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To Carry Pain, to Heal through Ceremony: Indigenous Women's Standpoint in Indigenous Australian and Canadian Literatures

Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu

> We carry pain until we can reconcile with it through ceremony. Pain is not framed like a problem with a solution.
> — Terese Marie Mailhot (qtd. in Sehgal)

Introduction: Challenging Settler-Colonial Discourse on Indigenous Terms

IN THIS ESSAY, I AIM TO ILLUSTRATE how Indigenous[1] literatures challenge the dehumanizing discourse perpetuated by dominant cultures of settler-colonial states that often reduce the sexualized and racialized genocidal violence against Indigenous peoples to bleak statistics of oppression and disenfranchisement. Indigenous knowledge and agency, as expressed through literature, serve to mend the ruptures caused by the imperialist and colonialist legacies of systemic marginalization and gender-based violence. Applying Indigenous women's standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson, "Towards") as a critical lens, I argue that Indigenous literatures create ceremony: writing Indigenous experiences "out of the spaces of domination" (Alexander and Mohanty xviii) subverts clichéd depictions of the voiceless, victimized, oppressed, and historically minoritized[2] Indigenous 'other' (Mohanty), and instead creates meaning of and belonging in a commons on Indigenous terms (Martin et al. 317).

Herrero and Baelo-Allué state that "Postcolonial subjects can be seriously traumatized by colonialist/racist discourses of identity, but they can also work through these traumas in order to rewrite themselves into existence" (xxi). Along these lines, literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice (enrolled citizen of the Cherokee nation) argues that "Our literatures are the storied archives — embodied, inscribed, digitized, vocalized — that articulate our sense of belonging and wonder, the ways of meaning-making in the world and in our time" (186). By validating and emphasizing

Indigenous knowledge, voice, and agency in terms of "a self-determined political, cultural and personal identity" (Rooks 49), Indigenous texts disrupt and reclaim their own narratives in an ongoing process of decolonization (Arvin et al.; Bardwell-Jones and McLaren; Lugones; Mack and Na'puti; Martin et al.; Linda Smith; Tuck and Yang).

A comparative analysis of the novels *Swallow the Air* (2006) by Wiradjuri author Tara June Winch and *Five Little Indians* (2020) by Cree author Michelle Good explores how establishing relational spaces has a profound impact on reclaiming Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing (Moreton-Robinson, "Towards" 337) that sustain and manifest the continuity of Indigenous cultures (Kovach 136). The authors foreground the power of reclaiming reciprocal relationships among the human, natural, animal, and spiritual worlds (Wilson 58) to disrupt dehumanizing power dynamics inherent in dominant structures. By acknowledging the value and relevance of Indigenous knowledge systems, these literary works celebrate Indigenous agency and the enduring strength of Indigenous communities.

Indigeneity Enduring

Indigenous literatures represent the continuity of Indigeneity amid historical legacies of gendered, genocidal violence that have resulted in intergenerational trauma.[3] Kanaka Maoli scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui introduces the concept of enduring Indigeneity as a critical analytic that acknowledges how Indigenous nations continue to survive and resist the destructive impacts of genocidal settler colonialism today. These forms of systemic oppression "deprive individuals of a specific set of human rights that do not cause immediate death, but rather lead to the slow and steady destruction of the group" (Rosenberg and Silina 107). Some scholars speak of a "slow motion" (Ntanyoma and Hintjens) or "cold genocide" (Kjell Anderson; Cheung et al.), others of a "genocide by attrition" (Rosenberg; Rosenberg and Silina; Wakeham), to refer to the historical and contemporary processes of inequalities structured by gender (Arvin et al. 9) in multiple ways. Gender-based violence is a constitutive element of imperialist-colonialist processes of invasion, settlement, and state formation, inherent in the structure (Wolfe 96) and logic of the settler-colonial project (Moses 34) and beyond. The theoretical framework employed here reveals that genocidal violence and policies across the settler-colonial world have been and continue to be structured by gender in multiple ways (Arvin et

al. 9).[4] The historical sexualization and racialization of Indigenous women (Barker; Morgensen) continue to bear on contemporary experiences of genocidal violence against Indigenous women. To be clear, Indigenous women do not constitute a monolithic entity; rather, I emphasize in this essay the complexity and diversity of Indigenous women's experiences and positionalities (Mihesuah 7) vis-à-vis dominant settler-colonial societies, shaped by the socio-cultural, -economic, and -political environments affecting their social realities.

Against this background, the literatures discussed here represent enduring Indigeneity based upon Indigenous women's knowledge created through their positionality in gendered, racialized power dynamics of the contemporary settler-colonial world. Literature thus represents knowledge creation to address persistently oppressive societal structures by recognizing "the persistence of Indigenous concepts and epistemologies, or ways of knowing" (Arvin et al. 21), in the struggle for justice and ultimately sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson, *Sovereign Subjects*).

Theoretical Framework

In this essay, the critical analysis of Indigenous women's writing is grounded in Indigenous feminist theories[5] and engages with feminist standpoint theory, in particular Indigenous women's standpoint theory as introduced by Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson of the Quandamooka Nation ("Towards"). Broadly speaking, feminist standpoint theory[6] aims to understand how social location and experiences of marginalized groups shape their understanding of the world and the knowledge that they produce (Haraway). These "situated knowledges" (Haraway) are shaped by and inalienable from positionality within specific socio-cultural, -political, and -economic structures at the intersection (Crenshaw) of race, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, and other. Feminist standpoint theory posits that the lived experiences of marginalized groups, such as women, represent an epistemological vantage point (Harding, *Science Question* 26) in providing critical insight into as well as challenging dominant power dynamics.

However, the mere experience of marginalization does not constitute a feminist standpoint, as Kristen Intemann observes; rather, a standpoint is "achieved through a critical, conscious reflection on the ways in which power structures and resulting social locations influence knowledge production" (785). By uncovering how these power structures are created and maintained, a standpoint "aims to transform those relations through

the production of knowledge" (Ardill 325). Thus, the perspective of groups regularly minoritized in white settler-colonial patriarchal cultures — including women, Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQQ+, and people of colour — allows a more nuanced understanding of the social conditions resulting in their historically marginalized status. Recognizing the social locations of the above groups is far from espousing homogeneous experiences, which remain individually diverse and varied (Lenz 100; McClish and Bacon 29). That is not to say that the mere social location of marginalization and oppression — whether across gender, race, or economic or political access — is the *sine qua non* for producing knowledge (Moya 136; Wylie 341). Rather, a feminist standpoint is achieved through "an understanding of one's individual location in the social order as part of and shaped by that order's social and political contexts" (John 96). Critically reflecting on how power hierarchies and ensuing social locations affect the production of knowledge (Intemann 785) will result in the development of a "critical dissociation" (Wylie 348) from dominant forms of knowledge.

Indigenous standpoint theory further develops the concepts of feminist standpoint theory. It is based upon the recognition that Indigenous peoples' lived experiences, histories, and relationships with land and creation generate knowledge that offers valuable epistemological insights into postcolonizing[7] power dynamics (Ardill; Cox et al.; Foley; Minniecon et al.; Nakata). Feminist standpoint theory is regarded as the "evolutionary base" (Foley 45) for Indigenous standpoint theory since both prioritize theorizing knowledge from a position different from the dominant system of knowledge. According to Martin Nakata, this takes place at the 'cultural interface,' which he defines as "the explication and analysis of how the social organisation and practices of knowledge through its various apparatuses and technologies of the textual production organise and express themselves in that everyday, as seen from within that experience" (215). The cultural interface, as the contested knowledge-space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, presents a starting point for Nakata to inquire into how Western epistemologies produce asymmetrical power relations that in turn sustain the complex social realities of Indigenous peoples and communities (Ardill 333). An Indigenous standpoint acknowledges storytelling as a form of knowledge transmission; however, it significantly lacks a gender dimension, as Moreton-Robinson points out.

The Goenpul scholar introduces an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint as a more inclusive theory within social science research

(Moreton-Robinson, "Towards"; also see Cox et al.). An Indigenous women's standpoint highlights the unique insights and understandings that emerge from the lived experiences of Indigenous women in the production of knowledge in the "constant struggle against normative dominant patriarchal conceptual frameworks" (Moreton-Robinson, "Towards"331). An Indigenous women's standpoint, like a feminist standpoint, represents an effective critical lens as it dismantles the implied objectivity and neutrality of Western patriarchal knowledge production:

> [It] generates its problematics through Indigenous women's knowledges and experiences acknowledging that intersecting oppressions will situate us in different power relations and affect our different individual experiences under social, political, historical and material conditions that we share either consciously or unconsciously. These conditions and the sets of complex relations that discursively shape us in the everyday are also complicated by our respective cultural, sexual, racialised, abled and class differences. (340)

Moreton-Robinson emphasizes here the complexity and diversity of Indigenous women's lived realities. In contrast to a feminist standpoint, though, an Indigenous women's standpoint emphasizes the legitimacy and validity of embodied knowledge in relation to concepts of sovereignty, kinship, and ancestral connections. It recognizes the interconnectedness of Indigenous peoples with their "respective countries, human ancestors, creative beings and all living things" ("Towards" 335). Indigenous women's social location, as she argues, "provides a unique vantage point based on our experiences of colonisation and our different way of being human" (342). Indigenous knowledges are thus produced through lived experiences that expose patriarchal structures of gendered, genocidal violence.

In the context of this essay, an Indigenous women's standpoint represents a practical methodological framework for the analysis of Indigenous literatures. The authors discussed here negotiate pervasive genocidal violence through narratives of survivance,[8] resistance,[9] and resurgence.[10] An Indigenous women's standpoint can offer alternative understandings of the gendered and racialized power dialectics at work in these texts; they expose the insufficiency of Western patriarchal ways of being and knowing. In this light, the novels discussed here create ceremony; they expose historical and contemporary violence and transform colonial power relations through the knowledges generated by ontological relationships

to sovereignty, kinship, and ancestry, including the Earth and all living beings in a process of decolonization.

Literatures of Be(long)ing

Wiradjuri author Tara June Winch's debut novel is symptomatic of how Indigenous literatures can disrupt genocidal structures of racist and sexist oppression by negotiating Indigenous experiences and knowledges. *Swallow the Air* revolves around May Gibson, an Indigenous teenage girl of mixed heritage, and her journey to find belonging. The novel starts with an end, May's mother's death by suicide. The main character displays specific knowledge from a position of "strong objectivity" (Harding, *Whose Science?*), marginalized by socio-cultural, -political, and -economic structures at the intersection of race and gender. May's sense of self is imbalanced by intergenerational trauma based upon the Stolen Generation[11] as evident from her mother's traumatic memory: "Goulbourn, '67. All my brothers and sisters had been put into missions by then, except Fred who went and lived with my mother's sister. And me, I was with my mother, probably cos my skin's real dark, see — but that's another story, you don't need to know that" (Winch 23). Obviously, racist societal structures privilege lighter skin. There is no place for Aboriginal people in the novel unless they are cleaning white people's houses, like May's mother. Tucked away in a part of town where they can be neither seen nor heard, they live in a subsidized housing area ironically called Paradise Parade: "Way down, past the flags and half a million dollar beachfronts, there hid a little slice of scum. From the wrong side of the creek, we'd had the privilege of savouring the last crumbs of beachfront property. Soon they'd demolish all the fibro and move us mob out to the western suburbs" (33). May's sense of unbelonging is intensified by the power hierarchies between the Aboriginal community and the white community, literally written in graffiti on the wall. When one day May tries to get a glimpse of a part of the beach presumably frequented exclusively by white neighbours, her identity as a Black Indigenous woman results in violent sexual abuse. Incapable of "hiding her skin," the teenage girl is assaulted and raped by a white man: "'This gunna show ya where ya don't belong dumb black bitch'" (37). The text paints a broader picture of a society structured by class and race segregation that results in the discrimination and violation of Indigenous women and girls.

The impacts of colonization and genocidal violence have severely

affected the psychological and emotional well-being of Aboriginal families, communities, and nations (Dudgeon et al., *Connection*). May's mother's story reveals how all women in her neighbourhood share the trauma of forced child removal, often resulting in mental health challenges: "[They] were messed up, climbing those walls, trying to forget. It wasn't a good time for the women, losing their children" (Winch 24). The death of May and Billy's mother is not solely precipitated by the history of the Stolen Generation but also compounded by years of intimate partner violence and ensuing physical, emotional, and psychological abuse: "Midnight whimpers, so faint, so light as if never of a victim. We see it through the crack of our bedroom door. Billy and me, watching Mum's head swinging into the cupboards, her crazy hair flinging into her own bloody mess. 'Don't tell me to get a fuckin job'" (87). Violence — whether at the hands of a partner, from racist societal structures, or as a result of the trauma of genocidal history — exacerbates mental health issues, leading to depression and mental health disorders, as the character of the mother illustrates:

> Mum's stories changed when [my father] left. She became paranoid and frightened of a world that existed only in her head. Who was going to beat her mind? Dad wasn't there anymore, but she still saw him, he still managed to haunt her. I remember the madness, the fear. Was he hiding under the bed, Mum? Was he in the cupboards reaching out for your wrist? (88)

At this point in the novel, the author paints the picture of a community disconnected from traditional ways of being and knowing, a situation exacerbated when the minimal thread of family connection unravels. Upon their mother's death, the siblings move in with their aunt, who has an alcohol abuse disorder and lives in a physically abusive relationship. When Billy leaves the dysfunctional home after a confrontation with his aunt's boyfriend, May's world collapses, fragmenting the glue that held her sense of self: "I felt Aboriginal because Mum had made me proud to be, told me I got magic and courage from Gundyarri, the spirit man. It was then I felt Aboriginal, I felt like I belonged, but when Mum left, I stopped *being* Aboriginal. I stopped feeling like I belonged. Anywhere" (97).

Motherless and homeless, May embarks on a journey to find a place to belong — a journey that results in a circle of dead ends. She finds Billy, who succumbs to addiction; she tracks down her father only to remember that he is a violent and abusive monster; she lives in the city as an outsider, both among Indigenous folks who know that she does not belong and

among dominant society that treats Indigenous Australians as second class at best and as criminals at worst. When her journey leads her to track her maternal Wiradjuri roots, May recollects her mother's stories and stories that she heard from aunts and elders on the way: "Mum's stories would always come back to this place, to the lake, where all Wiradjuri would stop to drink. Footprints of your ancestors, she'd say" (141). Her search for her mother's Aboriginal mob leads May to the mission where her grandmother grew up, revealing the insidious dynamics of intergenerational trauma resulting from the Stolen Generation and the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse suffered at missions: "'Other people don't understand, when that bad spirit happens to family, it stays in the family, when we [are] born we got all our past people's pain too. It doesn't just go away like they think it does'" (170).

The text clearly underscores how the dysfunction that we observe originates in power hierarchies of genocidal racist structures of violence that shape the main character's experiences as a survivor of sexual and family violence, racist discrimination, loss of loved ones to suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, and poverty. Along the lines of Moreton-Robinson, who argues that "an Indigenous women's standpoint is ascribed through inheritance and achieved through struggle" ("Towards" 340), the novel generates knowledge through the characters' social position, inextricably tied to the intergenerational trauma of genocidal violence: "'There is a big missing hole between this place and the place you're looking for. That place, that people, that something you're looking for. It's gone. It was taken away. We weren't told, love; *we weren't allowed to be Aboriginal*'" (Winch 182). Contrary to the elder's belief that Indigenous ontological connection has been lost, the novel underscores the idea that May's sense of belonging is not solely determined by the ongoing historical legacy of racist and sexist genocidal violence. Only when her romanticized notion of reconnecting with her maternal roots falls apart does May come to realize that she has belonged all this time:

> It all makes sense to me now. . . . This land is belonging, all of it for all of us. This river is that ocean, these clouds are that lake, these tears are not only my own. They belong to the whales, to Joyce; they belong to Charlie, to Gary, to Johnny, to Issy, to Percy, to Billy, to Aunty, to my nannas, to their nannas, to their great nannas' neighbours. They belong to the spirits. To people I will never even know. (183)

Here the novel foregrounds an Indigenous women's standpoint, emphasizing how the main character's ontological relationships with ancestors, kin, the animal world, and country[12] inform her epistemology (Moreton-Robinson, "Towards" 341). The journey that May undertakes informs her understanding of identity by negotiating her social location through ontological relationships:

> [A]t the water I am always home. Aunty and my brother, we are from the same people, we are of the Wiradjuri nation, hard water. We are of the river country, and we have flowed down the rivers to estuaries to oceans. To live by another stretch of water. Salt. Even though this country is not my mother's country, even though we are freshwater, not saltwater people, this place still owns us, still owns our history, my brother's and my own, Aunty's too. Mum's. They are part of this place. (Winch 194)

In contrast to a settler-colonial perspective that perceives land as individual property, an Indigenous women's standpoint analysis illustrates how Indigenous knowledge is shaped by a relational connection to lands, oceans, rivers, and mountains in the context of the novel (Arvin et al. 22). The text emphasizes that Indigenous be(long)ing is embodied knowledge of "locating oneself in relation to country in our account of ourselves" (Watego 45). Evidently, May places herself within her mob's genealogy[13] by recognizing that, as a Wiradjuri woman, she carries her ancestors and her country within her.

Winch's novel draws from the Indigenous tradition of storytelling circles (Brown and Di Lallo; Graveline; Kovach) to expose the fallacy of settler-colonial epistemology. The journey that May takes and the stories that she collects and remembers come full circle at the end of the novel, which portends new beginnings: Aunty's house is literally torn down, demonstrating that societal power differentials evidently remain unchallenged. However, by applying an Indigenous women's standpoint as a critical lens, the reader recognizes that the text creates ceremony. According to bell hooks, "oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (*Talking Back* 43). Along these lines, the novel creates ceremony through its validation of Indigenous knowledge systems by reconfiguring interconnectedness with ancestors, kin, and all living beings — which, according to Moreton-Robinson, is the basis for Indigenous sovereignty ("Towards" 335).

Literatures of Resurgence

Cree author Michelle Good's novel *Five Little Indians* explores the inter-generational trauma of the residential school system in Canada. An Indigenous women's standpoint sheds light on the socio-cultural, -eco-nomic, and -political dynamics responsible for shaping the experiences of five survivors forcibly taken from their families and released from resi-dential school at the age of sixteen. Although the individual stories of the characters at the fringes of society vary, a critical Indigenous standpoint analysis unveils how multiple forms of oppression structure the embed-ded power hierarchies that result in the characters' marginalization and revictimization during and after their time at the mission.

The children experience severe sexual, physical, and psychological abuse at the hands of the priests and nuns at the mission. Racialized methods of control and subordination include dehumanizing Indigeneity, for example by shaving the children's heads as punishment — in many Indigenous cultures, hair has a spiritual and symbolic value.[14] All surviv-ors develop different coping mechanisms after leaving the mission: the character of Maisie resorts to self-harm, cutting, substance abuse, and prostitution, exposing the destructive force of racist and sexist institutional and societal structures; childhood sexual abuse is consistently linked to a survivor's entrance into prostitution and later victimization as adults (Farley; Nixon et al.). Maisie displays characteristics of escapism (Ward and Inserto 28), which describes how survivors numb fear, trauma, and pain through substance abuse as a way of coping with past sexual violence and current physical pain. Standpoint theory describes "an understand-ing of one's individual location in the social order as part of and shaped by that order's social and political contexts" (John 96). Accordingly, the novel interrogates the insidious genocidal structures through the trau-matic experiences of the protagonists, which generate specific knowledge to reveal the hypocrisy and violence of existing power structures. In the end, internalized self-blame remains a futile mechanism for the character of Maisie to make sense of a lifetime of consistent sexual, physical, and emotional victimization (Nixon et al.). The novel demonstrates that the experiences of an oppressive and exploitive societal system do not trans-form into a catalyst for agency and resistance (Alexander and Mohanty x) for Maisie. Instead, the text indicates her despair at regaining her own humanity when Maisie states that "My chance of being Jimmy's girl was

gone before I even left the Mission" (Good 75). The character dies by suicide from an overdose.

When applying an Indigenous women's standpoint, it becomes clear that positions of knowledge are earned through struggle to make sense of contemporary Indigeneity, culture, and community, challenging the oppressive colonial logic of dehumanization through retracing and embracing relationality. This struggle against colonial objectification and violence persists in the lives of contemporary Indigenous women, as illustrated when, upon aging out of the mission, Lucy narrowly escapes a predator who tries to exploit her sexually, illustrating the contemporary sex trafficking crisis in Canada that disproportionately affects Indigenous women and girls (Roudometkina and Wakeford): "For Indigenous women, colonization has involved their removal from positions of power, the replacement of traditional gender roles with Western patriarchal practices, the exertion of colonial control over Indigenous communities through the management of women's bodies, and sexual violence" (Huhndorf and Suzack 1).

Along these lines, Lucy's experience manifests the gendered power dynamics of settler-colonial racialization and sexualization of Indigenous women's bodies. Lucy finds shelter with Maisie, who organizes a job for Lucy at the brothel that she cleans. All Indigenous women in the novel confront a range of racist and sexist stereotypes affecting their daily lives: "You Indian chicks are good for two things, and both of them happen in motel rooms" (Good 97). The societal structure affords Indigenous women no agency, either suffering sexual exploitation in prostitution or resorting to low-income domestic labour. At the cleaning job, Lucy meets Clara, another survivor of the mission. When Lucy becomes pregnant, Clara navigates the system that denies Indigenous women the agency and sovereignty to assume maternal roles and to care for their own children. Clara helps Lucy to flee the hospital clandestinely as child welfare services threaten to separate her from baby Kendra and forcibly take her to a residential school:

> "I gave them a fake address when I signed you into the hospital."
> "Why the hell did you do that?"
> "Just in case."
> They looked at Kendra. Kendra would not become a case. (127)

Evidently, an Indigenous women's standpoint illustrates how the characters' experiences have engendered knowledge to confront the dominant

power structures that aim to dismantle the fabric of Indigenous communities through forced child removal. At this instance, Clara and Lucy succeed in building what Ashley Noel Mack and Tiara R. Na'puti call "deep coalitions," a process that centres Indigenous voices by "engaging with Others at the colonial difference while enabling robust challenges to colonial violence by reasserting indigeneity" (349).[15] Embedded within Indigenous ways of being and doing are principles of relationality and kinship, exemplified by Clara's actions of arranging an apartment and furniture for Lucy, assisting her in navigating a hostile system to pursue her nursing studies, and fostering their kinship by supporting Lucy in raising Kendra. In many Aboriginal societies, "motherhood was an affirmation of a woman's power and defined her central role" (Kim Anderson 83). The construction of characters who generate and nurture Indigenous kinship and community within the text successfully undermines the racist and sexist narrative that devalues the role of Indigenous mothers.

An Indigenous women's standpoint acknowledges that Indigenous relationality through kinship, community, and spirituality constitutes sources of knowledge that disrupt existing colonial power dynamics. Clara exerts decolonial resistance through her work for the American Indian Movement. However, it is by developing Indigenous kinship relations and reconnecting with Cree culture and spirituality that she becomes a symbol of healing. Clara leads Indigenous survivors on a path of justice and healing at the point where Indigenous women's "shared knowledges and experiences within hierarchical relations of ruling and power converge and are operationalised" (Moreton-Robinson, "Towards" 342). As a Native Court worker, she defends her people from wrongful convictions:

> The guy, not much more than a kid, had been caught stealing apples from a corner grocery. . . .
> "He'd just been let out of Indian School, up north somewhere. They kept him until he was eighteen, then put him on a bus to the city."
> Lucy shook her head. "Those people. What was he supposed to do? Starve?"
> "Yeah, that's what I said. The judge didn't like it much, but I tried to explain he just didn't know what else to do and had nowhere to go."
> "Like us. Just thrown away." (Good 225)

Clara succeeds in challenging power structures that otherwise force sur-

vivors like her into a continuous cycle of incarceration and abuse, specifically because of her social location and experiences as an Indigenous woman. Drawing from shared knowledge in a traumatized community of survivors empowers Clara to challenge structures that serve to keep Indigenous nations at the fringes of society. Accordingly, the novel does not simply emphasize violent colonial abuse; instead, it emphasizes the importance of actively engaging in the process of decolonizing persistent power hierarchies (Mack and Na'puti 348).

Cree-Métis scholar Kim Anderson argues that "how you live your life is also ceremony" (8). Good's novel creates a character who creates knowledge through struggle by embracing Indigenous ways of being and doing, thus charting a path to healing. At the conclusion of the novel, the return to ancestral land and burial of the remains of Clara's friend Lily, who passed away because of abuse and medical neglect at the mission, symbolize the potential for healing from trauma and the prospect of new beginnings.

Conclusion: Indigenous Literatures Enduring, Resisting, and Healing

> If stories are archives of collective pain, suffering and resistance, then
> to speak them is to heal; to believe in them is to reimagine the world.
> — Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes ("Speaking Truth to Power" v)

The above analysis of novels by Winch and Good illustrates how Indigenous women's standpoint theory serves as a productive and meaningful analytical framework. Understanding the power dynamics and societal structures that contribute to the deliberate erasure of Indigenous histories and contemporary Indigenous realities is an integral aspect of engaging in the process of "colonial unknowing" (Mack and Na'puti 348). An Indigenous women's standpoint helps readers to gain a more nuanced understanding of how Indigenous literatures challenge repressive "settler colonial curses that disfigure and diminish" (Justice 70) contemporary Indigeneity. Elaine Coburn and Emma LaRocque argue that, "Despite the context of historical and ongoing genocide, in their activism, in their artistry, and in their scholarly writing, Indigenous women are affirming their agency and humanity against oppressive, dehumanising colonial relationships" (115). Indigenous texts position women within their social context as subjects with agency, recognizing that the knowledge they create represents a means to subvert intersecting oppressions of genocidal violence.

Thus, Indigenous women's standpoint theory has been shown to represent an effective strategy to analyze how Indigenous literatures create ceremony as a vehicle of "renewal and continuity into the future" (Kroeber 25) by reaffirming the fundamental role of Indigenous relationality (Hanson). The novels discussed here validate Indigenous knowledge systems, underscoring the significance of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing (Moreton-Robinson, "Towards" 340) for disrupting the same power structures that are responsible for and continue to perpetuate Indigenous marginalization. Reclaiming agency and power through Indigenous knowledge is crucial for navigating, resisting, and unmasking settler-colonial systems of oppression in the pursuit of sovereignty. As the late Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew stated, "Indigenous literature is, indeed, powerful medicine with which contemporary Indigenous writers are taking back our spirits" (194). Consequently, Indigenous literatures represent ceremony in mending and replacing colonial ruptures, fissures, and silences through narratives of resistance (Arvin et al. 21), resurgence (Hanson; Simpson), and healing, all woven together through Indigenous knowledge.

Notes

[1] In this essay, I mainly use the term "Indigenous" when referring to Canadian First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, Australian and Torres Strait Islander First Peoples, and Indigenous peoples across former settler-colonial societies. As a non-Indigenous, white, middle-class, female-identifying scholar, I acknowledge that this terminology remains limited (Hargreaves; Peters and Mika) and that Indigenous peoples identify in diverse and multiple ways (Damm; Rumsey). I will refer to Indigenous peoples' self-identification where known.

[2] The term "minoritized" recognizes that specific groups of people have been marginalized historically by structures of inequality of the dominant culture. Minoritized groups share the experience of being excluded but do not represent a homogeneous entity or experience oppression in the same way (Wingrove-Haugland and McLeod). I use the term without intending to obfuscate forms of agency and resistance by marginalized peoples but wishing to emphasize the power hierarchies that an Indigenous women's standpoint reveals.

[3] Extant scholarship illustrates the close relationship between colonial violence and the social reality of Indigenous nations and communities in Australia and Canada today (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; Bourassa et al.; Jones; Tatz; Tjepkema et al.; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). See also Atkinson and Woods; Bombay et al., "Intergenerational Effects"; Bombay et al., "Intergenerational Trauma"; Hackett et al.; McQuaid et al.

[4] Contemporary violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA (Lezard et al.) people has been acknowledged as a protracted and ongoing genocide against Indigenous nations (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [Canada] et al.).

[5] See also, for example, Archuleta; Arvin et al.; Barker; Green; Huhndorf and Suzack; Mihesuah; Suzack et al.

[6] Feminist standpoint theory was developed by Dorothy E. Smith and Nancy Hartsock, then expanded by other scholars, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Donna Haraway, and Sandra Harding, among others (see Collins; Crenshaw; Haraway; Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology"; Harding, *Science Question*; Hartsock; hooks, *Feminist Theory*; and Dorothy Smith).

[7] Moreton-Robinson employs the term "post-colonising" to the ongoing colonizing power dialectic in the context of Australia ("Towards" 344).

[8] On Indigenous storytelling as an act of healing and survivance, see Eigenbrod; Episkenew; and Vizenor.

[9] Hargreaves explores and highlights the stories, experiences, and voices of Indigenous women who have actively resisted violence and discrimination, shedding light on their struggles and resilience.

[10] Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson introduces resurgence as nation building by generating networks of complex relationships with human and non-human beings, including with "plant and animal nations, our families, the waters, the skyworld, communities, and nations" (23).

[11] Today, twenty-five years after the *Bringing Them Home* report, Indigenous families continue to experience forced child removal at a rate exponentially higher than for non-Indigenous families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up thirty-seven percent of the total out-of-home care population but comprise only six percent of the total child population in Australia. They are ten times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Indigenous children. See Liddle and Gray.

[12] In Aboriginal Australia, the Indigenous concept of belonging to and responsibility for land is encapsulated by the word 'country.' According to Pat Dudgeon et al., "Descent is about belonging to a people and a place. This involves kinship — that is, relationships and obligations to other people and place or 'country'. A notion of 'country' is fundamental to Aboriginal identity. . . . Where one is from, and the people one belongs to, have always been and will always remain important. Demonstrating where one is from, what 'country' and group/people they belong to, is critical to any Indigenous person in their self-identity and when introducing oneself to other Indigenous people" ("Aboriginal" 5).

[13] Discussing the novel *Shell Shaker* by LeAnne Howe, Justice, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, demonstrates how the protagonist "places herself firmly within a genealogy and a purpose" by recounting her name, spiritual, and tribal relationships (80).

[14] Long hair can have spiritual significance in Indigenous cultures, and the act of cutting hair represents the severing of the child from the community (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 32).

[15] Mack and Na'puti's work is informed by decolonial scholars (Lugones).

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