriver'" (290). In this regard, the limitation of settler access to Knott's friendship with "Her" takes on another inflection. Settlers do not "carry Her" as Knott does. Instead, they must recognize their own proximity to the processes of silencing and violence that render "pretty and Native . . . a dangerous combination." Settlers must also be attentive to the connotations of "thriver" as a subject position of resilience and flourishing not only rooted in the past and present but also holding a position in the future.

The cadence of the lines "I carry Her" carries over to the concluding poem of the memoir, "To Indigenous Folks Contemplating Suicide." Not only does this poem hearken back to the use of words such as *suffocated* and *drowning*, which invoke processes that lead to death through a lack of air or an inability to breathe, but also, importantly, it articulates healing and resilience in terms of self-determined futurities. "Breathe" is the opening line, and over the course of the poem the listener is told

to "Suck back the air" (301). With this reminder, the breath becomes a bridge between listener and listened-to in which the listener is reminded of having "come from warriors" and to "Let traditions and ceremony be your medicine" (302, 303). In the concluding stanza, the listener is told once again to "Breathe. / . . . / Even if it's the hardest thing you have ever had to do" (304). The listened-to calls forth acts of healing and living while they gesture to the connections and relations of the listener. Significantly, these connections and relations are grounded in the present as well as in the future. The listened-to speaks to the listener from this position in the final lines of the poem: "Don't tell me that you can't, / Because I, / I've been there too" (304). The final lines not only refuse death but also conjure up the future. The work of the settler here is to acknowledge this shift and "do the difficult work of holding onto settler colonial violence and Indigenous resurgence" (Patel 17). Specifically, settlers must use complicity not only to engage with past and present colonial structures but also to begin to imagine and work toward different and unsettled futures.

In "the post-Truth and Reconciliation context," argues Robinson, "there has been increasing hunger for particular . . . 'more easily digestible' forms of Indigenous culture and narratives" (49). The narratives circulated in the media, Robinson continues, are those that emphasize trauma and healing as a singular process in which Indigenous people overcome supposed deficiency (49). How and which narratives are amplified are entangled with settler forms of listening that seek distance from settler colonialism, situating it comfortably in the past or as unavoidable, unmovable circumstances. *In My Own Moccasins* speaks volumes in its refusal of these prescribed colonialist narratives. The politics of refusal articulated in the memoir is complex as it moves through various registers. Not only are the privileges of settler listening challenged; settlers are also called on to face colonial violence by listening for moments of complicity instead of fixating on the harm done to Indigenous women. Furthermore, Knott deploys refusal to create and hold space for Indigenous women where they can attend to the work of healing and presencing. The politics of refusal in *In My Own Moccasins* fosters ways to rethink engagement with Indigenous narratives and reshape relationships. "I did not write this for you" does not ask settlers to turn away. However, it does urge them to pause and reorient listening to hear this statement in conjunction with those for whom Knott wrote her memoir: "I wrote this for you [sisters]." To do so is actively to

engage with settler complicity and Knott's refusals as resurgence. To do so is to listen quietly for an invitation and its attending responsibilities.

Notes

[1] For further reading, see Ratcliffe

[2] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues that acts of presence are foundational for Indigenous resurgence. "Indigenous societies," she states, "were societies of doing; they were societies of presence" (*Dancing* 92). She continues, "Indigenous cultures understand and generate meaning through engagement, presence and process — storytelling, ceremony, singing, dancing, doing" (93).

[3] In using the term "settler," I draw primarily from Chelsea Vowel's understanding of it as referring to non-Indigenous people in Canada of the "European-descended sociopolitical majority" (16). However, I also acknowledge Dylan Robinson's point that, perceived as only a "fixed identity category," the term "risks reifying a cohesive and essentialist form of subjectivity that does not take into account subtle gradations of relationship, history, and experience" (39).

[4] I borrow this phrasing from Sam McKegney, who comments on how the various "strategies of ethical disengagement" taken up by "non-Native critics to avoid doing damage to Indigenous texts may have had unintended inverse (and adverse) effects of obfuscating Indigenous voices and stagnating the field" (58). McKegney proposes allyship as a "critical posture" for non-Indigenous critics. Although my article does not engage with allyship, it does align with McKegney's assertion that, to "respect the creative work of Native writers, the intellectual work of Native critics, the activist work of Native community members, one must engage — listen, learn, dialogue, and debate" (63).

[5] "Listening relations," argues Audrey Thompson, "across difference are typically asymmetrical. Those in power set the terms by which race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are to be addressed" (85).

[6] Dale Tracy makes this observation in a critique of Cathy Caruth's *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013). This work, Tracy argues, shares issues similar to those in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) in its conceptualization of trauma as "unspeakable" and thus diminishes the meaning of trauma in terms of how it is articulated and witnessed (35, 36).

[7] In his examination of settler colonialism and genocide, Patrick Wolfe refers to the "settler-colonial tendency" as "the logic of elimination" (387).

[8] As Elisabeth Paquette argues, "'culture' can operate to delimit the term with which it is associated" (144). Looking at how the Canadian government employs the term "cultural genocide," Paquette contends that the term "genocide" becomes depoliticized (144).

[9] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word *almost* as "Mostly all, nearly all; for the most part" and as "Very nearly but not quite."

[10] Tracy argues that Martha Nussbaum's notion that a literary work allows someone to "know what it is like to be someone else" is "misguided." "Rather," Tracy proposes, "literature helps one to know what it is to encounter another" (4).

[11] In her analysis of Métis filmmaker Christine Welsh's documentary *Finding Dawn*, Alison Hargreaves comments on how the film "reflects responsible research practices where gendered colonial violence is concerned. It is about how our chosen modes of inquiry impact our findings and affect the terms on which we might then imagine and pursue social transformation" (94).

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