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Towards an Alternative Poetics of Space: Intersections of the Feminine and the Environmental in Recent North American Indigenous Fiction in English

W poszukiwaniu alternatywnej poetyki przestrzeni: motywy kobiecości i środowiska w anglojęzycznej prozie rdzennych pisarek Ameryki Północnej

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Introduction

This Ph.D. dissertation aims to explore the congruence of space, environment, and femininity as represented in selected twenty-first-century fiction written in English by North American Indigenous women writers. Settler colonialism adversely affected the condition of both women and the environment in North America. Indigenous women have traditionally carried environmental knowledge acquired through intergenerational exchange and an intimate and reciprocal relationship with local ecosystems. Nathalie Kermoal points out that Indigenous women's ecological wisdom has functioned as a guarantee of healthy community relations and environmental prosperity: "women's relationship to land is bound up with values that are integral to the well-being not only of their families and communities but also of the environment" (120). This knowledge, however, became utterly marginalized or even erased by settler colonial heteropatriarchal structures. Indigenous writers restore these reciprocal interconnections to contest settler structures and mappings. The choice of literary texts from both sides of the 49th parallel allows for a comparative reading and a tentative delineation of the distinct features of American and Canadian Indigenous spatially-oriented women's writing. Literary criticism has often prioritized questions of Indigenous identity, traditional cultural heritage, colonial histories and traumas. By contrast, this dissertation envisions to explore the overlaps between Indigenous female condition and nature, and the place-making potential of the dynamics between humans, especially women, as well as between people and the environment, which question colonial spatial paradigms.

Colonists used normative cartography as a tool to appropriate vast territories of Indigenous land in the New World. The process of mapping territories legitimized colonial presence and the subsequent emergence of settler colonial nation states. Through cartographic representation of space, settlers were able to conveniently erase Indigenous presence from seized territories. The new land politics introduced by settlers emphasized land ownership and its function as a commodity meant to be possessed and exploited. Therefore, for the purposes of the colonial project, Indigenous communities had to be relocated from their ancestral lands to free territories for European settlement. Mishuana Goeman, a Seneca scholar, in her influential project on spatiality in twenty-century Native American women's writing, emphasizes that in the settler colonial context

> the production of space, referring to landscapes that arise out of social practices and geographic forms of organization along the lines of gender, race, and class, are structured to maintain a sense of stable colonial histories and power. In relation to settler colonialism imposing colonial geographies must be understood as yet another method to eliminate or eradicate or absorb that which is Native. If applied to geographies, we can come to understand the simultaneous unmarking of the area as Native land with a mapping of it as private corporate property as part of the geographic knowledge regimes. (2013: 30)

Goeman thus directs attention to the multidimensional processes that accompany the emergence of colonial spaces. Colonial geographies are more than a physical appropriation of land—they impose settler colonial social and land management structures, as well as require elimination of Indigenous peoples in various dimensions. Native bodies and spatialities are mapped as divergent from settler normative cartographies: "Native space is delegated to exist outside national settler terrains, even while it is controlled and manipulated by settler governance. As Native bodies are constructed as abnormal and criminal, they, too, become spatialized. Natives occupy certain spaces of the nation and are criminalized or erased if they step outside what are

seen as degenerative spaces" (33). Settler discourses frame Indigenous people and geographies they occupy as marked by degeneracy and corruption in order to legitimize Native dispossession and marginalization.

Indigenous writing challenges settler cartographies by (re)mapping North America. Goeman defines narrative (re)mapping as

> the labor Native authors and the communities they write within and about undertake, in the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making, to generate new possibilities. The framing of "re" with parentheses connotes the fact that in (re)mapping, Native women employ traditional and new tribal stories as a means of continuation or what Gerald Vizenor aptly calls stories of survivance.[1] (3)

Imaginative (re)mappings of settler colonial spaces center Indigenous stories, ontologies and knowledge systems as a means of resistance against settler colonial geographies and of envisioning Native thriving. Storytelling emerges, therefore, as an important medium of activism and social change. Goeman argues that Indigenous stories, both traditional and contemporary, "incite us to imagine literary possibilities that deconstruct tired colonial paradigms" (13). Hence, the Seneca scholar stresses Indigenous literature's potential to critique and generate tangible change. Moreover, the focus on women's writing allows, according to Goeman, to question and unsettle settler "heteropatriarchal representation of national space" (14), as well as engenders Indigenous alternatives to those gendered mappings.

Settler oppressive structures are enacted through active discrimination against, and gender violence perpetrated on, Indigenous women, girls and queer persons. This

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[1]Introduced by a Chippewa scholar, Gerald Vizenor, survivance is an influential concept in contemporary Indigenous studies, defined as the continuation of Indigenous stories that opposes settler discourses. For Vizenor survivance is "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" (85). The concept emphasizes the return to the Indigenous tradition of storytelling as a means of resistance against colonial impositions and settler realities.

leads to a situation in which Indigenous women's condition is continually marked by precarity. Sarah Deer, a Muscogee scholar, directs attention to the ubiquity of sexual violence against Indigenous women in settler states that

> is experienced at such high rates in some tribal communities that it becomes "normalized." Native women know that there is a high likelihood of experiencing rape at some point in their lives, and preparing for this inevitable violence resembles a full-time job. It is part of the daily lives of Native women, "normalized" but never acceptable. (5)

This commonplaceness of violence and its internalization under settler colonialism, both within and outside of Indigenous communities, defines Indigenous women's existence as precarious; their lives are shaped by constant navigation of realities that establish their bodies as violable.

Settlers have perceived Indigenous women as exotic and hypersexual since the colonial contact. As argued by Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Choctaw), "[a]s opposed to portraits of European women, who were shown fully clothed and demure, paintings of the New World included depictions of Native Women as symbols of savage sexuality in the wilderness: topless and voluptuous, often carrying a spear, adorned with feathers and tobacco leaves, and surrounded by animals" (59). Such representations, locating Indigenous women as a part of untamed landscapes and in close proximity to wild animals, result in animalization of their bodies and subsequent dehumanization. Like land, Indigenous women were viewed, therefore, as open for conquest: "Native women were seen as sexual beings free for taking, and indeed, sexual violence against Native women was common after invasion" (59). This stereotyped settler discourse continues to this day as, in the words of Michelle Good (Cree), in the mainstream consciousness the Indigenous woman "is disposable. She is an object to be used and discarded. She is less than human and thus can be treated as such" (96). The settler dehumanization

of Indigenous women presents them as deprived of personhood and rights, while their bodies emerge as violable.

Today the stereotype of Indigenous woman as a "squaw," a derogative term pointing to her assumed sexual leniency, as well as her overrepresentation in the context of prostitution, result in the excessive criminalization of this gendered and racialized group. Focusing on Native women's presumed transgressions of social norms, whether through sex work or addictions, mainstream discourses construct them as the Other to the settler respectability. In her analysis of the murder of a Salteaux woman, Pamela George, Sherene Razack notes the contingency between Indigenous female bodies and the places they occupy. Both are framed by settler discourses in the category of degeneracy, wherein women's "bodies in degenerate spaces lose their entitlement to personhood through complex processes in which the violence that is enacted is naturalized" (129). The media often reinforce stereotypical images of Indigenous women's degeneration imprinted in the settler consciousness (Doenmez 85; Dean 13-14). Amber Dean in her book project related to the Vancouver's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls highlights this persistent dehumanization of Indigenous femininity in settler discourses, noticing that "they were repeatedly marked in media reportage and by police officials and politicians as 'prostitutes' or 'hookers,' as 'drug addicts,' and more subtly as impoverished and racialized 'others': in other words, by how they were framed as simply not belonging to hegemonic conceptions of the normatively human" (14). Surrounded by rhetoric that repeatedly questions Indigenous women's personhood, the society at large has limited prospects of recognizing them as human (Razack 127).

The law enforcement and justice systems in settler North America are complicit in the processes of Indigenous women's othering and, by extension, the

naturalization of violence against them. Robyn Bourgeois, a mixed-race scholar of Cree descent, argues that "the over-criminalization and under-protection of Indigenous women and girls has long been a pattern of the Canadian justice system" (77). The police forces' failure to address the violence against Indigenous women and girls manifests in such instances as denying the family the right to file a missing person report or inadequately conducting investigations based on racial prejudice and stereotypes (76). Due to the history of discrimination, Indigenous women are frequently reluctant to contact the police when they experience violence. As argued by Colleen Dell, "[t]heir reasons for this avoidance include fear that they will not be believed, especially if they are victims; that the police will be unresponsive; and that they will be embarrassed" (130). The history of law enforcement's failure to recognize and properly investigate cases related to violence against Indigenous women is persistent also in the United States. In the American context, the legal order shapes realities where violence against Indigenous women remains unpunished—where "rapists [walk] free on a regular basis—even taunting their victims and tribal officials because of legal loopholes" (Deer xii). For a long time, the intricate judiciary system in the United States obstructed bringing non-Indigenous perpetrators of sexual abuse and other violent crimes on tribal lands to justice since tribal courts lacked the authority to criminally prosecute non-Indigenous persons (41). At the same time, the rates of perpetrators being prosecuted by federal or state courts remained alarmingly low (41).[2] In Caroline F. T. Doenmez's words, "the media, the justice system, and the law have disappeared Indigenous women" (87). In this respect, Indigenous women in North America are subjected to a politics that does not see them as persons.

[2] These problems have been partly corrected by the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization (2013), as well as by the later introduction of Savanna's Act (2020) and Not Invisible Act (2020), as discussed later in this dissertation.

Social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women puts them at higher risk of experiencing gender violence. For example, their precarious financial situation results in transport-related social exclusion. The scarcity or virtual lack of public transport reaching Indigenous reserves in Canada and reservations in the United States, accompanied by high costs of vehicle maintenance, leads Indigenous women to search for alternative modes of transportation. For this reason, they often resort to hitchhiking. Travelling in strangers' vehicles, especially in sparsely populated areas with limited mobile phone coverage, exacerbates Indigenous women's condition of precariousness and vulnerability to experiencing violence. Indeed, Canada's Highway 16 connecting Prince George and Prince Rupert in the province of British Columbia has been known as the Highway of Tears due to the large number of Indigenous women having gone missing along it. As emphasized by Jessica McDiarmid, there are no official statistics that would confirm the exact number of Indigenous women who were murdered or went missing on the Highway of Tears; yet non-government organizations regularly learn of new cases (3). McDiarmid calls the Highway of Tears "a microcosm of a national tragedy—and travesty" (4), suggesting that it epitomizes the extent of violence experienced by Indigenous women in settler colonial Canada and strategies of its under- and misrepresentation in settler discourses. In the settler eyes Indigenous women remain the degenerate Others, whose actions are scrutinized and presented as the rationale for the experienced violence. Such a framing of the issue exempts the settler government from addressing the real problems and absolves the state from its responsibility to provide these women with safe and affordable transportation.

Today, the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIWG) provokes Indigenous activism and resistance against settler structures that oppress Indigenous women. MMIWG is a large-scale phenomenon spanning over decades and

occurring in various geographical locations across settler North America, where Indigenous women's bodies have been disappeared, violated, and murdered. For decades, settler colonial governments allowed the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women to go unaccounted for. One of the first instances when the crisis of MMIWG was widely addressed by settler mainstream in North America concerned the Downtown Eastside murders in Vancouver and the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry that followed them. The Vancouver's district of Downtown Eastside witnessed numerous disappearances of women between 1980s and early 2000s, primarily women occupying the social margins, e.g., the homeless, involved in prostitution, and drug addicts (O'Reilly and Fleming 41). Because of the low social status of the missing women, "the police efforts did not reflect the same commitment to resources and solution as other missing persons cases" (43). In their critical analysis of the murders, Patricia O'Reilly and Thomas Fleming emphasize that the large-scale investigation was conducted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) only after the remains of one of the missing women were identified at Robert Pickton's pig farm (42). The detailed inspection of the crime scene uncovered remains of twenty-six other women, more than half of whom were Indigenous (43-45). Pickton was eventually convicted for only six of the murders he committed (43). As a result of the public plea for the inquiry into the police negligence in the investigation of the cases of women missing from Downtown Eastside, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) was established in 2011. As argued by Jodi Beniuk, "[t]he Inquiry has been called a 'substitute' for a full trial of the twenty outstanding charges" (87). While the Commission certainly was an important development on the way to the social acknowledgement of the problem of MMIWG, Beniuk critiques its methodological limitations and the silences it maintained:

> The blatant lack of inclusion of women from the DTES [Downtown Eastside] in the Inquiry process is a dismissal. This mimics the same institutionalized dismissal of Indigenous women and sex workers that was displayed by the police in the original negligent Pickton investigation. An Inquiry into missing and murdered women that silences their voices cannot hope to be effective. (8)

It can be seen that MWCI reproduced the mechanisms of othering Indigenous women and, in the end, failed to address the intersections of colonialism, socio-economic marginalization and race that are at the core of the MMIWG crisis.

The narratives of degeneration, animalization, and criminalization of Indigenous female bodies that facilitate erasure frame them as expendable and, consequently, invisible to the settler colonial gaze. Indigenous women's deaths and their missing status is often unaccounted for precisely because of the presumed disposability of their bodies. The disappearing of Indigenous women through gendered hierarchies and violence should be approached as an intrinsic strategy of the colonial conquest. As argued by Goeman, colonialism is not solely based on the appropriation of territories but also relies on the invasion of Indigenous bodies, "particularly women's bodies through sexual violence" (2013: 33). Foregrounding this corporeal aspect of conquest is crucial for conceptualizing the problem of MMIWG and the settler states' reluctance to recognize women's missing status and rights.

In the last two decades, Indigenous writing in the United States and, particularly, in Canada has enjoyed a renaissance, including a more prominent than ever number of literary contributions by Indigenous women. In the literary analysis of the selected novels, I aim to foreground Indigenous resurgence understood as a process of restoring Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and histories, taking place on Indigenous terms. Aubrey Jean Hanson, a Métis scholar, in her article "Reading for Reconciliation? Indigenous Literatures in a Post-TRC Canada," postulates a turn from

reading Indigenous literature for reconciliation to reading for resurgence. She critically questions the pervasiveness of the notion of reconciliation (69), which has emerged in the recent years as a crucial social paradigm, especially in Canada. While the discourse of reconciliation is ubiquitous both in official settings and in the media, the notion itself remains elusive. In the context of Canada-Indigenous relations the concept of reconciliation has been applied as "a shared signifier for renewed relations" (Henderson and Wakeham 9). However, Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham stress that it might "obscure the complex negotiations surrounding the slippage of meanings attributed to this word, ranging from serious political and socio-economic transformation to the maintenance of the status quo" (9). Since the discourses surrounding reconciliation are to a great extent controlled by the government and settler media, they often fail to convey an Indigenous perspective, focusing primarily on political goals that imply progressive change but, in the long run, sustain settler colonialism. Keavy Martin, an allied scholar, directs attention to the fact that settler discourse on reconciliation prioritizes easing settler conscience over seeking substantive redress for Indigenous nations due to its "fixation upon *resolution* that is not only premature but problematic in its correlation with *forgetting*. The danger is that the discourse of reconciliation—though rhetorically persuasive—can at times be less about well-being of Aboriginal peoples and communities than about freeing non-Native Canadians and their government from the guilt and continued responsibility of knowing their history" (49; italics in the original). Consequently, reconciliation as a social paradigm endorsed by settler Canada remains problematic as it often serves other purposes than improving the condition of Indigenous nations.

Literature is often seen as a vehicle for reconciliation—the #IndigenousReads campaign remains one of the Canadian government's principal undertakings in this

respect, as affirmed on its official website ("Reconciliation"). Hanson addresses the initial proposal of establishing the month of June as an "Indigenous book club month" in Canada formulated in 2015 by the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs at the time, Honourable Carolyn Bennett (Hanson 70-71; Bennett). While Hanson is aware of the potential of Indigenous literature as a powerful tool to combat settler racism, she also notices the limitations of its implementation as an instrument of reconciliation. One of the criticisms put forward by the Métis scholar, as inspired by Pauline Wakeham, is that such a campaign "is an example of the settler state relying upon Indigenous intellectual labour" (71). In other words, employing Indigenous literatures as a tool of reconciliation places the burden of educating the settler mainstream about its colonial history on Indigenous writers. As emphasized by Hanson, even though Indigenous writing has considerable educative potential for settlers, it should not be considered Native literature's primary purpose. Thus, it is vital not to ignore "the community-oriented concerns at play in the creation, sharing, and celebration of Indigenous literatures" (71). In other words, the informative aspect associated with reconciliation is only secondary to the community value and transfer of insider cultural knowledge that encourage Indigenous resurgence.

While the concept of reconciliation prioritizes settler-Indigenous relations, the notion of resurgence focuses on revitalization within Indigenous communities. It, therefore, departs from the insistence on settlers in relation to Indigenous peoples, instead giving precedence to Native perspectives and goals. Hanson understands resurgence as

> a socio-cultural movement and theoretical framework that concentrates on regeneration within Indigenous communities. It validates Indigenous knowledges, cultures, histories, ingenuity, and continuity. Resurgence is an Indigenizing impulse; it acknowledges colonialism and domination through resistance but it does not focus solely on colonialism as the most important

concern. Instead, resurgence insistently focuses on Indigenous communities as sites of power and regeneration. (74)

Therefore, resurgence removes the settler from the equation and re-centers Indigeneity. While the framework confronts traumatic colonial histories, its primary intention is to foreground Indigenous resistance and potential to flourish. For Hanson, reading for resurgence is premised on remembering rather than on forgetting as associated with reconciliation. She considers resurgence as shifting the frame of reference from celebrating reconciliation, a settler theorization, to channeling Indigenous efforts into struggle for sovereignty. The scholar argues that "[c]hallenging reconciliation as an end goal for Indigenous struggles is about remembering the deeper histories and the broader contexts. It entails pushing further into what is possible for Indigenous communities when it comes to self-determination" (74). Hence, reading for resurgence enacts Indigenous sovereignty and is driven by a decolonizing impulse that is intricately linked with collectivity.

Leanne Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, in her theoretical project advances the concept of *radical resurgence*. Alike Hanson, Simpson considers resurgence a mechanism facilitating Indigenous sovereignty. The scholar defines resurgence as "a set of practices through which the regeneration and reestablishment of Indigenous nations [can] be achieved. […] the intellectual and theoretical home of resurgence [has] to come from within Indigenous thought systems, intelligence systems that are continually generated in relationship to place" (16). Only a radical and intimate commitment to the practices of resurgence has the potential to dismantle settler structures. For Simpson, radical resurgence is a way of contesting and unsettling settler colonialism premised on the return to Indigenous ways of understanding and navigating the world. She argues that restoration of traditional systems of knowledge

is instrumental in re-building Indigenous realities: “[t]he Nishnaabeg brilliance those Elders pulled me into was profound. Their world—a cognitive, spiritual, emotional, land-based space—didn’t recognize or endlessly accommodate whiteness, it didn’t accept the inevitability of capitalism, and it was a disruption to the hierarchy of heteropatriarchy” (17). Simpson, therefore, identifies settler structures imposed on Indigenous peoples—capitalism and heteropatriarchy—as not coinciding with Indigenous traditions. By unsettling these structures through resurgent practices, Indigenous people engage in acts of *generative refusal* that disrupt settler colonialism and provide an Indigenous alternative (35). Simpson emphasizes that decolonization must occur outside of settler structures as she “cannot see how Indigenous peoples can continue to exist as *Indigenous* if [they] are willing to replicate the logics of colonialism, because to do so is to actively engage in self-dispossession from the relationships that make [them] Indigenous in the first place” (35; italics in the original). This radical stance is immersed in the rationale that foregrounds the salience of land-based practices and traditional ways of relating to people and the environment.

Leanne Simpson sees land and Indigenous people’s reciprocal relationship with place as a source of knowledge and ethics. The scholar relies on the term *grounded normativity* coined by Glen Coulthard (Yelloknives Dene) that is described as “the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure [Indigenous] ethical engagements with the world and [their] relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” (Coulthard 13). The concept foregrounds the role of land in the shaping of Indigenous identities. In this perspective, settler colonialism has targeted Indigenous land-based practices, and it has “tried to eliminate or confine the practice of grounded normativity to the realm of neoliberalism so it isn’t so much a way of being in the world but a

quaint cultural difference that makes one interesting" (Simpson 25). For this reason, Simpson considers the everyday practices of grounded normativity a means of Indigenous resistance and radical resurgence (25). Coulthard also suggests that land is the central element of Indigenous activism and resistance against settler structures: "Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of *land*—struggles not only *for* land, but also deeply *informed* by what the land as a mode of reciprocal *relationship* […] ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating, and nonexploitative way" (60; italics in the original). Therefore, the ethics conveyed in a long-standing relationship with land provides an alternative to the capitalist means of production characteristic of settler colonialism and thus undermines colonial structures.

The instructive potential of land in Indigenous cultures is further explored by Simpson in her conceptualization of *land as pedagogy*. This theorization foregrounds the role of land in the process of generating wisdom. Simpson explains that Indigenous epistemologies radically differ from settler systems of knowledge production as Indigenous pedagogy

> takes place in the context of family, community, and relation. It lacks overt coercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream, Western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued. The land, Aki, is both context and process. The process of coming to know is learner led and profoundly spiritual in nature. Coming to know is the pursuit of whole-body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, and when realized collectively, it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-determining, interdependent, and self-regulating community-minded individuals. It creates communities of individuals with the capacity to uphold and move forward our political practices and systems of governance. (151)

Simpson approaches land both as a context for and a means in which learning happens. By conceptualizing land as a source of knowledge, the scholar emphasizes the role of

maintaining relationships with the environment as a method of resistance against colonial permanency on Indigenous ancestral territories.

Moreover, Indigenous ideation of space often destabilizes Western ideas of the centrality of the human subject. For example, Patty Krawec (of Anishinaabe and Ukrainian descent) notes that "[i]n the Anishinaabe creation story, the animals and plants—and probably the rocks too—promised the Creator that they would take care of us. They welcomed us into creation, and in this way, they welcomed us into relationship" (171). Hence, non-human nature is assigned sentience and agency in that they are the initiators of a caring relation with humans. In a way, the environment holds a senior position in this relationship as it accommodates and sustains human beings. In her important intervention, Vanessa Watts, an Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee scholar, argues that the Indigenous perspective on non-human agency is based on the premise that agency is "tied to spirit, and spirit exists in all things, then all things possess agency (…) and therefore, we, as humans, know our actions are intrinsically and inseparably tied to land's intentionality" (30). This aspect of environmental agency, namely intentionality, has been undertheorized in Western ecocriticism which, according to the scholar, puts forward "diluted formulations of agency" (30). Watts' theoretical stance radically transgresses colonial understandings of space; her concept of *place-thought* signifies "a theoretical understanding of the world via a physical embodiment (…) Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extension of these thoughts" (21). By assuming land's unconstrained agency, Indigenous place-thought decenters the human subject, dismissing Western modernity's insistence on human exceptionality based on the ability to think and, thus, take intentional actions.

The relational conceptualization of land transgresses its colonial definition that, as signaled at the beginning of this Introduction, primarily emphasizes its material value as a resource. Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) explains that under settler colonialism land

> is understood through the lens of the western materialist worldview as a wealth of ecosystem services or natural resources. In contrast, through the lens of traditional Indigenous philosophy the living world is understood, not as a collection of exploitable resources, but as a set of relationships and responsibilities. We inhabit a landscape of gifts peopled by nonhuman relatives, the sovereign beings who sustain us, including plants. (2018: 27)

Hence, in Indigenous traditions, people are integral parts of the ecosystem and are in an intimate and reciprocal relationship with the non-human environment. Human existence is, thus, interdependent with nature. Dennis Martinez calls this dynamic between human and more-than-human, *kincentricity*. The term

> refers to the reciprocal relationships contained in Indigenous stories of an "Original Compact" made between the animals and humans. Animals would offer their lives to humans provided that humans would take care of the plants and animals by asking for permission to harvest—leaving gifts in exchange for lives taken, not taking more than is needed, showing respect for their bodily remains after they were killed and butchered for food, and not failing to regularly care for their habitats and relations. If humans failed to honor this compact, the plants and animals would refuse to offer their lives for human sustenance and would cause harm and misfortune to the hunter or gatherer, his or her family, and even future generations of their community. (Martinez 140)

Thus, in Indigenous cultures people's interactions with the more-than-human are governed by reciprocity and respect. The kincentric relationship between people and nature, as described above by Martinez, developed into an ethics fundamental to the organization of human interactions with the environment in Indigenous cultures (140).

Relationality is a crucial element in Indigenous value systems. Native axiologies foreground the salience of kinship in the well-being of collectivity by means of such concepts as *seven generations* or *all my/our relations*. Kinship is often

understood more broadly in Indigenous traditions than in their Western counterparts. The category of kin goes "beyond the idea of human relatedness" (Justice 74), including more-than-human entities. Furthermore, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) explains that kinship between people is also perceived as more complicated and not corresponding solely to family relationships:

> Kinship can be biological relationship and genetic inheritance, with its various logics of identity transmitted through ideas of race, blood, and now DNA; this often heteronormative, patriarchal kind of kinship often presumes very narrow, fixed limits of belonging, wherein only certain authorized kinds of relatedness are seen as legitimate or even permissible. Yet it can also be about extra- or even non-biological cultural and community relationships, chosen connections and commitments, as well as political, spiritual, and ceremonial processes that bring people into deep and meaningful affliction. (74-75)

Hence, kinship between people in Indigenous cultures might be conceptualized more broadly than in settler conventions deriving from European genealogic traditions. The more extensive nets of kinship relationships construe alternative genealogies that question and contest settler heteropatriarchal structures. By employing Indigenous approaches to kinship, women writers attempt to unsettle the status quo determined by settlers and reclaim elements of Indigenous cultural landscape that provide opportunities for resurgence.

Indigenous relational ethics has been targeted by settler colonialism. As argued by Lindsay Nixon[3] (Cree-Métis-Salteaux), "Indigenous relationalities, in their many manifestations, have been encroached upon by the settler-colonial project, become a source of frequent misinterpretation, and been made a location for colonial-capitalist biopolitical regulation" (197). For this reason, Nixon considers urgent the need for anti-colonial methodologies that emphasize "the return to Indigenous notions of relationality" (197). Inspired by feminist thought and ethics of care, the scholar

[3] Since the publication of their book chapter, the scholar has changed their name to Jas M. Morgan.

proposes the term *Indigenous Relational Aesthetics* in order to describe "relational ways of making art encoded within Indigenous epistemologies" (196). Therefore, Indigenous art, including writing, emerges as a legitimate means of restoring Native kinship traditions. This ethical approach to cultural production emphasizes positive transformation of relations both within Indigenous communities and beyond, enacting healing (196). I rely on the concept of Indigenous Relational Aesthetics in my dissertation examining the potential of selected literary texts to enact an ethics based on Indigenous manifestations of relationality and their engagement in re-building community ties.

Ceremonies are important land-based practices that sustain Indigenous reciprocal connection with the environment, reinforcing and renewing kinship relationships. Laura De Vos, an allied scholar, notes that Indigenous cultures are organized around a paradigm of *spiralic temporality* that "emphasizes the relationships across time between related, transformed experiences and allows for a dynamic return and rebirth of the past into the future" (6). This is not to stress the repetitive character of the cycles of nature and ceremony, but rather to demonstrate their transformative potential (6). De Vos argues that applying the concept of spiralic temporality to re-consider resurgence "renders legible the ways that reclaiming the past does not mean being limited to an infinite repetition of the same cycle of traditional knowledge, but rather signifies the fluidity of the continued relevance of the core values of Indigenous ways of knowing" (14). This argument is particularly salient in the continuous debate on "authenticity" that surrounds Indigenous practices. De Vos sheds light on the constant evolution of Indigenous cultures and knowledges, which is, however, embedded in original teachings and value systems. Similarly, Melissa Nelson (of Anishinaabe, Cree, and Métis descent) stresses the importance of blending tradition

with innovation for flourishing Indigenous communities: "the process of re-indigenization means we have to decolonize our minds, hearts, bodies, and spirits and revitalize healthy cultural traditions. We also have to create new traditions, new ways to thrive in this complex world during these intense times" (2008: 14). Indigenous women writers embrace this positioning in their writing, imagining collective effort to revitalize ceremonies and other cultural practices that strengthen relationships between people and the environment.

Because of the vast body of Indigenous North American feminist writing, selecting literary texts for the purposes of this thesis proved challenging. The issues connected to place-making, the environment, and the location of the human within ecologies are crucial themes discussed in Indigenous women's writing in North America since its very emergence. Indigenous women writers who began their careers in the second half of the twentieth century, such as American novelists Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), as well as Canadian authors Jeanette Armstrong (Syilx Okanagan) and late Lee Maracle (Stó:lō), depict Indigenous, predominantly female, protagonists, as imperiled by colonial violence and closely tied to their environments. This tradition has been continued, as well as revised, in the twenty-first century by Indigenous women writers in the United States, such as Frances Washburn (Lakota and Anishinaabe) in *Elsie's Business* (2006) and *The Sacred White Turkey* (2010), Diane Wilson (Dakota) in *The Seed Keeper* (2021), Kelli Jo Ford's (Cherokee) in *Crooked Hallelujah*, and Louise Erdrich (Chippewa) in her rich oeuvre, to mention just a few. In Canada as well, many female writers of Indigenous ancestry have contributed to and shaped a vibrant literary culture, for example, Eden Robinson (Haisla and Heiltsuk) in her *Monkey Beach* (2000) and the Trickster trilogy (2017, 2018, 2021), Tanya Tagaq (Inuk) in *Split Tooth* (2018), Leanne

Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) in *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2013) and *Noopiming* (2020), Katłıà (Dene) in *Land-Water-Sky* (2020).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I selected four novels authored by Indigenous women writers that were published between 2014 and 2020. My choice was dictated by the ambition to honor the diversity of recent Indigenous women's writing. Thus, I address novels authored by both an internationally recognized writer, Louise Erdrich, as well as emerging and less acknowledged writers who are making their way into the canon of Indigenous feminist writing. I wish to direct attention to texts that have not yet received substantial academic attention but provide significant insight into Indigenous women's condition in settler states. My focus is also on their interconnections with environments, which conceive alternative to colonial mappings of North America. Moreover, the temporal coincidence of the publication of the selected novels with the intensification of Indigenous women's activism both in the United States and Canada, epitomized by such social movements as Idle No More or Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls campaign, provided another salient reason to scrutinize their engagement with the themes of womanhood, space, and ecology. The fiction constituting the project's corpus includes two American novels: Linda LeGarde Grover's *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (2014) and Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020), as well as two Canadian novels: Katherena Vermette's *The Break* (2016) and Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie* (2015). Although the selected texts differ when it comes to genre and style, they center on women's perspectives and tackle intersections of Indigenous women's and environment's condition under settler colonialism. I propose the following research hypotheses: (1) however different in scope and genre, the selected narratives establish a crucial relationship between Indigenous women and the environment, which are both most

vulnerable to colonial exploitation; (2) the selected Indigenous fiction, by exploring interlocking forms of oppression, provides an alternative to colonial mappings of space.

My dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter One aims to provide a comprehensive historical and socio-cultural overview of the issue of space and settler colonialism in North America. I define the term settler colonialism and address different strategies of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people it entails. Patrick Wolf's theoretical formulation of settler colonialism as a structure and Kyle Powys Whyte's concept of *settler inscriptions* serve as a starting point for the reflection on land politics in the U.S. and Canada. The reference to colonial precepts such as *manifest destiny*, *doctrine of discovery*, or *terra nullius* directs attention to the early colonial discourses applied to legitimize and legalize settler appropriation of Indigenous territories. Furthermore, I discuss diverse settler policies both in the U.S. and Canada implemented through history that intended to facilitate Indigenous displacement, dispossession, and assimilation. Pertaining to the contemporary issues troubling Indigenous communities in North America, the chapter also addresses settler colonial extractive economies that encroach on Indigenous traditional lands and exacerbate the condition of the natural environment, at the same time endangering Indigenous lifestyles and traditional practices. Throughout the chapter, the emphasis is placed on the correlation between strategies of land appropriation and the condition of Indigenous women. Thus, Chapter One functions as a necessary background for further analysis of the selected literary texts. The general picture drawn here of settler colonial approach to land in the New World makes possible its confrontation with the Indigenous relational and reciprocal ideations as offered by Indigenous feminist writing.

In the following chapters, I conduct literary analysis of the selected narratives. Chapter Two focuses on two novels written by Native American women writers, Linda LeGarde Grover and Louise Erdrich. Both narratives can be classified as examples of historical fiction as they tackle the period of the relocation and termination policies in the United States and their aftermath for Indigenous communities, particularly women. In my analysis, I aim to demonstrate that Grover's and Erdrich's narratives negotiate the status of a reservation in the face of impending termination. Grover focuses on the symbolic reclamation of Indigenous ancestral territories through regeneration of kinship ties strained by settler colonial assimilationist policies. The novel conceives unusual means to mark a powerful symbolic interconnectedness between Indigenous people and land. In my interpretation, I show how Grover's reflection on Indigenous women's condition directs attention to their precarious position in the urban centers during the relocation era and to methods of settler biopolitical control over their bodies. Erdrich's novel, in turn, represents Chippewa political struggle against termination as a policy of dispossession and assimilation. I therefore read the novel as a powerful expression of Indigenous self-determination. Furthermore, I argue that Erdrich tackles the issue of Indigenous women's condition in the cityscape at the time of termination. This appears a particularly important literary intervention as it exposes the impact of settler policies on Indigenous women's exposure to sex-trafficking that is inevitably connected to the crisis of MMIWG. However, by centering resurgence, I stress how Grover and Erdrich confront the spatial dispossession of Indigenous peoples emerging from the settler state's policies and represent Indigenous resistance that reclaims the appropriated geographies.

In Chapter Three, I offer a reading of two recent Canadian Indigenous novels—Katherena Vermette's *The Break* and Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*. These

literary texts focus on the cycles of intergenerational trauma following colonialism that trouble Indigenous communities and impact women in particularly adverse ways. Vermette sets her novel in urban Winnipeg, where Indigenous women are relegated to an impoverished and racialized neighborhood that emerges as a space of degeneration and precarity. In my analysis, I attempt to show that recurring gendered violence suffered by female characters in the novel reflects the patterns of colonial violence inflicted on Indigenous women's bodies, their dehumanization and disposability. I further discuss the impact of intergenerational trauma on Vermette's Indigenous female characters and the collateral violence it provokes. I argue, nevertheless, that despite the overwhelming sense of precarity and trauma, Vermette represents women's network of kinship exercising an ethics of care that transgresses settler geographies of misery and hopelessness. Lindberg, in turn, depicts a community, where kinship obligations are radically disrupted by intergenerational trauma. In my reading, toxic family dynamics, abuse suffered at the hands of closest relatives, and the following trauma drive the protagonist to search for alternative safe space outside of the reserve. In Lindberg's novel, as I aver, cityscape functions as both a zone of precarity for Indigenous women and a site of resurgence, where the protagonist constructs her "womenfamily."

It is important to emphasize that, as a non-Indigenous scholar, an outsider, I do not participate in resurgent reading to the same extent that Indigenous peoples do—in many ways, my reading is limited as it does not respond to the lived and embodied experience, represented in this fiction. Yet my ambition in this dissertation is to provide interpretations of the selected novels that offer insight into how Indigenous literary texts are filled with capacity to imagine, promote, and enact Indigenous resurgence. The project was initially inspired by the Idle No More movement that in

its activism approaches women's and environmental issues as co-dependent. This encouraged my reflection on the interconnectedness of the condition of women and nature in settler colonial nation states and settler structural violence that inflicts harm on both. My academic training in Native American studies at Southern Oregon University in the United States further fostered my interest in Indigenous women's issues. I began to see the MMIWG crisis as epitomizing settler gendered violence and politics that erase Indigenous women and render their bodies violable and disposable. During my studies, on May 16th, 2019, I had an opportunity to participate in the signing of the House Bill 2625, concerning missing Native American women in the State of Oregon, which declared it a state-wide emergency. This significant, eye-opening experience grounded my reflection on the deep-rooted settler complicity in the structural and institutional oppression of Indigenous women.

At the same time, witnessing Indigenous women's determined activism and solidarities gave me a powerful sense of their self-determination and resurgence. During my recent research trip to Vancouver, BC, and Seattle, Washington, I observed settler urban spatial configurations that confine Indigeneity into zones of precarity and degeneration, especially in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Simultaneously, I recognized numerous sites of Indigenous resistance in the cityscape that again emphasized decolonial efforts and resurgent potential. These experiences formed my understanding of the issues discussed below and without doubt affected the shape of this dissertation.

Chapter One

Settler Colonial Mappings of North America

Settler colonialism is primarily a spatial endeavor. In the New World, the European colonists seized vast territories of land already populated by Indigenous nations and converted them into their home, appropriated and yet permanent. Settler permanence in North America was enacted through the mechanisms of exerting geographical domination over Indigenous lands and peoples by means of mapping, (re-)naming and dividing territories. Colonial cartographical representations of land did not simply represent or outline new territories, but rather were applied to instill ideological foundations of ownership for the creation of new settler nation-states. Sioux scholar Nick Estes argues that land is the central element that sustains Indigenous contestation and protest in North America: "[t]here is one essential reason why Indigenous peoples resist, refuse, and contest [settler] rule: land. In fact, [settler] history is all about land and the transformation of space, fundamentally driven by territorial expansion, the elimination of Indigenous peoples, and white settlement" (67). Considering settler geographies of North America is, therefore, essential to the understanding of contemporary Indigenous condition and decolonial struggle. In this chapter, I define settler colonialism, its methods of rationalization and legitimization of imperial conquest and territorial expansion, as well as its strategies of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples. Special attention is given to the contemporary settler spatial politics based on extraction and resource development.

1. Settler inscriptions in the New World

Settler colonialism is a form of colonialization in which the incoming population creates settlements to permanently reside on the colonized land. The colonists impose administrative, legal, social, economic, and cultural structures modeled on the ones found in their country of origin and, at the same time, strive to erase local Indigenous populations and their ecologies. Patrick Wolfe, an influential theoretician of settler colonialism, emphasizes that settler realities are built on the logics of elimination of the Native (1999: 2; 2006: 387). In his *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, Wolfe explains that "[s]ettler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. […] The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event" (1999: 2). Such a ramification points to the continuity, endurance, and permanence of the colonial occupation of Indigenous territories, which resists the possibility to approach it as a singular occurrence of invasion that would enable the settler society to create a comfortable temporal distance from the acts of dispossession. When considering settler colonialism as a structure, the logics of elimination become a source of settler rationalization and legitimization of their right to occupy the appropriated territories—a quasi-redemptive strategy that liberates settler conscience. Therefore, according to Wolfe, the rationale underlaying the politics of elimination is not exclusively dictated by race or ethnicity but primarily by the "access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (2006: 388).

The settler colonial logics of elimination operate on different levels: from the ideological "romance of extinction" (Wolfe 1999: 2), through biopolitical regimes, to physical dispossession and displacement. The romanticization of Indigenous elimination or extinction is best exemplified by the adoption of the *vanishing Indian*

trope in settler discourses. As pointed by Dina Gilio-Whitaker, a scholar and a member of the Colville Confederated Tribes,

> The persistence of the vanishing Indian narrative in American society represents a collective inability to perceive Native people as survivors—as peoples with viable, living cultures that although altered and adapted to modern circumstances are nonetheless authentic and vibrant. The narrative has spun off into dozens of stereotypes and misconceptions that dehumanize them and keep them frozen in racist legal and policy frameworks that continue to deny them full access to their own lands and control over their own lives and resources. (59)

The stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples as anachronistic artefacts belonging to the past long gone are instilled in the popular culture, especially Hollywood Westerns, and often remain the settler mainstream's primary and only encounter with Indigeneity. Thomas King, a writer and scholar of mixed Cherokee and European descent, introduces the term *Dead Indians* to describe the settler fantasy of Indigenous vanishment. The stereotyped Dead Indians are constructed by settler discourses as a strategy of avoidance "that North America has conjured up out of experience and out of its collective imaginings and fears" (King 53). Based on what King calls "bits of cultural debris" (53), such as "war bonnets, beaded shirts, fringed deerskin dresses, loincloths, headbands, feathered lances, tomahawks, moccasins, face paint, and bone chokers" (53), representations of Dead Indians comfortably situate Indigenous peoples in the perpetual past. Such images thereby obscure contemporary Aboriginal survival and resistance, as well as continuous settler colonial exploitation of Indigenous peoples and their lands.

The mechanisms of elimination and replacement are further exposed in the concept of *settler inscriptions* proposed by Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi). In the light of Whyte's proposition, the creation of settler homelands requires that the settler structures modelled on those functioning in the Old World, such as religion, culture,

social norms and lifestyles, as well as political and economic systems, should be embedded into the environments in the New World:

> Making a homeland is a process of inscription, that is, it is an ecological endeavor in the sense in which I have been using the concept of ecology. A territory will only emerge as a settler homeland if the origin, religious and cultural narratives, social ways of life, and political and economic systems (e.g., property) are physically incised and engraved into the waters, soils, air, and other environmental dimensions of the landscape. Settler ecologies are inscribed so that settlers can activate their own cultural, economic, and political aspirations and collective capacities. In this sense, waves of settlement seek to embed ecologies required for their own collective capacities to flourish in the landscapes they seek to occupy permanently. (2017a: 359-360)

Since the inscribed settler ecologies serve to mark and instill colonists' permanency on a given territory, settler inscriptions, even though multidirectional and multidimensional, are always inherently territorial. The processes of inscription target Indigenous homelands and ecologies because they might hinder the settler legitimacy to claimed territories (2017a: 360). At the same time, settler inscriptions, which define the colonists' present and future on the occupied territories, are intricately connected to the idea of progress as realized through the industrial development and infrastructure. By referring to such inscriptions as "deforestation, mineral and fossil fuel extraction, petrochemical and other industries producing water and air pollution, commodity agriculture, urban sprawl and widespread automobile use" (2017a: 360), Whyte stresses that settler impositions on North American landscapes are frequently far from sustainable.

Long-term systemic and indelible changes in ecosystems create fabricated genealogies that allow settlers to project their continuity and permanency on the land. Having their homelands transformed by settler inscriptions, Indigenous peoples become alienated from the familiar spaces, as well as reciprocal kinship relations they

entail and traditional lifestyles in sync with them. Whyte describes the contemporary Indigenous condition under settler colonialism as what Indigenous ancestors would consider a dystopian future (2017b: 207), pointing to the devastating impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities:

> It would have been an act of imagining dystopia for our ancestors to consider the erasures we live through today, in which some Anishinaabek are finding it harder to obtain supplies of birch bark, or seeing algal blooms add to factors threatening whitefish populations, or fighting to ensure the legality in the eyes of the industrial settler state of protecting wild rice for harvest. (2017 b: 208)

The settler inscriptions that transformed Indigenous landscapes and ecologies should be considered a method of Indigenous alienation and erasure. Defamiliarized from the environments and cultural practices connected to them, Indigenous peoples were forced to adapt to new realities for survival. The colonial period emerges, therefore, as a cycle of multiple crises and disruptions for Indigenous peoples, to which they were unprepared to respond. Since colonialism signified the end of the world as Indigenous peoples knew it, it is often approached by Indigenous scholars in terms of an apocalypse (Whyte 2018a: 230-231; Dillon 8-9). Contemporaneity emerges, hence, as a post-apocalyptic landscape that, in turn, necessitates a new kind of response that involves finding "sources of agency that will allow [Indigenous peoples] to empower protagonists that can help [them] survive the dystopia or post-apocalypse" (Whyte 2018a: 231). The post-apocalyptic landscapes wrought by settler colonialism define contemporary Indigenous condition and their struggle for social change and Indigenous futurity. Hence, the colonial past tangibly impacts Indigenous present and future.

2. Colonial legal doctrines and territorial expansion

Settler colonial appropriation of Indigenous lands required legal doctrines and precepts in order to legitimize colonist's occupancy of territories already inhabited by Native nations. The notion of discovery has historically acted as an important element of the colonial endeavor that framed the colonizers' sense of entitlement to the invaded territories. European colonizers marked their presence in the New World by performing symbolic rituals of discovery, such as labeling trees, engraving stones, hanging and burying objects (e.g., coins), erecting crosses, and planting flags (Miller 2010: 13; 21). Moreover, the Europeans established an international law that would legitimize their possession of the new territories overseas based on claimed discovery.

The Doctrine of Discovery has functioned as the foundation for the bodies of settler law concerning Indigenous peoples in North America. As described by Robert Miller: "[t]he primary legal precedent that still controls native affairs and rights […] is an international law formulated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that is currently known as the Doctrine of Discovery" (2010: 1). Tracey Lindberg, a Cree legal scholar and the author of the novel later discussed in this dissertation, defines it as

> a dogmatic body of shared theories (informing theory, law, and understanding) pertaining to the rightfulness and righteousness of settler belief systems and the supremacy of the institutions (legal, economic, governmental) that are based on those belief systems. The shared theories have been predicated on a notion of 'first' or 'discovery' as original peoples/Indigenous peoples in their own territories did not share settler theory or understanding or settler legal, economic, or governmental institutions and were deconstructed as non-existing in order to allow for 'rightful' and righteous settlement of Indigenous peoples' lands. The Doctrine has been utilized as a rationale to take Indigenous lands on the basis of Indigenous peoples' constructed and Doctrinally defined deficiencies and inhumanity. (2010: 94)

Lindberg's definition points to the delegitimization of Indigenous knowledges and social structures by the colonizers that became the basis for their dispossession. The doctrine was provisionally formulated to legally secure settler right to occupy lands inhabited by Indigenous nations and assert colonial authority. Roxanne Dunbar-Oritz radically interprets the Doctrine of Discovery as the "legal cover for theft" (198), which emphasizes the colonizers' desire to legitimize their appropriation of Indigenous lands.

Miller delineates ten elements of the Doctrine of Discovery as incorporated by settler colonial legal systems in North America. The first crucial component of this legal doctrine concerns the notion of *first discovery*, which assigns sovereign and property rights over a particular territory in the New World to the first European nation who "discovers" it (Miller 2010: 6). This has been further extended to what Miller describes as *actual occupancy and current possession*, which implies that only colonists who occupied and possessed those territories should enjoy the full sovereign and property rights, which in practice "was usually accomplished by building a fort of settlement, for example, and leaving soldiers or settlers on the land" (2010: 7). Another key element of the Doctrine is the right of *preemption* also referred to as the *European title*, which states that a European nation acquires exclusive right to purchase the land from Indigenous nations upon first discovery. At the same time, the European title renounces Indigenous right to freely sell their land to and foster diplomatic relationships with other European governments, thus limiting Native nations' sovereign and commercial rights (2010: 7).

While the Native nations lost their full property rights upon the first discovery and the enforcement of the European title, under the Doctrine of Discovery they maintained the rights to occupy and use their ancestral lands as indicated by the *Indian*

title or *Native title*, which as noted by Miller "is considered to be a limited ownership right" (2010: 7). Further, the European nation could claim a substantial amount of land surrounding the territories they actually settled on upon the tenet of *contiguity.* Miller points out that in practice

> each country was considered to have rights to the unoccupied lands between their settlements to a point half way between the settlements. Most importantly, contiguity held that discovering the mouth of a river gave a European country a claim over all the lands drained by that river; even if it was thousands of miles of territory such as the Louisiana Territory (defined by the Mississippi River) and the Oregon Country (defined by the Columbia River) in the United States and Canada. (2010: 7)

Lands inhabited by Indigenous nations were not considered an occupied territory under the precept of *terra nullius*, sometimes also referred to as *vacuum domicilium*, which signifies a land that is "empty or null or void" (2010: 7). This element of the Doctrine of Discovery was based on race and religion as only the Europeans, and by extension Christians, were seen as the ones with the authority to occupy and own land. Christianity facilitated the development of the Doctrine of Discovery, adopting the stance that "non-Christian peoples did not possess the same human and natural law rights to land, sovereignty, and self-determination as Christian peoples[4]" (2010: 8). This element of the doctrine also includes the assumption of a proper land use. In other words, territories that were not handled according to the Western methods of land management were deemed "empty and waste and available to be claimed" (2010: 8). Miller argues, therefore, that the notion of *terra nullius* allowed the colonists to claim territories already populated by Indigenous peoples rationalizing their actions by referring to the improper use of land: "Europeans often considered lands that were actually owned, occupied, and being actively utilized by Indigenous peoples to be

[4] This is also symptomatic of the early colonial rhetoric that dehumanized Indigenous people.

vacant and available for Discovery claims if they were not being properly used according to European laws and cultures" (2010: 8).

In the light of the Doctrine of Discovery, European nations would obtain the rights to Indigenous territories through *conquest*. This is reflected by the early colonial rhetoric of *just wars*. The notion of just wars is rooted in the medieval Christian doctrines regulating the status of infidels and the Church's legitimacy to engage with them in warfare in the name of Christ (Echo-Hawk 18). It was further secularized for the purposes of the colonial conquest. As argued by Walter Echo-Hawk, a Pawnee attorney and legal scholar, the Indigenous nations in the New World would either accept the newcomers or they would be in the state of war with the colonial forces: "[i]f Indians prevented Europeans from enjoying their right to travel, sojourn, trade, or 'share' in communal property belonging to the Natives, the Europeans may engage in a 'just war' to conquer and colonize the barbarian infidels as punishment for violating the rules of civilized society" (18). For example, the Spanish invented the legal declaration for starting the war with Indigenous nations, namely *requirimiento*, which was supposed to be read out loud to the Native population in Spanish before military actions could begin (Miller 2010: 15). The declaration detailed that "they must accept Spanish missionaries and sovereignty or they would be annihilated" (Miller 2010: 15). Echo-Hawk understands *requirimiento* as a procedure that "turned invasion and slaughter into a just and legal war" (18). Yet conquest under the Doctrine of Discovery as applied by the settler courts may be assigned a broader understanding. For example, in the court case *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, a defining precedent for the formulation of the Indian law in the United States, the court's decision emphasized that the first discovery is equivalent to military conquest as "the European country claimed political, real property, and commercial rights over the Indigenous peoples just by discovering them"

(Miller 2010: 8). It seems vital to emphasize that, contrary to the common belief, the majority of Indigenous territories were not claimed by military conquest but redeemed via treaties under the premises of first discovery (Miller 2010: 60).

The colonial invasion in North America has often been framed on the argument of civilizing the inferior Indigenous peoples. Bringing *civilization* to the New World is an important element of the Doctrine of Discovery (Miller 2010: 8) that transforms conquest into a noble and righteous endeavor. The civilizing mission is often termed after Rudyard Kipling as *the white man's burden*. Echo-Hawk discusses the concept's racist and patronizing foundations and attempts to subvert the colonial rhetoric by stating that

> the term is a euphemism for imperialism based upon the presumed responsibility of white people to exercise hegemony over nonwhite people, to impart Christianity and European values, thereby uplifting the inferior and uncivilized peoples of the world. In this ethnocentric view, non-European cultures are seen as childlike, barbaric, or otherwise inferior and in need of European guidance for their own good. As thus viewed from European eyes, colonization became a noble undertaking done charitably for the benefit of peoples of color. As it turned out, however, the reverse was true: the white man became the burden of the black, brown, yellow, and red men and women. (16)

The precedent that instilled the concept of the white man's burden in the American law was established as early as in 1831 in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (20). This court case initiated the development of the *trust doctrine* as the Supreme Court "stated that the [Cherokee] nation was dependent on the United States for its 'protection' and 'wants' and was in a 'state of pupilage' with the federal government. The *Cherokee Nation* Court then went on to state that the Nation's 'relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian'" (Miller 2010: 63). Paternalist attitudes towards Indigenous nations are, therefore, reflected in the assumed political and legal role of the settler state as the guardian to the Indigenous peoples. As a result, the Indigenous nations in the United States began to be referred to as "domestic dependent

nations" (Echo-Hawk 107), which emphasizes their loss of full sovereignty and dependency on the colonists.[5] Another legal paradigm that refers to the authority of the colonists over Indigenous nations and underlies settler colonial law in the United States is the doctrine of *plenary power*, namely the "absolute power of Congress over Indian people and their property" (Echo-Hawk 20). Throughout history it was (ab)used by the settler states to exploit Indigenous peoples and their land (Miller 2010: 61; Dunbar-Oritz 189).

Miller argues that in the American context, another legal doctrine, namely *Manifest Destiny*, was formulated in the nineteenth century in relation to the processes of Westward expansion and the closing of the Frontier (2006: 2). This new legal framework was deeply rooted in the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning the Doctrine of Discovery (2006: 3). In the light of Manifest Destiny, Americans as the newly founded nation are endowed with extraordinary "virtues," which contribute to the special and unique character of the United States' political and governance system and state institutions. Therefore, the doctrine assumed that it is the Americans' mission to spread this ideal system all over the continent. Under the premises of Manifest Destiny, this endeavor would be considered as divinely conditioned and fulfilling God's plan (2006: 120). In his analysis of the emergence of Manifest Destiny at the time of the United States' pursuit of the Western territories or what was called the Oregon Country, Miller recognizes that,

> even though the words 'Manifest Destiny' were new, the idea of American domination of the North American continent had been widely accepted from

[5] Audra Simpson, a Mohawk scholar, describes the situation that Indigenous peoples navigate within settler states in North America as *nested sovereignty*, pointing to the necessity of operating within settler colonial framework and, at the same time, being separate from it. Simpson argues that "Indigenous bodies, Indigenous sovereignties and Indigenous political orders prevail within and apart from settler governance. This form of 'nested sovereignty' has implications for the sturdiness of nation-states over all, but especially for formulations of political membership as articulated and fought over within these nested sovereignties" (11).

> colonial times and the early days of the United States. The import of the phrase "Manifest Destiny" was that it gave a name, a cachet, a justification to this continental ambition and it came to have its own mystical meaning and resonance in American history and in the American psyche. (2006: 120)

Hence, like the Doctrine of Discovery, Manifest Destiny is based on the discourse of civilizational superiority and legitimized by reference to Christianity as the indicator of civility and by extension humanness. Dunbar-Oritz approaches Manifest Destiny as an ideology "according to which the United States expanded throughout the continent to assume its preordained size and shape. This ideology normalizes the successive invasions and occupations of Indigenous nations and Mexico as not being colonialist or imperialist, rather simply ordained progress" (118). Therefore, Manifest Destiny would again rationalize imperial expansion and legitimize dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

Even though there are differences between the legal systems in the United States and Canada, settler law in the latter is also founded on the Doctrine of Discovery (Lindberg 2010: 97; Reid 337) and historically actively incorporated elements of Manifest Destiny (Robinson). While the colonists settling on the territories of today's Canada clearly internalized the notions of civilizational superiority and assumed rights towards Indigenous territories, the unfavorable circumstances, including both a more severe climate and threats posed by other colonizing nations, forced the British Crown to initially engage with Indigenous peoples on a nation-to-nation basis (Lindberg 2010: 98). Lindberg, therefore, explains that in contrast to the United States, in what is known as Canada

> The practice was not to regard the First Peoples as non-entities, but to engage them to the degree their territory was required and their cooperation was warranted. In some cases, this meant dealing with the nations in treaty agreements. In others, it meant dealing with First Nations as problems to be dealt with. There was no language and no law that dealt with the nations as other than sovereigns and the nature of treaties and agreements that followed

> colonizer landing on Indigenous lands were predicated on notions of nationhood, authority, and autonomy. (2010: 98)

While the First Nations have understood the treaties as legally binding agreements outlining the reciprocal relationships between Indigenous nations and settlers, as well as their responsibilities towards land, the Canadian approach to treatymaking evolved drastically. Lindberg points to the gradual change in Canadian law that aspired to limit First Nations rights and sovereignty (2010: 97). In the end, "[e]ntrenched in the notion of Indigenous inhumanity was the understanding that if Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations were antithetical to 'civilized peoples', then the rights that accompany them could not be understood in the same way as settler rights" (2010: 100). One of the primary examples of a Canadian legal document that was meant to dehumanize Indigenous peoples and invalidate their rights to the ancestral territories and sovereignty was the Indian Act passed in 1876 (2010: 117). This body of legislation will be further discussed in more detail in the following sub-chapter.

3. Settler colonial strategies of dispossession and displacement

3.1. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 and forced removals

In the early nineteenth century, an increasing number of European colonists settled on the territories of the thirteen founding states on the American East Coast, which provoked the U.S. government's urgency to address the problem of the remaining Native American lands east of the Mississippi that were not open for white settlement. As a result, the United States proceeded to dispossess and remove Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands in order to expand white settlement on more expedient territories (Duignan et al. 290). The US Indian Removal Act that epitomized these

ambitions was passed in 1830, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. It "authorized the president to grant Indian tribes unsettled western prairie land in exchange for their desirable territories within state borders (especially in the Southeast), from which the tribes would be removed" (Duignan et al. 290). Yet the idea underpinning the Act emerged much earlier. As noted by Miller, the notion of the removal of the Indigenous population formed in the settler American consciousness already at its very beginning. During his presidency, George Washington claimed that Native peoples would have to disappear for they hindered American expansion; he vividly described it using the "Savage as Wolf" comparison (2006: 78). The rhetoric of Native American removals was, further, propagated by President Thomas Jefferson, who in 1803, namely twenty-seven years before the introduction of the Indian Removal Act, agreed with the authorities of the state of Georgia on the relocation of the Cherokee Nation from their ancestral homelands (2006: 80). As argued by Miller,

> The official Indian policy of the Removal era is considered to have run from 1830 to the 1850s. Long before 1830, of course, Washington and Jefferson were writing about Indian removal, and every president after Jefferson, from James Madison to Andrew Jackson, officially and publicly supported the policy of removing Indian tribes west of the Mississippi River as the final solution to the Indian problem. (2006: 169)

The Indian Removal Act legally enacted the expansionist and imperialist ambitions of the American government to annex desirable lands and, at the same time, dispose of the Indigenous populations on the East Coast.

Although the Indian Removal Act stated that land should be purchased from Indigenous nations only with their consent (Duignan et al. 290-291), settlers often resorted to force in order to relocate Native communities that opposed the idea of leaving their homeland. The Five Civilized Tribes inhabiting the Southeast territories of the contemporary United States, namely the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw,

Muscogee, and Seminole, suffered particularly violent and degrading removals. The most infamous of them was the forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation from their ancestral lands (located in the states of Georgia and Alabama) to the "Indian Territory[6]" west of the river Mississippi or in what is now Oklahoma (Dunbar-Oritz 112). This forced removal is often referred to as the Trail of Tears. According to King, "[t]he Cherokee call the removal from Georgia *nunna daul isunyi* or 'the trail where they cried'" (King 88). Dunbar-Oritz emphasizes the tragic consequences of the forced marches west on the Indigenous nations: "half of the sixteen thousand Cherokee men, women, and children who were rounded up and force-marched in the dead of winter out of their country perished on the journey. The Muskogees and Seminoles suffered similar death rates in their forced transfer, while the Chickasaws and Choctaws lost around 15 percent of their people en route" (113). The removals not only displaced Indigenous nations from their homelands but also violently decimated and fragmented their communities.

While in Canada the removal policies were not implemented on the same scale as in the United States, smaller Indigenous groups were also relocated from their homelands in order to fulfill the government's plans and objectives. As explained by King, "[i]n the States, removals were part of a national strategy to move Native people off prime land and push them out of the way of White settlement. In Canada, relocations were employed ostensibly to further the official goals—protection, civilization, and assimilation—of Canadian Native policy" (89). Therefore, the process of First Nations and Métis relocations in Canada has been grounded on

[6] The introduction of the term "Indian Territory" in the Indian Relocation Act marks the spatial isolation of Indigenous peoples from the settlers. The relocated nations' title to the lands in the Indian Territory was supposed to be permanent. In practice, however, a substantial part of these territories was claimed by European squatters with an encouragement from the U.S. government (Echo-Hawk 161).

different premises that appear less violent and racially driven. However, King describes examples of First Nations and Métis relocations from different historical periods so as to direct attention to the discrepancy between the official and actual motivation underlying them. The latter was based on the idea of progress and the perception of Indigenous communities' presence as the obstacle to development, while "[t]he official rationale for removal and relocation was Indian welfare" (85). A substantial number of relocations in Canada happened as late as in the twentieth century (89) as a result of rapid industrialization of the state after the Second World War, "this time to make way for large-scale industrial projects. In particular, hydroelectric projects" (94). The confluences between the energy infrastructure and Indigenous dispossession are discussed in-more detail further in this chapter.

3.2. The Indian Act of 1876 in Canada

In the Canadian context, the legislation that defined settler-Indigenous relationships was the Indian Act of 1876. The Act outlined the consolidated state's policy regarding Indigenous peoples and "dictated all aspects of Indigeneity in Canada, including identity" (Bourgeois 71). Lindberg argues that the Indian Act was, in fact, a document that confirmed the authority of the Canadian government to administer Indigenous peoples and their lands to the settlers' liking as it "introduced and normalized unilateral decision making by the Canadian government about Indian peoples. It constructs Indians as objects to be controlled and as subjects of foreign legislation" (2010: 147). The document introduces and defines the notions of bands, "Indians," and reserves (2010: 117), which should be approached as settler impositions. Further, the Act also determined the system of governance that First Nations had to implement based on

band councils, which often departed from their original legal traditions and ways of self-governing. Importantly, the settler policy regarding Indigenous peoples and their lands defined in the Indian Act provides for the government's authority and control over the management of Indigenous land, resources, and monies (2010: 118).

Allan Greer emphasizes that at the core of the Indian Act was the policy that simultaneously established and undermined Indigenous spaces (73). The provisions regarding Indigenous enfranchisement illustrate this contingency. The Indian Act established the possibility of Indigenous individuals that meet certain criteria to become Canadian citizens, which, at the same time, implied their loss of the Indian status. In this way, together with Canadian citizenship, enfranchised Indigenous individuals would take "a portion of reserve lands into the settler sphere" (73). King critically comments on the enfranchisement policy, pointing to the interweaving of Indigenous identities with land and resource management:

> It is a brilliant plan. No need to allocate money to improve living conditions on reserves. No reason to build the new health centre that's been promised for the last thirty years. No reason to fix the water and sewer systems or to update the science equipment at the schools. Without Status Indians, the land can be recycled by the government and turned into something useful, such as estate lots and golf courses, and Ottawa, at long last, can walk away from the Indian business. (169)

On the same note, Greer concludes that the Indian Act illustrates that "[a] multi-faceted assault on Indigenous lands, Indigenous cultures, and Indigenous political independence was arguably the central feature in the making of Canada as self-governing polity within the British Empire" (73). The racialized policy of assimilation legalized through the Indian Act targeted First Nations' sovereignty and imagined a solution to the "Indian problem" in the gradual dissolution of the Indian Status through enfranchisement.

The Indian Act is a particularly gendered and discriminatory piece of legislation that targeted Indigenous women's status rights. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Keith Smith explain that "[t]he Indian Act has used gender as its primary mechanism of defining Indian status. The act, until 1985, passed Indian status through the father (patrilineally) and for over a hundred years forcibly removed status and membership in reserve communities from women who married non-Indian men. Children of non-Indian men were no longer considered Indians" (2). At the same time, an Indigenous woman would not regain her status rights upon divorce (Barker 261). Joanne Barker (Lenape) in "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada" emphasizes that "[t]he only way for a nonstatus woman to (re)gain status was by marriage" (261). At the same time, the Indian status of men was inherent and did not depend on matrimony[7] (261). In this sense, the Indian Act enacted heteropatriarchal norms and promoted gender-based discrimination. In the long-term perspective, Indigenous women became marginalized in their nations' self-governance and politics:

> Some of the most troubling consequences of the Act were the corrosion and devaluation, however uneven and inconsistent, of Indian women's participation within Indian governance, economics, and cultural life […] The provisions represented and perpetuated a much longer process of social formation in which Indian men's political, economic, and cultural roles and responsibilities were elevated and empowered while those of Indian women were devalued. (262)

Therefore, women would be antagonized in their own communities, which often resulted in the denial of their leadership roles and affirmation of heteropatriarchal standards in Indigenous governance.

[7] First Nations men would be enfranchised and by extension lose their Indian status in the case of service in the Canadian army or education in a public school (Barker 261).

Many Indigenous women and their children were gradually excluded and isolated from their communities, which contributed to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in the urban settings (Sangster 34). The loss of the Indian status also entailed that the women would be deprived of benefits associated with it. Bourgeois observes that this resulted in the economic marginalization of Indigenous women in Canada as the "loss of status also translated into a loss of treaty obligations, which means that excluded Indigenous women and their children faced significant financial losses, including treaty monies, educational funding, child care funding, health benefits, and tax benefits" (Bourgeois 73). The poor socio-economic standing of Indigenous women in the Canadian society exposes them to the higher risk of different forms of violence (Bourgeois 72; Barker 263-264), which is particularly salient for this project. Beverly Jacobs (Mohawk) goes as far as stating that "[s]ince the inception of the Indian Act, there have been missing Indigenous women who were forcefully displaced from their traditional territories for 'marrying out.' This was the beginning of missing Indigenous women" (31-32). This radical critique of settler discriminatory laws emphasizes its impact on the Indigenous communities—disrupted and fragmented—that intently forced Indigenous women into the condition of precarity and lead to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls crisis.

3.3. The reserve/reservation system and the geography of misery

The establishment of reserves in Canada and reservations in the United States constituted another settler attempt to spatially segregate Indigenous peoples from the settler mainstream. The reserve/reservations system delineates Indigenous territorial base as insignificantly small, as emphasized by Dina Gilio-Whitaker, who argues that

reservations "would confine Native people to territories far smaller than they had for millennia been accustomed to, diminishing their ability to feed themselves" (58). Hence, the spatial configurations introduced by settler colonialism directly affected Indigenous peoples' ways of life and created circumstances of precarity that impacted their collective well-being and led to their dependence on the settler state for sustenance. As Mishuana Goeman emphasizes, within this optic, "[i]t is important to remember that many reservations were set up as places of containment, some even requiring passes to leave" (2008a: 28). The formation of reserves/reservations should therefore be considered in the context of binary oppositions that these imposed spaces entail, namely: reserve v. off-reserve, Indigenous land v. settler territory, scantiness v. vastity. Indigenous people are thereby forced to navigate those categories, which diminish their prosperity and sense of agency.

The contemporary legacy of the establishment of the reserve/reservation system in settler North America is accurately captured by a Cree writer and scholar, Billy-Ray Belcourt. Pointing to the character of reserves as places of Indigenous confinement and containment, Belcourt describes these settler spatial inscriptions in terms of a *geography of misery*: "the reserve is something of a non-place calibrated by affects I want to group under the sign of misery. Yes, misery is a bad word. Harsh, even. But I think it is big enough to conceptualize the cramped conditions under which life is haphazardly improvised on the reserve" (2). Hence, reserves/reservations are places of seclusion where the lives of their inhabitants are hardly livable as they are constantly negotiated in-between the overpowering poverty and cycles of intergenerational trauma and colonial violence. As a result, the Indigenous condition on the reserves entails "the miserable feeling of not properly being of this world,"

"exhausted existence," and occupation of the "zone of biological struggle" (2). The boundary between life and death becomes utterly fragile:

> The reserve, then, is where life is lived at the edge of the world, a bio-necropolitical gulag of sorts where slow death stunts indigeneity's future-bearing potentiality. Put differently, it is an incubator of deadened life, where the plasticity of the life-death binary is worked up so as to harvest bodies that are stripped of vitality and sensation. (4)

The geography of misery emblematic of the reserves enacts mechanisms of Indigenous erasure by exerting its biopolitical power over Indigenous bodies.

Belcourt coins the term *geography of misery* in the context of the epidemic of diabetes among Indigenous peoples on reserves, which is based on spatial and biosocial impositions brought about by settler colonialism. He argues that the settler control over resources available on the reserve is a form of disciplining Indigenous bodies or even programing them for self-sabotage: "the food that does and does not make its way into this geography of slowed immiseration renders calculable the biosocial toll of colonial world-building. […] Indigenous bodies are biopolitically generated to slowly destroy themselves from the inside" (5). Diabetes, being a disease closely tied to the quality of nutrition and one's lifestyle choices (exercise), is inflicted by the settler colonial containment of Indigenous peoples and administration of resources that limit their access to healthier and more balanced food and lifestyle choices. As argued by Belcourt, settler colonial "biopower is characterized by the mismanagement of biological life, where disease control has been avoided as a method of ethico-political abandonment. Sometimes negligence is the form that state power takes" (4). This negligence is one of the factors that actively construct geographies of misery. Reserves as described by Belcourt are, therefore, sites where settler states exercise their power over Indigenous bodies, exposing settler mechanisms of elimination.

3.4. The boarding and residential school systems as tools of forced assimilation

Another settler strategy of dispossession and displacement that entailed both spatial and biopolitical impositions based on the mechanisms of elimination was the establishment of the boarding school system in the United States and residential school system in Canada. In these educational systems, Indigenous children were removed, often forcibly, from their homes and placed in facilities far away from their families and familiar geographies (Katanski 4). Alienated from their cultures and environments, Indigenous children were not allowed to follow the traditional instruction based on oral storytelling and interactions with the surrounding ecosystems, maintained by Indigenous communities in North America for centuries. Instead, they received education modelled on the Western norms and system of knowledge. In this sense, boarding/residential schools substantially disrupted Indigenous knowledges, targeting the continuation of Aboriginal cultures, lifestyles, and languages. Goeman emphasizes that boarding and residential schools were "part of the colonial making of space" (2008a: 28) through disciplining Indigenous bodies and distancing them from their communities and land. The spatial defamiliarization of Indigenous children was seen as the most efficient way of uprooting them from their original cultural background: "[c]omplete removal from their parents […] was the only way to prevent relapse to Indigenous ways. Taken and then returned to their communities, the children were sometimes alienated from their parents and relatives because they could not speak their languages or had no bonds to their kin" (Estes 118).

The Western education offered by the schools encompassed reading, writing, and math. It appears vital to stress that the instruction received by Indigenous children

at the boarding/residential schools was rather elemental. The education focused, instead, on instilling in them Western ideological foundations. Indeed, the official rationale for the establishment of the institution was formulated in terms of a civilization and salvation mission (TRC 43), which echoes the early colonial rhetoric. Since most of the schools were funded by settler states but operated by religious denominations (TRC 58-59), Christian dogma constituted an important part of the curriculum. Furthermore, Margaret Jacobs points to the institutional emphasis on teaching Indigenous children menial work that varied depending on their gender:

> The schools focused not only on teaching Indian children to read and write in English and to adopt Christianity but also imparted new ideas about gender and family. As part of their effort to promote domesticity among girls, the boarding schools trained them in cooking, laundry, and housekeeping. Many schools then developed outing programs in which they placed Indian girls within white families, ostensibly to practice and perfect their domesticity. Boys were placed out to do agricultural labor and other unskilled work. (180)

By preparing Indigenous children to take on labor-intensive physical work, the institutions aimed to produce individuals who would blend into the settler mainstream, promoting the idea of Indigenous assimilation and enfranchisement.

In order to achieve the assimilation goal, Indigenous bodies were submitted to constant discipline in these institutions. Children were forbidden to speak their original language (TRC 4; 81) and forced to adhere to restrictive diet (85-86), as well as Western standards of hygiene, clothing, and hairstyle. The disciplinary system enforced in schools often entailed violent forms of punishment and humiliation—both psychological and corporeal (102-103). Moreover, Indigenous students were frequently subjected to institutionally sanctioned physical and sexual abuse (Dunbar-Oritz 213; TRC 105-110). Poor sanitary conditions led to epidemics of tuberculosis; the death toll was disproportionate (TRC 92-93). Boarding and residential schools

functioned, therefore, as sites of utmost precarity that victimized, traumatized, and erased generations of Indigenous youth.

By means of uprooting Indigenous children, boarding and residential schools in North America aimed to form them into Can-American citizens. These educational bodies were established in order to dispose of Indigenous people by forcibly assimilating them into the settler mainstream. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report argues that the residential school system was a salient part of the settler policy of forced assimilation that aimed to "cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada" (TRC 1). For this reason, the report suggests that residential schools should be addressed in terms of cultural genocide (1) that undermined Indigenous communities' capacity for survival and initiated a harrowing cycle of intergenerational trauma that continues to this day. The recent unearthing of the remains of 215 children buried in unnamed graves at the former Kamloops residential school in British Columbia (Dickson and Watson) sparked more detailed investigations into residential school sites across Canada, which resulted in the discovery of a vast number of unreported and unnamed burial sites (Eneas; Sawyer). In response to the discoveries that took place in Canada, the first Indigenous Secretary of the Interior in the United States, Deb Haaland, announced a nationwide federal Indian Boarding School Initiative that will investigate the sites and issue a comprehensive report for the better understanding of the legacy of the boarding school system in the U.S. (Chavez). These revelations confirm the status of the boarding and residential schools as institutions of forced assimilation and elimination, which perhaps should be considered beyond the framework of the policy of cultural genocide.

3.5. Termination policies and the urban Indigenous communities

In the twentieth century, it became clear that the existing strategies of dispossession and displacement, however harrowing and disruptive for Indigenous peoples, had failed, since Aboriginal individuals and communities continued to prevail both in the United States and Canada. The settler policies of forced assimilation and elimination did not succeed in erasing Indigenous populations and disposing of the "Indian problem." Hence, the U.S. government formulated a policy that was supposed to dissolve the settlers' obligations towards Indigenous nations as outlined by treaties and the trust doctrine. In 1953, the Congress passed the Termination Act and the Relocation Act that disregarded former legal agreements between Indigenous peoples and the U.S. government and terminated the special status of Native nations as the wards of the state. At its core, the termination policy represented the desire to blend Indigenous individuals into the settler mainstream through dispossession. As emphasized by Gilio-Whitaker,

> Cloaked in the language of liberating Native peoples from U.S. "supervision," termination envisioned the dissolution of reservations, the abdication of federal protections for tribal lands and cultures, and the end of the federal services to Indians. Free from the yoke of federal paternalism, Indians would finally disappear into the social fabric of America, undifferentiated from all other American citizens. (48)

Hence, the termination policy, like other strategies of dispossession and displacement outlined in this chapter, was meant to enact the mechanisms of elimination in order to dispose of Indigenous people. The Canadian government headed by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau attempted to force similar legislation in 1969 in the form of what is commonly referred to as the White Paper (King 72). The Aboriginal leaders and activists' backlash following the presentation of the policy pressured Trudeau's government to withdraw the White Paper in 1970 (Lagace and Sinclair). In the 1970s,

continuous dissent against and resistance to the termination policy on the part of Indigenous nations lead to the repudiation of the termination policy also in the United States. The federal government eventually changed the course of the Federal Indian Policy, navigating it in the direction of the acknowledgement of Native self-determination (Wilkinson and Biggs 164).

The policies of termination were accompanied by Indigenous relocation programs. The U.S. government encouraged migration of Native individuals and families from reservations to big American cities with the promises of job opportunities that would help them escape from the reservations' geographies of misery. By being accepted into a relocation program, an Indigenous person was provided with short-term benefits, as well as a vocational training and/or educational opportunities while moving to the city. The relocation programs resulted in a mass migration of Indigenous peoples to the urban centers, which caused a drastic change of Native demographics—recent statistics show that there are more Indigenous peoples living in the cities than on the reservations (Gilio-Whitaker 48). In Canada, a statistical shift in the Aboriginal demographic profile occurred after the implementation of Bill C-31 in 1985, when Indigenous women and their descendants who had lost their status under the Indian Act were able to reclaim their Indian status (Trovato and Price).

In her literary analysis of Esther Belin's works, Goeman emphasizes that the relocation policies and widespread migration of Indigenous peoples to the urban areas introduced a new set of settler spatial inscriptions, where "the spatial dichotomy between rez and off-rez […] begins to develop […] as a marker of 'Indian' identity and as a barrier between community members" (2008b: 297). As a result, urban Indigenous mappings include a sense of constantly being torn in-between the reserve

and the city. The urban Indigenous condition recalls a diasporic experience, where one's self is constantly negotiated in-between their homeland and current locale. Gilio-Whitaker recognizes the diasporic liminality characteristic of contemporary urban Indigenous individuals and directs attention to the sense of estrangement that it entails:

> While many urban Native people today maintain connection to their homelands, their lives and identities are mediated and shaped by these histories of dispossession and displacement. To be an urban Indian is to live under diasporic conditions, sometimes by choice, but more often by circumstances of birth. It is a state of disconnection from land and the culture and lifeways that emanate from land, such as language, ceremonial and religious practices, and traditional food and medicine knowledge. (2008b: 48-49)

Hence, the spatial configurations enacted through the policy of relocation distance Indigenous people from their ancestral land, which, in turn, leads to the alienation from one's language, culture, and traditional knowledge that are produced through the intimate and reciprocal relationship with place. At the same time, urban Indigenous activism is an important part of the decolonial movement, which shows that cities also become sites of Indigenous resistance and resurgence. Urban Indigenous communities create Pan-Indigenous hubs where people of diverse tribal affiliations work together for social and environmental justice. In this sense, urban landscapes emerge as spaces of subversion that undermine settler colonial spatial impositions.

4. Settler colonial extraction, wastelanding, and the landscapes of power

Nowadays, the spatial politics of settler colonial nation-states in North America are entrenched in neoliberal ideologies and extractive economies. Since the 1940s, settler encroachments on Indigenous lands and sovereignty have been predominantly urged by the resource development industry and the energy sector. The post-war economic

growth necessitated more intensive resource extraction and energy production to meet the demand of settler development.

Contemporary Canada and the United States may be regarded as petrostates, namely nation-states founded on fossil fuels extraction, processing, and transportation or what Sourayan Mookerjea describes as “a polity that is subordinated and restructured according to the needs of either the Big Oil multinationals or the global political economy of oil or both” (331). Settler economies and lifestyles as we know them would not be possible without the exploitation of fossil fuels. In this sense, the contemporary Can-American condition might be described in terms of a petroculture, where the society and individual human experiences are built on and defined by the pervasiveness of energy technologies (Wilson et al. 15). Today’s settler petrocultures rely “on the pillage of natural resources and the construction of race, class, and gender, which reify some people as resources to be exploited, resulting in socio-cultural paradigms where some lives matter more than others” (Wilson et al. 11). Hence, both resource and energy infrastructure should be seen as settler inscriptions imposing colonial neoliberal capitalist structures on North American landscapes and environments, as well as on Indigenous bodies.

4.1. Wastelanding, settler zones of sacrifice, and the landscapes of power

In her *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*, Traci Brynne Voyles proposes the term *wastelanding* to describe the settler processes of place-making, where wasteland is “a racial and spatial signifier that renders an environment and the bodies that inhabit it pollutable” (9). The concept of wastelanding illuminates the spatial configurations of settler colonial extractive practices that locate resource

development infrastructure on Indigenous lands (which in the colonial imagination remain conceptualized as *terra nullius*) and in close proximity to racialized Indigenous bodies. As argued by Voyles, wastelanding is governed by

> the assumption that nonwhite lands are valueless, or valuable only for what can be mined from beneath them, and the subsequent devastation of those very environs by polluting industries. This very pollution results in the common designation of wastelanded spaces […] as "sacrifice" zones. As sacrificial lands, these landscapes of extraction allow industrial modernity to continue to grow and make profits. (10)

The zones of sacrifice[8] encompass Indigenous lands and by extension Indigenous bodies "render[ing] pollutable, the[ir] lungs, the[ir] cells, the[ir] respiratory tracts" (11), at the same time, targeting their worldviews, knowledge systems, cultures, landscapes, and their worth as a people constructing them as "pollutable, marginal, unimportant" (11). Settler colonial wastelanding is, therefore, a process founded on environmental racism and injustice, where certain territories and bodies become marginalized and defined as insignificant, which rationalizes their exploitation and exposure to pollutants.

Voyles explains that settler wastelands are mapped through the processes of social construction and reification. Namely, they are enacted by the construction of difference and then reified via the transformation of the socially constructed discursive category of difference into a material, lived, embodied experience (10). Therefrom,

[8] Naomi Klein also uses the concept of sacrifice zones in her *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. Climate* (2014). She applies the term to the critique of the global politics of resource development and its entanglements with race, gender, and class. Klein points to spatial configurations imposed by the resource extraction projects that connect locations that are geographically distant but related through exploitation: "sacrifice zones all shared a few elements in common. They were poor places. Out-of-the-way places. Places where residents lacked political power, usually having to do with some combination of race, language, and class. And the people who lived in these condemned places knew they had been written off" (310).

racial difference is materialized by the actual bodily instances of racism, such as "threats and acts of violence, foreshortened life expectancy, incarceration, under and uncompensated labor, inequalities in wealth accruement" (10). Correspondingly, "ideas about the value of environments are manifested by the material consequences of environmental destruction" (10). It is vital to emphasize that the value of an environment or a territory is not inherent but set by the significance that people assign to it. Voyles provides an example of an urban area transformed from a pollutable "ghetto" into a protectable gentrified neighborhood to illustrate that "the material conditions of the place derive from the hegemonic meaning that is ascribed to it" (16). Moreover, the meaning ascribed to the place is determined by the bodies that occupy it—unimportant pollutable racialized bodies constitute zones of sacrifice, while white and therefore significant bodies render spaces protectable. The wastelanded spaces of settler colonialism enact these constructed and material contingencies through the extractive exploitation of Indigenous lands for resource and energy, as well as the exploitation of racialized Indigenous bodies through pollution, social and cultural marginalization, and exploitative labor.

Dana E. Powell frames her critical analysis of the confluences of space and extraction referring to the multiplicity of power relations that shape landscapes. In her book entitled *Landscapes of Power: Politics of Energy in the Navajo Nation* (2018), Powell engages with the intersections of the energy infrastructure, sustainability, and Indigenous sovereignty. The concept of *landscapes of power* that the scholar proposes "offers theoretical compass and empirical terrain, holding in tension the polyvalence of power and complex materiality of landscapes. While what appear at first glance to be infrastructural problems are indeed that, they often are also vivid instantiations of ethical impasses" (11). Hence, the term attempts to reflect on the ethical conundrum

surrounding Indigenous communities' entanglements in resource development and the spatial configurations they generate. Similarly to Voyles, Powell emphasizes that Indigenous, here specifically "Diné bodies and communities have been materially affected by logics of violence and lack associated with development regimes. These logics accept sacrifice zones as collateral damage for U.S. Cold War imperialism (through nuclear weapons production) and twentieth-century industrial capitalism (through fossil fuel extraction)" (7). For this reason, Indigenous (Diné) landscapes are not solely material but are also produced through ethical formulations as to their value, function, and meaning. While in settler discourse minerals, such as uranium and coal, are assigned special meaning and value as resources that produce energy, in Indigenous (Diné) culture they represent a different set of significations that include their relational and spiritual functions. Powell explains that Indigenous nations must constantly navigate in-between the prospects of economic stability promised by the energy sector and the environmental and cultural repercussions of extraction.

Departing from Voyles's conceptualization of Indigenous spaces solely in terms of wastelands, Powell argues that landscapes of power provide "a framework for thinking about places and populations as sites of action, creativity, and possibility—not only landscapes of waste, toxicity, and ruin, as prevailing frameworks have long defined Navajo land" (17). As sites governed by struggles over power, landscapes can be re-shaped in unexpected and unpredictable ways through human as well as non-human agency. In this sense, Powell stresses that "[l]andscapes are not mere planer [sic] surfaces for human drama. They are, rather, the vibrant, material interface of human and non-human interaction across time and space. They are sites and processes of struggle over material infrastructure, as well as meaning and memory" (14). Indigenous connection to the land based on the ethics of care renders

space relational and, therefore, defers extraction. Since the landscapes are created through power struggles, Indigenous people, by renouncing extractivist logics, exercise their power to create, in Powell's words, the collective spaces of "generative refusal" (243), where they re-define the meaning of resources and generate spaces of sovereignty in tune with their ethical orientations based on care and reciprocity.

4.2. Hydroelectric development in the U.S. and Canada

In the twentieth century, hydroelectric projects became grounds for Indigenous dispossession and displacement both in Canada and in the United States. The sudden upsurge in dam infrastructure was dictated by the changed (post-)industrial realities following the Second World War under the sign of development and progress. Dams constituted settler impositions on North American landscapes and environments that secured energy demands of the settler nation-states' growing economies. This kind of infrastructure performs several functions, such as "flood control, water storage and delivery, and electricity generation" (Gilio-Whitaker 60)—the latter being the most salient for the settler economic growth. King points to the surge in the construction and ubiquity of hydroelectric infrastructure being located on Indigenous territories: "[t]he Army Corps of Engineers, in particular, was able to determine with amazing regularity that the best sites for dams just happened to be on Indian land. Even when there were more suitable non-Native sites available" (95). This points to the strategy of constructing Indigenous homelands as wasteland, whose primary function is to act as zones of sacrifice for the growing settler economies. Estes confirms that dam construction sites enact settler processes of wastelanding: "unlike during the previous century, when Indigenous land was coveted for its endless bounty, […] in the twentieth

century, Indigenous land was desired merely so that it could be wasted—covered with water" (134). Through hydroelectric projects, such as the Pick-Sloan Plan in the Missouri River Basin (Gilio-Whitaker 61; Estes 133-134; King 95), O'Shaughnessy Dam in California (Gilio-Whitaker 61), Bonneville, John Day, and Dalles Dams on the Columbia River (61), Kinzua Dam in New York (61), Coolidge Dam in Arizona (62), the Churchill Falls Generating Station in Newfoundland (King 96), the James Bay Project on La Grande River in Quebec (King 96; Voyles 10), and the Norman Generating Station on the Winnipeg River (Luby 2020), settler nation-states have constructed zones of sacrifice that imperil Indigenous peoples and their subsistence.

The impact of dam infrastructure on Indigenous communities, their land base and ecosystems has been disastrous. Brittany Luby, an Anishinaabe scholar, dedicates an entire book project to the history of dam infrastructure and its consequences for her community. She demonstrates that, contrary to the common assumptions about the post-war period of development as creating better social realities for Canadian citizens, "the benefits of large-scale infrastructure projects and their environmental impacts were (and are) divided inequitably in Canada. The dividing line was (and is) highly racialized" (5). One of the crucial effects of the construction and operation of damming sites was Indigenous displacement. In many cases, the creation of power facilities necessitated Indigenous relocations and lead to situations where Aboriginal people have been denied access to their ancestral territories (Luby 83; Gilio-Whitaker 61). This caused serious material and spiritual repercussions for the communities. Dams transformed the mappings of Indigenous ancestral lands as floodplains; the actual and potential "floodwater provided the physical means to terminate Indigenous nations and relocate people […] to end the "Indian problem" once and for all" (134). The

multifaceted spatial configurations imposed by damming infrastructure enacted once again the settler mechanisms of Indigenous elimination.

When considering the effects of damming in North America, it is vital to think about the contingency between the environment and Indigenous peoples. The environmental imprint caused by dam infrastructure is manifold and includes

> the inundation of entire ecosystems, impacts on temperatures and changes in nutrient and toxin concentration in rivers, and increasing erosion and sediment deposition. Reservoirs created by dams encourage the proliferation of nonnative invasive species; and large dams contribute to the extinction of indigenous species of fish; disappearance of birds; loss of forests, wetlands, and farmlands; erosion of coastal deltas; and many other issues. (Gilio-Whitaker 60)

For many Indigenous communities living on the riverbanks and lakeshores, the bodies of water served as sources of subsistence—they provided fresh water and food, invited game, enabled agriculture, granted wood for heating and dwelling construction (Estes 134). These ecosystems devastated by damming directly jeopardize Indigenous livelihoods. Deprived of traditional sources of food, Aboriginal communities have become more and more dependent on the settler state for subsistence. Gilio-Whitaker stresses that the "[d]ecreased reliance on traditional foods is directly related to increases in food-related diseases, such as diabetes" (61). It is, therefore, evident that dams as settler inscriptions not only physically displaced Indigenous peoples but also dispossessed Aboriginal communities in less tangible ways, "represent[ing] one seldom-mentioned aspect of the [settler] cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples" (61).

4.3. Settler colonial extractivism

Today, settler colonial mechanisms of extraction have perhaps the most destructive impact on Indigenous peoples and North American landscapes and ecosystems. Resource development secures settler petrocultures, at the same time endangering environments and racialized bodies. As observed by Gilio-Whitaker, settler extractive and toxic sites are overrepresented on Indigenous lands since "of the United States' 1,322 Superfund sites,[9] 532 of them were located on Indian lands—an astoundingly disproportionate figure considering how little of the US land base is Indian trust land" (68). This once again confirms that Indigenous peoples and their lands are constructed as pollutable zones of sacrifice for the settler colonial prosperity.

One of the most prominent examples of settler resource development in terms of its entanglements with spatiality, race, and the environment is uranium mining. The United States' fascination with atomic power that developed during the Cold War in the mid-twentieth century formulated nuclearism around both energy production and military technology. It constituted what "we might call atomic modernity—the notion that both war and peace would be produced precisely because of and through this futuristic new technology" (Voyles 69). American nuclear ambitions led to the settler re-imagining and re-mapping of the American Southwest—territories abundant with uranium deposits. These new mappings erased Indigenous populations inhabiting these territories (Navajo and Pueblo). Instead, they constructed a new frontier, where "uranium prospectors 'settlers' and 'adventurers,' invoked deeply rooted tropes of nineteenth-century westward expansion, racial violence, colonial settlement, and

[9] The Superfund sites are locations of petro-chemical industries stations and plants that pose potential environmental hazard and are listed under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980. These are mostly but not exclusively extraction sites.

capitalist industrialism, right down to the portrayal of the Colorado Plateau as empty land from which 'settlers' can glean great wealth while promoting the nation's interests" (Voyles 56). In other words, in the settler imagination, the presence of resource transforms the barren desert region into a space of national importance that was supposed to be "tamed" at any cost. Half of the uranium mines constructed at that time were located on the Navajo reservation and relied on primarily Indigenous cheap labor (Gilio-Whitaker 65).

Like damming infrastructure, intensive uranium mining took a toll on local ecosystems and Indigenous populations. Water contamination in the desert landscapes, where access to water was already limited, constituted one of the most serious environmental repercussions—polluting local ecosystems and depriving Indigenous communities access to fresh water (Gilio-Whitaker 65). Moreover, toxic and radioactive uranium pollution has exerted devastating effects on the local Indigenous communities' health. The alarmingly high cancer cases rates among local Indigenous population are the contemporary legacy of the uranium mining industry. As observed by Gilio-Whitaker, "[w]hithin a few decades lung-cancer death rates skyrocketed on the reservation, and children suffered radiation burns from playing around the mines or in water exposed to the waste" (65). High birth defect rates and genetic mutations are other important health issues that are directly linked to uranium mining (Voyles 142). Voyles approaches these legacies of uranium development on Navajo territories in terms of *slow violence*, adapting a concept proposed by Rob Nixon (2011), and arguing that "the ill effects of radiation exposure take ten, fifteen, sometimes twenty years, and sometimes multiple generations to manifest. This makes uranium mining in Diné Bikéyah a kind of 'slow violence' or 'delayed destruction' that emerges over time" (Voyles 5). While the mines are no longer in operation, their destructive effects

continue to this day, with time becoming more and more tangible for Indigenous peoples.[10]

Fossil fuel extraction, from coal mining through oil drilling to gas fracking, have become through decades the staple of settler economies. Throughout the twentieth century, intensive economic growth caused a tremendous upsurge in energy consumption, which was mostly covered by the burning of fossil fuels. Moreover, "similar increases in water use, sulphur dioxide emissions, world population levels, and (of course) carbon dioxide emissions are directly related to the expanded economic capacities enabled by fossil fuels" (Wilson et al. 5). On the global scale, the environmental imprint of fossil fuels combustion encompasses air and water pollution, climate change and global warming, as well as extreme weather conditions, melting of glaciers and rising sea levels. Fossil fuel economies adversely impact the environment on an unprecedented scale. As argued by Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman,

> Extractivist, capitalist production has resulted in what is now being referred to as the Anthropocene: human-induced climate change on such a scale and to such a degree that it can now be mapped within geologic time. Of course, this geological term redistributes responsibility for the negative impacts on our planetary ecosystems to all "humans," when these outcomes have largely been caused by populations in the global West, and by those with the greatest access to *power* – fossil fuels and capital – within those zones. (12; italics in the original)

It bears noting that the concept of the Anthropocene, however apt, may obscure the fact that the responsibility for, as well as hazards and benefits connected to the fossil fuel development are unevenly distributed across human population.

[10] Similar impacts of uranium mining trouble the Indigenous inhabitants of the Spokane Reservation in Washington, where two uranium plants operated during the Cold War era (Gilio-Whitaker 67).

Zoe Todd, a Métis scholar, observes that "when the narrative is collapsed to a universalizing species paradigm" (244), the complex and specific situations of diverse human populations, especially these affected by colonialism and imperialism, become invisible. For this reason, Heather Davis together with Todd argue for an alternative to conventional starting date for the Anthropocene that highlights its temporal coincidence with the European colonization of the New World (763). The scholars explain that approaching the colonization of the Americas and the Anthropocene as concurrent and intricately connected events "allows us to understand the current state of ecological crisis as inherently invested in a specific ideology defined by proto-capitalist logics based on extraction and accumulation through dispossession—logics that continue to shape the world we live in and that have produced our current era" (764). By tracing the sources of the Anthropocene in the settler colonial logics of extraction, the scholars make space for a more diverse and sustainable conceptualizations of the ongoing environmental crisis that emerges as intricately connected to the colonial project. In this sense, "the current environmental crises which are named through the designation of the Anthropocene, can be viewed as a continuation of, rather than a break from, previous eras that begin with colonialism and extend through advanced capitalism" (771). Fossil fuel extraction, identified as the major culprit of the progressing climate destabilization, renders the local settler politics of extraction exercised since the beginnings of the colonial encounter, a global problem.

While the global repercussions of intensive resource extraction have come under increased scrutiny and critique across the World, the local, already tangible, impacts of extractive projects often remain obscure for the wider public. This is, again, attributable to the conceptualization of racialized spaces where these infrastructures

are most visibly located as wastelands and zones of sacrifice. As with other forms of development described in this chapter, the local environmental imprint of fossil fuel extraction and transmission is overwhelming, including the groundwater contamination and depletion, pollution and loss of habitat and species, as well as the fragmentation of ecosystems (Amnesty International 30-33). All these environmental impacts of the fossil fuel industry directly influence local Indigenous communities' subsistence, especially in terms of access to traditional sources of food and clean drinking water. Estes reflects on the repercussions of the extractive practices for Indigenous communities in Western Canada, noting that: "tar sands extraction—by companies such as Suncor Energy, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, and Shell Canada—has poisoned water, land, air, plants, animals, and people. Duck and moose—staple foods of many Indigenous communities—have become contaminated with toxins, and harvests of wild berries and plants have been decimated" (30). The discovery and development of bitumen reservoirs located in the Athabasca oil sands in the Canadian Province of Alberta, one of the biggest tar sands sites in the world, has led to a complete transformation of the landscape and local ecosystems. Functioning as settler inscriptions, fossil fuel development projects ravage Indigenous reciprocal ecologies, alienating them from the land and species they were intricately and intimately connected to. Leanne Simpson perceives this kind of dispossession as yet another settler strategy of assimilation and elimination:

> the opposite of dispossession isn't possession, it's *connection*. Settler-colonialism strangulates my connection to the land, and it has a vested interest in legally dispossessing me from my territory. As long as I'm disconnected from my territory, it doesn't care if I'm displaced or not. I can be assimilated in my territory, dispossessed in Western legal perspective from my land rights, but I can still be in my territory and completely assimilated and that's totally fine. The government's OK with that. I'm no longer a threat. (Simpson in Hern and Johal 66-67)

Disrupting Indigenous peoples' connection to land is, therefore, a method of disciplining Aboriginal bodies. Because of the devastation of Indigenous ecologies and the consequent lack of self-sustenance, the fossil fuel projects engender their virtually complete reliance on settler capitalist economies for survival.

Intense resource extraction adversely affects Indigenous women in particular. The changes in local demographics caused by the influx of temporary resource development workers to territories where fossil fuel projects are conducted yield widespread social and economic repercussions that are detrimental for Indigenous women as often the most vulnerable social group.[11] Economies in regions where resource development projects are underway are heavily influenced by the disproportionately high salaries of the energy industry workers in comparison to the local population, which results in the increase in the living and accommodation costs. This leads to Indigenous women's food and housing insecurity since they statistically earn the least (Amnesty International 41). At the same time, housing insecurity is a major indicator for Indigenous women's engagement in prostitution (Farley et al. 16). Indigenous women experiencing poverty and without employment options in their vicinity become involved in transactional sexual relationships with resource extraction workers (Amnesty International 49). In this sense, the economic destabilization caused

[11] The presence of the energy industry projects creates a considerable number of relatively well-paid positions that attracts people from other parts of Canada, usually young men, to temporarily move there. These people constitute so called "shadowed population," which refers to the workers who come to a given territory to stay there for a limited time only at the same time maintaining a permanent residence somewhere else and usually not being included in the census-based local statistics (Amnesty International 11). The influx of many male resource sector workers drastically changes the demographics of a place and leads to growing inequalities, resulting in a precarious condition of those "without access to the high wages of the resource industry" (45). This situation may cause a number of negative consequences for local people in the area, especially the economically disadvantaged Indigenous populations and the most vulnerable among them Native women and girls.

by the resource development sector, directly and adversely impacts Indigenous women's livelihoods.

Violence against Indigenous women is rampant in proximity to the resource extraction sites. Challenging realities of living in a work camp lead some men to "release work-related stress through a pattern of destructive and anti-social behaviours referred to locally as 'blowing off steam,' which can include excessive partying accompanied by drug and alcohol use. One impact is an increased risk of violence in the host communities, including violence against women" (Amnesty International 37). Indigenous women's bodies often emerge as territories of conquest for the resource sector transient workers, who have no connections to the local population, are far from their families and, consequently, lack any sense of responsibility. As a result, Indigenous women are exposed to "encounters with strangers ranging from aggressive harassment to extreme violence, and unsolicited offers of drugs and money in exchange for sex, attempts to coerce women into vehicles with groups of men, sexual assault, and gang rapes" (Amnesty International 50-51). Therefore, the violent extraction from the land is connected to the violence inflicted on Indigenous women's bodies as phrased by Nick Estes: "[l]ike the land itself, the bodies of Indigenous women, girls, trans, and Two-Spirit people are also seen as open for violence and violation. Resource extraction intensifies a murderous heteropatriarchy" (30-31).

In the recent decades, fossil fuel extraction and transmission became a source of contention for Indigenous peoples in North America. Resource development projects were imposed on Indigenous peoples both in Canada and the U.S. without consultations or with dubious consent of Indigenous political elites that do not represent the entire community's sentiment regarding the issue. Occurrences such as the Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Council's approval of the TransCanada's KXL pipeline

project in 2014 (Estes 35), the lobbyist energy group claiming tribal consent to the Jordan Cove LNG pipeline and terminal project in Oregon (Oaster), or the discord between Wet'suwet'en elected and hereditary chiefs regarding the construction of the Coastal GasLink (Sterritt) illustrate the tensions within Indigenous communities regarding resource extraction infrastructure. Perceiving the energy industry as a panacea for the poverty troubling their nations, Indigenous leaders often support development on their territories in order to improve the socio-economic situation of their community. Gilio-Whitaker points to the ethical complexity of the situations when Indigenous leaders and governing bodies participate in the fossil fuel development: "the relationship between nation building and extractive land use is a conundrum that exposes profound contradictions, considering the very real cultural values that view the Earth as a living relative to be honored, not harmed" (70). Hence, while resource extraction projects might and often do benefit Indigenous nations' economies in terms of capital and workplaces, they seem to always inherently counter the Indigenous kincentric ethics of care and responsibility for both the human and the non-human. The collateral damage of such projects is often emphasized by means of protest by Indigenous activists and grassroot movements.

Applying Naomi Klein's terms, Indigenous peoples prove to be at the forefront of *Blockadia* or a global space of resistance that "is not a specific location on a map but rather a roving transnational conflict zone that is cropping up with increasing frequency and intensity wherever extractive projects are attempting to dig and drill, whether for open-pit mines, or gas fracking, or tar sands oil pipelines" (Klein 294). The Standing Rock protests are a perfect and probably most well-known example of *Blockadia* in North America, where the Sioux together with an army of allies coming from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds generated transnational zones

of resistance both in encampments at Standing Rock, as well as in the cyberspace through #NoDAPL movement. The camps constituted a physical barrier consisting of the Water Protectors' bodies that in unison blocked the settler process of inscribing the Sioux ancestral land with fossil fuel infrastructure. Violent actions of the police against the protesters confirmed that this transcultural and anti-colonial zone of resistance imperiled the settler colonial system (Estes 63). As emphasized by Estes, while Barack Obama publicly praised the boldness of Black civil rights movement activists of the 1960s, "under his watch, private security working on behalf of DAPL unleashed attack dogs on unarmed Water Protectors who were attempting to stop bulldozers from destroying a burial ground" (56). This illustrates the complicity and entanglements of the political class, regardless of their affiliation, in maintaining both settler colonialism and petro-capitalism in North America.

Similar zones of contestation have emerged across Canada and the United States in response to planned and ongoing resource development projects, the latest example of which were the Wet'suwet'en protests and railway blockades against the construction of a pipeline through the nation's territories at the beginning of 2020 (Boyd). Formed in 2012, a social and environmental justice Indigenous movement, Idle No More, organized "round dances (traditional healing and celebratory dancing and singing) in shopping malls and blockades of rail lines transporting oil, as well as protested Stephen Harper's Conservative government's abuse of Indigenous rights, privatization of Indigenous lands, and rollback of environmental protections to intensify fossil fuel extraction" (Estes 30). Idle No More became an important movement that spread also in the United States, constituting a net of grassroot organizing. By critiquing and actively resisting settler colonial inscriptions governed

by the logics of extraction, such initiatives re-imagine and transform North American landscapes into landscapes of Indigenous power and environmental sustainability.

Chapter Two

Geographies of (De)Termination in Linda LeGarde Grover's *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* and Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*

This chapter explores the spatial poetics emerging from two historical novels by Native American women writers: Linda LeGarde Grover's *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (2014) and Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020). The selected narratives offer an insight into the legacies of the U.S. policy of termination as experienced by two distinct Chippewa[12] communities. In the analysis, I stress the writers' effort to amplify Indigenous women's voices and experiences. Both Grover and Erdrich address adverse outcomes of settler policies of forced assimilation for Native nations in the United States, and their particularly detrimental impact on Indigenous women's condition. At the same time, they seek to redress settler colonial impositions on Indigenous land and people connected to termination and relocation, by centering Indigenous resistance and resurgence.

1. Homing geographies in Linda LeGarde Grover's *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*

Linda LeGarde Grover is a writer and a professor emeritus in American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and a member of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa. She has authored two novels, *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (2014) and *In the Night of Memory* (2019), a poetry volume *The Sky Watched: Poems of Ojibwe*

[12] The terms Chippewa, Ojibwe, and Anishinaabe can be used interchangeably to denote the group of Indigenous nations inhabiting the Great Lakes region. The plurality of names is the effect of colonialism. For more information, consult Younging 2018.

Lives (2016), a short story collection *The Dance Boots* (2012), a collection of essays *Onigamiising: Season of an Ojibwe Year* (2017), and most recently a syncretic memoir entitled *Gichigami Hearts: Stories and Histories from Misaabekong* (2021). While Linda LeGarde Grover is certainly a less well-known writer to a mainstream American reader than Louise Erdrich, her writing has received critical acclaim and was awarded with several important literary prizes, such us the Flannery O'Connor Award (2010), Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize (2010), the Native Writers Circle of the Americas First Book Award (2008), and the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers Fiction Award (2015). Grover's writing organically interweaves Ojibwe traditional stories with contemporary realities since, as the writer voices in an interview conducted by Alex Higley and Lindsay Hunter, she is convinced that "we [Indigenous people] are reliving those stories in our own lives every day. And it's always been this way. When people say, oh, the old stories, they're alive—they're not only alive, they are us, and we are the stories" (Grover 2022).

Grover's first novel, *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, tells the story of an Ojibwe community subjected to multiple settler strategies of dispossession and forced assimilation. The plot spans the time period from 1970 to 2014, but also references earlier events. Grover dismisses a chronological order and readily shifts between first- and third-person narration, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the stories recounted in the novel. *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* is set in a fictional Mozhay Point Indian Reservation located in northern Minnesota in proximity to Duluth, which geographically corresponds to the ancestral territories of Grover's people. The narrative interweaves the life stories of several characters and families living on the reservation, creating a collective protagonist. Special attention is devoted to the intertwining lives of three resilient women characters: Margie Robineau, Theresa

Rooney, and Dale Ann Dionne, who confront historical forces governed by racism and depreciation of Indigenous women. *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* tells the story of the termination era by focusing on the allotment and relocation policies that respectively facilitated and accompanied the planned termination of Indigenous nations in the United States. By referring to the widespread settler practices of the time, such as forced sterilization of Indigenous women and coerced adoptions of Indigenous children by non-Native families, Grover addresses the impact of the termination era on Native communities. In the novel, Indigenous women's condition is inextricably tied to land and their lives are particularly affected by settler colonial land politics.

1.1. The policy of allotment and literary reclamation of Indigenous spaces

In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, the fictitious Mozhay Point Indian Reservation is subjected to multiple settler processes of Indigenous elimination and land appropriation. In the novel, Grover describes the complex spatial dynamics that resulted from the implementation of the General Allotment Act of 1887 for the local Indigenous community.[13] The writer depicts the complicated history of a piece of land located on the Mozhay reservation that was once inhabited by Wazhushk (Muskrat) family and subsequently allotted to another Indigenous family, the LaForces. The novel comments on the logics of Native erasure, specifically on the settler land politics that diminished the reservation's land base by half. While the Wazhushks live on the eastern half of the reservation, which remains with the tribe, they are "not listed on the

[13] The allotment era was introduced by the General Allotment Act of 1887, which "reduce[d] the overall Indigenous land base by half and furthered both Indigenous impoverishment and US control" (Dunbar-Oritz 158).

1854 treaty as part of the Miskwaa Rapids Band" (Grover 2014: 177)[14] and therefore are not entitled to land allotment and subsequently forced to leave their home. For this reason,

> [t]he small board house that Little Muskrat had built and the seasonal camps that had given them subsistence would no longer be theirs to occupy but would become the property of the LaForce family, who because they were listed on the treaty as Miskwaa Rapids Band members would leave the west side of Mozhay, leave their camps, their house, and the profitable living they had been making on the west side of the river by trading pelts and buying and selling household goods and sundries. (178)

This double relocation of Indigenous families designed to accommodate settler plans to appropriate a great portion of Miskwaa people's land points to the expendability of Native peoples in the settler eyes. It also discloses the arbitrary character of defining tribal affiliation based on lists of tribal members compiled by settlers.

The distinction between allotted Indians, those who are recognized as Indigenous people by the settler state, and unallotted Indians, or those whose rights as Indigenous peoples are not acknowledged, constitutes a settler imposition regarding Native identities. It is the settlers who determine who has the right to stay on the reservation and who has "no right to the property or any allotment of land, and […] must move" (180). This practice of construing Indigeneity by the settlers actively enacts mechanisms of Indigenous elimination. The settler documentation of tribal members does not reflect the real ties of individuals to land and community, ignoring dynamic transfers of people (both internal and in-between tribes) and penalizing persons and families that did not sign former agreements with the U.S. government in an act of dissent.

[14] Subsequent quotations from *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* come from the 2014 edition of the novel, as published by University of Minnesota Press, and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

Settler policies, moreover, promote the static model of dwelling, which does not apply to the Miskwaa people realities as they still practice semi-nomadic lifestyles by cyclically moving between seasonal camps. As detailed in the novel, the Wazhushk family has established "four seasonal camps that had been the pattern of their lives" (184). In her *Onigamiising: Seasons of an Ojibwe Year*, Grover stresses the importance of the notion of four seasons in Anishinaabe culture for they represent "the cycle that is the foundation of how the Ojibwe have lived for many generations. The Ojibwe of long ago followed the rhythm of the seasons in weather, lives, history, and in their physical and spiritual well-being for themselves and others" (2017: xi-xii). The continuity of this cycle is fundamental for Ojibwe traditional lifestyles and sustenance. Before leaving their homeland, the family visit all the four seasonal camps—maple sugar camp, summering camp, wild rice camp, and winter camp—their spatial reference for the recurring cycles of changing seasons that guide their lives and subsistence. Therefore, not only is their land appropriated by the settlers but also their way of life is severely disrupted, which consequently imperils the very essence of their identity as Indigenous people that is inextricably connected to place.

The relocation of the Muskrat family discloses the discrepancy between settler and Indigenous conceptualizations of land. The head of the family, Little Muskrat, cannot comprehend the logics applied by the federal Indian agent to displace his family, "how it could be right that the maple sugar tree stand that our family had made camp in every spring, and all the land that had provided for the Muskrat family since before his own father, Big Muskrat, had been born had become a part of the LaForce allotment" (Grover 2014: 180). In the Elder's perspective the longstanding relationship with land and its ecosystem is the key factor that determines one's belonging to a place. The relational model of inhabiting a territory as articulated by Little Muskrat is

juxtaposed with the settler worldview whereby one's dwelling is closely tied to the notion of private property. The federal Indian agent dismisses the Muskrat family's legitimacy to stay on the land they have customarily inhabited for generations imposing on them the colonizers' legal framework: "[t]he Muskrat family is going to have to leave that property. It belongs to the LaForce family now. It is their legal property, their property that has been allotted to them by the U.S. government" (180). By legalizing displacement and instituting a system of land management based on property rights, the government diminishes the Indigenous nation's sovereignty. Grover illustrates how, in Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez's words, settler colonialism "disarticulates established meanings and establishes new ones" (122). The replacement of the relational understanding of place with the capitalist institution of private property manifests the mechanism of imposing settler homelands on Indigenous ancestral lands.

The displacement camouflaged as land allotment is not favorable for the LaForces either. They are a prosperous Native family, engaged in trade with settlers, trappers, and fur traders. Little Muskrat recognizes that the LaForces have no interest in moving east on the Wazhushk land, which he asserts by rhetorically asking the agent:

> Why would they want to come all this way to maple sugar when they were going to the same stand for such a long time? The woods are thick and the tress healthy and the sap pure and delightfully sweet over there. Why would they want to travel all the way over here to do that, when the maple sugaring camp they go to now is so close to their fishing and hunting camps on the other side of the rapids? Why would they wish to leave their trading post, where they prospered so in money and luxuries? (179)

This passage demonstrates that federal government encroaches on the nation's sovereignty and that the system based on private property introduced by the allotment policy is not adequate for the Miskwaa people's lifestyles governed by changing

seasons. The traditional way of life of the Native community assures their survival, which becomes threatened by the radically diminished land base.

Forced displacement of the Muskrats from their homeland is followed by the degeneration of the family's condition. In the words of Little Muskrat, they become "*aandakii,* living elsewhere" (181) as they move to the former western part of the Mozhay Point Reservation, where they squat, building a "one-room tar-papered shack with one window. A wooden floor, a stoop, and a door" (185). The Muskrats must adapt to their altered circumstances in order to survive. While the family proved non-eligible to be allotted land, their Indigeneity is paradoxically re-established by the federal Indian agent, who ensures that the youngest family member, Zho, attends the boarding school for Native children (186), where he is supposed to "use [his] English name, Joseph Washington" (186). This demonstrates the selective acknowledgement of one's Indigeneity depending on the circumstances; the Muskrat family's Indigeneity is only recognized when it serves the settler nation state's interest, namely Native assimilation. Moreover, when Zho is fifteen, his parents go missing in mysterious circumstances "while walking along the riverbank on their way to Odanang, to trade their bundled pelts for coffee, flour, and a length of wool" (186). The Muskrats spatial isolation from the Mozhay reservation is the reason why "their absence was not noticed by anyone for some time" (186). Therefore, the family's relocation creates a situation of precarity as, due to settler inscriptions, they are alienated from their community and forced to search for alternative means of subsistence because it is no longer possible to ensure survival following solely the traditional way of life.

The overwhelming sense of loss that haunts the Muskrat family is symbolically redressed in Grover's novel. After his parents' death, Zho finishes a commercial business program at the Haskell Indian School. As an adult, he does not immediately

return on the reservation for he is "an orphan, an unallotted Indian who lived elsewhere, *aandakii*" (188). Yet Zho has reoccurring dreams of his "father's birthplace, the maple sugaring camp on the land that became the LaForce allotment" (189). Through his dreams, the man accesses the traditional knowledge inextricably connected with land that was transferred in his family from generation to generation, for example, that of the maple syrup production—an essential part of Anishinaabe lifestyle (189). The character's terminally ill wife, Eva, thinks of Zho's dreams as a gift from his parents (190). Zho's oneiric visions provide him with instruction that he was denied as a child due to settler mechanisms of assimilation, such as his family's displacement and forced education in a boarding school. In one of the dreams, Zho's grandmother tells him the story of his umbilical cord that is buried in the sugar bush on the LaForce allotment. It symbolically connects the Muskrats forever to this particular location as stressed by his relative: "[p]art of you is here, where someone else is going to live but where you were born and where we have lived. No matter where you go, your odissimaa will stay here, and because of that we will always be a part of this place" (192). Birthing ceremonies involving the burial of a child's umbilical cord or their mother's placenta are present in many Indigenous cultures in North America and beyond (Rogoff et al.; Gonzales; Schwarz) and celebrate people's ties to place. These ceremonies establish a person's connection to land, which parallels that of being connected to their mother. By narrating the intimate bond between Zho and his family's homeland by referring to the symbol of the umbilical cord, Grover restores the space formerly appropriated by settlers to its rightful inhabitants.

The recurring dreams encourage Zho to return to his family's ancestral territory and reclaim it. The man recognizes his family's legitimacy to dwell on the LaForce allotment that coincides with the land where his family members' umbilical cords are

enshrined. The presence of their biological matter ceremonially buried in the ground reflects the family's close and intimate relationship to this particular spatiality: "the place where his odissimaa, the cord that tied him from before birth to his mother, Ozhawaa'ikwe, and through her to the earth, is buried. Because of them the Muskrats are bound eternally and blessedly to the land that became the LaForce allotment" (192). Grover draws a parallel between a person's connection to land and that of a child to their mother, which emphasizes the caring and familial relationship between people and the environment. Zho's life following his return to Sweetgrass is immersed in grounded normativity as he engages in traditional land-based practices of his people, such as, hunting, as well as wild rice and maple sap gathering. Zho's living off the land ensures continuation of traditional Ojibwe lifestyles and is an act of radical anticapitalism. The return to traditional lifestyle on the land of his ancestors provides in the novel a sense of regeneration and renewal against colonial dispossession.

To emphasize the inextricable connection between Indigenous people and land, Grover explores the spiritual and medicinal significance of sweetgrass in Ojibwe culture. The novel's opening directs attention to the overpowering scent of sweetgrass drifting from the LaForce allotment and filling the reservation's air:

> On this western end of Mozhay it happens that way occasionally when the wind comes from the northeast, the scent of sweetgrass edging and swirling from the LaForce family allotment land, its source somewhere near the maple sugarbush, making its invisible way past the cabin and down the driveway to the road, where it dissipates and fades when it reaches the boat landing. (1)

As explained by a Potawatomi scholar, Robin Wall Kimmerer, "sweetgrass is a powerful ceremonial plant cherished by many [I]ndigenous nations. It is also used to make beautiful baskets. Both medicine and a relative, its value is both material and spiritual" (2020 [2013]: 5). Hence, the scent of the plant originating in the LaForce

allotment emphasizes the special status of this spatiality in Grover's novel. Sweetgrass acquires a symbolic, ephemeral, spiritual meaning since, despite the perceptible fragrance, "no sweetgrass grows on the LaForce land, even in the swamp on the far side of the allotment" (1). This mysterious re-occurrence of the scent on reservation is again tied to the umbilical cord ceremonially buried on LaForce allotment: "[b]elow the earth that is covered by leaves in the fall, snow in the winter, mud in spring, and sparse northern moss in the summer, a small deerskin bag sewn with red thread and blue beads holds an infant's umbilical cord, an odissimaa, wrapped in dried sweetgrass" (2). Moreover, the scent of sweetgrass is activated by spirits of ancestors who "tread so lightly that their feet, transparent as the air, make no more mark on the ground than air itself; with every step the scent, invisibly compressed and released, renews and rises into the LaForce allotment atmosphere" (2). In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, spatial configurations reflect Ojibwe worldview. Place emerges as more than a geographical location—a reciprocal co-habitat of beings. The odissimaa bag and its powerful, almost supernatural, quality of generating a strong aroma of sweetgrass suggest that, as argued by Silvia Martínez-Falquina, "what is buried prevails and can resurface" (84). Therefore, the novel actively enacts the potential of Indigenous resurgence that transgresses settler impositions on Indigenous land.

1.2. Urban relocation programs and Indigenous women's precarity

Grover explores in particular the impact of settler policies of termination and relocation on the deterioration of Indigenous women's condition. The effects of relocation on Native women's precarity culminate in the story of a young Mozhay woman, Dale Ann. She is a brilliant student and a bookworm about to graduate from high school and pondering on the possibility of pursuing higher education—an idea

encouraged by one of her teachers: “Mr. Strand had asked Dale Ann once if she was going to go to college. She had beamed at the compliment, cherished it, played it back in her mind from time to time” (52). Dale Ann is considered a paragon of a Native student also by other teachers at her school and is selected for a relocation program dedicated to “American Indian young people who were good students, who showed potential” (53). However, another of Dale Ann’s teachers, Mr. Gunderson, readily dismisses the girl’s aspirations: “[c]ollege isn’t for everyone, you know. […] But there are many opportunities for education and work training out there for a young woman that can lead to a fine future” (53-54). Mr. Gunderson’s paternalism reflects a racist attitude of the time, which emphasizes the presumption that Indigenous peoples are not meant for certain career paths because of their ethnicity. Dale Ann’s horizons are limited to receiving a long-distance phone operator training, which is framed by Mr. Gunderson and the relocation official as complicated and challenging: “it was detailed, it was demanding, it wouldn’t be easy” (54-55). Vocational job training is presented to the Indigenous woman as “the opportunity of the lifetime” (54) that it “would be a shame to waste” (54). The discourse surrounding the federal relocation program operates on paternalism and grandiose promises regarding an offer to receive training for a relatively simple position. At the same time, the reservation is juxtaposed with the urban American landscape: while the former is presented as a geography of misery where “there really was no opportunity at all” (54), the latter emerges as a space full of opportunity. In a way, through the relocation program that targets the most ambitious and talented Indigenous students, the federal government promotes the flight of human capital from reservations to urban centers, which will further impoverish Native communities.

In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass,* the relocation program involves the participant's geographical and emotional isolation from their community, a strategy often employed in policies of Indigenous assimilation. Dale Ann is offered a switchboard operator's training in distant Chicago, a fourteen-hour bus ride from Duluth, the city closest to the Mozhay Point reservation. This distance deprives the young woman of a network of support; she is forced to navigate the new urban reality on her own. The program assigns Dale Ann a relocation worker, Miss Novak, who is supposed to accommodate the girl in the city: "look after her, make sure that she knew how to handle her money, how to budget so that she could pay her own bills and even send some money home" (54). The support offered by the federal government is, therefore, primarily connected to managing personal finances. The presumption that Indigenous youth is not versed in budgeting indicates the patronizing settler attitude towards them. While the relocation worker provides Dale Ann with organizational help, the program fails to provide an adequate and culturally-specific network of support that would aid the participant in the transition to a foreign urban landscape.

In Chicago, Dale Anne experiences alienation and non-belonging. She shares an apartment with two white middle-class female college students "who had volunteered to take a reservation Indian girl into their apartment and introduce her to life in the city" (56). While initially she is cordially welcomed by one of the roommates, Cat, the young woman's curiosity in Dale Ann is based on her bizarre ethnic belonging, the exciting and "exotic presence of an Indian from somewhere out in the woods right there in her and Buff's apartment" (58). On the contrary, the other girl living in the apartment is condescending about Dale Ann as she would

> generally reproach Buff with her poor-me attitude, poor little Indian girl who had to work to pay rent and couldn't go to any college at all, let alone school like Northwestern. Buff was irritated and offended by Dale Ann, who seemed

> to think she landed in some sort of wonderland that was a cross between Buckingham Palace and a country club. (57)

Cat and Buff's privileged lifestyle bewilders Dale Ann as it is utterly different from the one lived on the reservation. Buff openly states that "Dale Ann was, to put it simply, born to a different way of life; Buff knew it, Dale Ann knew it, and there wasn't any point in their trying to pretend that she wasn't" (59). The white female character's classist attitude and discomfort she experiences in Dale Ann's presence emphasize settler racial bias and revulsion towards the Other. However, ironically, despite their privilege, Dale Ann's roommates and their college friends embrace the anti-establishment sentiment of the time resulting from the social dissent against the Vietnam War. They take part in the anti-war demonstrations, support left-wing student organizations, such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and preach radical Marxism: "[t]he group talked about […] the antiwar protest planned for Friday afternoon in front of library. About the Movement. The People. Liberation. James was going to fly to Montreal, then south to illegally enter Cuba to spend spring break with Venceremos, cutting sugarcane in the fields with workers by day and studying with the revolutionaries at night" (62). While they openly criticize the establishment and neoliberal politics, they seem unaware of the fact that it is the system that they reject that guarantees their social status and privilege.

During one of the house parties, Dale Ann is sexually abused by one of Cat and Buff's friends, Paul. The abuse happens when Dale Ann goes to her room to take out a ten-dollar-bill from her savings in order to buy a joint that she thinks might make her a part of the group: "[s]he might become like them, casual and detached, knowing the inside jokes, knowing the right thing to say. […] She might become a Dale Ann generously buying a lid of marijuana for her new friends, who surrounded her with the

laughter and drawling jargon she understood because she was one of them" (68). Yet the protagonist's desire to belong is never satisfied. In her bedroom, she is joined by a white student, who violently rapes her. This brutal act points to the inadequacy of Dale Ann's effort to be accepted as one of the group—she remains the violable and disposable Other. The perpetrator is cognizant of the violence he is perpetrating as he instructs his victim to remain silent: "'Not a sound,' he whispered. 'Not one sound'" (73). Paralyzed, Dale Ann summons up an image of a rabbit caught in a snare and bleeding on the snow (73). The juxtaposition between a dying animal and the raped woman demonstrates the dehumanization and animalization of the Indigenous woman in the settler man's eyes. However, the perpetrator blames the victim for the abuse: "You know you wanted it […] I did you a favor" (73). These words suggest that settler perception of Indigenous women as squaws render their bodies violable. After the act, Paul humiliates Dale Ann sharing with the whole group that she is not his type (73). Another boy, Charles, responds to Paul's mockery, by saying that the Indigenous girl's face reminds him of a seal (73). Again, the Indigenous woman is likened to an animal, which radically dehumanizes her and points to her position as prey.

Following the traumatic event, Dale Ann returns to the reservation but does not find understanding and support in her closest relatives. The woman's return disappoints her mother, Grace, as narrated by Dale Ann in one of the chapters: "there I was, no longer a shining example to my sisters and my little brother and all the other kids at school, and a letdown for the entire reservation" (91). Grace's expectations regarding her daughter's success in the city are connected to a vision of material stability and aspirations to a settler lifestyle: "I had been a big part of Grace's plans for her life's future ease. She had pictured me earning a paycheck, sending money home, meeting some white man with a nice job, sending money home, inspiring my

younger sisters to do the same, all of us sending money home" (90). Grace's desires are founded on her family's participation in settler capitalism and Catholic religiosity, which appear more important than her daughter's well-being. Driven by appearances, the woman does not adequately support Dale Ann, when she learns about her pregnancy—the result of rape. Together with a local priest, Grace comes up with a scheme to conceal the fact that her daughter is expecting a child: "I would go to Duluth, to a home for unwed mothers, where I would work for my keep. Grace would tell people that I had decided to become a nun and was living in a convent" (93). The woman's endeavor emphasizes her daughter's coveted piousness, integrity, and purity in order to disguise what Grace, in line with Catholic teachings, considers moral corruption. Dale Ann's mother, therefore, does not enact her kinship obligations towards her daughter for fear of losing her social status. Moreover, she deprives Dale Ann of an important attribute, her long hair, as a way of disciplining her daughter and enacting her new fabricated identity. In Indigenous cultures cutting one's hair short is often a symbol of grieving loss. Grover transforms this cultural symbol into a site of power struggle where Dale Ann is chastised by her own mother and denied agency. For Grace, the fantasy of propriety and success emerges as more important than the actual welfare of her daughter as she "looked proud, too, of the Dale Ann she had herself re-created and appeared to almost believe in" (93). Grace's self-delusion stresses the unhealthy family dynamic that exacerbates Dale Ann's miserable condition.

Dale Ann is victimized not only by a settler man but also by settler institutions. In the house for unwed mothers, she is coerced into revealing the identity of the child's father, which revives her traumatic memories. The novel stresses the objectification of the Indigenous woman and her body that is enacted in the process: "I inhaled, I spoke

his name, his heavy fingers clenched and squeezed that part of my body that was no longer my own. And, with that, my body and my future became the county's property" (94). Consequently, Dale Ann is deprived of agency both through the act of rape and settler institutional violence. The woman's condition symbolically corresponds to that of Indigenous land—she becomes property, a geography open to appropriation. Moreover, during labor, Dale Ann experiences obstetric violence due to her racial belonging and marital status:

> This time she took my face in both hands and brought her own face close to mine, and I saw I was inhuman, after all, only the incubator for a baby that would belong to someone else; that I had no husband to sit with me in the labor room, that there would be no witnesses to anything she might say. 'Stop it,' she hissed. 'Stop it, Dale Ann; you know and I know it can't possibly hurt that much.' (96)

The Indigenous woman is radically dehumanized in the nurse's gaze. The medic resorts to violence in the interaction with the Indigenous protagonist since, as the degenerate Other, Dale Ann does not merit compassion. Her traumatic experience of childbirth reveals the ubiquity of systemic racism.

Another aspect that Grover tackles in her novel is the policy of forced sterilization implemented in the 1970s that targeted Indigenous women in particular. Rebecca Kluchin analyzes the abuse of sterilization procedures on Native women in the United States in the context of the government's neo-eugenic policies, based on the category of reproductive fitness that excluded the poor and women of color (3-4). The rationale for large-scale coerced sterilization of Indigenous women was "[g]uided by the assumption that restricting birth rates on Native reservations would reduce dependence on government assistance" (Kemball 165). In the 1970s, as many as 25 to 50% of Indigenous women of childbearing age in the U.S. underwent forced

sterilization[15] (Kluchin 108; Lawrence 410). In Grover's novel, on the occasion of her child's delivery, Dale Ann is also permanently deprived of the capacity to further reproduce. The woman is constrained to sign her permission for the sterilization procedure only after it has already taken place:

> In signing I gave my permission for the Indian Health Service to pay for the fallopian tubal ligation that had been done while I was still under anesthetic, which saved the county money, time, and the unpleasantness of dealing with a conscious young woman who might have regretted wishing that the baby that belonged to some happy mother was dead. Or, God forbid, have ever decided that she might wish to have another baby, a child of her own. (98)

By not informing the patient beforehand about the performed procedure, the hospital denies Dale Ann the right to informed consent, violating existing protocols. This unethical practice prevents the woman from exercising her agency and deciding about her health and body. The ubiquity of forced sterilization of Indigenous women reveals racism that guided the U.S. reproductive policies. The federal government's aim was that of controlling the growth of Native population, another example of a settler mechanism of Indigenous elimination and erasure. As argued by Andrea Smith, Indigenous women's "ability to reproduce continues to stand in the way of the continuing conquest of Native lands, endangering the continued success of colonization" (79). By infringing on Indigenous women's reproductive rights, the settler state actively enacts a bio-colonial regime that obstructs Indigenous sovereignty and diminishes Native communities' potential to flourish, affecting "the entire Indian community in the United States" (Lawrence 410).

As a result of abuse, sterilization and subsequent lack of psychological and emotional support, Dale Ann suffers for the rest of her life. The woman's condition is

[15] For more detailed information regarding forced sterilization of Indigenous women in the United States, consult Lawrence and Kluchin.

marked by alienation, invisibility, and loneliness. Her experience of the colonial gendered violence is never recognized, and her sense of personhood is erased by the settler racist and misogynist regime. Jane Lawrence emphasizes that the unspeakable trauma that forcibly sterilized Indigenous women went through led to adverse consequences in their personal lives and social dynamics: "[t]he sterilization of Indian women affected their families and friends; many marriages ended in divorce, and numerous friendships became estranged or dissolved completely. The women had to deal with higher rates of marital problems, alcoholism, drug abuse, physical difficulties, shame, and guilt" (410). Driven by a sense of defeat, Dale Ann dismisses the possibility of building a relationship with a man she is genuinely in love with, Jack Minogeezhik. The traumatic experiences she undergoes prevent Dale Ann from getting romantically involved with the man, which reinforces her sense of longing and loneliness: "I never stopped thinking about Jack, and I watched as his life progressed, parallel to mine and separate" (101). Deprived of the chance of starting a family and becoming a mother, the woman fulfills herself in her job as an educator in programs for Indigenous children on the reservation: "and all those little kids, my, she treated them just like they were her own […] those little kids, they all love her" (8). Through the work with children, in a way, the character shares care and affection that she cannot exercise with her own child. The specter of giving away her child for adoption and the impossibility of having more children haunts Dale Ann, who projects her maternal instinct on her friend's daughter, Crystal: "I sometimes pretended that Crystal was mine […] One of my sweetest memories is the time I handed her a Ritz cracker and she said in her darling little voice, so deep and scratchy, 'Thank you, Mama.' I didn't correct her but answered, 'Oh, that's all right, Crystal; you are welcome.' […] Sometimes I even imagined that Crystal looked like me, maybe the smallest bit, though

she didn't really" (84). Forced sterilization has deleterious consequences for the woman's psyche. Despite being fit and emotionally prepared for motherhood, Dale Ann is brutally denied this possibility by the settler state due to her racial belonging.

Despite Dale Ann's tragic and traumatic past, Grover concludes the protagonist's storyline by centering resurgence. Although Dale Ann is not adequately assisted by her closest family, a female Elder, Beryl, driven by traditional ethics of care, fulfills her obligation towards the community. She ensures that the tribal office receives a copy of adoption documentation concerning Dale Ann's child: "[r]ight in front of the social worker Beryl told me not to sign adoption papers until a copy of the baby's birth certificate was sent to the Ar-Bee-See's enrollment office, and she sat there with me until the worker got us a copy" (99). Beryl's action enacts Indigenous sovereignty and allows for the subsequent reestablishment of disrupted ties. Thanks to the Elder's action, Dale Ann's biological son, Dag, adopted by a white family, returns on the reservation some thirty years later to search for his lost heritage. Not only does he reunite with his biological mother but also becomes an integral part of the community. Furthermore, Dag's return to Sweetgrass causes a reunion between Jack and Dale Ann. Jack eventually understands Dale Ann's motifs when she rejected him: "[l]ate summer in 1971. A college student in Chicago. Jack pondered. Vietnam, his unanswered letter. Dale Ann's vow of chastity. Dale Ann's love of children. Dale Ann's avoidance of him. Dale Ann" (150). The disclosure of Dale Ann's trauma story through Dag's return redresses balance both at the level of the individual and the community. By providing Dale Ann's story with a positive resolution, Grover suggests that Indigenous commitment to the traditional ethics of care and kinship obligations bears potential to transgress settler gendered violence.

1.3. Homing geographies and ecologies

As reflected in Zho Wash's, Dale Ann's, and Dag's stories, the novel's plot revolves around people's movement from and their returns on the reservation, which reflects tribal geographies following the termination and relocation policies. Grover maps the fluctuation of people in-between the reservation and the city, complicating the settler state's narration of unidirectional transfer of Indigenous people to the urban centers. The migration of Indigenous people to the city encouraged by settler policies is likened to seasonal migrations of birds:

> Michael fled down I-35 right in the middle of ricing, gone overnight it seemed, like the Lost Lake geese who flew south in autumn. He flew only as far south as Minneapolis, like a lot of people did from reservations up north, Indians on the road with a destination in mind, looking for work, for opportunity, for relatives who were homesick. To escape for a while. When their hearts' seasons changed, they flew back home, in a migratory pattern that had come to seem as natural and inevitable as the patterns of birds. (107)

Grover, therefore, reframes the geographical implications of settler policies, putting emphasis on the process of coming back home. This representation marks the failure of the termination and relocation policy as the characters do not either settle in the city or assimilate with the urban settler mainstream for diverse reasons. At the same time, it stresses the role of the reservation as a home—while reservation is a settler imposition on Indigenous land, it also functions as a point of reference for community members. Although the intention of the relocation is to assimilate Indigenous people and undermine Native communities on the reservation, Indigenous attachment to collectivity and a particular geography clearly resists settler ambitions. Through the representation of Indigenous movement from and towards the reservation in terms of bird migration patterns, the novel foregrounds the establishment of a new spatial arrangement that, despite being conceived as a settler inscription, becomes a habitual

mode of dwelling as people adapt to the changing circumstances. By employing the environmental imagery, Grover mitigates the impact of the settler assimilationist policies of the 1970s and emphasizes Indigenous endurance and resurgent potential.

In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, Grover employs environmental tropes as a homing device in order to unsettle settler colonial impositions on Indigenous communities and their land. The novel gives prominence to the seasonal land-based practice of wild rice harvest taking place annually on the Mozhay Point reservation. Anishinaabe communities attach immense cultural and ecological value to wild rice. The plant functions as "a glue holding together biological, family, social, cultural, economic, ecological, political, and spiritual dimensions of group life" (Whyte 2017a: 362). In other words, wild rice is not only an important source of nutrition for the Ojibwe but also a carrier of teachings via traditional stories. The practice of harvesting rice in couples who engage with the surrounding environment at the same particular moment in time strengthens a sense of collectivity and community-building. Seasonal collective engagement in harvesting wild rice recalls the traditional lifestyle of Anishinaabe peoples based on seasonal cycles, as well as reciprocity with other community members and the environment. Applying Kyle Whyte's terms, wild rice maintains a hub-like quality, in that it "pull[s] certain people, nonhumans, and ecosystems together in ways that promote collective action" (2017a: 358). In the novel, the community continues the traditional activity respecting its protocols despite their diminished land base and other detrimental effects of colonialism on Indigenous ecologies. The continuation of this land-based practice should be considered a form of resistance against settler inscriptions and their protection, "a strategic process whereby foods that are renewed serve to engender ranges of adaptive options that are appropriate when confronted with the challenges of Indigenous erasure in settler

landscapes" (Whyte 2017a: 363). Furthermore, the wild rice harvest functions in the novel as a ceremony that "invokes the principle of reciprocity" where the humans take responsibility for rice and their community (L. T. Smith 193). Thus, *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* represents a continuation of traditional Native land-based practices in order to mitigate the overwhelming sense of loss and emphasize Indigenous resilience and resistance to settler colonial impositions.

The novel juxtaposes two stories of wild rice harvest that follow a cycle of disruption and reconnection, and thus put into focus the adversities the community must face in the struggle to continue their lifestyles as Anishinaabe people. In the first story, Zho Wash encourages his son, Michael, to rice with a local girl, Margie Robineau, as he himself gives up on participating due to his old age. While at the beginning the ricing partners appear to work well together, the couple's compatibility disintegrates when Margie declares her feelings for Michael (111). The latter's rejection of the young woman and his subsequent departure from Sweetgrass mark a defeat of the young characters' devotion to community and traditional protocols against their personal sentiments, which reflects the progressing assimilation. Beryl notes that the young man, by suddenly leaving the reservation, does not honor his kinship obligation towards his father: "[b]ig help he was with wild ricing, that Michael; left his dad with all that green rice to finish all by himself before it could go bad" (112). Margie also plans to depart as "without Michael there was no reason for her to remain at Sweetgrass" (113). Yet for inexplicable reasons, she is drawn back on the reservation, observes Zho processing the wild rice, and stays in his cabin. The man assists heartbroken Margie in her healing:

> He picked strengthening plants from the swamp and brewed her tea, fed her sweet venison from a young deer he had shot and dressed just for her. Brought from the woods a snarl of sweetgrass, wet and fragrant, that he showed her

> how to braid and to coil and to stitch into baskets. He noticed that each day she cried a little less. (116)

In spite of their substantial age difference, Margie and Zho's curious cohabitation turns into affection, which unnerves Michael as he ironically comments: "[w]hat were they, honeymooners?" (118). A year later Margie gives birth to a daughter, Crystal, whose paternity causes consternation in the community—while Zho claims that he is the father, people suspect it is Michael. Margie's bizarre relationship with the older men is somewhat foretold at the beginning of the novel as, in her dream, the woman encounters Zho Wash's grandmother, who shares a frybread/lugalette recipe with her and offers the following instruction: "*[c]ome back to Sweetgrass; it is yours after all. Come back and take good care of my grandson; take good care of Zho Wash*" (45; italics in the original). Since Margie is a descendant of the LaForce family who was allotted the Muskrat land by the U.S. government, her relationship with Zho is highly symbolic. In a way, the two families, who were displaced from their homelands due to the allotment policy, become united on the land they both occupied in the past. This representation of the entanglement between people and place transgresses the order introduced by settler land management and reflects Indigenous refusal of settler legal orders. Margie and Zho *home* Sweetgrass, emphasizing the transient character of the notion of private property enforced by settlers. Through the reinstatement of Indigenous habitual dwelling, the novel repudiates the settler encroachment on Indigenous land.

Wild rice harvest emerges as a site of homecoming also in the second story set some thirty years later that features Zho and Margie's daughter, Crystal, and Dale Ann's son, Dag. The unanticipated encounter between the male character, alienated from his cultural background through adoption, and the female character, raised on the

reservation but suffering from alcohol addiction, generates tension, but is also transformed into a site of reconnection and resurgence. Dag romanticizes his Native heritage and operates on stereotypes while harvesting wild rice. He imagines his ricing partner as an "Indian princess" (136) and a "conquered princess" (136), which parallels settler discourses that objectify Indigenous women. Nevertheless, Crystal immediately senses Dag's ignorance concerning the realities of living on the reservation and the superficiality of his demeanor:

> Do you think Indian men chase us around and grab us and pull us by the hair, do you think they do that? You, there, in the fancy outfit, you, there, with the yuppie environmentalist big-bucks car, you think some Indian woman is going to follow you home when she reads your white-guy love medicine bumper stickers? Pretty impressive, advertising yourself with your car. How are sales? Who do you think you are, anyway? She didn't say any of those things. Dag wondered if she thought them, or if he did, himself. (137)

For a person raised in an individualistic, capitalist and competitive society, like Dag, to "live in relation" is an ethics that requires a radical shift from Western values and models of behavior (L. T. Smith 193). Although Dag and Crystal are of similar age, their experiences of Indigeneity are discrepant. Due to his white-passing appearance and affluent upbringing, the man is not forced to confront poverty and systemic racism to the same extent as the individuals living on the reservation. Moreover, Dag is conflicted about his status as a Native person. While he realizes that he is a stranger in the community, he exhibits a sense of injustice stressing his entitlement to a Native identity: "I'm legally enrolled; I probably have more Indian blood in me than some of the people at the boat landing who wouldn't talk to me" (134). The man operates on the settler logics of blood quantum to determine his Indigeneity and, therefore, must inevitably be confronted with the Native custom of acknowledging one's belonging by

performing certain roles in the community.[16] Dag's liminality thus reflects the complexity of defining Indigenous identities at the intersections of one's genetics and cultural upbringing.

In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, Grover addresses the issue of non-belonging engendered by settler policies of forced assimilation and attempts to redresses it by imagining a harmonious relationship between Dag and Crystal. While Dag is not versed in Anishinaabe traditions and customs, he displays a sense of connection, however stereotypical or romanticized, to Mozhay Point and its people: "this is where I come from, this is my home, this is the goodness and simplicity and the beauty of my home. My home" (142). The entanglement between him and Crystal becomes evident in the woman's dream where she is chased by a windigo figure that might be associated with her inability to fight addiction (140). The windigo is a cannibalistic monster in some Indigenous storytelling traditions that represents the violation of community values and introduces imbalance within it.[17] In Native stories, the figure of the windigo explicitly implies cannibalism as the most degenerate form of human corruption. Hadley Friedland explains that "[t]he wetiko (or windigo) concept has existed within Cree and Anishinabek societies for centuries. It has most often been translated into English as "cannibal," but it clearly encompasses more than literal flesh-eating. Beyond the ancient stories of cannibal giants who roamed the land, the concept is used to describe human beings who do monstrous things" (2018: xvi). Furthermore, Cynthia Sugars notes that windigo "has also been widely used as a metaphor for the violence

[16] See also Joanna Ziarkowska's inquiry into the issue of incorporating biomedical metaphors based on the tropes of the blood quantum and genetic kinship by Indigenous writers and their juxtaposition with relational models of belonging in her *Indigenous Bodies, Cells, and Genes: Biomedicalization and Embodied Resistance in Native American Literature* (2021).

[17] Also wetiko, wittigo or wendigo. Differences in spelling result from the diversity of Indigenous nations and languages that feature windigo stories.

of imperialism and the sickness at the heart of the modern capitalist world" (79). In Grover's novel, Crystal's alcohol dependence marks the threat of progressing assimilation and unhealed colonial traumas. However, the couple's affection that follows the ricing incident is reciprocal and emphasizes growth and resurgence against the damaging impact of colonialism on their lives. Marriage transforms Crystal, who is no longer followed by her inner windigo; having overcome addiction, "Crystal looked younger in her thirties than she had during her twenties" (154). The stable relationship that she shares with Dag aids her personal and professional development, as she trains to become a licensed nurse practitioner (160). At the same time, Dag becomes an integral part of the community on reservation.

Moreover, Crystal's pregnancy maintains continuity of Native presence as the existence of the new generation subverts settler mechanisms of Indigenous erasure and stresses cultural persistence on the contested land. Once again, the novel emphasizes the importance of cycles for Crystal and Dag's child symbolically replaces Zho in the realm of the living: "I will see our grandson before Margie does, with my death I will leave a place in this world for him" (192). This linkage between past and future generations, which is reflected in the Muskrat family in-between Zho and his grandmother, and subsequently between Zho and his grandson, manifests what Laura De Vos calls *spiralic temporality*, as discussed in my Introduction, for it exhibits the cyclical renewal and transformation of the past into future (5-6) that centers Native restoration. In this way, Grover elevates the resurgent potential of love, care, and kinship. In the novel, Indigenous characters construct better futures for their families and communities despite the overwhelming legacies of colonialism. Ultimately, the literary geographies mapped in *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* are grounded in homing

or re-claiming Indigenous lands through the ethics of reciprocity and care practiced in relation to both people and the environment.

2. Landscapes of Termination in Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*

Louise Erdrich is one of the most celebrated and prolific Indigenous writers in North America, as well as one of the most successful contemporary American authors. She has won numerous eminent literary prizes, among others the National Book Award (2012), the National Book Critics Circle Award (twice in 1984 and 2016), the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction (2015), and the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction (2014). Erdrich's extensive literary oeuvre consists of eighteen novels, three collections of poetry, two memoirs, and seven children's and young adult books (Peterson and Jacobs xi). Erdrich is of mixed Indigenous, French, and German ancestry and an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. She was born in Little Falls, Minnesota, in 1954 and spent her early years in Wahpeton, North Dakota. These territories remain the field of reference for her fiction, which, as argued by Seema Kurup, is a *literature of place*: "Erdrich's is the literature of the land, of home, where identity is clearly constructed out of the climate, the seasons, the natural world, and Ojibwe tribal culture and tradition" (6). Erdrich's academic background is in literary studies; she completed her undergraduate studies in English at Dartmouth College and graduated with MFA in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University. In 2009, Erdrich received an honorary doctorate from Dartmouth College. In addition, Erdrich owns an independent bookstore, Birchbark

Books, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which actively promotes Indigenous writing and arts.[18]

Erdrich's seventeenth novel, *The Night Watchman*, received astounding critical acclaim and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2021. The novel is set in the 1950s in North Dakota and Minnesota—the states that coincide with the ancestral territories of the Ojibwe people. The narrative interweaves two principal plotlines. One of them centers on a Chippewa night watchman in a local jewelry plant, Thomas Wazhashk, who stands against the federal government's plans to terminate the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. As the author explains in the book, this character is modelled on her grandfather, Patrick Gourneau (Erdrich unpag.). The second plotline focuses on Patrice Paranteau (also referred to as Pixie throughout the narrative), a young Indigenous woman living in the bush on the reserve. She sets out on a search for her sister, Vera, who has disappeared in urban Minneapolis. These seemingly disparate itineraries conflate, drawing the reader's attention to the serious repercussions of termination policy for Indigenous communities, and, in particular, Native women. Erdrich confronts the settler government's policy of land allotment and Indigenous people's relocation to American urban centers. She thus addresses a missing chapter on the history of termination, namely the precarious condition of Indigenous women in the city and its contingency with the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in the United States. Since it represents the historic struggle of her people for self-determination, Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* might be considered a Chippewa epic.

[18] For further biographical information concerning Louise Erdrich, see Beidler and Barton, Stookey, Halliday, and Stirrup.

2.1. The reservation's geography of misery and Indigenous labor

The Night Watchman explores the problematic geographical and conceptual boundaries of the reservation, hinting at its colonial origin as a settler inscription. In the novel, the reservation, impoverished and deprived of settler infrastructure, emerges as a geography of misery, where life is constantly defined by the struggle for basic subsistence. The characters often adopt an ambivalent attitude towards their locus. While it is a familiar geography that the community might call home, it also remains a settler imposition and a site of dispossession. One of the community members, Juggie, recalls the government's efforts to diminish the size of the reservation:

> they sent a fool from Wahpeton named McCumber to count Indians. Of course he wasn't a fool. He knew very well what he was doing. Most of us were off hunting and he counts only full-bloods so in consequence our reservation, which was already down to twenty townships, gets mashed down to only two townships. That's what I mean by getting it wrong. […] Getting it wrong meant people starved dead. We don't have our land or all our people in one place ever since. (Erdrich 366)[19]

The incommensurability of Indigenous and settler worldviews and lifestyles is used to the disadvantage of the Native American community. Settler means of defining Indigenous identity through blood quantum are adopted as a strategy to render the community more precarious. The radical reduction of land base adversely impacts the Chippewa as they lose their hunting and gathering grounds, which leads to food insecurity and exacerbating poverty.

Moreover, the introduction of the reservation system implies a complete change of lifestyle as depicted in Erdrich's novel. Thomas's father, Biboon, experiences the transition into the reservation system firsthand: "[t]hey were confined

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[19] Subsequent quotations from *The Night Watchman* come from the 2021 edition of the novel, published by Corsair, and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

on the reservation, and had to get the permission from the farmer in charge to pass its boundaries. For a while they were not allowed to go off to search for food, and one terrible winter the old people starved themselves so that the young people could continue" (68). The normative settler mapping of the reservation's boundaries restricts the community's traditional foodways and the lifestyle they entail. It is a new settler imposition on Indigenous land that requires the Native American community to shift from the reciprocal co-existence with the surrounding environment as an integral part of the ecosystem to the Western ways of inhabiting landscape. Therefore, the reservation surfaces in the novel as a site of confinement and containment—a settler inscription that undermines Indigenous people's survival and alienates them from their traditional ways of life.

The landscape of the reservation in *The Night Watchman* is haunted by grinding poverty. Patrice, one of the novel's leading characters, lives in substandard housing located in a desolate part of the reservation: "a simple pole and mud rectangle, unimproved, low and leaning" (11). The simple shack inhabited by the Indigenous family does not resemble conventional settler housing. For Barnes, the white schoolteacher living on the reservation, the house looks like "a rude shelter for animals, the stacked poles plastered with pale yellow mud" (82). Barnes's first impression evokes a sense of abjection and his allusion to an animal shelter hints at the radical animalization of Indigenous peoples in settler eyes. The Paranteau house is depicted as both spatially and temporally peripheral. Patrice emphasizes the anachronistic character of the dwelling by stating that "time did not exist at her house" (20). Detached from the settler colonial spatio-temporal regime, the Paranteau house is seen by Barnes, the settler character, as outdated and, by extension, degenerate. Yet, being a guest of the Paranteaus, the man notices that the family tends to their dwelling

despite the poverty they experience: “he saw that there were signs of care taken. The table was scrubbed clean. […] Behind the table there was a small wood-burning range and an iron stew pot, steaming” (82). The practices of care radically contrast with the image of decadence conjured up by Barnes.

Patrice’s family continuously strives for survival in the changing economies on the reservation. Regardless of their effort, the protagonist’s low socio-economic standing makes her a victim of bullying at school. The children who mock Patrice attach strong pejorative gender and racial connotations to the poverty experienced by the girl’s family that reflect the dominant racist ideology: “she had been so poor she came to school in shoes cut so her toes could poke out, coatless until the teacher scrounged one up, underwear sewed from a flour sack, hair in long traditional braids. They had called her squaw. Even the other girls. They had called her dirty” (235). The girl is referred to with an offensive term used to devalue Indigenous femininity, which designates her as a reprehensible other, her child body being prematurely sexualized. The nexus of race, gender, and poor economic standards constitutes zones of precarity, whereby Indigenous women like Patrice continually struggle for survival.

While Patrice belongs to the poorest social stratum on the reservation, Thomas’s situation can appear more privileged. He owns a farm, featuring an old house that he bought “along with the allotment back in 1880, before the reservation was pared down” (25), which lacked a source of water. In 1940s, Thomas’s family benefits from a government housing program that provides them with “a snug government cottage” (25). His house is well-maintained: “[t]he house was neat. Everything had its place. Nothing was torn or hanging loose. Everything was mended” (77). However, it does not benefit from modern commodities present in the great majority of American households at the time. For instance, the house lacks access to

running water: "[o]n weekends, he used the team and wagon to haul the water for drinking. For bathing and cleaning they had the rain barrels. In winter they melted snow" (41). Not only are many households on the reservation denied access to running water infrastructure, but they also are imperiled by water insecurity: "[m]ost people closer in, near town, or out in prairie land, had lost their water or cattle had ruined their springs. Even the dug wells were drying out" (48). Due to the changes in the landscapes caused by settler inscriptions, such as progressing urbanization and livestock farming, for many community members supplying one's family with safe fresh water becomes an everyday struggle.

Thomas's wife, Rose, aspires to a lifestyle facilitated by modern infrastructure absent on the reservation. When Rose assists her husband during his night shift in the jewel bearing plant, she takes the opportunity to have a hot shower in the ladies' room, which she greatly enjoys: "[s]he couldn't help but like the plumbing" (360). Rose's aspirations to improve her family's comfort of living are also visible in her fascination with an electric clothes iron: "she had asked for a plug-in ironing machine. They didn't have electricity yet. So getting the iron didn't make sense. Still, Thomas bought her the plug-in iron. She guarded the iron jealously, shined it like a trophy" (76). The absence of modern infrastructure, such as running water and electricity, on the reservation exposes the disparity between settler American and Native American standards of living. As argued by Jean O'Brien "non-Indians actively produced their own modernity by denying modernity to Indians" (xxiii). However, Erdrich represents the Chippewa community as open to modernization and settler infrastructure with ambitions to improve their socio-economic condition. This radically contrasts with the ubiquitous image of Indigenous peoples as backwards and adverse towards progress,

demonstrating that their underprivileged position stems from settler colonial politics that favor the reserve's underdevelopment.

The legacy of settler colonialism remains tangible for the Indigenous community depicted in the novel. Erdrich emphasizes the role of settler colonial land politics in creating the condition of scarcity on the reservation that continues in the twentieth century:

> There weren't enough jobs. There wasn't enough land. There wasn't enough farmable land. There weren't enough deer in the woods or ducks in the sloughs and a game warden caught you if you fished too many fish. There just wasn't enough of anything and if he didn't save what little there was from disappearing there was no imagining how anyone would get along. (166)

When access to land and its resources—the basis for Indigenous subsistence—is radically limited and constantly endangered, the Native community has little opportunity to flourish. Settler inscriptions as represented in *The Night Watchman* threaten Indigenous well-being and survival. The reservation system leads to the progressing abandonment of the traditional lifestyle rooted in grounded normativity and causes disruption of Chippewa reciprocal and relational ecologies.

The daughter of one of the tribal members and a young researcher, Millie Cloud, outlines the poor economic condition of the community in the form of a report. The scholar's study surveys the economic and physical condition of households on the reservation: "Millie had noted the construction of each house, the condition of the roof and windows, if there were windows. She noted how the house was heated, and how many people inhabited the house […] asked a number of questions about money and made a number of additional observations" (261). Being an outsider in her father's community since she was raised by her mother in Minneapolis, Millie observes the extent of poverty that troubles the reservation and perceives it as a geography of

misery: "[n]ow she knew what it was like on the reservation and thought that living there would be quite a challenge for her" (261). After having read the report, Thomas points to the paradoxes it poses:

> The good news is we're poor enough to require that the government keep, and even improve upon, the status quo. The bad news is we're just plain poor. […] The good news is we are sheltered by roofs. The bad news is 97 percent are made of tar paper. The good news is that we have schools. The bad news is that so many of us are illiterate. […] The good thing is we have this report. The bad news is also this report. (306)

Erdrich emphasizes the sense of contradiction evoked by the report by using anaphoric structures. They demonstrate that on the surface the condition of the community does not appear to be tragic; however, at the core, their everyday realities are marked by poverty and precarity. In this way, the reservation as depicted by Erdrich in *The Night Watchman* emerges as a geography of misery shaped by settler colonial biopolitics that undermines Indigenous livability.

In the world represented by Erdrich, it is no longer possible to survive on the reservation relying on traditional Chippewa economies; therefore, the Indigenous community members are forced to participate in the settler capitalist modes of production and consumption for sustenance. Both protagonists,[20] Patrice and Thomas, alongside other community members, primarily women, take jobs in the first manufacturing plant established close to the reservation. Erdrich thus represents the first generation of Chippewa workers within the settler capitalist system: "[Patrice] was the first person in the family to have a job. Not trapping, hunting, or berry-gathering job, but a white people job. In the next town" (13). The work at the jewel

[20] I use the term protagonist for clarity to indicate the "primary" characters in Erdrich's novel, whose storylines structure the plot. Yet rather than depicting an itinerary of individual protagonists, Erdrich focuses on the entirety of the community, hence, in the case of *The Night Watchman* the protagonist should also be associated with the collective.

bearing plant provides the only source of income and a provisional sense of stability for many families. While Indigenous labor in the manufactory undoubtedly benefits individual families in the financial sense, participation in settler economies inevitably entails progressing assimilation to the Western lifestyle. Thanks to his job, Thomas can afford to purchase and maintain a vehicle: "[h]is beloved car was a putty-gray Nash, used […] Now with this regular job he could make regular payments. No need to worry how weather would treat his crops, like before. Most important, this was not a car that would break down and make him late for work. This was a job he wanted very much to keep" (18). Thomas's car symbolically reflects the male protagonist's aspirations to the comforts of the American settler lifestyle. However, paradoxically, the main purpose that the car fulfills is that of a reliable mode of transportation to the man's workplace. This illustrates how capitalism creates prerequisites for participating in its prosperity and new needs that allow a racialized minority to enter the system. According to Altamirano-Jiménez, Indigenous labor functions as "a colonial imposition and a form of discipline involving everyday life and embedded in social and power relations producing inequalities" (29). In other words, Indigenous work has been adopted as a strategy of controlling Native bodies, assimilating them, and, at the same time, upholding their underprivileged position.

By imposing a regime that disciplines Indigenous bodies and lifestyles, the factory emerges as a site of exploitation of Indigenous labor, female labor in particular. Indigenous women are preferred to men and women of other ethnicities for the job since they score high in dexterity tests: "[t]he government attributed their focus to Indian blood and training in Indian beadwork" (3). The work that Indigenous women perform at the jewel bearing plant requires manual dexterity, focus, and attention to detail. For Native women the job is daunting and physically taxing: "[b]y the middle

of the afternoon, her shoulders began to blaze. Her fingers cramped and her flat ass was numb" (9). Furthermore, the workers at the plant are treated as expendable—they are allowed only three days of sick leave, while any other time off work is unpaid and there is "no guarantee that [one] would keep [one's] job" (60). When the factory awaits an inspection, female employees are denied a coffee break in the afternoon, which they see as a necessary moment of rest (253). Strikingly, the women are also forbidden by the white manager, Mr. Vold, to speak while working (10). As the job ensures day-to-day survival for Patrice's family, the protagonist is constantly haunted by the prospect of losing it: "[s]he couldn't get sick. If she got sick, there was no telephone to let anybody know. She would be fired. Life would go back to zero" (20). There is a pervasive sense of uncertainty surrounding her employment, which emphasizes Patrice's vulnerable and precarious position. The woman's participation in capitalism is restricted solely to labor as she is denied access to the modern infrastructure. This demonstrates that even though the presence of the enterprise certainly improves the quality of life of individuals and whole families on the reservation, it does not introduce a systemic and comprehensive change that could transform the socio-economic situation of the community.

Furthermore, in *The Night Watchman* women's bodies become "zones of sacrifice," as defined by Voyles (10-11) and discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, for the production of luxury goods. Valentine, Patrice's best friend and co-worker, is promoted to work in an acid washing room (286). Since the change of the position comes with a pay rise, Patrice is jealous of her colleague's apparent success. Yet Valentine's position, framed as a promotion by the company's manager, in fact, involves a transfer to a hazardous working environment and exposition to chemicals. The woman needs to wear "goggles, gloves, a white hair wrap, and a

protective rubber apron" (286). The reason for Valentine's transfer to the acid washing room was presumably dictated by her slower work pace in comparison to other workers: "Patrice was faster, more precise, more focused, and produced a clean card every time" (286). This demonstrates that Indigenous women workers are treated instrumentally by the manufacture's management. The strain of working in the factory is also manifested by Patrice's eye infection:

> [i]t wasn't bad at first, as long as she resisted the need to rub them. She could still—blinking, squinting—focus on the card. She could pluck up the jewel bearings, glue them correctly, and complete her work. But too slowly. […] The pain began to sharpen. Pus glued her eyes shut when she slept. […] She was afraid that she might lose her job. (336)

This shows that the worker's bodies are useable as long as they are capable of enduring the hardship of working in the factory. Otherwise, they are expendable. Erdrich's representation of the Indigenous women's working conditions confirms Carol Williams's argument that "racially marked women [a]re conscripted as indentured or *colonized* manual laborers, at the extremes of political and social marginality" (8). In other words, the status of Indigenous women on the labor market reflects their precarity and disposability.

Yet the jewel bearing plant emerges also as a space of emancipation for the female characters in the novels. Although they are forbidden to speak while at work, the women exercise their agency: "they did speak. They hardly remembered what they said, later, but they talked to one another all day" (10). Patrice compares the work at the jewelry manufacture to the traditional Chippewa women's activity of beading: "[i]t reminded Patrice of the way she felt when beading with her mother. Beading put them both into a realm of calm concentration. They murmured to each other lazily while they plucked up and matched the beads with the tips of their needles. In the jewel plant,

women also spoke in dreamy murmurs" (10). The juxtaposition of the women's communal traditional practice of beading and the work at the plant suggests that some aspects of the Chippewa culture are adapted to the settler capitalist setting. While women's precarious economic situation forces them to participate in settler modes of production, their emphasis on collectivity and reciprocity creates sites of resistance. In the words of Brenda Child, "[r]ather than abandon cultural ideas about work, they [Indigenous women] reimagined and restructured labor in ways that were of greatest worth to the community" (240). This is evident in the novel, when in a gesture of resistance, women working at the plant prepare a petition to reinstate the coffee break (437). As explained by Erdrich at the end of the novel, the women's resistance and struggle to get unionized produced tangible outcomes: "[i]n the end unionization was voted down. However, pay increases were immediately authorized. A cafeteria was completed. And the workers regained their coffee break" (444). *The Night Watchman* depicts Indigenous women as far from passive victims, restoring their agency and hinting at the activist impulse underlying their actions. Erdrich's account of Indigenous women's labor is an important literary contribution which sheds light on the history of Indigenous women's work in the settler colonial United States that remains virtually unnoticed.

2.2. Termination—emancipation—extermination

As discussed in more detail in Chapter One of this dissertation, the termination policy was initiated in 1953 and introduced the government's plan aiming to extinguish Native American tribes' status as wards of the state[21] and, consequently, remove

[21] For more details concerning the termination policy's effort to abandon the legal construction of Native Americans as wards of the state, consult Valandra (35-40).

federal responsibilities for Indigenous nations. In practical terms, terminated nations would no longer have access to federal services provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), encompassing such areas as infrastructure, health care and education (Britten 122). The reason for termination was largely dictated by the urgency of cost reduction (Valandra 30; Deloria 74). However, the project also involved settler mechanisms of Indigenous elimination: Native individuals from terminated nations would lose their tribal affiliation and become assimilated into the settler mainstream, which radically threatened Native nations' sovereignty. Historically, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa was one of the first tribes to be included in the termination plan, alongside the Flathead (Montana), Klamath (Oregon), Menominee (Wisconsin), and Potawatamie (Kansas and Nebraska) (Martinez and Williams Bordeaux 438). While the policy was never officially implemented in relation to the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, other communities like the Klamath and Menominee struggle with the negative outcomes following their termination till this day (Deloria 70-72).

In Erdrich's novel, the early information about the government's intention to terminate its obligations towards Native American tribes reaches Thomas, the chairman of the Turtle Mountain Advisory Committee, through rumors he gathers from newspaper articles and tribal newsletters: "[s]ubdued jitters at the passage of a bill that indicated Congress was fed up with Indians. Again. No hint of strategy. Or panic, but that would come" (18). The fact that the tribal council obtains information about the policy that refers to their situation from news reports indicates the lack of prior consultation with Indigenous groups regarding the government's plans. Thomas and other community members finally gain access to the document's draft through their personal contacts: "Moses had a good friend in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Area

Office in Aberdeen, South Dakota, who had sent him a copy of the proposed bill that was supposed to emancipate Indians […] Thomas hadn't seen the bill yet. Moses gave him the envelope and said, 'They mean to drop us'" (23). The government's effort to withhold information about the termination from Indigenous tribes who would be affected by the policy first-hand functions as a mechanism of Native dispossession that targets their rights and land base.[22]

In the official media discourse, the federal government neatly frames their intention to terminate some of the Indigenous nations as a process of their emancipation:

> *E-man-ci-pation*. *Eman-cipation*. This word would not stop banging around in his head. *Emancipated*. But they were not enslaved. Freed from being Indians was the idea. Emancipated from their land. Freed from the treaties that Thomas's father and grandfather had signed and that were promised to last forever. So as usual, by getting rid of us, the Indian problem would be solved. (80)

Thomas immediately realizes that the liberatory rhetoric incorporated by the state conceals the ulterior motive for the bill. In contrast to the information circulated in the mainstream discourses, the government's strategy is that of profound assimilation and, consequently, eradication of Indigenous peoples from the American social landscape, as a solution to the "Indian problem." Emancipation serves as a euphemism to describe yet another settler mechanism of Indigenous erasure and land appropriation. Erdrich includes fragments of the bill's draft in order to illustrate that the official document

[22] Reetta Humalajoki notes, based on the minutes of the Klamath General Council meeting, that one of the first terminated tribes, the Klamath, were not informed about the details of termination of their nation: "the broad tribal membership did not have a strong understanding of the basic concepts of the policy, let alone how it would be implemented" (416). The efforts to withhold the details of the policy from tribal councils accompanied by an intense propaganda in the media highlighting Indigenous emancipation appear a consistent and deliberate strategy of the federal government when introducing the policy.

does not appertain to the noble idea of emancipation as publicized in the media. While studying the act, Thomas reflects on the meaning of the term:

> in the first line of the first dry sentence, the word termination, which instantly replaced in Thomas's mind that word emancipation with its powerful aura of expanse. In the newspapers, the author of the proposal had constructed a cloud of lofty words around this bill—emancipation, freedom, equality, success—that disguised its truth: termination. Termination. Missing only the prefix. The ex. (90)

Thomas suggests a contiguity between "termination" and "extermination," as opposed to the euphemistic "emancipation." The termination policy fits into the U.S. government's politics towards Native Americans across centuries as its main goal has been to eliminate Native presence on the land. Termination is, therefore, yet another manifestation of the settler colonial nation state's continuous and consistent pursuit of Indigenous dispossession. Joyce Asiginak, a community member in Erdrich's novel, sees termination and its flagship plan to relocate Native peoples to the urban areas as a strategy of removal: "They want to 'relocate.' That's fancy for 'remove.' How many times were we removed? No counting. Now they want to send us to the Cities" (121). Again, Joyce's stance points to the recurrent pattern of settler policies that aim to dispossess Indigenous people.

It is vital to emphasize, however, that Indigenous responses to the planned termination varied. While in Erdrich's novel the primary reaction towards the government's policy is that of dissent, *The Night Watchman* also presents a divergent perspective of one of the community members, who is ready to embrace the policy. Eddy Mink, a war veteran who turned into an alcoholic, sees termination as an opportunity: "I heard about it, sure. This thing sounds good […] Hear I could sell my land. All I got is twenty acres" (24). Eddy adopts an individualistic stance, whereby his economic well-being eclipses the negative outcomes of the planned termination for

his community. Thomas attempts to convince Eddy that termination of their tribe would not only impoverish individuals like Eddy but also the entire community: "you wouldn't have any hospital. No clinic, no school, no farm agent, no nothing. […] No government commodities. […] By law you wouldn't be an Indian. […] What about when your land money runs out. What then? […] What about how it will affect all the old people, people who want to keep their land" (24-25). Thomas exercises his kinship obligation towards other community members, particularly the most vulnerable ones, by emphasizing the importance of the collective. Eddy, although reluctantly, admits that Thomas is right (25). In the end, Eddy Mink becomes one of the most significant advocates against termination. In one of the official hearings concerning the policy, he boldly states that: "[t]he services that the government provides to Indians might be likened to rent. The rent for the use of the entire country of the United States" (201). The character's transformation marks the community's collective effort towards self-determination.

Erdrich depicts in detail the organization of the community's struggle against termination. Thomas writes numerous letters to congressmen, senators, and heads of local organizations to present the Chippewa position on their planned termination. He also contacts local authorities, explaining the repercussion of the bill for individual states and counties, i.e., being burdened with providing medical services, schooling, and infrastructure on the reservation:[23]

> He was so close to getting the county commissioner from the next county over to write a letter that would strenuously object to taking over federal responsibilities for his people. There was not a sufficient tax base on the reservation to care for roads, not to mention schools. Oh yes, in this case they needed all the minor officials of white townships and counties that they could scare from behind their office desks. Thomas began to write. (362)

[23] The economic burden imposed on individual states and counties following termination was not anticipated by the federal government, as stressed in studies by, among others, Vine Deloria Jr. (68-72) and Laurie Arnold (119-120).

The intense work required by the struggle against termination compromises Thomas's health (441-442), which manifests the considerable strain of the unpaid labor against settler colonial impositions. Apart from Thomas's activism, the tribal committee consider their plan of action in the face of impending termination. Thomas's father, Biboon, who remembers previous struggles of the Chippewa against settler plans to diminish the tribe's land base and violate the treaties, emphasizes that resistance against termination should be collective (68; 118) and suggests organizing a petition (119). Biboon highlights that "[s]urvival is a changing game" (119) and, therefore, the community needs to adjust to the current circumstances and adopt settler tools to resist the government's plan. The tribal council endorses Biboon's idea and initiates an information campaign on the reservation, assuring that all the community members can express their dissent. Louis Pipestone, responsible for collecting signatures, "tend[s] the petition like a garden" (160). This metaphorical statement reveals that the collective action is rooted in the ethics of responsibility and reciprocity. It also highlights the potential of the community to thrive despite the settler colonial impositions.

The Night Watchman addresses the religious and racist roots of the termination policy. In order to confront the government's plan, Thomas gathers information about its actual initiator, Senator Arthur V. Watkins, a historical figure:

> I will think of Watkins as my adversary. An enemy has to be defeated in battle, but an adversary's different. You must outwit an adversary. So you do have to know them very well. In Thomas's experience, anyone who took on and tried to sweepingly solve what was always called the 'plight' or the Indian 'problem' had a personal reason. He wondered what that would be for Arthur V. Watkins. (276)

A whole chapter in the novel is dedicated to the biography of the Republican senator, who served two terms from 1947 to 1959, as well as the racial bias that prompts his

actions. Erdrich points to Watkins's Mormon background; his family historically profited from Indigenous dispossession during the allotment era "when the Ute people and the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, where the Watkins land was located, were relieved of 13.8 million acres of land" (185). As stressed by the narrator, "Arthur V. Watkins grew up on some of this land, which had been stolen by his father" (185). Senator Watkins emerges as a villain in Erdrich's novel, as a beneficiary of settler colonialism and a man immersed in religious ideology that favors Native assimilation. The figure of a ghost, a victim of the boarding school system, who reappears periodically in the novel, draws parallels between Senator Watkins and the boarding school officials: "[t]he instant that Roderick saw Senator Arthur V. Watkins, he knew exactly who he was. Watkins was the teacher who'd taught the Palmer Method, the little man who'd whacked his hands with the ruler's edge, who'd pulled his ears, who'd screeched at him, who'd called him hopeless, who'd punished him for talking Indian" (400). This comparison directs attention to the function of termination as another policy of forced assimilation. During the hearings in Washington, Watkins applies simplifications and stereotypes concerning Indigenous people, claiming, for instance, that they dislike farming (401). His statements reveal his paternalistic and self-righteous attitude: "[n]o government, no matter how benevolent, can put ambition into people. That has to be developed by themselves. You can't legislate morality, character, or any of those fine virtues into people. You learn to walk by walking" (403). This passage from the novel echoes the infamous statement that Watkins made during a real-life meeting with the Menominee tribe: "[n]obody can walk for you. You have to do your own walking. And the only way you can learn to walk is to use your own limbs" (Herzberg 319). Erdrich's attention to historical detail points to the solid archival research that underlies her novel and encourages reflection on this particular

historical moment not only in the light of legal and economic resolutions but also socio-cultural tensions of the time.

Moreover, Erdrich introduces in *The Night Watchman* the characters of two Mormon missionaries, Elnath and Vernon, who embody the inherent racism towards Indigenous people informed by the congregation's sacred texts. The racial bias is encapsulated in the concept of the Lamanites put forward by the Book of Mormon. Vernon, attracted to a Chippewa girl, Grace Pipestone, emphasizes the forbidden character of his affection due to the woman's race:

> he says that if his seed mingled with a Lamanite's he would be damned to the unrelenting fire, but he would be willing to suffer […] then I get curious and ask what's a Lamanite? He says didn't I know and I say no. He tells me I'm a Lamanite and I say no I'm a Chippewa. He says same thing as a Lamanite. But if I would take up becoming a Mormon I will turn whiter and whiter until I am shining in the dark. (270)

The primary plotline in *The Book of Mormon* involves the conflict between "the God-fearing, civilized, and white-skinned Nephites and their unbelieving, cursed, and dark-skinned cousins, the Lamanites" (Mueller 33). Therefore, in Mormonism, the dark skin of the Lamanites is inherently tied to their moral corruption. The concept of the Lamanites is, therefore, essentially a racial category. Accordingly, Mormons reiterate the colonial strategy of labelling the diverse Indigenous nations of the continent with a misnomer and presenting them as the uncivilized heathens that need to be assimilated in order to receive salvation. This is particularly evident in the idea propagated by the congregation that Native skin becomes whiter as they are converted to Mormonism (Mueller 52; Murphy 2). Mormon theology elevates the mission of assimilating Indigenous peoples, echoing the colonial concepts of the civilizing mission and the white man's burden. Through the characters of Elnath and Vernon, the reader gains access to a viewpoint shaped by a conflation of religious and racial prejudice. This

perspective is crucial to understand the point of reference for Senator Watkins's quest to terminate Native tribes, rooted in a tradition that highlights the pursuit of Indigenous assimilation.

Erdrich emphasizes Indigenous activism and agency against settler mechanisms of erasure at work during the termination era. The impending danger of termination inspires collective mobilization on the reservation. Besides raising a petition, tribal members also organize a boxing fundraiser, the "Battle Royal Benefit" (273), where two local boxing idols compete to raise money to send the Chippewa delegation to Washington D.C. to participate in termination hearings. Symbolically, the Indigenous boxer, Wood Mountain, wins on points over Joe Wobleszynski, his settler opponent, which in a way foreshadows the community's successful struggle over the settler imposition. Termination becomes the most significant concern of the community and an element strengthening its unity and self-determination. The grassroots spirit is also reflected in the community's effort to engage Millie Cloud, the young Chippewa scholar, in the meticulous preparations for the hearings in Washington. Millie's report is employed to confirm the council's stance that the economic situation on the reservation does not allow for the termination of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. Ultimately, in Erdrich's novel termination policy is depicted as the federal government's fiasco that, instead of eliminating Indigeneity, leads to the resurgence of the Chippewa.

2.3. Indigenous women's erasure in the cityscape

In *The Night Watchman*, Erdrich constructs the city as an urban borderland, whereby Indigenous women are relegated to the zones of utmost precarity. Minneapolis

emerges as perilous and corrupt spatiality, where female characters, deprived of agency and personhood, have to navigate the social margins. Unexperienced and without a network of support, they become an easy target for exploitation. Notwithstanding, in order to persuade Indigenous peoples to relocate, the government's publicity offers an idyllic image of the city accompanied by the promise of a getaway from the reservation's impoverishment:

> Behind her a poster was taped to the wall. **Come to Minneapolis**. The Chance of Your Lifetime. **Good Jobs** in Retail Trade, Manufacturing, Government Federal, State, Local, Exciting Community Life, Convenient Stores. **Beautiful Minnesota**. 10,000 Lakes. Zoo, Museum, Drives, Picnic Areas, Parks, Amusement, Movie Theaters. **Happy Homes**, Beautiful Homes, Many Churches, Exciting Community Life, Convenient Stores. (63; emphases in the original)

This proves to be an effective strategy that encourages many to search for a better life. In the novel, the protagonist reflects on her sister's motivation to leave the reservation as resulting from the settler state's propaganda: "[b]esides love, Patrice thought that Vera had probably gone to Minneapolis for Exciting Community Life and Beautiful Homes" (63). This idealized vision of the city where Indigenous people are bound to prosper, as propagated by the state, stands in stark contrast to the violent urban topographies sketched by Erdrich. Such a juxtaposition directs attention to the discrepancy between the expectations of Indigenous people moving to the cities as based on the official state narrative and the brutal realities they often have to confront. For this reason, "[m]any people came back within a year. Some, you never heard from again" (11). The number of people returning to the reservation marks the failure of the relocation program to accommodate Indigenous peoples and blend them in the urban mainstream. At the same time, Erdrich illustrates how the policy of assimilation became a policy of erasure regarding those who went missing on the urban borderland.

Due to their position of vulnerability, Indigenous women would sometimes be intentionally lured to the city only to be coerced into prostitution. Patrice is enlightened about such dealings by her coworker, Betsy: "[t]hey come up here and tell women they'll get married down in the Cities, let's go. Then down in the Cities, they ditch the woman, sell her to someone who puts them out for sex" (296). This is what happens to Patrice's sister, Vera, whose prospective husband has "apparently not married her, as she still had her own name" (125) after their arrival in Minneapolis. When the woman's loved ones lose contact with her, finding Vera is her family's responsibility because no institutional means of tracking relocated Indigenous persons are offered by the state program (63). Since the novel portrays the beginnings of Indigenous people's mass relocation to the big cities, Patrice, oblivious to the mechanisms of exploitation, is tentative about her sister's status as a missing person, which she demonstrates by saying hesitantly that she "had maybe disappeared" (13). While very much missed by her family, especially her sister who desperately tries to find her, the woman's missing status is not acknowledged by the state. When Zhaanat and Patrice ask Thomas for advice regarding finding Vera, the man suggests notifying the police. Thomas's belief in the settler institutions radically contrasts with the women's perspective:

> what he said was both unthinkable and disappointing to Patrice and Zhaanat. To seek police assistance for an Indian woman was almost sure to put her in the wrong. No matter what happened, she would be the one blamed and punished. It was for that reason unthinkable to approach the police, and it was disappointing because Thomas trusted their enemies. (221-222)

The female characters' recognition of the ubiquitous criminalization of Indigenous women by the settler state and the law enforcement institution's complicity in upholding the status quo demonstrates the systemic dimension of Indigenous women's precarity endorsed by the settler United States.

In an endeavor to find her sister, Patrice ventures into urban Minneapolis. Arriving at her destination, the woman feels overwhelmed by the immensity of the cityscape, which appears to be a maze: "she had seen enough of the size of the city to know it was more than miles. It was street after confusingly similar street" (104). Mobsters use women's spatial alienation in the new urban geography to lure them into their snare. Indigenous women's propensity for being trafficked is emphasized in the scene when Pixie after her arrival at the train station is almost immediately approached by a shady male character, who insistently offers her a ride:

> You'll like it here. You want a job? There's jobs. I can get you a job right now. You have to know the right people. I know the right people. A cabdriver? No, I'm not a cabdriver. I drive people around but I'm not a cabdriver. Here. I gotta stop here and see a fellow. You come in with me. Sit down, take a load off. No? Well I don't take no for an answer. (105)

In Erdrich's novel, the initial stages of relocation provide mobsters with an easy occasion to prey on Indigenous women, who are oblivious of their precarious position. Patrice is bewildered by the fact that "she found the scum so fast" (106). The process of coaxing the protagonist into "accepting" the job in a nightclub emphasizes her lack of agency. She acknowledges how illusory her options are by commenting that the offer "[s]ounds like a trap" (113).

The night club that Patrice is coerced to work in has ties to the resource development industry. The owner named it Log Jam 26: "as a tribute to northwoods industry he decided on a lumbering theme. Thus, Log Jam. 26 is just a number. There is a Paul Bunyan type of theme to the drinks and such" (109). Paul Bunyan's myth is deeply entrenched in the American consciousness, which is proved by a number of statues representing the frontier lumberjack of gargantuan proportions, often accompanied by a blue ox, Babe the Blue Ox, located across the country. The reference

to the American folk hero, or American *fakelore* hero[24] (Dundes 5), is not accidental. Paul Bunyan embodies greatness, immensity, strength and tenacity, as well as simplicity, unsophistication, and naivety—mirroring the Americans' self-image in the nineteenth century (12). Alan Dundes argues that the folk hero "symbolizes America's great size and strength. He is concerned with clearing the land, with making profit from its rich natural resources" (15). Paul Bunyan, therefore, epitomizes settler colonial expansion and exploitation of resources. What is more, his enormous size and physical strength make him a paragon of settler masculinity. In *The Night Watchman*, the lumberjack theme of the club and its folk patron therefore reveal the toxicity of settler patriarchal norms. The affinity between the exploitation of natural resources and of (racialized) women's bodies becomes evident; both forms of exploitation are parts of the same system.

In the urban spaces of dubious reputation that epitomize settler patriarchy and toxic masculinity, the settler fantasies of the exotic and hypersexual squaw are imposed on Indigenous women's bodies, which are utterly objectified in the white men's gaze. During her short episode of working in a night club, Patrice is constrained to wear a Baby Blue Ox costume, namely a "blue rubber wet suit with white hooves painted at the ends of the hands and feet. Two large white disks with scarlet centers where the breasts would be" (112). The costume manifests the animalization of the woman—her othered racialized body explicitly disguised in the form of a bizarre animal. Dressed as a ludicrous blue ox, Pixie performs an erotically charged dance submersed in a water-filled large aquarium, doing "the underwater tricks" (110). In

[24] It might be argued that Paul Bunyan's status as the national folk hero is fabricated, hence, situated in the category of *fakelore*. Richard Dorson proved that the hero's origin in the oral folk tales or legends is doubtful. Instead, he traces the provenance of Paul Bunyan's character in written stories and, most notably, the advertisement campaign of the Red River Lumber Company (Dundes 5).

this respect, her hypersexualized body is put on public display in order to satisfy the desires and fantasies of white men. The "waterjack" performances respond to the dominant image of Native women as exotic, erotic, animal-like objects. Trapped in the very limited space of the aquarium, Patrice surfaces a captive prey for the predacious scrutiny of the men who attend the club. Therefore, the show reproduces the inherently colonial dynamics whereby Indigenous women are objects of colonists' desire, and thus deprived of personhood. While Patrice manages to escape from the criminal establishment, many women are less lucky. The warnings of female staff at the night club disclose the exploitative approach to women's bodies: "[w]aterjacks don't last. You better quit while you still can. […] The waterjacks, they up and die" (157). In this respect, Indigenous women's lives are seen as expendable, catering for the male desires.

Other than in spaces of exotic and sexualized spectacle, Indigenous women in Erdrich's novel are relegated to the racialized zones of degeneration on the urban skid roads. In neglected parts of the city, they are virtually erased—confined in precarious domestic settings and coerced into sex work. An Indigenous woman coming from the White Earth reservation, Bernadette Blue, remains in a relationship with a dangerous man involved in criminal activities. While on the surface the character seems to be well-off—"[s]he was a stunner. Wearing a red silk kimono with pink blossoms" (149)—Patrice notices "the bruises through her makeup" (150), evidencing that she suffers from domestic violence. Bernadette is represented as an ambivalent character in the novel. On the one hand, she is a victim of physical, emotional, and presumably sexual abuse. Yet, on the other hand, she is, whether intentionally or not, complicit in the actions of her partner's gang. When Bernadette buys her family member a car, Patrice suspects the woman is involved in her sister's disappearance (309). The frailty

of urban Indigenous condition requires the female character to navigate the zones of precarity. She must decide between being a part of the illicit practices in a position of illusory power and becoming one of the women who are trafficked, like Vera. This sense of tentativeness regarding Bernadette and her actions points to the stark ethical choices that the woman must have made in order to survive in the precarious urban geography.

The revelation regarding Vera's previous address also implies Indigenous women's confinement in degenerate spaces, as well as their radical animalization. During her investigation into her sister's disappearance, Patrice witnesses a horrific scene. In a neglected, dangerous and racialized part of the town, the protagonist reaches a desolate apartment, where she finds a dying dog chained to the wall in one of the bedrooms, as well as other rooms: "[i]n each one, a filthy mat, a gnarled blanket, sometimes shit, the smell of piss, a chain bolted into the wall and at the end of each chain an empty dog collar […] Strips of an old sheet. Dried blood. Two wadded-up diapers" (147). The sensory imagery applied to describe the apartment immediately manifests its degrading character. By means of the synesthetic reference to feces and blood, this degenerate spatiality provokes the sense of utmost abjection. Erdrich employs the trope of a dog which is, as argued by Connie Jacobs, pervasive in the writer's oeuvre (87), signifying a "protector, companion, helper, and healer" (89). In *The Night Watchman*, the dying canine encountered by Patrice "mind-talks to Pixie, relaying critical information" (C. Jacobs 89): "[s]he died on the end of a chain, like me" (Erdrich 147). Erdrich draws a symbolic parallel between the dog's condition and Vera's. Only later, in her dreams, Patrice understands the dog's utterance and comprehends that her sister was held captive in the apartment just like the dog: "[t]he empty dog collar. It was not a regular dog collar. It didn't buckle. It had been sliced

apart. The chain that the collar was locked onto—you'd need pliers to remove it. And the dried shit in the corner was human" (159). This disquieting image marks Vera's radical dehumanization; her animalized captive body chained to the wall and situated in a despicable space of degeneration.

Being sex-trafficked and located on the abject margins of the urban society, in Maya Ode'amik Chacaby's terms (126), Vera occupies the borderland between being missing and being murdered. Chacaby in her striking essay "(The Missing Chapter) On Being Missing: From Indian Problem to Indian Problematic" elaborates on the condition of missing Indigenous women inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of the borderland.[25] Chacaby recycles the concept to comment on the liminality experienced by missing women:

> There is a tenuous space *between* Being Missing and Being Murdered. I know. I lived there for over a decade. I remember it like a dream, that hypnagogic space, living in the death world, a spectral Indian ghosting the colonial wastelands, the slums, the seedy piss-filled corners and alcoves between walls and fences. Living between passing out in snow banks (latex boots frozen to skin) and death, between rape and death, drugs and death, cops and death, safe spaces and death, friends and death. Living between the lonely sorrow of being unwanted into non-existence, my spectrality glinting off the eyes of each passerby, and the cold angry adrenaline shock of real fucking death. (126; italics in the original)

In the novel, Vera's condition reflects that in-betweenness; the specter of death constantly threatens her survival. After the indefinite period of being held captive, chained in inhumane conditions, she is sold to perform sex work on a ship—another place of confinement and unthinkable abuse, where "the men entered and used her body, day and night (though she could not distinguish day from night)" (Erdrich 263).

[25] Gloria Anzaldúa in her influential work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) refers to the US-Mexico border as the liminal borderland navigated by Chicana women, marking their in-betweenness and non-belonging both in the Mexican homeland and the American mainstream.

Eventually, when Vera becomes physically and mentally ill as an effect of continuous rape, her mutilated body is abandoned in a port by the ship's crew for certain death:

> one night, they dressed her in a dead man's clothes and carried her out of the ship and up a dock. The man who'd used up what she needed knew how it was not to have what they needed. He advised the other men not to throw her in the lake, which was cold, anaerobic in its depths, and would preserve the body they had used. So two of them dropped her, unconscious in her own filthy blanket, at the end of a steep alley in Duluth. (264)

The woman's body is, therefore, conceptualized as expendable. When no longer in condition to be brutally ravished, it is supposed to be inevitably eliminated. The men never consider Vera human. The woman is aware of her lack of agency, the frailty of her existence and proximity to death: "[if] she wanted to get away, she'd have to run through knives. If she got through the knives, she would have no skin left to protect her. She would be raw flesh. She would be a thing. She would be agony" (228). Vera's existence, in a sense, is overshadowed by impending death to the degree that it is seen by the woman as the preferable option: "[t]o be dead was perhaps a relief. […] She began to wonder whether she was even dead. Although she had been dead way back when she'd been alive. Maybe for a long time" (279). Vera's condition therefore undermines the division between life and death; this disturbing liminality emphasizes her radical dehumanization and disposability.

Found in an appalling condition, unconscious on the side of the highway and rescued by a war veteran and a medic, Harry Roy (298), Vera shows symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Harry decides to take care of Vera himself because he is aware of the racist attitudes persisting in the health care services: "he knew the hospital all too well. They might treat her like a drunk and after she warmed up just throw her out onto the street" (298). Thus, Vera's racialized body is always already defined as that of a degenerate Other. The man recognizes Vera's condition as

he has dealt with cases of PTSD when in the army: “[i]t was bad but nothing Harry hadn’t seen before. The twitchiness, shaking, jumpy eyes, bad dreams, sudden welling of tears but no sobs, the attempt to hide her fear” (301). While Vera finds safe space in Harry’s home, his presence as a man triggers her traumatic memories. For this reason, Harry’s dog, Edith, assists the woman in her healing, as “[t]he level upon which the woman was afraid had nothing to do with Edith, but it did have to do with Harry” (300). The reader learns about Vera’s condition from the animal’s perspective: “[t]he woman had slept in the clothing of a man who cooked with grease, she had slept in snow and wild mint, near the carcass of a skunk, had recently been in town and before that out on the water. There was no harm in her, but she was confused, in despair, and might choose to sleep forever” (299). The proximity of the woman’s exploited body to that of a dead animal again marks Vera’s radical dehumanization. Vera’s scent informs the dog “that unspeakable things had happened to her and might happen again” (300), revealing the woman’s precarious position. Erdrich again relies on a dog figure to perform the role of a helper and healer, as well as mediator between the traumatized human character and the reader.

It is vital to acknowledge that while the city is the primary stage for gendered violence in the novel, Indigenous women’s condition on the reservation emerges as vulnerable, too. This is best illustrated by Erdrich in an attempted rape on adolescent Patrice by a group of white settler boys. The boys offer Patrice a ride, which she accepts because of the lack of alternative transportation options (73). When in the car, the girl is harassed by the boys, primarily by the leader of the group, Bucky Duvalle. Patrice manages to escape, outsmarting her abusers by navigating the familiar topography to her advantage: “when they got down to the lake she jumped in and begun swimming toward her uncle’s fishing boat. And they haven’t dared follow her”

(72). Her body, however, bears signs of abuse: she “looked at the scratches, the bruises. There was even a bite mark on her shoulder. She’d felt none of it. But she could still feel where his hands went. […] The next day, more bruises had surfaced from under her skin” (352). While Patrice escapes thanks to her familiarity with the surrounding landscape, her situation of precarity is specifically tied to the settler colonial spatial politics of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century that allowed settler access to Indigenous allotments on the reservation. Erdrich comments on the negative aftermath of the allotment period for the depicted Indigenous community, when describing a settler family who “had a farm on the reservation. They had bought the land from the bank back in 1910 when Indian land was all people had to sell. Sell or die. The land was advertised everywhere, for sale, cheap” (10). Moreover, as reflected in the novel by the attempted rape, the influx of settlers on reservation puts Indigenous women and girls in a position of precarity. Settler men’s proximity to Indigenous women is represented as problematic due to the replication of heteropatriarchal standards that depreciate Indigenous women and the potential abuse they entail.

The violence against Indigenous women is normalized to the point that, in the settler eyes, it does not appear as violence at all. In *The Night Watchman*, the instigator of the assault on Pixie receives punishment—he is struck with permanent partial paralysis of his face shortly after the occurrence. Symbolically, the deformation of the man’s body exposes the monstrous character of his behavior. Despite the misery that the man suffers as an aftermath of his actions, Bucky does not express regret:

> He feels as he has been punished enough for something he did just because he wanted to. If his brain worked he could name grown men right and left who had done the same and were walking around in good shape, smiling with their whole mouth, opening and shutting both their eyes. Yes, he’d cuffed her around. Yes, he’d almost nailed her. But nothing happened! It’s not that he shouldn’t have tried. Just that he picked the wrong girl. (370)

Bucky’s lack of remorse and his rationalization of what has happened point to the ubiquity of violence against Indigenous women and their radical objectification in white men’s eyes. Indigenous women emerge as violable and disposable—violence against them is commonplace. Patrice reflects that, if not for his disability, Bucky would resort to violence again (331). The punishment for the man’s actions is not administered by the settler law enforcement institutions but by the victim herself: “she herself had done it. Her hatred was so malignant it had lifted out of her like a night bird. It had flown straight to Bucky and sank its beak into the side of his face” (352). Patrice’s supernatural retribution threatens the status quo, whereby Indigenous women are not considered agents but rather disposable objects, provoking in the man a sense of injustice. Relying on the state’s complicity in the ubiquity of violence against Native women as illustrated by the virtual lack of legal prosecution of perpetrators, Bucky considers his mysterious punishment to be unfair. Paradoxically, bringing the offender to justice transgresses the colonial hierarchy of power. Patrice’s revenge restores Native women’s agency, suggestively disrupting the cycle of white perpetrators evading punishment.

2.4. Resurgent potentialities of Indigenous womanhood

Despite the overwhelming sense of Indigenous women’s precarity and settler misogyny permeating the novel, Erdrich represents Chippewa women as strong and resourceful characters who challenge the discourse that situates them as victims of colonial exploitation. In the novel, Erdrich seeks redress for Indigenous women, objectified and relegated to the zones of utmost precarity in the settler colonial United States. Emblematically, the narrative offers a restorative closure to Vera’s exodus.

When the woman recovers at Harry Roy's place, she decides to go back home, which actively manifests how she reclaims her agency. On the reservation, she is reunited with her son and finds a loving and caring partner in Wood Mountain. Erdrich closes Vera's plotline with the image of her weaving a basket: "Wood Mountain made the split ash frames and Vera wove red whips of fresh-cut willow in and out. The scent of the willow was sharp and secret" (432). This quasi-idyllic scene provides a sense of restoration and rejuvenation emerging from the engagement in the traditional female practice, which re-establishes Vera's womanhood against the brutal victimization she was subjected to when missing.

The elevation of Indigenous womanhood in *The Night Watchman* is manifested also in the character of Zhaanat, Vera and Patrice's mother. Zhaanat performs the function of a knowledge-keeper and medicine woman in the community. The female character represents traditional Indigenous femininity, free of colonial influences, since as a child she was "fiercely hidden away, guarded from going to boarding school" (21). Instead, she becomes a living repository of Chippewa knowledge: "[s]he was traditional, an old-time Indian raised by her grandparents only speaking Chippewa, schooled from childhood in ceremonies and the teaching stories" (21). Zhaanat engages in the practices of grounded normativity, as her knowledge and teachings are intricately and intimately connected to land: her "deep knowledge had been part of a web of strategies that included plenty of animals to hunt, wild foods to gather, gardens of beans and squash, and land, lots of land to roam" (21). As the Chippewa land base diminishes and the natural resources deplete, Zhaanat's knowledge becomes apparently obsolete, yet proves crucial for the community's prospects of resurgence. The situation in the novel mirrors Leanne Simpson's perception of the colonial impact on Indigenous knowledge systems: "[c]olonialism

has strangulated grounded normativity. […] When colonialism could not eliminate grounded normativity, it tried to contain it so that it exists only to the degree that it does not impede land acquisition, settlement, and resource extraction" (25). At the same time, in Leanne Simpson's theoretical framework, Indigenous resurgence can only be achieved through a return to land-based practices of grounded normativity, as defined in the Introduction, since they "are the intelligence systems that hold the potential, the theory as practice, for making ethical, sustainable Indigenous worlds" (25). For this reason, Zhaanat's knowledge performs a crucial role for the community's potentiality to transform their realities shaped by settler inscriptions: "Zhaanat's real job was passing on what she knew. People came from distances, often camped around their house, in order to learn" (21). Zhaanat's work is not recognized as labor from a settler colonial perspective. Yet by nurturing Chippewa traditional knowledge and land-based practice, the protagonist engages, according to Madeline Knickerbocker, "in work we might today see as political or as oppositional to the colonial state, although in general it was not framed as such" (34).

Zhaanat's ways of knowing radically contrast with Western modes of knowledge production, revealing the apparent incommensurability of Indigenous and Western worldviews. Immersed in traditional teachings, Zhaanat represents "a different sort of intelligence" (189) unlike "the teachers and the nuns and the priests and the other adults" (189). Zhaanat's worldview is based on the premises of reciprocity, non-human agency, and ethics of care: "[b]ecause everything was alive, responsive in its own way, capable of being hurt its own way, capable of punishment in its own way, Zhaanat's thinking was built on treating everything around her with great care" (190). Because the character experiences the world as relational and inherently linked to the Chippewa traditional stories, for Zhaanat, the distinction

between the "real" and "storied" worlds is not expedient, as they both permeate each other. This is evident in her reflection on settler inscriptions and changes in Chippewa ecologies that follow them: "[t]hings started going wrong […] when places everywhere were named for people—political figures, priests, explorers—and not for real things that happened in these places—the dreaming, the eating, the death, the appearance of animals" (345). Zhaanat's worldview is founded on an entirely different paradigm than that of the settler mainstream. While settlers emphasize the human mastery over nature, her philosophy articulates the transience of human life and "the timelessness of the earth" (345). As explained by Mary Siisip Geniusz, in Anishinaabe worldview "[h]umans are not at the top of the order of creation. Humans are not the lords of this earth. We are at the bottom because we are the most dependent" (15). Such a perspective radically contrasts with Western philosophy based on human exceptionalism. In *The Night Watchman* the settler impositions on the Chippewa traditional topography immersed in stories cause a "rift in the life of places" (345). She observes that "[t]he animals didn't come around to these locations strained by the names of humans. Plants, also, had begun to grow fitfully. The most delicate of her plant medicines were even dying out altogether" (345). Zhaanat symbolically connects the shift to the new paradigm as intruding into the storied vernacular geographies of the Chippewa and altering them in radical ways. Therefore, the medicine woman intuitively describes the colonial processes of inscribing homelands through settler inscriptions as delineated by Whyte (2017a: 359-360).

As Zhaanat's intelligence is rooted in an epistemology and ontology divergent from the Western system of knowledge, it is often perceived as bizarre and disquieting. The knowledge keeper arrives at conclusions in ways different from settler empirical methods:

> Zhaanat's intelligence was of frightening dimensions. Sometimes she knew things she should not have known. Where a vanished man had fallen through ice. Where a disordered woman had buried the child who died of diphtheria. Why an animal gave itself to one hunter not another. Why disease struck a young man and skipped his frail grandfather. Why an odd stone might appear outside the door, one morning, out of nowhere. (190)

Zhaanat learns about the situation of her missing daughter, Vera, through dreams and ceremonies (43-45; 219; 289), which prove legitimate ways of knowing in Indigenous cultures (Kidwell and Velie 9). The character's intuitive knowledge defamiliarizes mainstream readers and invites them to consider the limits of Western knowledge system based solely on observation. The character's appearance further strengthens the sense of peculiarity. Barnes is fascinated with the woman's hands: "[s]he was missing the pinkie finger on one hand. On the other hand there was a small extra finger, a perfect thumb. Her fingers were wrong, but still added up to ten. This unnerved Barnes to the point of extreme discomfort" (83). The curious anatomy of her hands reflects her transgressive status. Due to her eccentricity, the local community is convinced that it is Zhaanat that has caused Bucky's deformity: "Didn't Bucky think what other people thought? That his disfigurement had something to do with Zhaanat and with her? That somehow they'd frozen half his face and sucked the strength from his arm? That they'd cursed him?" (73). The popular belief that Zhaanat is empowered to cast spells confirms that she is seen as a witch figure, especially by the non-Indigenous part of the local population. However, the medicine woman's mysterious and almost supernatural abilities are intriguing even for her close family. Patrice is bewildered by the fact that Zhaanat successfully nurses Vera's child: "[w]omen's bodies make such miracles. After a week of intense suckling by the baby, there was a trickle of milk. Patrice had believed her mother, but she was still surprised" (216). By emphasizing the extraordinary capacities of the female body, the novel elevates women's care as a powerful tool of resurgence that undermines settler patriarchy.

A significant portion of Zhaanat's knowledge revolves around women's issues. She is versed in traditional herbal medicine, gathers and processes plants that have medicinal uses like miskomin, raspberries: "[i]t's a woman plant. Helps with cramps, strengthens the womb, makes the milk flow. But she uses it for general things too. That's why she's got so much of it. And this here, gaagigebag, is a woman plant too" (388). The strong link between certain plants and women manifests the traditional female reliance on plants for healing and the intimate reciprocity they share. In Anishinaabe worldview and traditional stories, plants are often referred to as relatives (M. S. Geniusz 42), for example cedar tree is conceptualized as a grandmother, while birch as a grandfather (42). Geniusz emphasizes that Grandmother Cedar and Grandfather Birch provide all the necessary elements needed for sustenance and survival as indicated in traditional teachings (42). Both tree species are evoked in the novel as intimately involved in restoring Indigenous femininity. In Erdrich's novel Zhaanat plants cedar trees near a cabin that Vera attempted to reclaim as her house before she disappeared (311). This gesture should be perceived as an act of care—as a way of summoning Vera and facilitating her coming back home, providing her with all that she needs to survive, and reclaiming space. Medicine trees transform the abandoned cabin into an Indigenous women's home as traditionally Grandmother Cedar creates both physical and spiritual home for the Anishinaabe (M. S. Geniusz 42). The relations between women are further consolidated in the novel through collecting and collectively consuming birch sap:

> Together they drank the icy birch water, which entered them the way life entered the trees, causing buds to swell along the branches. Patrice leaned to one side and put her ear to the trunk of a birch tree. She could hear the humming rush of the tree drinking from the earth. She closed her eyes, went through the bark like water, and was sucked up off the bud tips into a cloud. She looked down at herself and her mother, sitting by a small fire in the spring woods. Zhaanat tipped her head back and smiled. (439)

Like cedar, birch provides people with both spiritual and physical sustenance in Anishinaabe cultures. The passage narrating Patrice and Zhaanat's engagement in the traditional Chippewa activity of collecting birch sap conveys the reciprocity and interconnectedness of species. Birch nourishes itself by producing sap, drawing water and minerals from the soil, and symbolically shares its nourishment with people. Patrice reflects that "[w]hen you drank it [sap], you shared the genius of the wood" (438). The image of two women, sharing the sap, therefore creates a powerful sense of women's mutual reciprocity and their intricate interconnectedness with nature.

In *The Night Watchman* Millie Cloud is particularly fascinated with Zhaanat's knowledge. The medicine woman's extraordinary intelligence and skills encourage Millie to re-direct her research in order to learn from Zhaanat and disseminate the knowledge she preserves. The character of Millie marks a turn in Indigenous knowledge production as in recent years more and more Native people pursue university education and research degrees. Within those institutional settings they strive for the inclusion of their systems of knowledge in the curricula and call for the decolonization of the academia.[26] Given that research on Indigenous peoples was conducted primarily by non-Indigenous researchers, who often displayed obvious bias towards the Native communities they studied, to this day Indigenous peoples often identify research with exploitation by settler scholars. Research is, as argued by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary" for "it is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (1). However, the last decades witnessed a growing number of Indigenous scholars that undertake

[26] For more information regarding Indigenous decolonial movement within the academia, as well as its limitations and critique, consult: Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021 [1999]), Zoe Todd's "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism" (2016), and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (2012).

intellectual work aimed at undoing these colonial legacies within the higher education institutions both in the U.S. and Canada. Indigenous presence in the academia has resulted in a rich body of work on Indigenous peoples authored by Indigenous scholars. In Erdrich's novel, Millie tries to compile Zhaanat's traditional knowledge about medicinal plants in her new research project. Recently, similar projects have been successfully conducted by real-life Indigenous women scholars, such as, among others, Wendy Makoons Geniusz in her *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings* (2009) and Mary Siisip Geniusz in her *Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do Is Ask: Anishinaabe Botanical Teachings* (2015). In *The Night Watchman*, Millie introduces a new standard into her research practice, following reciprocal ethics characteristic of Chippewa protocols. For this reason, the young researcher seeks to secure funding in order to remunerate her Indigenous mentor: "[s]he had decided to become an anthropologist, and wanted to study with Zhaanat. Millie was applying for money to pay her informant. 'It isn't a lot of money,' she said in her letter, 'but between that and what Patrice saves maybe she can go back to school'" (438). Millie, therefore, strives to alleviate the family's difficult economic situation so that Patrice can realize her dream of going to college. This relational and reciprocal attitude towards research—that is supposed to benefit Indigenous communities—manifests a kind of ethics that transcends the exploitative practices of settler science.

Zhaanat's daughter, Patrice, represents a new generation of Indigenous women, whose lives are to a greater extent dictated by settler colonial norms and instruction. She speaks both Chippewa and English fluently as well as "follow[s] most of her mother's teachings but also became a Catholic" (21), which shows that she is anchored in both Indigenous and settler culture. The young woman's liminality reveals

the progressing assimilation of Indigenous femininity. Patrice devotedly collects settler lifestyle magazines, such as *Look*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Time* (45) and reads Emily Dickinson (21). Moreover, she fantasizes about attending college, which proves an unlikely scenario for a woman living on a reservation due to the economic situation: "[a] woman from her own tribe doing a study. It sounded like something that she herself would like to do. Go to college. Do a study. She was smart enough, good at math, and her writing was always best in class. But she thought of herself as that little hide tent, stretched so thin. Without her, the family would collapse" (291). Even though Patrice is talented, her horizons are radically limited by the geography of misery she was raised in. Nevertheless, she is determined to use Millie's experience to gather information about university education. The hearings in Washington further motivate Patrice to pursue a legal career: "'What do I have to do to become a lawyer?' asked Patrice. Millie told her" (422). Patrice's desire to become a lawyer emphasizes her ambition to defend tribal rights and improve the situation of her people. The protagonist embodies the liminal, partly assimilated Indigenous womanhood that navigates settler institutional settings to empower Indigenous nations and strengthen Native self-determination. Furthermore, Millie's support for Patrice manifests the resurgent and decolonial potential of Indigenous women's reciprocal relationships and solidarities.

Patrice's liminality results in the novel from her non-conforming femininity that transgresses both traditional and settler gender norms. Patrice enjoys activities conventionally associated with masculinity, such as hunting. She notes the difference between her and her female friends' lifestyles: "[w]ouldn't Doris and Valentine like to see me out here setting snares? […] They do have jobs. And they belong to the Homemakers Club. They sew and make gardens and raise chickens" (315). While

other women are associated with domesticity, Patrice navigates the immensity of the wilderness. At her father's funerary celebrations, she "sat down with the men by the fire. They treated her differently when she wore her father's boots and the big coat and overalls" (327). The protagonist, therefore, enters the male space and participates in a traditional male activity, as well as is accepted by men when doing so. This points to the liminality of the character's gender identity, which is strengthened by her ambivalence towards men (254; 312; 343) and her apparent lack of maternal instinct (188; 307). As stressed by Whyte "Anishinaabe intellectual traditions do not emphasize a binary gender system, but rather embrace gender diversity and fluidity" (2018b: 128). By not conforming to the standards of femininity, Patrice revives Chippewa gender fluid tradition.

A queer reading of the novel marks its resurgent potential since, as argued by Kai Pyle (Métis and Sault Ste) in "Reclaiming Traditional Gender Roles: A Two-Spirit Critique," erasing traditional Indigenous gender systems was an integral part of colonial assimilationist policies (110-111). Patrice not only evades the binary gender norms characteristic of settler patriarchy, but also enacts queerness. For example, the protagonist's relationship with Millie Cloud bears traces of same sex attraction, particularly on the part of the latter. The women are depicted as intimate, often sleeping next to each other (330; 392). While these images are not erotically charged, Millie's fascination with Pixie is clearly romantic and it is a great disappointment to her that Patrice sees their relationship as sisterly (417-418). This storyline is not fully resolved in the novel, which leaves the reader with a sense of uncertainty as to the future of Patrice and Millie's queer relation. The potential of homosexual love between the two female characters creates a transgressive space that contests settler colonial heteropatriarchy.

The protagonist's gender non-normativity is further enacted in the novel in a scene portraying Patrice sleeping in the embrace of a bear. The interspecies encounter between the woman and a bear emphasizes interconnectedness of people and their more-than-human kin, which radically disrupts settler distinctions between the human and the non-human. Reciprocity shared between the protagonist and her more-than-human companion animates the landscape: "[t]he place looked alive, the bank of the ravine, the leaf cave. Felt alive" (312). In Anishinaabe cultures, bears are animals endowed with powerful healing and teaching potential (W. M. Geniusz 69). In many Indigenous nations across the continent, a bear performs the function of a clan animal. By portraying an intimate bond between Patrice and the bear, Erdrich enacts the healing potential of a non-normative encounter. The interaction with the animal emerges as a powerful medicine: "[s]leep was a fuel, too, making her springy and buoyant. She was so much stronger than she thought. And fearless" (313). Adapting Melissa Nelson, such an "eco-erotic boundary-crossing entanglement of difference […] can engender empathy and kinship and a lived environmental ethic" (2017: 232). Patrice's adventure further prompts her to question the social expectation of entering a heterosexual relationship: "[w]hy would she waste her time figuring out men when she was a person who had slept with a bear?" (313). In *The Night Watchman,* Erdrich imagines an interspecies intimacy that actively resists settler heteropatriarchal gender norms, thus transforming settler inscriptions into sites of women's emancipation and resurgence.

Chapter Three

Mapping Women's Trauma in Katherena Vermette's *The Break* and Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*

This chapter offers a reading of two recent First Nations Canadian novels: Katherena Vermette's *The Break* (2016) and Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie* (2015) focusing on the spatial confluences with violence against Indigenous women and the resulting trauma. The selected literary texts comment on the contemporary Indigenous women's condition in settler Canada, mapping the geographies of precarity posed by urban topographies and collective efforts towards restoration and resurgence. Addressing the lateral character of the issue of sexual violence in Indigenous communities, Vermette and Lindberg emphasize the far-reaching impact of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous peoples in Canada and the settler institutions and policies that reinforce the extent of violence inflicted on Indigenous women.

1. Urban Topographies of Collateral Violence in Katherena Vermette's *The Break*

Katherena Vermette is a Métis poet and writer living and writing in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, a city located on the Treaty One territory. She won the Governor General's Literary Award for her poetry volume *North End Love Songs* in 2013. *The Break*, published in 2016, is Vermette's debut novel; it has gained critical recognition, as well as popularity among readers in Canada, being shortlisted for the Governor

General's Literary Award in 2016 and a finalist of Canada Reads in 2017 (Hanson 2020: 52). Vermette sets her novel in Winnipeg's North End, a neighborhood known for its ethnically diverse population, including a large number of Indigenous peoples, as well as for its high crime rates. This neighborhood has also been the point of reference for the writer's poetry. Vermette emphasizes the importance of representing this particular spatiality and its confluence with Indigenous femininity: "[w]hen I write stories, I write primarily about Indigenous women, Métis women, who are inner-city residents, who have all these things that are familiar to me, that might not be familiar to other people" (Vermette in Hanson 2020: 61). By recounting contemporary urban Indigenous women's condition based on the author's lived experience, Vermette introduces previously marginalized voices into the Canadian mainstream literary landscape.

The novel's plot centers on an investigation of a sexual assault committed on a thirteen-years-old Indigenous girl, Emily. At some level, the story bears traces of the classical *whodunit* crime story,[27] where "[i]t is up to readers […] to work alongside Tommy the police detective to figure out who perpetrated the assault" (Wallace 203). As the police investigate the assault, the complex entanglements between the characters unfold. The narration spans four generations of the Charles-Traverse family, focusing on the Indigenous women's experiences marked by intergenerational trauma, interlocking oppressions, and recurring abuse. Vermette creates a microcosm of urban Indigenous women under settler colonialism, where female characters and their fates are closely and intimately interconnected. This is reflected in the structure of the novel, as it features multiple perspectives, switches narrators, and readily shifts

[27] Wallace recognizes that the novel's detective character emotionally invests readers into unraveling the mystery, pointing to the "tension between aesthetic enjoyment and ethical engagement" (203) as the readers find entertainment in what, at its core, is a story of trauma and abuse.

between first- and third-person narration. Each of the chapters is told from the point of view of a particular character, whose inner struggles and insights push the plot forward. Proposing such a structuring paradigm for the novel, Vermette embraces ambiguities and hesitations, at the same time sketching a multivocal collective history of violence inflicted on urban Indigenous women in Winnipeg.

1.1. The cycle of abuse and oppression

The Break is permeated by the sense of precarity as each of the Indigenous female characters depicted in the novel suffers from or bears witness to violence and abuse at some point in their lives. The vicious cycle never seems to end, starting with Emily's great-grandmother Kookom Flora who experiences abuse in foster care (Vermette 335)[28] and later falls victim to domestic violence perpetrated by her Indigenous husband (328). The next three generations of Indigenous women in the novel are depicted as constantly in fear and under threat of violence, which demonstrates the long history of Aboriginal women's precarity that is endemic to their condition under settler colonialism.[29]

Due to the ubiquity of abuse and the sense of a continually lurking danger, Indigenous girls are instructed by the older members of the family to be constantly vigilant, as emphasized in Rain's way of educating her daughter, Stella: "I taught her how to look and be aware all the time. I don't know if that was right or wrong, but

[28] Subsequent quotations from *The Break* come from the 2016 edition of the novel, published by Anansi, and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

[29] The violence against Indigenous women is often linguistically framed in terms of an epidemic. However, Sarah Deer argues that referring to this problem using the term epidemic is inadequate as it disregards a long history of violence, suggesting that it is only a recent problem and thus denying settler responsibility for the crisis. In Deer's opinion the trend of "[u]sing the word *epidemic* to talk about violence in Indian country is to depoliticize rape. It is a fundamental misstatement of the problem" (x).

she's still alive so there has to be some good in it" (4). This passage demonstrates the fragility of Indigenous women's livelihoods and the efforts to desperately protect them. In the novel's central plot, Stella, who loses her mother at an early age, witnesses through a window an assault on a young girl, who later turns out to be her cousin's daughter. After having been interviewed by the police, the woman is confronted by her white husband, who attempts to convince her that she might have misinterpreted the incident due to her past experiences (15). This provokes a sense of frustration in Stella, for whom violence and abuse are inextricably intertwined with Indigenous women's condition. She uses the metaphor of a pattern to illustrate her existence as interweaved with precarity:

> A *pattern*, she thinks of the word—like something that makes something else. *Pattern*. All those little things, those warnings to be careful, those teachings of what not to do. She always knew to be careful, always knew how to look out for men, strange men, men doing strange things. That's how she was raised. On alert. One by one the scenes echo in her head, almost every day. (84; italics in the original)

This metaphorical image of warnings, events, and memories generated by the cycle of abuse, evokes the Indigenous practice of beading, where colorful beads are carefully and patiently assembled by women's hands to create meticulous patterns. The artistic creation of beautiful objects is juxtaposed in this passage with the precariousness that shapes Stella's sense of self. At the same time, the pattern is not solely Stella's own as "[i]t's really the past. Not even hers. Just stories that really belong to other people but were somehow passed to her for safekeeping, for her to know, forever. Incidents. Situations" (84). In this way, the design extends to all the Indigenous women in Stella's life, as well as Aboriginal women in general, entangled within the patterns of violence under settler colonialism.

Accordingly, the death of Stella's mother, Rain, some ten years before the primary plot of the novel begins, reveals the extent of neglect of the settler colonial institutions, as well as the systemic criminalization of Indigenous women. On the night when Rain freezes to death while attempting to return home, she is assaulted by a white man and refused proper medical care. When the woman arrives at the hospital, the medical staff treats her with disdain: "[s]ome nurse just saw her, drunk and bloody. The nurse rolled her eyes and told Stella's mom to wait. […] They thought she was just drunk, had made her own head injury, and could wait" (271-272). Instead of offering immediate help to a woman who arrives at the clinic "half conscious" (271), the medics disregard the seriousness of Rain's condition. The attitude of the hospital's staff towards the patient is evidently dictated by her ethnic belonging. Rain is dehumanized in the nurse's gaze: the Indigenous woman's bleeding body is thus stripped of dignity and located in the territories of the abject and the degenerate. Rain's sister, Cheryl, carries with her the sense of injustice as the settler health care institution fatally fails her sister: "[t]hey didn't even treat her. Just put her right back out in the street. Didn't even look, just thought she was another drunk and didn't care" (180). The fact that Rain was under the influence of alcohol confirms the stereotype of Indigenous women as addicted to substances, as well as to the degeneration and sexual promiscuity linked to substance abuse.

Based on racist assumptions, the blame for the act of abuse is located within the victim's body. Rain's body—injured and covered in blood—is not conceptualized as violated but as self-violated when the nurse thinks that she must have "made her own head injury" (272). Collecting bits and pieces of information regarding her mother's death from newspaper articles and eavesdropped conversations of adults, Stella arrives at the conclusion that Rain must have been the one responsible for her

death: “[i]t meant that it was her mom’s fault. All her mom’s fault. Her mom was dead and it was all her own fault” (272). All of Rain’s actions on the night of her death are subjected to detailed public scrutiny: “[i]f she hadn’t done this, if she hadn’t done that, all those things we all knew she shouldn’t be doing. But she did them anyway” (326). Centering the narration on Rain’s supposed moral corruption, the media and the police uphold the discourse of Indigenous woman’s degeneration, over-criminalizing her actions in order to conceal the inadequacy of the state protection. Kookom Flora denounces these narratives, re-centering the victim while asking “[b]ut if she hadn’t, would she really be alive now?” (326). This question, resonating in the emptiness brought about by Rain’s death, directs the reader’s attention to the real problem at the core of the incident—Indigenous women’s precarious condition in the settler colonial state.

It is important to emphasize that while Rain’s behavior is scrupulously dissected, the actions and motivation of the man who abused her are never questioned:

> She had recently had sex, no signs that it wasn’t consensual. The guy said it was, when they picked him up—he said it was consensual and she was crazy. He had hit her but he was sorry. She had a record and he didn’t. He only got a suspended sentence. She wouldn’t have died if she hadn’t been drinking. If it hadn’t been winter, if she would’ve waited, if she hadn’t been so stupid. The head injury was only a part of it after all. (272)

The man in his statement questions Rain’s sanity, without providing proof. The white society trusts him, since in the settler imagination Indigenous people are strongly associated with madness. Erin Soros observes that “[in the colonial times] the Native person was defined as somehow at the liminal edge of the human, the almost non-human. In this realm, [she] would argue, the Native is by extension also the almost-sane” (75). Rain is doubly dehumanized through the representation of her body as degenerate and her psyche as insane, being inherently constructed as the gendered and

racialized Other. Sherene Razack, writing about a real-life murder of an Indigenous woman, Pamela George, by white perpetrators, observes that the same strategy was enacted both by the defendants and the judicial system. She explains that "the men's and the court's capacity to dehumanize Pamela George derived from their understanding of her as the (gendered) racial Other whose degradation confirmed their own identities as white—that is, as men entitled to the land and the full benefits of citizenship" (93). For the same reason, in Vermette's novel, the court does not challenge the perpetrator's testimony even though the sexual intercourse between him and Rain ends in violence that proves to be fatal for the woman. The court's suspended sentence confirms white privilege: the offender does not "go to jail. It wasn't his fault" (326). This verdict proves the systemic character of injustice that is perpetuated in the court system in Canada, which "established leniency for perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women and girls" a long time ago (Bourgeois 79).

The circumstances of Rain's death parallel these of the narrative's focal event—Emily's assault. In an uncanny way, history repeats itself when in the cold winter evening Rain's relative is sexually assaulted, too. While the motive of the rape is radically different, both occurrences are enacted in similar circumstances. Both Rain and Emily are abandoned after the act of aggression in the freezing Manitoba winter; however, the crucial difference is that, in contrast to Rain, Emily survives the assault. Yet, because of the distrust towards settler institutions that the girl has internalized, and a sense of shame following the abuse, the female protagonist does not seek medical help right away. On the morning after the attack, her mother's partner, Pete, finds Emily unconscious and immediately drives her to the hospital (92). While the injured girl is granted proper medical help at the hospital, the medical procedures adopted by the doctors provoke anxiety among the members of her family. The Indigenous

characters, bearing in mind the past neglect regarding Rain, display a lack of trust towards the decisions of the doctors to release Emily home. Lou reflects on the way Emily's condition revives the memories of Rain's death: "I think of my aunty and how she died. What my mom and grandmother must be thinking now. Here at the hospital, the same hospital that wants to release their girl, their other girl" (180). She tries to comfort her mother, Cheryl, attempting to convince her that Emily is being adequately cared about by the medical staff (180). Nevertheless, the older woman exhibits a sense of ambivalence: "'I know, I know.' She nods and nods. She does know, but she doesn't. […] I know she's been thinking about that familiar fear for a long time" (180-181). The distrust towards the health care system is encoded in Cheryl. Even though the attitude of the hospital personnel has changed significantly since her sister's death, the "familial fear" remains in place after the traumatic loss.

While Vermette points to a definite improvement of the attitude towards Indigenous women in health care, she also depicts a persisting reluctance on the part of the police to investigate the cases of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The investigation of the assault on Emily is conducted by two policemen: Officer Christie and Officer Scott. While Christie is a white, old, and experienced policeman, Scott is young, inexperienced, and of mixed Indigenous and white heritage. Scott's ethnicity is frequently mocked by his police partner, who constantly calls him "May-tee" (70; 72; 73; 127; 227; 295). From the beginning of the investigation, the senior policeman frames the incident as a gang fight (70). Like her own husband, Officer Christie discredits Stella's testimony (13), emphasizing the expertise of the police and stressing the implausibility of the Indigenous woman's account. The officer's behavior epitomizes the enforcement of heteropatriarchal norms, where Indigenous woman's stance is subordinate to a white man's judgment; it represents what Colleen Dell refers

to as the “racist, sexist, and classist conduct on the part of police agencies in response to Aboriginal women” (130). In the chapters narrated by Tommy Scott, the reader learns that Christie would devote the least effort possible to the investigation: “the old guy is lazy, so lazy he didn’t write anything more than he had to. He probably didn’t even write down what the witness has said. Not really” (70). Thus, the officer’s attitude does confirm the police force’s failure to address violence against Indigenous women with a suitable commitment. His attitude is based on racist premises as demonstrated by Christie’s statement: “Naw, just nates beating on nates. Same old” (72).

The senior policeman’s attitude symbolizes the indifference towards the victims of abuse and his willingness to overlook cases of violence against Indigenous women and girls. When Tommy advances the investigation and connects the incident witnessed by Stella with the assault suffered by Emily, his conclusions are received by Christie with heavy sarcasm: “‘Congratu-fucking-lations, May-tee,’ he says. ‘You’re now the proud owner of one hell of a fucked-up rape case’” (127). Moreover, Christie in a few instances tries to bypass the existing protocol while conducting the investigation. This includes the situation in which he tries to pressure the family to agree to the questioning of an under-aged victim of sexual abuse in the absence of her mother (124). Identifying the family members as suspicious and potentially involved in the abuse, Christie bases his intimations principally on the family’s ethnic belonging (119-120). Hence, Christie might be identified as embodying the attitude of “[m]any police officers in Winnipeg [who] have long acted as though brown lives simply do not matter” (Paris 8). In this way, Indigenous women are abandoned by the system that, instead of protecting them, appears complicit in the ubiquity of abuse they

experience.[30] This demonstrates the failure of the settler institution to adequately respond to the incidents of violence against Indigenous women and the subsequent lack of trust on the side of Aboriginal individuals.

Tommy Scott functions as the counterweight to Officer Christie as he is determined to thoroughly investigate the case and bring justice to the Indigenous family. His eagerness might be in part related to his Indigenous background as "Native women always remind him of his mom" (75). Tommy and his mother, Marie, were the victims of domestic violence perpetrated by the man's white father (76). As a result, Officer Scott exhibits genuine compassion towards Emily and her family: "[i]t hurt to look at her. Her mother beside her, refusing to leave her side. All these women holding each other up" (291). The case in which he is emotionally engaged reveals the Métis man's dissatisfaction with his job:

> This work isn't what he thought it'd be. He thought he'd be breaking down doors and always in the action. At the academy, he learned about community policing, which basically meant that he was supposed to be nice and make relationships with people, but he doesn't do that either. Mostly he just takes notes, makes reports and never thinks of them again. Or does think of them, but just never does anything about them. Incidents become reports become just words on a screen. Computer folders become numbers, filed away. (76-77)

This reflection points to the discrepancy between police training and its implementation in the actual practice. While Tommy expects to be involved and establish relational liaisons with citizens, in reality, his job comprises primarily bureaucratic tasks. Officer Scott working within the framework of the settler colonial institution observes the ineffectiveness of the justice system. In cases such as Emily's

[30] The neglect displayed by the Canadian Police is also illustrated in a flashback when, as schoolgirls, Stella and her cousins, Louisa and Paulina, are followed on their way back home by a white old man in a yellow car. When Cheryl, Stella's aunt, reports it, the officers ignore the incident. Quite to the contrary, the police place the blame on the girls' caregivers: "[t]he cops told Aunty Cheryl she probably shouldn't let the girls go to the store all by themselves, like that was the answer to everything" (169).

rape, even though the perpetrator is caught and sentenced, the Western concept of justice does not bring the sense of closure and harmony:

> Tommy thinks of his case again and lists it all in his head. His mom's stories make him feel better, but he is still not reassured. He wants everything to be different. He wants the simplicity of finality, but it's never like it is in the movies. It always lingers on. Like a song that ends a beat or two before it's supposed to, it feels like there should be more but there's nothing, just an empty space and a long, fading echo. (302)

Vermette's decision to provide Tommy with a voice as the only male narrator in the novel emphasizes the ambivalence of the police actions as striving for justice since they work within settler colonial frameworks which are responsible for the oppression of Indigenous communities in Canada. This is stressed by Sarah Hunt when she describes the limitations of justice as enforced within settler legal frameworks: "the potential for justice will always be limited by the violence of colonial law. Canadian law itself rests on the dehumanization of Indigenous people, as the myth of European discovery of Canada perpetuates the myth of inferiority that remains embedded in Canadian law" (28). The Western conceptualization of justice is insufficient to adequately address the struggles of Indigenous women since the colonial structures introduced intergenerational cycles of poverty, discrimination, and trauma. The criminalization of Indigenous peoples does not disrupt these cycles but upholds them.

1.2. Survivors/perpetrators

This sense of the inadequacy of justice as inferred from the settler colonial legal tradition is the strongest when analyzing the motives of Emily's attacker—an Indigenous girl that is the victim's coeval, Phoenix. While Vermette does not seek to justify Phoenix's actions, she constructs the girl as a round character, one whose story

is multi-layered and intricately shaped by traumas connected to colonialism. Hence, even though the reader is shocked when it is revealed that Phoenix is the perpetrator of the rape on Emily, enacted with the use of a glass bottle (308-309), they are also struck with an ambivalent sense of empathy towards the adolescent aggressor. It is clearly suggested in the novel that Phoenix's brutality results from her experience of inadequate parenting as a child. The dysfunctionality of her family has its roots in the sexual abuse of the girl's mother, Elsie, who was gang raped at a house party by a group of boys (202)—Phoenix's birth being the result of the assault. Stella happens to be Elsie's best friend at the time of the incident and witnesses the assault together with Paulina and Louisa, who intervene and take care of the victim. After the incident, Stella's friend is described as apathetic and absent: "Elsie was just limp, like she was passed out but her eyes were open. […] Elsie didn't say anything, just looked off at nothing. Her eyes looked dead" (203-204). Stella never talks to her friend again, as Elsie is kept isolated by her family. When she once encounters her best friend in the street, years after the assault, the woman appears not to recognize her: "Elsie saw her but there was no recognition, her eyes were as blank as they had been that night. Still dead" (207). The emphasis on Elsie's lifelessness and detachment in the descriptions suggests that the experience of sexual abuse has been a traumatic event for the woman and that she has not recovered from her trauma. While the narrators have only fragmentary knowledge about what happened to Elsie, the reader can deduce that her trauma has been neither appropriately addressed by her closest family nor consulted with a mental health counselor.

Furthermore, abandoned by her mother, Elsie is raised by her grandparents and has problems with creating a safe home for her children in her adulthood. She engages in a relationship with an abusive man, who is violent towards Phoenix and her younger

daughters, Cedar-Sage and Sparrow. This becomes evident when her children are taken away from her for inadequate parenting:

> The girls were taken away before the snow melted. That was Phoenix's fault too. She had worn her mom's baggy sweater to school, and the sleeves were too big and came down off her arms. She shouldn't have done that. She knew there were bruises there. Big long finger bruises. Not that she gave a fuck about Sparrow's dad. He could fucking go to hell, but everyone would blame her mama. (234)

The situation again reveals the failure of the settler colonial institutions that do not provide adequate assistance for Elsie to perform her duties as a mother, but rather permanently separate the woman from her children. Instead of intervening precociously to rectify the toxic dynamics in the family, the child welfare system becomes involved only when the children's removal from the household is inevitable. Once more, the Indigenous woman is criminalized and pathologized, while it is evident from Phoenix's testimony that it is Elsie's partner who is violent towards the children. While the narration does not provide a detailed description of the family dynamics, there is an awareness that the system fails Elsie and her daughters. As suggested by the passage, Phoenix is not only traumatized by the separation but also blames herself for it.

Indigenous children are overrepresented in the child welfare system in Canada, being nearly twice more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than their coevals of different ethnicities (Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock 583). The study conducted by Nico Trocmé, Della Knoke, and Cindy Blackstock suggests that the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is based on the disproportionately large number of risk factors present in Indigenous families as compared to the rest of the society. These include unstable housing, young parenting, parents with histories of maltreatment, dependence on welfare services, and high rates of substance abuse

(Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock 594). These risk factors are intricately tied to Canadian colonial history:

> It is likely that the high rates of parents' own histories of childhood abuse contribute to the complexity of the problems facing Aboriginal communities; experience of abuse, particularly in residential schools, might undermine the capacity of present generation of parents. The multiple disadvantages and challenges documented among Aboriginal families place Aboriginal children at higher risk for future maltreatment. (…) In order to correct the effects of an Aboriginal history of colonization and the forced removal of children, a comprehensive set of measures must address the social problems that the communities inherit. (Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock 596)

The scholars emphasize that, in order to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, it is necessary to address the cycle of intergenerational trauma that is the First Nations communities' colonial inheritance. Placing children in out-of-home care isolates them from their families and cultures and exacerbates the gravity of their situation. At the same time, as Bourgeois emphasizes, the child welfare system plays an important role "in the social marginalization [of] Indigenous women and girls that increases their vulnerability to violence" (75), including the exposure to violence and abuse within the foster care system.

Phoenix embodies the negative effects of being isolated from one's family on the child's further development. She is not only removed from her home but also separated from her sisters: "Cedar-Sage and Sparrow went to a home but they didn't have a place for Phoenix so she was stuck in a hotel with older kids. She cried that first night. (…) she still missed her sisters and her mama" (234-235). As a result, Phoenix's relationship both with her mother and her sisters is forever disrupted and impossible to recuperate. However, the protagonist continues to feel emotionally attached to her family despite her separation. The only objects that she carries with her when running away from a juvenile detention center are pictures of her family (230; 233-234) that she protects and cherishes. These photographs uphold the sense of home and family

that was taken from the girl following the abuse she underwent at home and by settler colonial institutions that did not adequately address her family's situation.

Vermette illustrates Phoenix's entrapment in the ongoing intergenerational cycle of trauma as she is both a perpetrator and a survivor of violence. Suzanne Methot (Cree) in her *Legacy: Trauma, Story, and Indigenous Healing* describes a project carried out in an Anishinabek community of Hollow Water, Manitoba, where community members designed "abuse family trees" as a way of conceptualizing and healing from colonial traumas (164). The scholar acknowledges that "[b]y mapping out the legacy of abuse within their families, survivors in Hollow Water have begun to understand that perpetrators are also survivors, and that what they have experienced at the hands of those perpetrators is part of an intergenerational cycle created by the impact of colonization" (Methot 164). Phoenix's psychological problems manifesting in her inability to control negative emotions, such as anger and rage (Vermette 34; 317), as well as her distorted understanding of the surrounding reality (229; 232), must be understood within the context of the intergenerational impact of trauma brought about by colonialism. Since her uncontrollable rage leads to episodes of violence (295), Phoenix is incarcerated in a juvenile detention center where she receives little support and care. These radical measures reflect the general approach of the settler state to the psychological problems troubling Indigenous youth. According to Natalie Clark, "[t]hese medical model approaches towards mental health issues further label and pathologize Indigenous children and youth, and result in increased criminalization and medicalization" (178). While in Vermette's novel the detention center requires mandatory therapy, including elements of Indigenous ceremonies, such as smudge (151), these practices, detached from their original cultural context, remain futile. Deprived of culturally specific, relational, and reciprocal circumstances for addressing

her traumatic past, Phoenix becomes more and more filled with anger that culminates right before the assault on Emily.

Jamie Paris interprets Phoenix's propensity for violence, aggression, and domination in terms of the standards of toxic masculinity that she internalizes:[31]

> It is th[e] lack of emotional range that causes people to break when bad things happen to them and the people they love. After all, Phoenix's rape of Emily happens because she snaps: she is scared, homeless, and has been rejected by her uncle and her former lover. She does not have a working kinship network to help her deal with the heartbreak of being rejected by a man she loves, Clayton, and she deals with her toxic emotions through sexualized violence. (3)

While Paris's argument locating Phoenix in the realm of toxic masculinity might be controversial, the girl clearly idealizes and emulates her uncle's masculinist behavior. As a high-rank member of an Indigenous gang, Bishop embodies the standards of toxic urban Indigenous masculinity. Phoenix's idolizing and perceiving the man as a role-model is problematic on many levels and shows the protagonist's lack of healthy interpersonal relationships. The assault that the girl commits originates in her anger, frustration, and helplessness. Through demonstrations of strength and violence, Phoenix attempts to resist the role of a victim pinned to Indigenous womanhood. This is particularly visible in her conversation with her mother while in prison, where she mentions with contempt Elsie's weakness (323). The girl hides behind her mask of toughness to prove that she is not powerless like her mother: "Phoenix just keeps walking like she doesn't notice, like she doesn't care at all. She just squares her shoulders, sticks out her chin, tries to suck in her gut as best she can, and walks down the hall. She walks like nothing can get to her, like she doesn't give a fuck" (324). Paradoxically, Phoenix mimics colonial gendered patriarchal strategies and resorts to

[31] Paris locates Phoenix's internalized masculinity within the context of Indigenous queerness—the traditional third gender characterizing "manly-hearted women" (3).

sexual offense as an act of empowerment. This is suggested also by Tommy's mother, when the young policeman does not want to accept that it might have been an Indigenous girl that abused Emily. Marie explains: "It's a power thing. Rape is about power. She wanted power" (298).

Phoenix's transgression can be understood in terms of the Indigenous mythical figure of the windigo, mentioned in the previous chapter in the analysis of Grover's novel. Methot draws a direct connection between the windigo and sexual abuse: "[t]he wittigo's craving for human flesh is about predation: not actually cannibalism, but something like it. Today's wittigo cannibalizes other people's souls through sexual abuse, and it eats away another person's identity by inflicting emotional abuse. [...] The wittigo destroys connection: to others and to oneself" (274).[32] In *The Break*, Kookom Flora, not realizing that her great-granddaughter was abused by another girl, conceives the perpetrator in terms of monstrosity: "[a]nother monster was there. A monster hurt Emily. I don't know who it was. To me, it looks like my Charlie, or that stupid man who hurt my girl. I know it's not them, but another monster in another person. There's always another one" (329). Even though Kookom does not know the identity of the perpetrator, she understands that it must have been a monster, similar to many others that she has met in her life. The windigo, therefore, functions as a powerful cultural allegory of the abuse that emerges from the intergenerational cycle of trauma and disrupts Indigenous relationality.

Methot argues that the reintegration of Indigenous sexual offenders into the community is an essential element of healing from colonial traumas (169-170). She observes that "[o]stracizing and banishing survivor-perpetrators only leads to further

[32] See also Anna Branach-Kallas's analysis of the windigo figure in the context of sexual abuse in her study of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway and other Canadian Indigenous novels (2014a).

silence around the issue of sexual abuse, because it erases stories that can help create understanding about intergenerational cycles of trauma" (170). In *The Wetiko Legal Principles: Cree and Anishinabek Responses to Violence and Victimization*, Hadley Friedland argues that traditionally a person who becomes a windigo, or a human that does "monstrous things" (2018: xvi), would receive adequate support from the community as they are bound by "identifiable and felt obligations" (35). Rather than isolation, encouraged by the settler prison system, the primary ways of responding to a windigo in Indigenous communities would traditionally be healing and supervision (85). Hence, the response to monstrous action of a community member would be always collective. Yet Phoenix—deprived of a meaningful network of kinship and shunned by her closest relative—has little assistance in resisting her internalized windigo.

Phoenix will forever have to carry the stigma of being a sexual offender. However, her position of fragility caused by pregnancy clashes with her monstrous acts. Elsie thoroughly despises her daughter for her atrocious actions: "'Oh Phoenix!' Elsie blubbers. 'They wanna put *sexual* charges on you! You're going to be a *sexual* offender.' She says the word like it is the worst thing ever, and Phoenix flinches because it is" (319; italics in the original). The girl herself feels utterly humiliated by the disgraceful act she has committed, and she is conscious of her wrongdoing. While talking to Elsie, Phoenix does not resemble the infuriated villain that she turned into while assaulting Emily on the Break. Phoenix's pregnancy that the reader learns about when she is already imprisoned discloses the character's fragility that she tries so meticulously to conceal. The young woman is relieved by the gender of her child since, when he grows up and becomes a man, he will not experience the same extent of victimization as women: "[g]ood that it's a boy. He'll be strong" (322). This assertion

exposes the internalized sense of precariousness and victimization tied to Indigenous femininity.

The maternal instinct that the character develops might be an indicator for her inner transformation: "Phoenix shrugs but doesn't think about her kid in care. She thinks about being out, about having a kid, getting real apartment, a stroller" (320). Martin Cooke's study on early childbearing in First Nations families suggests that for some young Indigenous parents early pregnancy might produce positive outcomes as it "may have been the 'turning point' that led some of these young adults to engage in education and work in a more meaningful way" (12). While Phoenix's story remains open-ended, her pregnancy brings a spark of hope that, despite her confinement in the settler penitentiary system and lack of active support on the part of her relatives, she might be able to bring her inner windigo under control.

1.3. Spaces of degeneration

The institutionalized realities that the characters navigate in Vermette's novel create a sense of spatial estrangement. In the processes of criminalization and medicalization, Indigenous women's bodies are physically separated from their familial networks. In spaces of confinement, whether in detention centers, prisons, mental health institutions, or foster care, Indigenous kinship is strained. Hanson suggests that Phoenix's spatial separation from her family has serious repercussions for the young protagonist as she does not "have a strong web of kinship to draw upon" (2019: 6). Hence, her experience is marked by a sense of uprootedness. Phoenix's getaway from the juvenile detention center reflects her determination to reunite with her family. Yet her uncle's reaction to her showing up in his house is not welcoming (Vermette 29).

The girl tidies his apartment, which she hopes will gain his acceptance. By engaging in the activity stereotypically assigned to womanhood in the light of patriarchal standards, Phoenix performs her femininity in order to rebuild family ties: "[t]hat's what she'll do, she thinks, she'll clean it all up before her uncle gets up. He likes when she does girl things like that" (25). Nonetheless, this attempt to confirm her belonging within the network of kinship proves futile.[33] The internalized sense of guilt and rejection haunts Phoenix throughout the novel. In the end, the distance separating her from her family is insurmountable. This is symbolically expressed in the passage where Phoenix loses her sister's address (316), which confirms the discontinuity of their relation. Because of the gravity of her crime, she will most probably be tried as an adult and the punishment will be severe. Pregnant and incarcerated, teenage Phoenix has therefore little chance to rebuild her strained networks of kinship or escape from the institutionalized spaces of confinement.

When considering the poetics of space in Vermette's novel, distance and isolation emerge as central themes. As the urban landscape of the Winnipeg's North End reminds Stella of the most painful memories connected to her mother's death, she desires to spatially distance herself from that geography: "[i]t was Stella who went two buses away. She would've gone farther too. She wanted to but somehow never did" (256). While the woman wants to find a house outside of the North End, the nuclear family that she starts with her white husband cannot afford housing in more affluent districts of the city. Yet the area where they purchase the apartment is considered less

[33] Phoenix's uncle perceives her presence in his household as a potential threat that could expose his criminal activity, as well as endanger his closest family. Hence, Bishop's conception of kinship emerges as transactional (based on interest and profit) rather than relational. His focus on his nuclear family unit (partner and daughter) reflects the proceeding disintegration of the traditional concept of extended Indigenous kinship and the internalization of settler colonial family structures.

dangerous than other parts of the district. The economic reasons tie Stella to the place that she wants to escape from:

> Stella didn't want to move here. She wanted to buy a house in the gentrified downtown neighbourhood where they were renting. But they couldn't afford a house there. Then, Jeff found this house and got excited. […] Stella didn't say anything. But she knew the place. Their neighbourhood was so close to her old one, the same really. Too close. Her past. All of it, right there on the other side of McPhillips. (89)

Since for the female character space is bound to her traumatic memories, she expects that physical distance from the familiar precarious locus will allow her to detach herself from her difficult past marked by trauma. However, the isolation from her family, which she marks by her spatial separation from the place where she grew up, harms Stella's psyche. This becomes clear when she does not find adequate support in her husband to cope with the assault she witnesses, knowing that her female network of kinship would appropriately assist her in that situation (15). Stella's husband contributes significantly to her isolation from Indigenous relations:

> She hadn't seen the rest of them because they never visited at night. The visits made Jeff nervous, he said. Now with a baby, he added. It had never seemed to bother him before. Then the afternoon visits started to make him nervous, too. His wife taking his baby on the bus to the really bad part of town, all the things that could happen, he said, and listed them, one by one. She could get mugged, she could get stabbed, she could get on the wrong side of a drug dealer, or worse. […] Jeff didn't understand. He was a white boy who grew up in the suburbs. (88)

Stella is therefore trapped in-between Jeff's expectations of devotion to the nuclear family they are building and responsibilities towards her Indigenous relations. When the female character's anxiety aggravates, she decides to finally re-connect with her Indigenous family and visits her grandmother. Even though she lives in the same city and district, Stella's visit is framed as a long and tedious journey (193). The woman's return to the familial network makes her feel at home and she recognizes that "she is

exactly where she is supposed to be" (273). Stella's sense of space in that instance depends on her reciprocal interconnectedness with her relations rather than on the physical aspects of the landscape. The geographies that she attempted to repress are the only ones that can stimulate her process of healing.

In Vermette's novel, the urban landscape of Winnipeg's North End is filled with ambivalences. While it is a site of trauma and abuse, it is also represented as the familiar space that the characters associate with home. In settler discourses the North End emerges as a degenerate space dominated by the racialized Others. In the above-mentioned discussion of the murder of Pamela George, an Indigenous woman who was also a victim of sexual violence, Razack explains how settler colonial land politics influences the confinement of Indigenous peoples in such spaces:

> White settlers displaced Pamela George's ancestors, confining her Saulteaux nation and others to reserves. Pamela George's own geographies begin here. Colonization has continued apace. Forced to migrate to the cities in search of work and housing, urban Aboriginal peoples in cities like Regina quickly find themselves limited to places like the Stroll. Over-policed and incarcerated at one of the highest rates in the world, their encounters with white settlers have principally remained encounters in prostitution, policing and the criminal justice system. Given the intensity of this ongoing colonization, white men such as Kummerfield and Ternowetsky had only a very small chance of seeing Pamela George as a human being. (95)

Located within the spaces of degeneration, Indigenous people are dehumanized and pathologized. Such a conceptualization of space leads to the interweaving of geographies and identities, both marginalized and approached as distinctly separate from white settler respectability. Neighborhoods with a high share of Indigenous population are, therefore, perceived as dangerous zones of transgression, evoking criminal activity and sexual promiscuity. Importantly, the mechanism of framing spaces inhabited by Aboriginal peoples as degenerate parallels the discourse of early

colonial times that emphasized the need to civilize the “savage” populations of the Americas.

Vermette reproduces in her novel these spatial configurations based on racial dynamics. The white policeman in *The Break* approaches the North End in terms of squalor: “‘we’ll go see how the good people live,’ Christie says sarcastically. Across the bridge being slightly less ghetto than on this side” (69). In the policeman’s opinion, the rundown section of the city is inherently tied to the moral corruption of the people inhabiting it. Indeed, the district is dilapidated and controlled by Indigenous gangs, as the reader learns from Rain’s account:

> It’s a good neighbourhood but you can still see it, if you know what to look for. If you can see the houses with never-opened bed sheet covered windows. If you can see the cars that come late at night, park right in the middle of the Break, far away from any house, and stay only ten minutes or so before driving away again. (4)

While the criminal activity of local gangs in the North End is certainly an important issue, the criminalization of the whole urban Indigenous community inhabiting that space only exacerbates the division into the respectable white settler cityscape and the degenerate Aboriginal topography. *The Break* thus indicates that, through the spatial delimitation, settler society exercises their power to segregate and control the Other. This process of ghettoization taking place in big Canadian cities directly impacts the precarity of Indigenous women, who not only are threatened by toxic masculinities characteristic of gang members, but also are themselves criminalized and unprotected by the settler state agencies.

What strengthens Rain’s portrayal as a dehumanized Other, stripped of her personhood and bound to the degenerate space, is her proximity to garbage. Refused access to the respectable white settler space of the medical clinic, Rain dies on the

street behind a dumpster: "[t]here was a grainy picture in black and white: a big square dumpster in front of a tall, brick wall. Something covered up on the concrete. It looked just like a blanket, fallen down, left behind" (271). Rain's dead body appears in the photo in a newspaper, being utterly objectified and confirming the settler's fondness of the stories about degenerate Others that maintain the status quo. In other words, in the settler imagination, Rain dies within the space that she is destined to occupy. As opposed to the Indigenous woman, whose body is intricately tied to the degenerate space, her white perpetrator departs from and returns to the settler respectability—his brief transgression of spatial boundaries does not generate any serious repercussions. Adapting Razack, their encounter is inherently colonial and exposes "a making of the white, masculine self as dominant through practices of violence directed at a colonized woman" (96). The establishment of domination through the conquest of both land and Indigenous, especially female, bodies is emblematic of the settler colonial project (Goeman 2013: 33). It is tragically upheld in the spatial configuration emerging in-between Rain and her oppressor.

Similarly, in the case of Emily's rape, the police assume that the reported assault was a gang fight due to the conceptualization of the space it occurred in as degenerate. Situated on the brink of the North End—a symbolic liminal space between the city and the wilderness—the Break is an undeveloped "Hydro land" (3). Its location entails the sense of the marginal: "[s]ome people call it nothing and likely don't think about it at all. I never called it anything, just knew it was there. But when she moved next door, my Stella, she named it the Break" (3). Hence, the stripe of the unsettled, forgotten land emerges as vernacular geography mapped through a personal relationship with it. Stella's naming it "the Break" symbolically calls it into existence. At the same time, the name speaks to the liminality of that territory in-between the

urban and the rural, as well as to the spatial demarcation it introduces. At the very beginning of the novel, in the voice of a first-person narrator, who can be identified as Rain, Vermette sketches the geography and history of the eponymous piece of land. It is a history of poverty and marginalization, initially of the Eastern European immigrants, who were assigned small plots of land in the area in order to be refused voting rights (3). Further, the narrator describes the shift in the district's demography: "[i]n the sixties, Indians started moving in, once Status Indians could leave reserves and many moved to the city. That was when the Europeans slowly started creeping out of the neighborhood like a man sneaking away from a sleeping woman in the dark" (4). This fluctuation of people reinforces the formulation of this part of the cityscape as degenerate.

The underdevelopment of the Break, as well as the North End in general, adds up to the settler society's conjecture as to its pathological and criminal character. Yet even there one can find the vestige of settler development. Hydro towers traversing the liminal topography haunt the landscape, imposing the specter of the resource extraction industry on the landscape. They function as a reminder of the settler domination over the land. The spatial ostentation of the hydro infrastructure is observed by various narrators in the novel. Rain emphasizes the sense of quasi-surveillance that the hydro towers entail:

> Huge and grey, they stand on either side of the small piece of land, holding up two smooth silver cords high above the tallest house. The towers repeat, every two blocks, over and over, going far into the north. […] My Stella's little girl, Mattie, named them robots when the family first moved in beside them. Robots is a good name for them. They each have a square-like head and go out a bit at the bottom like someone standing at attention, and there's the two arms overhead that hold the cords up into the sky. They are a frozen army standing guard, seeing everything. (4)

Further in the novel, Phoenix, having a flashback to the scene of the assault, also perceives the towers as robots: “[l]arge and wide Xs, they look like robots with arms up. They seem to be watching, somehow, like lookout towers or something” (143). In a way, the hydro infrastructure witnesses the assault. Assigning humanoid qualities to the hydro towers provokes estrangement and strengthens the spectral character of the constructions.

Tommy describes the landscape dominated by hydro towers as dystopian: “[t]he Hydro towers loom dark, four storeys high at least, narrow at the top like some sort of lookout tower. The kind in a post-apocalyptic movie or something, one where the world has all gone shit, everything is devastated, and only the clear-headed survive. They look scary anyway, shadowed in the night” (68). While Vermette does not directly address the environmental crisis, the depiction of the resource development infrastructure as evoking apocalyptic connotations reveals settler colonial complicity with the environmental dystopia. Further, Officer Scott locates the bloody crime scene in close proximity to the hydro infrastructure: “[b]etween them, he can just make out where they inspected the scene, where a big pool of blood lies in a packed-down snow” (68-69). Situating the Indigenous woman’s biological material (blood) in contiguity with the energy industry infrastructure, the novel draws a parallel between settler impositions on the environment and the precarity of Indigenous women’s condition under settler colonialism. While the traces of abuse are quickly covered by snow, the motionless frames of hydro towers and their haunting metallic buzzing sound (8) continuously assert settler colonial power dynamics.

1.4. Spaces of resistance

The Break as a liminal space proves also to be a space of resistance and resurgence. Rain describes her attachment to this piece of land as it contrasts with the concrete cityscape:

> I've always loved the place my girl calls the Break. I used to walk through it in the summer. There is a path you can go along all the way to the edge of the city, and if you look down at the grass, you might think you were in the country the whole way. Old people plant gardens there, big ones with tidy rows of corn and tomatoes, all nice and clean. (5)

The Break is, therefore, a space where nature sneaks into the urban landscape. Being an undeveloped part of the town, the land provides the opportunity for people to plant and harvest crops and vegetables. In the warmer months, the Break becomes an oasis, a refuge from the hustle and bustle of the city. It becomes a biodynamic space for the contestation of, and resistance to, the settler colonial land management; apparently undeveloped, it performs functions unanticipated by the system. This is stressed in Kookom Flora's reflection on that piece of land when her spirit lifts into the sky:

> I go higher to see the streets lined up in squares below me. Square after square, the city like a patchwork quilt, all stitched together in different shades of yellow and grey. Then, I go further, that long chunk of field where the Hydro towers sit, twisted like a thick white river, the land cuts right through everything. (337)

The unforeseen interference into the urban landscape provoked by the Break should be analyzed within the context of the dispossession of Indigenous peoples under settler colonialism and their confinement in urban spaces of degeneration. This stripe of an undeveloped, naturally evolving land on the verge of the city provokes a rupture in the perception of urban topographies as non-Indigenous spaces. Moreover, it provides a complex genealogy of Winnipeg as an urban inscription imposed on the ancestral territories of Indigenous people. Hence, the Break complicates the divide between the

rural and the urban, as well as problematizes the settler permanence on, and entitlement to, Indigenous land.

Furthermore, the dichotomy between the city and the reserve, and its conflation with gender constructions, is prominent in Vermette's novel. Goeman approaches this spatial division between the reserve and off-reserve territories as the adverse impact of the relocation policy that developed as a "marker of 'Indian' identity and as a barrier between community members" (2008: 297). In this light, the spatial configurations introduced by the settler colonial policies served to separate the members of Indigenous communities and confine them in spaces that, as discussed above, are associated with degeneration. Moreover, in Vermette's novel, the cityscape is closely tied to femininity, which reflects settler politics aiming to estrange Indigenous women from their traditional communities and lands outside of Winnipeg.[34] The only characters in *The Break* that inhabit reserves are men: Cheryl's ex-husband, Joe, as well as Rita's ex-husband together with his father. Moreover, Louisa's husband, Gabe, symbolically returns home when leaving his nuclear family (wife and children) and moving back on the reserve (36). The man's absence causes affliction to his family; however, his decision is affirmed by Lou as she constantly repeats that Gabe is not going to return home because he is already home on the reserve (283; 287). Therefore, men, other than gang members, are virtually missing from the urban topographies sketched by Vermette. Fathers and husbands are absent and Aboriginal women are used to their leaving (287). There is a strong sense of female community and a limited trust and dependence on men, as voiced in Kookom Flora's words: "I don't know if she knows

[34] One of such policies was introduced by the Indian Act, as discussed in Chapter 1, which regarded the loss of Status by Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men. Hunt explains that "*The Indian Act* imposed categories of belonging along patrilineal lines, such that Indigenous women who married non-status men lost their Indian status until the *Act* was amended in 1985" (27; italics in the original). This law estranged Indigenous women from their communities and stripped them of their Status rights, which impacted predominantly Aboriginal women in the urban centers.

yet, that men are good, strong, amazing and ordinary, but not everything. They can't be. They are too busy doing other things, and she should be too" (334). This tenacious feminist statement represents the Indigenous matriarch's conception of marital relationships that is radically different from the one promoted by settler colonial patriarchal norms. However, it is important to note that men in the novel are not criticized for their choices, even the most detrimental for their families—in the end, they also undergo cycles of colonial violence. They are not given much initiative and agency, located within the categories of rural and wild, like the places they occupy.

Even though Indigenous women in the novel are situated within the urban landscape, they long for the reserve and exhibit strong connections to non-urban topographies. Zegwan (also referred to as Ziggy throughout the novel), Emily's coeval and best friend, reminisces about her grandfather's house in the countryside, where she grew up:

> Ziggy loves being back home in the summer too. She loves the wheat fields and tall grass and bush. But when she misses her dad and her Moshoom, she thinks of wintertime. When they'd be outside until it was dark, which was so early most of the time but Ziggy still felt so, so tired by the time she saw the stars. (133)

Therefore, Ziggy identifies her home with her grandfather's place. Life on the reservation is in tune with the changing seasons and cycles of nature, which provide comfort, stability, and continuity. Since Rita left the reservation with her children after her husband's infidelity, both Ziggy and her brother Sunny only occasionally visit their male relatives, which creates a sense of uprootedness. After being beaten by Aboriginal girls on the night of the assault on Emily, Zegwan more than ever craves to return home on the reserve (137). Indeed, after the dramatic events, Rita decides that the reserve is a better place for her children to cope with what happened (348). It is where they can engage in grounded normativity. Living outside the city allows an intimate engagement

with the land and, therefore, generates sites of resistance and resurgence, where Indigenous knowledge and ethics are learned from the reciprocal interactions with the environment. This is perceived by Rita as the right way for her children to heal.

Vermette proposes a precise divide between male and female spaces of belonging, which disrupt settler patriarchal gender division that would associate women with nature and men with civilization and, hence, urban topographies. At an earlier point in her life, Cheryl also attempts to create a home with Joe outside of the city: "[s]he escaped with her crazy man to the bush, with only their babies and a dream. She wanted to raise her daughters in the quiet country, have a different life" (248). Yet the female character feels strongly connected to the city through the net of kinship that she leaves behind—her mother and sister. Since she feels responsible for Rain, whose alcohol problems exacerbate, she fluctuates between Joe's bush house and her family house in the North End. In the end, Cheryl defines the city as her home:

> Truth was she wanted to go back to the city. By then, she missed the place, its noise and exhaust smoke. The conveniently placed grocery stores and sometimes shovelled walkways. She wanted her mom's cranky old house on Atlantic and the kielbasa smell of the neighbourhood. That was her home. The bush was Joe's. (248)

Hence, the novel problematizes spatial configurations based on gender and positions Indigenous people as belonging to the urban context, acknowledging that "cities are Indigenous spaces" (Hanson 2019: 5). Yet, in this perspective cities should not be seen only as spaces of alienation. In her "Holding Home Together: Katherena Vermette's *The Break*," Hanson stresses that the novel dismantles the conception of urban spaces as solely sites of violence and recognizes the potential of urban Indigenous communities to build meaningful networks of resilience and resistance: "Vermette's novel portrays urban space as a site of potential struggle and violence for Indigenous

women, but it more powerfully portrays their resistance as they live out their relationships in the place they call home" (2019: 7).

It is important to emphasize, however, that in *The Break*, the traditional healing practices and ceremonies are bound to the land. In early spring, when Emily returns home from the hospital, all the women journey from the city to the reserve to perform a sweat lodge ceremony (338). Hence, the rural reserve land emerges as a ceremonial setting. The female characters feel "the deep, cleansing breath of land" (339), which suggests the healing potential that arises from it. The period of the year that the women engage in the traditional land-based healing practice has a profound significance as it responds to the cyclical character of nature, or what De Vos regards as "spiralic temporality" (2), as defined in the Introduction. The ceremony that the female characters engage in revives and strengthens their reciprocal relationships with place and community that transcend settler spatial impositions bound to a physical location. Leanne Simpson argues that "[t]he beauty of culturally inherent resurgence is that it challenges settler colonial dissections of [Indigenous] territories and [their] bodies into reserve/city or rural/urban dichotomies" (173). Through the practice of cultural persistence, the women in the novel generate embodied sites of Indigenous resurgence.

These spatial configurations prevail also in the urban landscape since, based on relational reciprocity, they help the female characters resist settler colonial binaries. When the women return to the city, their transformation is tangible; the ceremony symbolically continues through the relations that they share. They reflect on the implications of ceremonial practices on their well-being: "I need ceremony again. I said so many prayers in that lodge. I said I'd give up drinking. It's time to let that go" (348). The medicinal character of the land-based practice transforms the lives of individuals and disrupts the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Even though the spiralic

temporality is connected to land-based practices, Rita sees the potential of its incorporation also in the cityscape as an element of an embodied Indigenous geography: "[w]e should all give up something bad every spring" (348). This assertion reinvents the concept of the traditional, locating it within the urban setting. Therefore, Vermette in her novel applies the Indigenous paradigm of place as more than a physical location. The spatial configurations in *The Break* emerge from the networks of relations that the characters maintain and cherish. In the small female community depicted by Vermette, women support each other and collectively confront their problems shaped by colonial traumas. Hence, women are not only connected through their precarity and intergenerational cycles of abuse and violence, but also by the ethics of care and relationality that they continuously practice. These reciprocal interconnections generate sites of resurgence, where hopelessness tied to settler colonialism shifts into hopefulness (349) that exhibits the potential to re-imagine Indigenous women's condition for the next generations.

2. Geographies of Intergenerational Trauma in Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*

Tracey Lindberg is an As'in'I'wa'chi Ni'yaw Nation Rocky Mountain Cree legal scholar and writer coming from the Kelly Lake Cree Nation (British Columbia, Canada). A law professor at the University of Ottawa, Lindberg teaches courses in law and Indigenous studies. Her dissertation "Critical Indigenous Legal Theory" was awarded the Governor General's Gold Medal ("Tracey Lindberg"). Published in 2015, *Birdie* is Lindberg's debut novel, and has enjoyed widespread popularity and critical acclaim in Canada. In 2016, the novel was shortlisted for CBC's national book contest Canada Reads. Published in the same week as the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada's Final Report, the novel has been often read alongside the framework of reconciliation (Hanson 2017; Pinder 2019). Moreover, scholars like Hadley Friedland (2016) and Val Napoleon (2015) point to its narrative engagement with Indigenous legal traditions. Lindberg herself emphasizes that her novel responds to the Cree law, and more specifically *Wahkohtowin,* the concept of kinship or being related that underlies Cree legal traditions.[35] Her intention is thus to tackle questions such as "[w]hat do reciprocal obligations look like? What happens when they're broken, and how do you rebuild?" (Keeler).

Similarly to Vermette's *The Break*, Lindberg's debut novel focuses on female characters and spans four generations of Indigenous women. In *Birdie*, the history of settler colonialism in Canada, resulting in First Nations' detachment from traditional customs and practices, leads to far-reaching and tangible consequences for the Indigenous family depicted in the novel. The plot centers on Bernice Meetoos, also referred to as Birdie, who falls victim to child sexual abuse, enacted by her uncle. Confined to bed at a white woman's bakery in Gibsons, British Columbia, Bernice assumes a bird alter ego, travelling through her memories—scattered, unchronological, and fragmentary. The reader witnesses Birdie's journey and accompanies the protagonist on her road to healing. Reflecting the processes of assembling one's trauma story, which includes gaining access to the memories that have been repressed by the survivor of a traumatic event, the novel adopts an experimental structure. *Birdie* consists of fifteen chapters, prologue, and epilogue that are interspersed with *pawatamowin* (dream) and *acimowin* (story) sections that narrate events seemingly separate from these narrated in the chapters. By evoking Indigenous ways of knowledge production and dissemination, namely dreaming and storytelling,

[35] On the legal context of the notion of Wahkohtowin, see Wildcat (2018).

Lindberg defamiliarizes mainstream readers. The *pawatamowin* and *acimowin* sections illuminate the novel's central plot creating a universe that redraws the formal spatial and temporal limitations of the novel, connecting traditional practices and their imageries with the demands of contemporary literary production.

2.1. Familial/r spaces of precarity

In her novel, Lindberg portrays a multi-layered journey of the protagonist—both the symbolic one, on which Bernice sets out while dreaming, and the actual one, which maps spaces relevant to constructing Birdie's life story. The place central to the narrative is the Meetoos family house located in the countryside in the Canadian province of Alberta right outside of the fictitious Little Loon First Nation reserve.[36] In contrast to Vermette's novel, in *Birdie* the countryside and the reserve do not constitute spaces of resistance that demonstrate healing potentialities. On the contrary, the familiar geographies of the protagonist's childhood emerge as spaces filled with precarity. The Meetoos family dynamics are strained by the history of forced assimilation. The colonial rupture in the familial reciprocal relationships is stressed by the omission of one generation of the family in the novel. While the reader learns about Bernice's great-grandmother Kohkom Rose, the story of the girl's grandmother remains untold. This exclusion is symptomatic as it points to the virtual erasure of a whole generation that parallels the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes to state- and church-run residential schools. In the aftermath of the processes of assimilation and cultural genocide, the community becomes more and more

[36] The Meetoos family members are not recognized as "status Indians" since their ancestors refused to sign treaties with the colonizers and, therefore, do not have the right to live on the reserve (Lindberg 2015: 82-83; 87; 125).

fragmented, the Indigenous way of life and values connected to it gradually abandoned.

The residential school as an institution promoting forced assimilation and as a tool of cultural genocide has tangibly influenced the lives of the survivors and their relations, marking a rupture in Indigenous lifestyles and traditions. Methot recognizes residential schools as one of the traumatizing manifestations of colonial oppression; she argues that it is most adequate to approach colonial traumas suffered by Indigenous peoples in terms of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (CPTSD) (41). The long-term experience of colonial oppression by First Nations individuals and communities establishes the chronic character of trauma:

> For Indigenous peoples, the trauma of colonization is chronic because it happens across time as a result of a continual, persistent, and progressive process of loss. This traumatic history includes single incidents […] and ongoing systemic and institutionalized processes of colonization, such as the residential school system (which affected seven generations and destroyed the Indigenous family) and the prison system (a contemporary tool of control). […] In some cases, the chronic trauma experienced by Indigenous people is a result not only of the original experience but also of the prolonged and repeated outcomes of that experience——including inherited outcomes. (41)

Methot, therefore, directs attention to the complex sources and consequences of colonial traumas for contemporary Indigenous people that persist across generations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada also emphasizes the intergenerational impact of the residential school system on Indigenous communities:

> Residential schools are a tragic part of Canada's history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. […] The impacts of the legacy of residential schools have not ended with those who attended the schools. They affected the Survivors' partners, their children, their grandchildren, their extended families, and their communities. Children who were abused in the schools sometimes went to abuse others. Many students who spoke to the Commission said they developed addictions as a means of

> coping. Students who were treated and punished like prisoners in the schools often graduated to real prisons. For many, the path from residential school to prison was a short one. (TRC 183-184)

Intergenerational repercussions of the residential system include, as mentioned above, alcohol and drug addictions, as well as the cycle of violence as the once abused survivors become perpetrators. Methot offers a concise and accessible summary of the intergenerational impacts of trauma in *Legacy: Trauma, Story, and Indigenous Healing*, where she outlines the processes of colonization that trigger traumatic responses, everyday effects of trauma, and contemporary repercussions of intergenerational trauma in First Nations communities (28-30). Amongst the latter, Methot enumerates such intergenerational impacts of colonial trauma that trouble Indigenous communities in Canada today as alcohol and drug abuse, disunity and conflict, eating and sleeping disorders, sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse, teen pregnancies, accidental deaths, high suicide rates, dysfunctional community and family dynamics, toxic communication patterns, internalized sense of inferiority, and voicelessness (29-30).

Even though the residential school system is not directly addressed in the novel, the fictional lives of the Meetoos family reflect the intergenerational repercussions of the Canadian policies of forced assimilation. Alcohol abuse is ubiquitous among Bernice's relatives and leads to episodes causing the girl's anxiety, which is illustrated in her vision of the perfect house as the opposite of her every-day reality:

> [t]here would be no cigarette burns in gaudy-coloured carpet, no empty bottles or glasses half-drunk or spilled on the floor on weekends, and no visits without invitations from her parent's friends. No one would bother her in her room under the stairs, and she wouldn't be woken by thundering feet up the steps (a

> fight) or thudding down the stairs (someone falling down). (Lindberg 2015: 33)[37]

The problematic relationship with alcohol shared by most of the adult characters in the novel should be read within the context of intergenerational trauma endured by the community. Alcohol dependency yields a negative impact on the family life: Bernice's mother and her siblings are mostly disconnected from their traditional teachings, customs, and values. This is evident in the moose-skinning party that the men organize after hunting. While moose has been the source of subsistence for the Cree for generations and the hunting of the animal might be seen as the connection to the traditional lifestyle of the community, the party accompanied by alcohol violates the protocols associated with this activity. The imagery of skinning the moose by the men highlights the description of blood that illustrates the cruelty of the act (45). Further, Birdie's mother asserts that "[t]hey enjoy this more than they should" (46), pointing to the men's pleasure in processing the animal that departs from the traditional value of respect towards the hunted game. The traditional act of subsistence becomes a drunken gathering that escalates violence between family members (46). Bernice thinks of moose meet as of good medicine: "the stew was like a tonic that could cure most things. Maybe, she thinks, moose is home" (39). Yet in the novel the activity of processing the animal that traditionally would bring the community together and reaffirm reciprocal obligations,[38] or *wahkohtowin*, becomes an enterprise that sparks conflict and makes the characters drift apart.

[37] Subsequent quotations from *Birdie* come from the HarperCollins 2015 edition of the novel and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
[38] Indigenous communities have relied on game not only in terms of food but also for clothing, ceremonies, and reaffirmation of their cultural identity for generations. As stressed by Cunsolo et al. (2020), the lack of access to traditionally hunted game, such as caribou for the Inuit or moose for the Cree, "impacts on food systems, cultural continuity, community connections, and health and wellbeing" (34). Therefore, the preservation of traditional hunting rituals emerges as salient for many areas of Indigenous lives, both individual and collective.

As the community members do not honor their reciprocal obligations towards each other due to the impacts of intergenerational trauma, the family ties are severely strained. This is particularly visible in reference to parenting in the community, which relies heavily on single parenting by women. Fathers in the novel are absent—either physically present in the community but not engaging in the child's upbringing (Bernice's father) or completely absent and unknown (Freda's father). Therefore, the burden of caretaking falls entirely on women. Single mothers, like Maggie, face challenging realities of ubiquitous alcohol abuse, violence, and large families to raise, while, at the same time, struggling with intergenerational trauma. Bernice's mother is bitter and full of remorse about the difficulties she is facing: "Maggie would rather an Other. Another. Another life. With fewer nieces, nephews and Bernices around. Kids who weren't so noisy" (17). Due to her frustration with the reality she is bound to live, the woman fails to uphold her relational obligations: "she couldn't stand being around all of 'those damn kids.' Like Bernice hadn't come from her body. As if Maggie's nieces and nephews weren't of her blood. Weren't her responsibility" (17). The departure from the traditional ethics of care based on seven-generational planning exacerbates toxic family dynamics.

The reciprocal familial obligations are brutally violated in the novel through the acts of appalling malevolence when Birdie's uncle Larry sexually abuses her. Bernice becomes prey for the man for the first time on the day of a school Christmas pageant, when she is ridiculed by other children due to her snowflake costume made of a nightgown (163). Ashamed and heartbroken, the girl runs back home, where instead of finding safe haven, she encounters her inebriated uncle, who rapes her (164). The abuse continues repeatedly as the girl is looked after by Larry in the absence of other family members:

> [s]he was still going to her uncle's even though her mom had quit macramé. Now instead, every Sunday, her mom and Auntie Maisie drove to bingo while uncle Larry watched her alone. […] It was that year that her uncle Larry started pressuring her to do more than sit on his lap and let him feel her up. So, she was still trying to figure out if those pictures of Jesse were up because of her uncle or despite him. Or to make something strange normal. Bernice didn't think so; she knows there was nothing normal about it, about him. About Them. (12)

Birdie's platonic obsession with Jesse, a fictional character from a popular Canadian series, *The Beachcombers*, constitutes an escape from the harrowing reality of chronic sexual abuse. The traumatic character of the events results in the girl's confusion related to interpersonal relationships. The protagonist develops symptoms of PTSD common, as Judith Lewis Herman (149; 157-158) demonstrates, to cases resulting from child sexual abuse, particularly from a family member, namely an eating disorder and obesity, detachment, dissociation, and muteness.[39]

Lindberg juxtaposes the muteness of the sexual abuse survivor with the silence upheld by the family members following the traumatic events:

> No one mentioned the obvious; no one said what he was waiting for, what she suspected her uncle Aubrey would wait for if Larry was not around. No one talked about it, said a word, made demands, ordered her to do anything. The pure red rage of her seeming complicity—her failure to scream, to speak of this, to fight it, to cry—washed over her. […] She didn't talk for a year after. The funny thing is—no one seemed to notice. No one mentioned that her underwear was bloodied, that there were bruises on her arms and neck. No one brought up her swollen lip or the cut above her eyebrow. […] all but Auntie Val pushed slowly to remind her of her failing, of her unreliability. Bernice was under siege and alone. (165)

Despite the evident physical indicators of abuse, Bernice's family chooses to ignore what happens to the girl. The reciprocal familial obligations are once again violated as the abuse is not acknowledged and reported; the wrongdoing is not followed by

[39] I reflect on Lindberg's representation of trauma more extensively in my article "Unsettling Settler Colonial Timescapes: Trauma Time and Indigenous Temporalities in Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*" (forthcoming in *Resistance Through Time in Narrative Forms* edited by Teresa Valentini, Angela Weiser, and John Zilcosky, University of Toronto Press, fall 2023).

redress. On the contrary, the protagonist is left without psychological help or the support of her close ones.

Lindberg addresses in her novel what Robert Innes (Cowessess First Nation) and Kim Anderson (Métis) metaphorically call after Joan Jack "the moose in the living room" (183). This expression describes "Indigenous leaders and individuals who avoid dealing with the issue of violence Indigenous women face from Indigenous men" (187). For many reasons, including the fear of perpetuating negative stereotypes against Indigenous men and their over-criminalization, Aboriginal communities have avoided conversations concerning domestic violence inflicted by Indigenous men on Indigenous women (176). However, these silences, intended to be protective for the male members of the community, when maintained, reinforce the vicious cycle of abuse. When the abuse remains disregarded, neither the victim nor the victimizer obtains the necessary support that could lead to reconciliation and healing. Innes and Anderson suggest that only "by confronting the moose in the living room, families and communities can begin to openly tackle issues of violence and shame of victims and victimizers that the violence engenders" (188). Rather than confront the moose in the living room, Larry's wife, Auntie Maisie, asserts her complicity when offering Bernice a gift in exchange for keeping the secret (13). The rest of the Meetoos family also maintains the silence that "seeped into the kitchen, first. Permeating the curtains. Eating into the linoleum. Eventually settling in the fridge. It was like some sort of bad medicine—it made Freda skinny, Bernice fat, and Maggie disappear" (62). *Birdie*, therefore, illustrates the detrimental consequences of the connivance of relatives in the safekeeping of perpetrators.

One of the physical outcomes of trauma experienced by Bernice is her obesity. The protagonist maintains an unhealthy relationship with food based on compulsive

eating that transforms her body[40] (217). Lauren McGuire-Wood argues that the protagonist's physical change marks her desire:

> to make her body unhospitable and unappetizing to others, to her uncle, to the other men who hunger to take advantage of women's bodies as if they own them. […] Her body becomes a "cage" (139) that keeps her safe from harm, but limits her movement and freedom. Throughout her novel, Lindberg uses metaphorical and literal hunger to convey connections between body and place, and food as a means of protection and safety. (217)

Since the act of rape takes place in Bernice's small room under the stairs in her family home, the girl covets to fill in all the available space so that no one could hurt her again: "[s]he believed that if she got big enough there would be no room in there for anyone but her" (151). By spatially orienting the protagonist's body, Lindberg reflects on the contingency between the experienced trauma, place, and physique. Gaining weight becomes a tactic that Bernice employs to shield herself from violence. The girl's bloated body emerges as a desperate tool of protest against the premature violent sexualization that she undergoes.

Bernice's obesity stresses a sense of detachment from her body that is further strengthened when she assumes a bird alter ego: "she thinks of herself as habitable. Desirable by something. More, importantly, she thinks that she is somehow becoming. Something Else." (6). Her infected skin becomes a site for the encounter of the human and the non-human: "her skin became mottled with some sort of fungus. Then, it looked scabby and raw. Now, in the light of her bedroom, it looks a bit like the blister rust that clings to the side of the lodgepole (pine) trees back home […] As the blisters spread she feels, instead of alienated from her skin, more at home in it" (6). Bernice's body, therefore, emerges as a small ecosystem, where fungi thrive on her tissue while

[40] I provide a more extensive analysis of the trope of food in Lindberg's novel in a book chapter entitled "Recuperating Tastes of Home: Indigenous Food Sovereignty in First Nations Women's Writing," published in *Canada: A Taste of Home/Les Saveurs de Chez Soi*, edited by Ylenia De Lucia and Oriana Palusci, Guernica World Editions, 2022.

she hibernates. Through her skin infection, the protagonist also symbolically turns into a more-than-human, who shares characteristics with non-human species, such as pine. Through its material fusion with the elements of the environment, Bernice's body is depicted as utterly trans-corporeal. The concept of trans-corporeality introduced by Stacy Alaimo "insists that the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world" (11). This is particularly important in the Indigenous context, where human and more-than-human entities are reciprocally interconnected as kins (Martinez 140). Lindberg's representation of Birdie's body transgresses the boundaries between the human and the non-human that appears liberating for the protagonist, as she sees in it a potential to restore the sense of being at peace within one's body in contingency to the surrounding environment.

Bernice's scabby skin that connects her to the non-human marks her subsequent transformation into a bird—a form of dissociation filled with symbolism. The sounds she produces become "bird-like trill" (77), her senses adapt to her animal alter ego as "she was actually losing her sense of human feeling" (56) and "had to adjust her vision, like she imagined a crocodile did with his lids. She could hear everything, taste the colours of the sky, the grass, the dirt on the hill. She knew now that something had changed. That she had changed. That she had altered" (83). Bernice's transformation into a bird symbolically parallels the process of assembling her trauma story. The animal body, her "birdself" (173), allows her to travel through repressed traumatic memories and facilitates introspection that leads to healing. Lindberg constructs a compound "sheBernice" (172) that designates the protagonist's human incarnation to distinguish between her two manifestations. While Birdie's human form, overwhelmed with trauma, remains passive and switches to survival mode, the queer bird alter ego explores topographies of trauma, transgressing the

limiting boundaries of the protagonist's human body. The coexistence of human self with birdself is further developed in the *pawatamowin* (dream) and *acimowin* (story) sections of the novel; following the conventions of traditional oral storytelling, they recount the adventures of an owl which complements the main plotline.

Since Bernice's family house that is supposed to provide safe space becomes the stage of abuse, the protagonist is estranged from familiar geographies that constitute her childhood home. While still living with her mother, she avoids visiting her uncle's household: "She wouldn't go to her uncle's house after that, no matter how hard her mom tried to get her go" (12). The girl prefers to stay with the neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Olson, who are not her relatives. Once again, Lindberg stresses that family ties are broken through the act of transgression of reciprocal obligations. This detachment from familiar geographies is particularly significant when taking into consideration the extended family as traditionally the basic unit structuring Indigenous communities. When thinking about the adversities that happened in their family house and the failure of the family to respond to them, Aunt Val acknowledges that "[t]hat place was a firetrap anyhow" (181). The woman discerns the geography of misery that surrounded her family house; "[s]he also began to look around and see the potential for the sickness around her. Always close to Bernice and her other nieces and nephews, she began to notice that the girls were hiding. With some it was in the wide open – big heels, makeup and tight pants – but with Bernice it was different" (181). Violence becomes normalized with a quiet acceptance of the family members and hits the youngest generations the strongest.

By framing the condition of the community in terms of sickness, Aunt Val opens the possibility of reading the acts of abuse and transgression in terms of windigoization. It is signaled in the novel that Bernice's uncles transform into

indeterminate monstrous creatures: "[s]he wonders if Kohkom saw her boys turn into… something" (158). Lindberg represents the mundane character of the windigo, stripped of the mystical and spiritual context in which it is usually located. Such an approach, stressing the universality of the windigo, as argued by Friedland, "encourages the reader or listener to avoid 'exoticizing' or over-particularizing the *wetiko*, and instead recognize the universal human problem, the 'ordinariness of human monstrousness'" (2018: 46).[41] For years Bernice thinks about her uncle as of a vicious shapeshifter in order to rationalize his evil acts: "less than uncle and more than animal. She had also assumed that when he shifted, his vision was blurred and she was no longer Bernice, just body" (175), but in the end she understands that "he was just uncle. Not a wolf. Not a man. And he was bad" (175). The protagonist's desire to define the ontological status of the perpetrator leads her to assume that it must have been a creature that, when overwhelmed by its instincts, was not able to recognize her as kin. Yet she comes to the understanding that the malevolent acts committed by Larry are not the outcome of supernatural circumstances but his evil yet human intentions.

The family house spatially outlines the geography of abuse that activates Bernice's mechanisms of avoidance. When returning to her homeland after a long absence, Bernice once more confronts her uncle Larry. The scene resembles that of the first sexual assault committed by the man; this time, however, the intended victim is Freda. The protagonist shields her cousin from the drunken excitement of their relative, compelling his attention (174-175). While the man preys on his niece, he suddenly suffers from a heart attack that, as Birdie understands it, is brought on by his ill desire: "[t]here was no relief, only revulsion, at the realization that this excitement had

[41] In this context, see also Branach-Kallas's analysis of *Three Day Road* by Canadian writer Joseph Boyden, in which she approaches windigoization in terms of traumatic transformation within the ordinary self (2014b: 161-183).

overwhelmed him" (177). At the moment of the perpetrator's utter vulnerability, the female protagonist, filled with negative affect following years of recurring abuse, seeks revenge. For the first time in the position of power, Bernice desires that her victimizer should "look up at her and plead with teary eyes for help, forgiveness, silence" (177). Yet Larry's cry for help is ignored by Bernice. Instead, the woman starts a fire that consumes both the house and her predatory uncle: "[t]he uncle stared at her. They lit. She threw the matches, picked up her stuff […] and walked slowly to the door. 'Save yourself,' she said" (177). This act of revenge spatially annihilates the site of precarity and the perpetrator of the abuse, eliminating the potentialities for further violence. However, Bernice's actions, long repressed by the woman and uncovered only by her bird alter ego, also violate *wahkohtowin*, or Cree reciprocal obligations. Bernice's trespass, therefore, turns her into a windigo too, which is symbolically indicated by her hair growing grey: "[n]o one has mentioned it, and Birdie knows they won't. It's understood that she has seen something. Bad. In the dark times, the *Whitigo* comes. Especially when you are sleeping. She didn't let herself sleep much those days but on the one night she did, something changed her hair" (206). The transgression of Cree ethics turns Bernice into a monster that she can defeat only through the process of acknowledgment of the crime she committed and re-integration within the community following Indigenous protocols.[42]

2.2. Institutional care and urban borderlands

In the novel, it is not only the familial networks of kinship that fail the protagonists but also settler institutions that do not provide safe space and a relevant context for

[42] On the traditional Indigenous processes of healing from windigo sickness, consult Friedland (2018).

Bernice's healing. In-between the protagonist's childhood marked by abuse in her family house and the fire, Bernice experiences institutional care in a Christian girls' school and lives with a white foster family. Due to her own mental health issues, Bernice's mother, Maggie, cannot carry out her parental obligations and entrusts her daughter to her sister Val. Living with her aunt in substandard project housing in Edmonton that the girl calls "the Pecker Palace" (77), Birdie keeps missing her mother and envisaging a happy ending to her exodus: "Bernice had wondered anxiously when they would get the window coverings, when her mom would come again, when she would come to get her for good. So she could go with her. To. Someplace. Some new place. Some home" (78). Birdie's dream to find a new home where she and her mother would start a new life does not come true. Instead, the girl has to attend a Christian-led day school for girls that the protagonist refers to as "Christly school" (216). This institution proposes education immersed in Christian teachings and prayer, deprived of culturally relevant contexts for its Indigenous students. Just like many Aboriginal children in residential schools were forced to abandon their traditional customs and languages, Bernice is scorned for maintaining her Indigenous heritage as the nuns order her to take off her medicine bundle (79). Further, Aunt Val's incapacity to adequately take care of Bernice leads to the girl being placed under the protection of Social Services: "Bernice had been surprised when the police came to the door with the tired social worker. Looking around at Pecker Palace, she tried not to feel relieved. Relief felt like disloyalty" (84).

Yet the child welfare system also fails Bernice. Despite the initial relief that the girl demonstrates, the foster family that she is placed in does not provide her with a sense of home. The Ingelsons are a mainstream white Canadian couple filled with good intentions but oblivious of the social, cultural, and economic contexts of their

foster child's earlier life. Even though Birdie moves to a comfortable and economically stable household, where rather than lack she experiences abundance (142), she does not feel at home in that space even though she is ostensibly safe from harm. The girl feels out of place living with people who do not understand her, which is best illustrated by "the pork incident" (142). Bernice keeps storing food under her bed in case she decided to run away from her foster home, which is interpreted by Ann, her foster mother, as a sign of hunger and food shortages in the protagonist's family home: "'This sweet little girl was afraid,' hushed and conveying shock, 'that we would run out of food!' The horror of the notion and of Bernice's supposed past fills the dining room" (143). The girl, however, never experienced hunger in her childhood: "[t]here was always food to be had at home" (143). Bernice explains the poverty that exists in her community tying it to the history of colonialism that introduced structural inequalities between the Canadian mainstream and Aboriginal communities: "yes, most certainly, the Meetooses had more pinches than the Ingelsons. But that was the result of history and design, not some flaw in her family or her people" (143). The paternalistic attitude represented by Bernice's foster parents is based on racial stereotypes and appears degrading to the protagonist: "[w]hen she leaves the Ingelsons' and is street living in Edmonton – learning about protection, pride, loyalty, danger and madness – THAT will feel less like a pinch than living with the white couple" (143). The impossibility to bridge the differences that divide Bernice from Ann and Tom leads to the girl's escape and long period of homelessness on the streets of Edmonton.

The malfunctioning child welfare system in settler Canada, which does not recognize the needs for culturally specific care, rather than contributing to Indigenous children's well-being, results in their precarity. The Native Women's Association of

Canada points to the affinity between the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in child welfare system and Aboriginal women's vulnerability to violence, including the phenomenon of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NWAC 9-10). The child welfare system not only creates an environment for Indigenous girls to be abused while in care but also systematically aggravates their condition of vulnerability that often leads to homelessness, addictions, and prostitution. Anette Sikka in "Trafficking of Aboriginal Women and Girls in Canada" observes the role of the child welfare system in overcriminalization of Indigenous women and their susceptibility to engage in sex work, noticing that

> many girls' first point of entry into the criminal justice system is a charge for offence committed within a care facility. Girls may be charged with assault on a staff member or other 'violent' offences and are then remanded to detention centres […] The histories of children involved in care may cause them to act out in aggressive or destructive manners. Thus, given the high rate of apprehension of Aboriginal children, their over representation in the child welfare system leads to their over representation in the criminal justice system, which in turn facilitates their entry into prostitution. Left with few employment options and a history of abuse and neglect, Aboriginal women and girls more frequently turn to drugs and prostitution as a means of survival, both physical and emotional. (208-209)

Moreover, Sikka stresses that the welfare agencies often act neglectful in cases of girl runaways when they are teenagers: "'chronic' runaways over this age [fourteen] are not deemed 'missing' or 'high risk,' particularly when they stay with 'friends' or are thought to be just 'hanging out'" (213). Such an attitude increases the risk of coercion of young Indigenous women into prostitution and sex trafficking.

In *Birdie*, Lindberg exposes the settler child welfare system's impact on Indigenous women's condition of precarity, as well as their helplessness when this condition becomes unbearable. Bernice escapes from a stable and wealthy setting that nevertheless does not provide her with emotional support and belonging into the urban topography of precarity, where every day is a struggle for survival. The protagonist

becomes “a shopping cart lady” (148), which marks her homelessness as shopping carts are attributes of people living on the streets in North America, where they store and carry all their material possessions. Without a stable place to spend nights, Bernice searches for shelter in dangerous places: “the corner tables of darkened bars” (149) and “the hotel rooms of people who were flush” (149). Yet daytime is seen by Bernice as the most dangerous of times in the urban topography:

> [t]he day times were scarier. She was, just by her sheer size, recognizable. There was no hiding in the rushing downtown traffic […] No avoiding contact in spaces where people brushed up against strangers and shared space with enemies. There was no way to hide your treasure in spotlight, no time to grab your belongings when people could approximate your capacity to get away. (149)

While at night it is easier for the protagonist to hide, it becomes more difficult during the day. The life on the streets becomes so intense that Bernice loses a sense of her actions and reality surrounding her (90). One morning she wakes up with “a crow feather between her lips” (90), which might be read as a bad omen, signaling the protagonist’s lack of control over her life. In the end, the city poses a great danger to an Aboriginal woman who navigates it on her own, which is emphasized in the passage when the owners of a Lebanese restaurant find Bernice asleep in a dumpster behind their place. When they discover her inert body, they call “the fire department. That they do this, instead of calling the police, was understandable. Homeless people, in fact, an Indian woman (or, that’s what they called her in paper), had been set on fire in their dumpster before” (97). The recurrence of a life-threatening situation as applying to Indigenous women illustrates the ordinariness and systematic precarity of Aboriginal women in big cities. Located in close proximity to garbage, they are confined to the utmost space of degeneration in the urban center.

The possibility to remain anonymous and invisible are the characteristics of the city that the protagonist clearly embraces: “[s]he felt, at times, invisible. That helped. She could change, too. She could appear and disappear, using only words to unmask herself” (146). The desire to disappear is stronger when Bernice recognizes her relatives among the crowds of anonymous faces: “when she saw someone from home, she tried immediately to become invisible” (147), which is one of the mechanisms of avoidance that she develops. The city allows one to fuse with one’s surrounding. Urban landscape emerges, therefore, as a liminal space where the distance between existence and non-existence is ever so slight. Lindberg amasses vocabulary pertaining to this kind of anonymity and vanishing, such as “invisible,” “disappear,” “unmask,” “separate” (146-148) to stress the sense of liminality of the protagonist’s existence on the streets of Edmonton.

As mentioned in the analysis of *The Night Watchman*, in the context of Indigenous lives, borderland is the symbolic state of being on the verge of death, lost in the urban geography of degeneration. Missing and homeless Indigenous women are denied dignity and their spectral presence, haunting the white urban mainstream, discloses the structural injustice perpetuated by institutions and policies that the settler state attempts to meticulously conceal. Bernice becomes a quasi-specter in the anonymous city. On the streets, Bernice navigates the borderland—forever vulnerable yet surviving.

The borderland aspect of the city is further stressed in the novel by Maggie’s going missing in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Bernice’s mother scrupulously plans her disappearance; she chooses to go to a district in Vancouver known for being dangerous for Indigenous women:

> Walking from the bus depot, she had to ask people for directions three or four times. Some just walk away from her.
> One man asks her to be more specific. “Where on the Eastside?” He had looked at her, concerned. “You know, you shouldn’t go there at this time. You could get …”
> “Missing.” Maggie smiles at him kindly. “I will be fine, thank you. Can you tell me where the bars are?” At that, presuming whatever he presumes about Indian women going to Eastside bars, he gave her directions. […] She chose this city and this neighbourhood because she knows someone like her can disappear there. (256)

In the common consciousness, Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, similarly to the Winnipeg’s North End, emerges as a space of degeneration, marked by poverty, drug abuse, prostitution, and Indigeneity. Such an image of the district is sustained by the mainstream settler media that “contribute significantly to this sense of the neighbourhood as a bordered, ‘degenerate’ space” (Dean 39). Lindberg adapts in her novel the spatial configurations of urban Vancouver, which in the recent years has witnessed disproportionately large number of Indigenous women going missing, to comment on the ongoing land politics designed to dispose of Indigenous women’s bodies.

Maggie’s planned disappearance is possible due to the silent social acceptance of, and complicity in, the reality in which a specific urban area is marked by violence and abuse towards women. Female lives are conceptualized in the same categories as the geographies they are located on—aberration, pathology, and degeneration. Amber Dean notices the uncanny parallel between the mythological discourse of the frontier and racialized urban spaces: “[t]hese contemporary acts of colonial violence against Indigenous women are precisely the sorts of encounters that are authorized by the ongoing use of frontier mythology to describe the inner-city spaces from which women are being disappeared” (52). In her analysis of the phenomenon of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, the scholar observes the common tendency to discard them or their bodies on the peripheries of

the urban center (51-52). This confirms the treatment of Indigenous women as undesirable and disposable elements of the urban topography, meant to be erased in the name of the taming of the new Frontier. Forced to urban borderlands, where life is always perilously close to death, Indigenous women exist in-between being missing and being murdered. Maggie, comprehending the urban spatial dynamic under settler colonialism, vanishes into these borderlands of Downtown Eastside—missing and missed by her family members.

While the city is certainly represented in *Birdie* as a precarious space, by depicting Bernice's interactions with the cityscape throughout the novel, Lindberg proposes an alternative way of approaching the urban topography. When homeless, Bernice observes nature that intrudes into the cityscape. Edmonton "had a forest in it, deer through it and the odd moose lost within it" (149). The protagonist searches for familiar elements that would connect the city with her childhood home, like the smell of the earth that, despite being "disposable and compostable earth (mould, mildew and dust)" (89), forms a sensory link with the familiar landscapes of Little Loon. In the end,

> [l]iving in Edmonton, around Edmonton, about Edmonton, under Edmonton was the same as living in and about the rez. Living next to the reserve in a house at the outskirts of town was no different than living under the pedestrian bridge next to the Kinsmen Centre. There were woods, a river, she didn't fit in, and she had to rely on herself for protection. (89-90)

While recognizing the precarity of urban spaces, the protagonist points to the fact that both the city and her childhood home share a commonality: the sense of imminent danger. This illustrates the thorough spatial exclusion of Indigenous women's bodies from Canadian geographies—urban, rural, and on-reserve. The connections to the natural world that Bernice desperately searches for in the cityscape allow her to invent topographies that reinforce a sense of belonging. When during her short stay in

Vancouver the protagonist feels “the absence of life, of soil, of nature” (204), she strives to establish the slightest connection to nature in the concrete urban setting, which leads her to a flower store and a garbage bin nearby it that she calls a “death-garden” (204). Bernice finds discarded decomposing tiger lilies in the bin that again recall sensory memory of her home, where her mother kept the flowers, “a secret garden that no one on the outside of their home could imagine” (204). The flowers remain a powerful reminder of these moments of safety shared between the protagonist and her mother. Symbolically, Bernice ceremoniously scatters the remains of rotten lilies that “smelled like dirt” (205) to domesticate the anonymous and hostile cityscape.

2.3. Creating space for *womenfamily*

In the end, Bernice finds safe space in the most unexpected of places—in a white woman’s bakery, “Lola’s Little Slice of Heaven,” in Gibsons. Located in a small town in British Columbia, far away from Bernice’s childhood home near the reserve, Lola’s bakery offers the protagonist “both a job and a home” (8) as the owner “offered her the apartment above the shop as well” (8). In the novel, Lola epitomizes a typical middle-aged white Canadian woman. Birdie draws parallel between her employer and other settlers: “[s]he’d run into Lolas before in her life. Sure, her name was different and sometimes she was even a he, but it was the same person. Lolas were almost always fascinated because they had never met an Indian before” (9). Hence, Lola exposes the settler ignorance, which discloses the complicity of the settler mainstream in the upholding of power structures that promote white patriarchy and oppression of racialized others. Lola seems to confirm this stereotype through her opinionated nature (9) and occasional cultural insensitivity, e.g., calling one of the bakery’s pastries “Happy Squaw Squares!” (9). However, the protagonist challenges her prejudice and

acknowledges the woman's positive qualities: "Lola was not, well actually she was, as bad as you might think. But Bernice thinks that Lola has a really big heart and a head for numbers" (9). The relationship between the women grows into friendship characterized by selfless acts of kindness:

> [m]aybe it was one of those kindnesses that Lola heaps on her that can't actually be felt or measured – so much so that you don't actually notice it. Like the three meals. Like not smacking her gum or speaking too loudly around her. Like when she coaxed Bernice into her '74 Malibu and pretended she was not looking for Pat John's house. (59)

The curious encounter between a white settler and an Indigenous woman opens space for mutual understanding and care. Kait Pinder in "Action, Feeling, Form: The Aesthetics of Care in Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*" emphasizes the transformative potential of the encounter between the two characters: "[w]hile Lola still habitually thinks about her guests in the racist images available to the settler imagination, Lindberg underlines how care for Birdie brings out her kindness and love, and in turn reveals a deeper connection to both her tenant and her family" (227). Lola comes to think about Bernice as "the Kid" symbolically assuming parental duties towards her: "[n]one of the Whippets understands the softness of Lola's heart and the feelings of kindness that she has for Bernice. […] She feels tenderness for the girl because she suspects no one has been tender to her before" (Lindberg 111).

In *Birdie*, Lindberg attempts therefore to bridge some of the gaps separating Indigenous women from settler women, pointing to the overlaps in their condition under settler colonialism. Lola's own experiences of gendered violence at the hands of men (112; 114-115) establish connection between her and Birdie in spite their ethnic difference: "Lola also sees something in her that reflects in both of their mirrors. Survivor" (113). As a victim of abuse, Lola, rather than ignoring Bernice's trauma,

recognizes it, offering the stranger a safe space for healing and reconciliation. When Bernice's condition deteriorates, Lola attempts to provide what she imagines as the most favorable ambience for the girl's recovery: "the care package she held in her skinny arms. Candles and incense, cheesecake remainders and sandwiches. Table lamp and magazines, a small cassette player and some tape with what sounded like whale humping" (123). It is Lola who notifies Bernice's female relatives, Aunt Val and Freda, about the protagonist's condition and welcomes them under her roof (131). Even though Lola is not a perfect character, in all her eccentricity and, at times, ignorance, she emerges as a paragon of an ally figure; one that shares the resources that she possesses and uses her privilege to accommodate Bernice and her family members' resurgence. This solidarity emerging from the women's encounter transgresses violent settler geographies, proposing alternative topographies of settler-Indigenous dynamics based on care and reciprocity. Thus, as Pinder aptly suggests, "Lindberg also points to the potential transformation of settler Canada through reciprocal caring relation among all survivors of what she called the 'bomb' of colonialism" (227). This seems of particular importance in the context of the ongoing process of reconciliation in Canada.

The small women's community assembled in Lola's bakery redefines kinship relationships and reestablishes familial reciprocal obligations. Aunt Val is given another chance to commit to her responsibilities towards her niece as her "*kee kuh wee sis*, [her] little mother" (38). In Lindberg's novel the new familial bonds are enacted through the use of compound nouns, or "fullwords" (Pinder 233), such as "niecedaughter" (60), "little mother" (38), "bigwoman-sisterlittlemother" (61). These refer to the roles taken on by female characters towards other women. For example, "bigwoman-sisterlittlemother" (61) describes Aunt Val referring to her appearance

(big woman) and her familial obligations: being a sister of Maggie and "little mother" to Birdie. These noun compounds suggest the fluidity of familial relationships, with an emphasis on filling for the missing bonds. Since Maggie fails to uphold her parenting duties and express motherly love towards her daughter, Val takes over her responsibilities, acting as a mother figure for the girl. In this way, the Cree reciprocal obligations are being fulfilled despite the disruption of traditional family ties. Pinder argues that the alternative vocabulary introduced by Lindberg enacts a poetics of care "representing, through the shape of the word itself, Cree law, language, and ideas about community that may be otherwise unavailable to a non-Indigenous reader" (234). In other words, the novel renders Indigenous worldviews by means of linguistic innovation and reasserts collective values connected to reciprocity.

The traditional Cree ethics of care that reaffirms kinship relations between Indigenous female characters is foregrounded in the novel. Bernice's "little mother," Aunt Val, uses traditional Cree medicine while tending to her niece. She treats the protagonist's infected skin applying bear grease to her scars (117). Aunt Val watches over Birdie and comforts her when she screams or sleep talks: "she pulls her chair closer and hums to her, singing old songs, pow wow 69ers and some show tune that she can't get out of her head. Other times, when she feels that buzz, she will just hug Bernice or pat her hand" (118). These acts of care reconsolidate strained family ties between Aunt Val and Birdie: "Bernice is the next in a long line of women who not only like to argue, but who would not die. Val would see this because Val *is* this" (126; italics in the original). Valene unlocks her potential of a caretaker that she has somehow repressed throughout her life (126; 128); when nursing Bernice, she becomes a true matriarch for the family, "a modern bush woman" (127). Throughout her life learning from Kohkom Rose, whom she considers a feminist for her

perseverance and authority (127), Aunt Val has been immersed in traditional teachings and ethics. Val's grandmother and other women defend their community against settlers' intention to seize their ancestral land through the signing of a treaty (125). This act of resistance towards settler colonialism emphasizes Indigenous women's resilience and self-determination. However, the poverty haunting the community makes it impossible for the First Nations to evade the repercussions of colonialism in settler Canada even on unceded territories that are not "officially" colonized or "Indian Acted." Kohkom Rose emerges as a role model also for Bernice; she speaks Cree with her great-granddaughter despite the disapproval of the girl's mother and transfers to her shreds of knowledge and stories while engaging in traditional activities, such as tanning hides (73). The character of Kohkom functions in the novel as a safeguard of Indigenous tradition and family's well-being, as well as emerges as a paragon of Indigenous femininity. In the process of rebuilding her reciprocal obligations to her relative, Aunt Val in turn continues Kohkom Rose's legacy.

Care for Bernice brings together the protagonist's Indigenous relations and a white woman, who through collaboration create a "found" family, or what Lindberg calls "womenfamily" (245). In this way, the novel re-defines the notion of kinship, familial obligations and extends the concept of a family. Hanson notices that women assist Birdie when she is "cocooning" (68); they "are surrounding her with further layers: smoke, talk, silence, care, prayers, watchfulness, memory, love" (2017: 85). In Lindberg's novel, the small female community facilitates Birdie's travel through memories, allowing her to embark on a journey towards healing: "[t]he three women moving around her generate some sort of resistance that allows her to travel back and forth" (157). Lindberg's fictional family is not defined by blood ties but rather by intimate reciprocal relationships between characters that transgress ethnic divisions.

The protagonist is the catalyst that binds the community together. Hanson observes that "not having grown up with a home that was safe or a family where reciprocal obligations were lived out between the people around her […], Bernice has built home and family for herself by the end of the story" (2017: 86). Lola becomes an integral part of the protagonist's "madefamily" (245) despite her settler ancestry. Moreover, through the queer romantic relationship that develops between Lola and Freda (245), Lindberg transgresses settler heteronormative ideal of the family. On many levels, the representation of an entirely female community as a family bound by the ethics of care and reciprocity is an attempt to revise the concept, as well as elevate women's experience and solidarity.

2.4. Ceremonial spaces of resurgence

In Lindberg's *Birdie*, a ceremony held by Bernice and her "womenfamily" concludes the protagonist's process of healing, bringing reconciliation and restoration. After "having metabolized her past […] Bernice climbs out of the bed ready to begin in a good way, sacred way" (Hanson 2017: 86) allowing the three women to help her with a ceremonial feast she prepares: "[j]ust us four" (244). Throughout the period of recollection and working through the traumatic memories, the protagonist keeps making lists of ingredients that span from common snacks like Cheezies (235), through exotic spices like jalap root or masala powder (234-235), to traditional Indigenous ingredients, such as moose intestine and oolichan grease (188). The action of compiling lists accompanies Bernice's healing and prepares her for its culmination in the feast. Her "madefamily" assists Bernice in acquiring all the peculiar ingredients: "[a]ll [lists] sit on top of the journal that Bernice has been writing ingredients in for

years. She thumbs through it, stops at the first entry and wonders how the hell she is going to find bison marrow in Vancouver. And. Puts her foot on the gas. And. Goes hunting" (221). These ingredients are approached later in the novel as "[m]edicines. Maskihky" (246). Considering Bernice's difficult relationship with food, the collective cooking in the ambience of care and cordiality (245) emphasizes the significance and sacredness of the ceremonial feast.

The ceremonial arch of the novel follows Cree protocols. Before cooking and preparing food for the feast, Bernice goes through a cleansing ritual that traditionally would be performed to mark a girl's first menstruation as a coming-of-age ceremony: "[o]ld ladies would take the young ones when we had our first moons and put us in a lodge built for it" (243). The women drive Bernice to a sacred Indigenous site featuring *Pimatisewin,* or a tree of life, where they build a hut out of pine boughs in order to conduct the ceremony. The reception of menstrual huts has been largely negative in the Western scholarship, which reinforced the taboo of menstruation and women's seclusion from the community. However, Cutcha Risling Baldy (of Hoopa, Yurok, and Karuk descent) in her book *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms & the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies* highlights the importance of these spaces for Indigenous women in the pre-contact period and the salience of their restoration in contemporary Aboriginal communities. Baldy claims that

> women's houses could provide for social as well as spiritual experiences among women. In addition, while women were in "seclusion," the family, including husbands, brothers, sisters, and others, were tasked with caring for home and children, as well as providing food and resources to the woman. This was therefore not a secluding experience but instead would create a sense of community insofar as the woman could see firsthand the number of people who cared not only for her but also for her family. Residence in the women's house was considered a time of "concentrated meditation." (114)

Hence, Baldy's interpretation of coming-of-age ceremonies, rather than women's isolation, stresses the reaffirmation of collectivity. Women's ceremonies emerge as empowering acts of resurgence that strengthen whole communities: "[t]hrough these ceremonies Indigenous peoples are not just reclaiming their cultures but reclaiming their nations and sacred spaces through the (re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing of their Indigenous feminisms" (Baldy 150). Therefore, coming-of-age ceremonies are inherently spatial and can be interpreted in terms of grounded normativity or long-standing land-based practices, as defined by Coulthard (13). The reclamation of a menstrual lodge rite by Bernice is particularly significant since it productively opposes the traumatic sexual victimization that she endured as a child. Being forcibly sexualized and pre-maturely forced into adulthood, through ceremony, the protagonist reclaims her childhood and marks a new entry into adulthood. The traditional ceremonial setting of her people allows Bernice to restore spaces of healing and facilitates collective resurgence.

Bernice's rite as well as the subsequent feast take place on a sacred site near the tree of life, *Pimatisewin*. The sacred tree's condition parallels that of Bernice's; it is weak and vulnerable, nearly dying: "[s]he thought about the *Pimatisewin* […] and wondered whether that old tree would make it. There were supposed to be four of them, two in North America and two in South America. The one at Loon Lake was in sad shape. She had heard the one in B.C. was dying too, from pollution" (24). The role of the tree in the novel is highly symbolic and functions as a dual metaphor—one that epitomizes both Cree legal and ethical obligations (Napoleon) and the environmental repercussions of colonialism. The concept of a good life encapsulated in the dying sacred tree points to the deterioration of Indigenous collective well-being, materially demonstrating the devaluation of traditional ethics based on reciprocal obligations.

Further, *Pimatisewin*'s hunger (3) emphasizes the colonial rupture, which alienated Indigenous peoples from their sacred contexts. Since Aboriginal communities do not hold ceremonies any longer, the tree is not adequately "fed" and cared for. Settler inscriptions, transforming both the environment and Indigenous communities, have estranged Aboriginal people from their land base and permanently disturbed practices connected to Indigenous traditional environmental knowledge. The disruption in the continuance of the land-based ceremonial practices, as demonstrated by *Pimatisewin*, negatively impacts both the environment and the integrity of Indigenous communities, indicating the inextricable synergy between people and the environment. Since the tree of life emerges as full-fledged character and kin in the novel ("the old tree is a Kohkom [grandmother] tree" (28)), it is embraced as a relative and treated as an Elder. As such, it is a source of continuation and knowledge that, when cared for, provides a space for regeneration. Throughout the novel, Bernice recognizes her responsibility towards *Pimatisewin*. The ethics underlying the intimate personal and familiar relationship between the human and the non-human structure the kincentric ecology of the narrative (Martinez 164). The protagonist's deep concern for the tree's condition is stressed in *pawatamowin* (dream) sections (3; 28; 226; 241). Bernice's renewal of the sacred reciprocal relationship between people and the tree spatially transgresses settler inscriptions, creating ground for Indigenous reclamation of their legitimacy and their responsibility for/to ancestral territories and their ecosystems.

In Lindberg's *Birdie*, the restoration of the land-based ceremonies maps geographies of resurgence. Janice A. Makokis (Cree) approaches Indigenous rituals as resurgent and decolonial practices that reaffirm reciprocal obligations: "it is in ceremony that we begin to strip away the layers of colonialism that keep us bound to a colonized existence. Through ceremony we learn what our role and responsibility is

to our people and it is this role that keeps us relationally accountable and on the path of living the 'good life'" (47). The women literally feed the tree with the food they prepared together:

> The four women gingerly unpack the feast offering, and place it at the base of the tree, giving the earth thanks for all they have, for the clarity to be able to see it and for having been given the gift to survive. Taking care not to spill anything they feed their relative. The earth around *Pimatisewin* soaks up the exotic and the sacred, taking the food to its roots, its branches and its bark. (247)

This act that honors the land as a source of subsistence and a relation subverts its colonial understanding as a source of profit. The symbiosis between the human and the environment becomes further apparent when Bernice derives vitality from *Pimatisewin*: "[o]n the ground before her, the food they have made for Pimatisewin has leeched into the soil and has disappeared. She feels some energy in her limbs, as if she has eaten the food herself, and stands up, the Cree on her tongue having flowed to the tree" (250). Birdie's spontaneous ability to fluently speak Cree with the tree points to the power of ceremony to transform realities, reconnecting Indigenous people to their heritage. Through the ceremony Bernice reaffirms her healing and consolidates the "womenfamily" that she builds. Moreover, the protagonist assumes the function of a storyteller at the end of the narrative as she asserts: "I am feeling like I have a story to tell you" (250). *Birdie*'s finale reasserts the protagonist's position as a depositary of cultural knowledge, who enacts its continuation and regeneration. Thus, the ceremonial ending of the novel enacts, as in *The Break,* a form of spiralic temporality, which, following De Vos, is intimately grounded in place. At the same time the closing ceremony allows for cyclical mobility and transformation (6-7), opening a space for renewal, both individual and collective.

Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation was to examine the ways in which Indigenous women writers (re)map North America in their fiction, contesting settler colonial normative cartographies. Furthermore, my ambition was to explore how the alternative literary geographies emerging from contemporary Indigenous women's writing are negotiated via the dynamics between women and the environment. Therefore, the focus of my readings of the selected novels was on the diverse forms of relationality depicted in them, between women and their both human and more-than-human kin, as well as on the place-making potential of these representations. Indigenous women writers mediate space at a variety of scales, both through the reference to tangible, material landscapes and contestation of structures that uphold settler colonial spatial domination, for example, heteropatriarchy and capitalist modes of production. While the selected texts address colonial histories in critical and meticulous ways, they do not solely delve into the painful traumatic past and its aftermath, but rather emphasize Indigenous means of transgressing settler impositions and center collective processes of resurgence.

In the analysis of Linda LeGarde Grover's *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, I addressed Indigenous allotment—the colonial strategy of land appropriation—and its aftermath as represented in the novel. Due to the implementation of the settler policy, the fictitious Indigenous community not only is deprived of a significant portion of its land base, but also has to confront realities where their traditional lifestyles are severely disrupted. The Muskrat family's dispossession locates them in the situation

of utmost precarity; they are alienated from the land that assured their subsistence and forced to live elsewhere—they become *aandaki*. Grover, however, unsettles colonial geographies, portraying settler spatial orders as impermanent, which stresses transiency of the notion of private property reinforced by the allotment policy. Ancestral lands are restored to their legitimate inhabitants via vernacular mappings founded on the long-standing relationship with the land. In particular, the motif of *odissimaa*, the umbilical cord, which symbolically connects the Muskrat family to their ancestral land, marks their tangible interconnectedness with place. By restoring the traditional reciprocal relationality, the novel reclaims Native spaces imperiled by settler colonial policies.

My reading of Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* addresses the consequences of termination and relocation policies for Native American nations, especially when it comes to space and gender. The novel focuses on the ambivalent status of the reservation for the depicted Chippewa community. On the one hand, it is a settler inscription, a geography of misery that marks Indigenous containment and dispossession, yet on the other hand a spatiality which is defined by community relationships and values and which thus becomes a site of Indigenous resistance against the planned termination. Erdrich represents collective Chippewa activism against settler mechanisms of erasure, and celebrates Indigenous activism, agency, and self-determination. In the novel, the termination policy is represented as a failure of the settler nation state in its struggle for Native assimilation, as it strengthens rather than undermines Indigenous self-determination. Urban spaces, in turn, emerge as geographies of precarity for Native people, especially women. The stress on the termination's impact on the position of Indigenous women in the cityscape, and its association with sex-trafficking and the MMIWG crisis, should be considered a

strategic intervention made by Erdrich as it has not been a widely discussed outcome of this policy. Moreover, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the novel offers a wide array of powerful female characters who transgress settler heteropatriarchal norms and strengthen the resurgent potential of the narrative.

The novels penned by Grover and Erdrich analyzed in the thesis coincide when it comes to geographical and temporal circumstances—both scrutinize the termination and relocation era in the United States and focus on Chippewa communities. Both texts are concerned with the notion of reservation and the sense of ambivalence it provokes. This is unsurprising as defining the status of a reservation became ever so urgent for Indigenous communities during the historical period represented in the novels. The termination and relocation policies aimed to extinguish Native Americans' special status as the domestic dependent nations in the United States and turn tribal lands into private property. In other words, the aim of this policy was to repudiate tribal national identities and assimilate Native Americans into the settler mainstream so that they would not need state's assistance guaranteed by treaties any longer. At the same time, the reservation as a Native space would cease to exist and be incorporated to the United States land base as private property. This, according to the settler government, would solve the "Indian problem." When the only remaining Native spatiality became imperiled, Indigenous people needed to negotiate often contrasting attitudes towards the reservation. In their works, both Erdrich and Grover reflect on the dilemmas of the time by recognizing the reservation as a settler geographical imposition, but, at the same time, going beyond this singular ideation. Instead, in their novels, the reservation turns into a site of collectivity, resistance, and resurgence. In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, the characters restore their ties to community and land against settler strategies of Indigenous dispossession, assimilation, and elimination. The act of

rebuilding the community on the Mozhay Point reservation symbolically reclaims Indigenous spatiality. Hence, space, as conceived by Grover, is founded on and negotiated through the network of reciprocal relationships rather than via normative mapping. In *The Night Watchman*, in turn, the community's resistance against termination is accompanied by the collective struggle to retain their reservation. Spatial configurations emerging from Erdrich's novel suggest that reservation land is crucial for the self-determination of the depicted Chippewa community. Reservation is, therefore, a complex spatiality that bears signs of both colonial and Native significations. In my interpretation I have therefore emphasized that Grover and Erdrich offer (re)mappings that, rather than imagining a complete rejection of reservation as a settler inscription, envision it as a necessary setting for exercising Indigenous self-determination and building resurgent futures.

Space and, in particular, its relational dimension are equally salient in the Canadian novels discussed in this dissertation. My interpretation of Katherena Vermette's debut novel, *The Break*, focuses on the literary (re)mapping of the urban landscape of Winnipeg by the Métis writer. Vermette, in a way, reproduces settler Canadian geographies enforced by the Indian Act that radically marginalized Indigenous women by alienating them from their original communities and enclosing them in the urban spaces of precarity. The novel proposes a collective female protagonist that reveals Indigenous women's precarious condition in the Canadian cityscape; all the depicted Indigenous women experience or witness gendered violence at some point in their lives. Settler strategies of Indigenous containment in the urban spaces of degeneration as represented in *The Break* impede women's prospects to escape from these precarious geographies. The cycles of abuse experienced by Vermette's characters shed light on the ubiquity of violence and its recurring character.

Moreover, the novel raises the contentious issue of collateral violence connected to intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities as it depicts the possibility of victims, who do not receive appropriate assistance from settler institutions, to turn into perpetrators of violence. Nevertheless, Vermette shifts the geographies of precarity and misery conditioned by settler inscriptions into sites of Indigenous resurgence by enacting ethics based on women's kinship and care. In my reading, the ceremonial ending of the novel—held outside of the city but symbolically continuing in the urban topography—renews kinship relationships and restores resurgent Indigenous femininity.

The crucial aspect of my analysis of Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie* is, likewise, the vicious cycle of intergenerational trauma, an outcome of colonialism, that culminates in the protagonist's life. Since traumatic experiences painfully mark familiar geographies, Bernice searches for an alternative place to call home. This quest to overcome trauma and find a safe space grounds her journey through different spatialities from institutional ones, such as the mental health facility and foster home, to urban skid row. At the end of the narrative, Bernice finds her home and haven in a settler woman's bakery. Yet the safe space is associated with the set of kinship relationships established by the protagonist and her "womenfamily" rather than with a physical location. Like Vermette, Lindberg closes the novel with a representation of a ceremony that symbolizes restoration of kinship obligations. Employing both an environmental and ethical symbol of *Pimatisewin,* or the tree of life, the novel imagines a restored harmony between people and nature, which was earlier disrupted by settler inscriptions and cycles of intergenerational trauma it entailed. By rejuvenating reciprocal kinship, Lindberg (re)maps geographies of misery making space for Indigenous resurgence.

While the American novels discussed in the dissertation focus strongly on the status of the reservation, the selected Canadian texts are involved with urban spaces. Grover and Erdrich imagine cityscape as a precarious geography marked by gendered violence, whereas Vermette and Lindberg depict Indigenous women's attachment to the city in a more nuanced way. This might be related to the spatial arrangement enforced by the Canadian Indian Act, whereby Indigenous women were relegated to the urban landscapes and often alienated from their familial geographies of the reserve. Therefore, the historical underpinnings of the narratives, even though not always discernible (especially for a reader who might possess little knowledge about Indigenous peoples in North America and have little experience with Native writing), are crucial for the spatial configurations they represent. The representation of intergenerational violence and its collateral effects for Indigenous communities is intensified in the selected Canadian novels as juxtaposed with the Native American narratives tackled in this dissertation. This encourages me to propose a tentative comparative conclusion about a vital distinction between American and Canadian Indigenous feminist writing. While in the United States Indigenous fiction still relies, to a large extent, on the imagery present in earlier Native American works, which favor traditional tropes and political struggle, in the Canadian context female writers are more prone to experimentation, both at the thematic and formal levels. These differences might be linked to the evolving process of reconciliation in Canada that allows and encourages new perspectives on Indigenous experience and, in a way, facilitates a more direct critique of the settler colonial nation state and its atrocities. At the same time, in the United States, a more conservative social and political climate prompts perhaps a literary response that operates on more subtle and less explicit imagery.

The central aspect of the poetics of space emerging from the selected Indigenous women's writing from both sides of the 49th parallel is the transience of home. The representations of home prove complex as the colonial impositions have to a great extent disrupted Indigenous relational domesticities. Since Indigenous lands are constantly threatened, home is established through relationships rather than as a physical location. Native American feminist fiction addressed in this dissertation proposes alternative mappings, where reservations, or rather tribal communities living on them, become points of reference and a home for the characters. Grover suggests, however, that community relationships on the Mozhay Point reservation that she represents in her novel need re-building as they have deteriorated due to settler colonial policies of dispossession and forced assimilation. This is evident in Dale Ann's storyline: following the traumatic experience of rape in the city, she does not find comfort and safe space at home. The lack of adequate support exposes the woman to other forms of colonial gendered violence, for instance, forced sterilization. Nonetheless, the eponymous road back to Sweetgrass marks the symbolic coming back home of Grover's characters, which are, in a sense, exiled from their familiar geographies due to settler inscriptions. By representing returns onto the reservation, the Ojibwe writer sketches alternative geographies that contest settler mappings based on dispossession and reclaim Indigenous ancestral territories. Erdrich also represents the reservation as safe space that contrasts with the moral corruption of the city. It is only when Vera is back home and re-establishes her kinship ties that she can overcome her traumatic past.

In two Canadian novels discussed in this project, (collective) protagonists search for home in the city. Vermette illustrates the importance of extended kinship relationships in the maintenance of healthy and safe domestic spaces. Emily, the victim

of abuse, is surrounded by an extensive network of support that facilitates her healing. This demonstrates that transgenerational care constitutes a site of women's resurgence against their confinement in the racialized and degenerate urban zones of precarity. Vermette thus signals the potential of transgressing settler spatial configurations through kinship relationships. Similar mechanisms of home-making are enacted in Lindberg's *Birdie*, where the family established by the protagonist allows for her healing. In the novel, kinship is not identified with genetic relatedness because her relations only become true kin when they acknowledge reciprocal relationships and duty of care that they have earlier neglected. Indigenous women writers, therefore, unsettle Western ideas related to home and domesticity, focusing on re-establishing reciprocal relationships and practicing care, which disturbs oppressive settler spatial constructs.

The four novels discussed in this project address the ubiquity of violence against Indigenous women and girls and settler structures that enable it. Moreover, three of the selected literary texts directly respond to the MMIWG crisis that occurs in both settler nation states serving as setting in the works under consideration. As noted above, Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*, uncovers the aspects of the termination era in the United States that were meticulously concealed from the dominant narratives of American history, namely, the intensification of violence against Indigenous women and their sex trafficking as the legacies of the relocation period. While Grover does not depict a woman that is missing and/or murdered in her novel,[43] Dale Ann's experience likewise points to women's precarity connected to Indigenous relocation to urban centers, too. Vermette discloses the strategies of dehumanization and othering

[43] Grover's second novel *In the Night of Memory* (2019) directly tackles the issue of MMIWG. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I chose to discuss *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* as it seems to focus more directly on re-negotiating space.

applied in settler legal and institutional settings as well as media discourses in Canada, whereby the blame for violence and abuse always rests with Indigenous women. The murder of Rain in the novel enacts settler spatial organization, where Indigenous women's bodies are radically marginalized and rendered disposable. The recurrence of violence in the rape on Emily highlights the failure of settler institutions to address the problem of the cycles of abuse that target Indigenous women. In *Birdie*, Lindberg portrays spatial constructions of the Canadian urban topographies, such as Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which normalize Indigenous women's precarious condition and represents the settlers' silent complicity in their marginalization. Through the representation of Bernice's mother, Maggie, the novel, moreover, raises the important but insufficiently acknowledged and addressed issue of the intentional disappearances of Indigenous women and the ambiguous loss surrounding them.

Taking the above into consideration, I propose to read the MMIWG narratives, such as those discussed in this thesis, as instrumental in constructing the MMIWG crisis as a cultural trauma, both in the United States and Canada. Jeffrey C. Alexander defines cultural trauma as "a horrendous event" which continues to affect the lives of societies over a long period of time, challenging the sense of a coherent identity that has been achieved by a group of people, and impairing the communal bonds between them (1). Cultural traumas are mediated processes and not simply natural results of tragic events; fiction, as well as media and other representations, play an essential role in defining them and drawing people's attention to the suffering of neglected social groups (Alexander 1; 15-19). As demonstrated in my interpretation of Grover's, Erdrich's, Vermette's and Lindberg's fiction, both the embodied and symbolic erasures of Indigenous women under settler colonialism exert significant detrimental repercussions for entire Indigenous communities, exacerbating the existing traumatic

colonial legacies. Through their persistent struggle to commemorate the missing and murdered, the MMIWG movement has become the "carrier group," i.e., agents in the trauma process (Alexander 11), who voice the claim to acknowledge the crisis as a collective trauma. In this perspective, MMIWG is constructed, applying Alexander's definition, as a "fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process" (11). By formulating the MMIWG crisis as a trauma, Indigenous communities put forward a legitimate "demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution" (11). This would entail social transformation and the unsettling of settler colonial structures that erase Indigenous women from the social landscape. Through the focus on the Indigenous women's personal and collective condition, the literary texts analyzed in this dissertation illuminate the devastating impact of the MMIWG crisis on Indigenous nations. Importantly, they make the settler reader painfully aware of their complicity in the structures that disappear Indigenous women. As such, MMIWG narratives not only commemorate missing and murdered women but also actively promote social transformation and dismantle settler colonial order based on the logics of Indigenous elimination. While the traumas connected to the MMIWG crisis, on both individual and collective levels, are still immensely painful, the MMIWG movement concurrently promotes the practices aimed at healing and actively engages in the politics of representation and recognition.

The prominent presence of the issue of MMIWG in contemporary Indigenous women's writing coincides with, and perhaps enables, the advancing recognition of the problem by the settler colonial national administrations. For a long time, the settler attitude towards the issue of MMIWG could be well summarized by Canada's Prime Minister (2006-2015) Stephen Harper's words: "we should not view it as sociological

phenomenon. We should view it as crime" (Harper in Ditchburn 2014). Harper's statement exemplifies the decontextualization of the crisis from difficult socio-economic realities lived by Indigenous women that are directly linked to settler colonialism. Indigenous communities' insistence on the Canadian government conducting a nation-wide full-scale investigation into the issue of MMIWG led to the launching of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) in 2016 by the newly elected liberal government, headed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.[44] The process of "truth gathering" was based on collaboration with the victims' families, Indigenous leaders, Elders and community members, as well as experts and scholars in order to provide a complex examination of the issue ("Truth Gathering Process"). In 2019, the NIMMIWG published its findings, including an extensive list of recommendations. The Inquiry's final report argues that the crisis of MMIWG should be considered in terms of a genocide—quoting Chief Commissioner Marion Buller: "[t]his report is about deliberate race, identity and gender-based genocide" (NIMMIWG 5). Such a framing of the phenomenon constitutes a major shift in the process of recognizing MMIWG crisis as a cultural trauma. Described within the state legal taxonomy, it "draw[s] upon the governmental power to channel the representational process" (Alexander 19). In other words, it reaches another level, beyond that of the communities in question, when the official settler discourse begins to acknowledge the culturally traumatic character of the crisis, an important step towards social solidarity and justice (Alexander 1). Apparently, the trauma narrative regarding MMIWG has been recognized and endorsed by a large part

[44] The issue of reconciliation with Indigenous nations was one of the fundamental aspects of Justin Trudeau's 2015 electoral campaign. In this respect, the nation-wide inquiry into MMIWG was one of the key electoral promises made by the Liberal party that allowed "to distinguish themselves from the Harper government, which refused such a commission claiming that missing and murdered Indigenous women were an issue of individual criminality and not societal in nature" (Khajeh 35).

of settler society in Canada as shown by the statistics—most Canadians today acknowledge that missing and murdered Indigenous women have been victims of genocide (Bryden 2019).

The advancing recognition of the issue of MMIWG by settler government and society in Canada propelled the MMIWG movement in the U.S. Initially, several state legislatures, including Washington (2018), Oregon (2019), Arizona (2019), Wisconsin (2019), Alaska (2020), have passed bills addressing the MMIWG crisis. The federal-level recognition of the problem is also relatively recent. A piece of legislation that did not concentrate primarily on the MMIWG crisis but constituted an important development in the process of pursuing justice for Indigenous victims of violence was the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2013. While changes in legislation introduced by the VAWA should be seen as the first step towards granting Native tribes jurisdiction over crimes committed on tribal lands by non-Indigenous persons, ultimately only eighteen of over five hundred federally recognized tribes were authorized to implement it (Mallonee 116).

The Savanna Act (2020) is a milestone legislation that focuses directly on the problem of MMIWG in the United States; it implies the development of "standardized guidelines to respond to cases of missing and murdered Native women and enforce better reporting and data" (Mallonee 117). Megan Mallonee emphasizes, however, that the Act is constructed in a way that might overlook cases of MMIWG in the cities and on non-tribal lands (117). For this reason, a complementary law, Not Invisible Act, was signed in 2020. This Act envisions a creation of an advisory commission consisting of the representatives of law enforcement, as well as Indigenous leaders, families of victims, and survivors that would present guidelines so as to most appropriately tackle the issue and avoid any loopholes (117). Moreover, the

establishment of such institutional bodies as the presidential task force Operation Lady Justice in 2019 and the investigative Missing & Murdered Unit in 2021 promises a further systemic change in terms of approaching and investigating the cases concerning MMIWG in the United States. Like NIMMIWG in Canada, Operation Lady Justice and Missing & Murdered Unit constitute the institutional stage of recognition of MMIWG crisis as a collective trauma. Nevertheless, even though the legislative actions of the state and federal governments in the United States are certainly a step forward towards bringing justice and closure to the Indigenous people whose loved ones went missing or were murdered, the problem of MMIWG is still strikingly decontextualized from its historical roots in settler colonialism. While systemic changes in the law enforcement are necessary, there is also a pressing need to improve the socio-economic status of Indigenous women that is the primary risk factor for their susceptibility to experiencing violence. This problem is often overlooked by the official discourse on the MMIWG crisis in the U.S.

Women's condition in the novels discussed in this dissertation is intimately intertwined with their environments. Indigenous women writers rely on environmental tropes connected to land-based practices and traditional ceremonies to symbolically re-Indigenize landscapes. In *The Road Back to Sweetgrass*, Grover represents a continuation of wild rice harvest as a traditional land-based practice despite settler alterations of local Indigenous ecologies. This practice of cultural persistence enacts grounded normativity and symbolically stages Margie's and Dag's returns to the land of their ancestors. Erdrich, in turn, represents the female characters of *The Night Watchman* as intricately connected to nature. Zhaanat functions as a traditional medicine woman figure—she is a repository of traditional knowledge that rests on human interaction with land. Her intelligence proves crucial for the continuation of

Chippewa culture and ethics. Zhaanat's daughter, Patrice, while partly assimilated, also engages with local ecologies on a variety of scales. Interestingly, the protagonist's reciprocity with the environment emphasizes her non-heteronormativity, which destabilizes Western heteropatriarchal orders. Vermette and Lindberg, in turn, introduce environmental tropes in their novels by representing land-based healing through ceremonies. In *The Break*, the sweat lodge ceremony transforms female characters, and its effects continue in the cityscape, transgressing settler division into urban and rural geographies. *Birdie*, in turn, depicts a coming-of-age women's ceremony that stresses the link between the protagonist and the environment, as well as restores community ties. In the selected material, symbolic re-establishment of the reciprocal relationships between women and nature provokes restoration of Indigenous kinship and promotes collective resurgence.

For lack of space, in this dissertation I focused only on four novels selected from a rich and complex repertoire, all belonging to the convention of realistic historical fiction. It should be noted, however, that Indigenous women's (re)mappings of settler spaces appear also within the emerging genre of Indigenous futurism, for instance in Cherie Dimaline's (Métis) *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) and *Empire of Wild* (2019), Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* (2018) and *Storm of Locusts* (2019), and Darcie Little Badger's (Lipan Apache) *Elatsoe* (2020), to mention a few.[45] Grace Dillon introduces this

[45] I study in detail the spatial poetics of Indigenous women writing in two articles: "Dimensions of Decolonial Future in Contemporary Indigenous Speculative Fiction: Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning*" published in 2020 in *Anglica: An International Journal of English Studies* and "Storied Geographies: Settler Extractivism and Sites of Indigenous Resurgence in Cherie Dimaline's Empire of Wild" published in 2022 in *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*. Two of my texts on the subject are also in print: a book chapter in the forthcoming *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms* "Speculative Landscapes of Contemporary North American Indigenous Fiction" (forthcoming 2023) and an article in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* entitled "From Settler Inscriptions to Indigenous Place-Thought: Reclaiming Indigenous Geographies in Darcie Little Badger's *Elatsoe*" (forthcoming).

literary category in order to bridge speculative fiction, and science fiction in particular, with Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, sciences, and futurities. Dillon observes that "[h]istorically, sf [science fiction] has tended to disregard the varieties of space-time thinking of traditional societies, and it may still narrate the atrocities of colonialism as 'adventure stories'" (2). Therefore, Indigenous futurism aims to inscribe Indigeneity into genres that have typically commodified Native peoples and their knowledge systems. Within the genre of Indigenous futurisms, writers challenge the limits of speculative and science fiction, as well as re-imagine Indigenous writing. By representing future and speculative landscapes, Indigenous futurism exhibits a great potential to question, contest, and repudiate settler colonial structures and mappings. I see this new trend in Indigenous fiction as a continuation of Indigenous literary heritage in North America, and a novel way of both addressing the effects of colonialism on Native nations and imagining resurgent futures. Exploring Indigenous futurisms' poetics of space is particularly salient in the current situation of an ecological crisis, as the speculative character of the genre allows for a more experimental approach to serious environmental problems. Therefore, the inclusion of the genre in future research might open new horizons for the inquiry into the thematic undertaken in this thesis, namely the intersection of space, gender, and the environment.

Furthermore, it seems vital in future research to confront the poetics of space emerging from Indigenous women's writing with those found in narratives written by Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit[46] writers. For, as stated in this dissertation,

[46] Two-Spirit functions as an umbrella term encompassing the diversity of traditional, as well as contemporary, Indigenous North American queer gender identities. The concept of Two-Spiritedness aims to bridge the experiences of Indigenous individuals self-identifying as other than heterosexual, and to emphasize their distinct experience from non-Indigenous LGBTQ+ identifying people.

Indigenous bodies, like land, emerge as sites of colonial commodification and conquest. Settler heteropatriarchal norms target both women's and queer Indigenous bodies, in particular, as they constitute obstacles for the imposition of settler heteropatriarchal structures that enable conquest and appropriation of Indigenous lands. Indigenous queer writers, such as Joshua Whitehead (Oji-Cree) in his debut novel *Jonny Appleseed* (2018),[47] queer Indigenous anthology of speculative fiction *Love After the End* (2020) and non-fiction essay collection *Making Love with the Land* (2022), as well as Billy-Ray Belcourt (Cree) in his debut novel *A Minor Chorus* (2022) engage in literary (re)mapping of North America that rests on reciprocal kinship and inclusion of fluid gender traditions. Moreover, they re-negotiate the congruency of queerness and urban landscapes emblematic of Western traditions. Including Indigiqueer writers in the reflection on literary geographies alternative to settler colonial mappings might, therefore, prove productive and shed new light on the themes discussed in this dissertation.

The analysis of the selected texts indicates that recent Indigenous feminist writing re-negotiates North American geographies by contesting settler structures, such as private property, neoliberal capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. This critique is particularly important, not only in North America, at a historical moment when social crises and uncertainty connected to the changing climate expose the failings of the Western nation states and their exploitative politics. Indigenous writing has a great potential to inspire alternatives to Western perspectives and might provide us with useful insight to create better collective realities. Indigenous women's writing enriches and transforms feminist inquiry by including voices, points of view, and experiences

[47] I explore the literary geography of Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed* in "Two-Spirit Identities in Canada: Mapping Sovereign Erotic in Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed*" published in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* in 2020.

that have often been marginalized and misunderstood by mainstream feminism. This fosters more conscious solidarities and allows for the creation of stronger and more reliable networks of allyship responsive to the actual problems experienced by Indigenous women and their real needs. By emphasizing women's reciprocal care, Indigenous women writers signal the importance of women's solidarities that are necessary for the creation of better realities, especially for the marginalized communities. While the situation of Indigenous women in North America is unique, the analyzed novels, by representing women's precarity and gendered violence, remind us about the contemporary neoliberal nation states' foundation on heteropatriarchal structures that actively oppress, marginalize, and erase women, especially poor, racialized, and non-heteronormative ones. Although white women, like myself, to a great extent, are complicit in and benefit from neoliberal capitalism characteristic of Western nation states, their bodies are regulated by heteropatriarchal norms and their rights often remain uncertain and impermanent, which might be exemplified by the recent overturning of Roe v. Wade in the United States, or the draconic anti-abortion law introduced in Poland.

In the current moment of environmental uncertainty, the question of ethics that governs humans' relationships with their ecosystems is particularly important. Indigenous ecologies that stress reciprocal inter-dependence between humans and nature challenge Western attitude towards land that encourages its over-exploitation. Native environmental activism at the forefront of the *Blockadia* exhibits Indigenous commitment to the protection of ecosystems and reveals local repercussions of (neo)colonial slow violence, whereby poor and racialized bodies and their environments are overexposed to pollution. Indigenous communities and their environmentally-related knowledge might be a source of inspiration for Western

societies on how to restore ethical relationships with the environment and provide solutions to contemporary ecological crises. Indigenous women writers teach us that the renewal of reciprocal ethics that ties people to their environments is necessary for the restoration of balance. Today, it is necessary to re-conceptualize our relationship with the surrounding ecosystems as more ethical and reciprocal in order to imagine better environmental futures. Ultimately, Indigenous writing provides non-Indigenous readers, like myself, with a deeper sensibility towards the Other, both human and more-than-human. It allows one to immerse in a radically different ontology and epistemology that encourage the revision of one's worldview and reflection on one's own ethics and kinship obligations.

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Streszczenie rozprawy doktorskiej pt.

W poszukiwaniu alternatywnej poetyki przestrzeni: motywy kobiecości i środowiska w anglojęzycznej prozie rdzennych pisarek Ameryki Północnej XXI wieku

Celem niniejszej rozprawy jest zbadanie powiązań pomiędzy motywami przestrzeni, środowiska naturalnego oraz kobiecości w prozie XXI wieku autorstwa rdzennych pisarek pochodzących z Kanady oraz Stanów Zjednoczonych. Korpus rozprawy składa się z dwóch powieści amerykańskich – *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (2014) Lindy LeGarde Grover oraz *The Night Watchman* (2020) Louise Erdrich, a także dwóch powieści kanadyjskich – *The Break* (2016) [polski przekład *Przerwa* (2021)] Kathereny Vermette i *Birdie* (2015) Tracey Lindberg. Praca ma więc charakter komparatystyczny, gdyż porusza zbliżone konteksty dotyczące literatury rdzennej w dwóch północnoamerykańskich państwach kolonizacji osadniczej – Stanach Zjednoczonych i Kanadzie. Feministyczne „mapy" w utworach literackich rdzennych pisarek zestawione są w pracy z kolonialnymi ujęciami przestrzeni, co pozwala na analizę sposobów ich kontestacji oraz rewitalizację rdzennych orientacji względem miejsca.

W dysertacji stawiam następujące hipotezy badawcze: (1) wybrane teksty literackie ukazują istotną relację pomiędzy kobietami a środowiskiem, podkreślając, że są one najbardziej narażone na przemoc kolonialną; (2) proza rdzennych pisarek, poprzez ukazanie złożonych mechanizmów opresji, stwarza alternatywę dla kolonialnych obrazów przestrzeni. Aparat metodologiczny rozprawy jest

interdyscyplinarny i odwołuje się do teorii z zakresu feminizmu, ekokrytyki i studiów indygenicznych, pozwalając na kompleksową analizę problemów poruszanych we współczesnej prozie rdzennych pisarek. Odnoszę się także do prawnego i historycznego dyskursu kolonizacji osadniczej w Ameryce Północnej, dotyczącego przede wszystkim legitymizacji podboju i zawłaszczania ziem rdzennych narodów.

Rozprawa składa się z trzech rozdziałów, wstępu oraz zakończenia. Wstęp wytycza teoretyczne fundamenty przedstawionej w dalszej części pracy analizy, czerpiąc przede wszystkim ze współczesnych studiów indygenicznych. Przywołuję tu również teoretyczki feminizmu, zwłaszcza te, które wywodzą się z rdzennych środowisk, aby nakreślić sytuację kobiet autochtonicznych w Ameryce Północnej i ich reprezentację w dyskursie kolonialnym. Szczególnie istotnym pojęciem dla badanych przeze mnie motywów przestrzeni, kobiecości i środowiska naturalnego jest koncepcja *resurgence*. Odnosi się ona do procesu odnowy rdzennej kultury, tradycji i historii, który odbywa się z inicjatywy i pod pieczą rdzennych aktywistów i społeczności. Teorie oraz koncepty związane z rdzenną postawą względem terytorium i środowiska naturalnego, które podkreślają znaczenie etyki troski i wzajemnego szacunku (ang. *reciprocity*), wyłaniają się jako kluczowe dla podejmowanej w rozprawie tematyki. Są to m.in. termin *grounded normativity* opracowany przez badacza z narodu Yelloknives Dene, Glena Coultharda, pojęcie ziemi jako pedagogii (ang. *land as pedagogy*) zaproponowane przez badaczkę wywodzącą się z narodu Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, Leanne Simpson, czy koncept *Indigenous place-thought*, rdzennego miejsca-myśli, który sformułowała Vanessa Watts, wywodząca się z narodów Anishnaabe i Haudenosaunee. Ponadto, we wstępie omówiono inny element pełniący ważną rolę w procesie indygenicznej konceptualizacji przestrzeni, mianowicie pojęcie pokrewieństwa i więzi.

Rozdział pierwszy wprowadza zarys historyczno-kulturowy dotyczący kolonializmu osadniczego w Ameryce Północnej. Zdefiniowano w nim pojęcie kolonizacji osadniczej oraz kolonialne koncepcje przestrzennej dominacji, takie jak objawione przeznaczenie (ang. *manifest destiny*), doktryna odkrycia (ang. *doctrine of discovery*), czy *terra nullius*. Teoria Patricka Wolfe'a, która proponuje podejście do kolonializmu osadniczego w kontekście struktur narzucanych przez kolonizatorów raczej niż pojedynczych wydarzeń związanych z podbojem czy zdobyciem terytorium, stanowi istotny punkt wywodu. Wprowadzono tu także pojęcie osadniczych inskrypcji (ang. *settler inscriptions*), które sformułował rdzenny badacz z plemienia Potawatomi, Kyle Powys Whyte. Termin ten odnosi się do przeniesienia przez osadników na terytoria Ameryki Północnej zachodnich wzorców dotyczących funkcjonowania ekosystemów i społeczeństw, tj. hetero-patriarchalnych norm społecznych czy konceptualizacji środowiska naturalnego jako źródła zasobów naturalnych oraz zysku. Ponadto w rozdziale pierwszym omówiono problem kolonialnych strategii wysiedlania i wywłaszczenia rdzennych narodów z ich ziem na przestrzeni wieków, a także procesów asymilacji. Poruszono tu także współczesne problemy, takie jak wydobycie surowców czy infrastruktura sektora energetycznego, które stanowią zagrożenie dla integralności rdzennych terytoriów i ich ekosystemów, a co za tym idzie dla dobrobytu autochtonicznej ludności. Celem rozdziału było także zilustrowanie powiązań pomiędzy kolonialną polityką wywłaszczenia a statusem kobiet rdzennych w Stanach Zjednoczonych i Kanadzie.

Kolejne rozdziały rozprawy są rozdziałami analitycznymi. Rozdział drugi jest poświęcony analizie dwóch powieści rdzennych pisarek pochodzących ze Stanów Zjednoczonych – *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (2014) Lindy LeGarde Grover oraz *The Night Watchman* (2020) Louise Erdrich. Obie autorki są pochodzenia

odżibwejskiego, a ich powieści można sklasyfikować w kategorii fikcji historycznej, gdyż odnoszą się do wydarzeń okresu reorganizacji i relokacji (ang. *termination and relocation era*). Istotną częścią analizy jest refleksja nad rolą rezerwatu w obu powieściach – z jednej strony jest on tworem przestrzennym, który został narzucony przez kolonizatorów, z drugiej zaś funkcjonuje jako miejsce wspólnotowego sprzeciwu wobec kolonialnej opresji, podkreślające rdzenną suwerenność. Uwypuklono tu próbę re-negocjacji statusu rezerwatu w obliczu polityki reorganizacji podjętą przez obie pisarki. Ponadto, w interpretacji poruszono motywy przestrzennej marginalizacji rdzennych kobiet oraz jej źródeł w amerykańskiej polityce wobec rdzennych narodów w okresie reorganizacji i relokacji. Interpretacja obu powieści skupia się na przedstawionych przez pisarki strategiach kontestacji kolonialnych struktur, które ograniczają rdzenną suwerenność i dostęp do terytoriów przodków, jak i na literackich metodach odzyskiwania i rekultywacji autochtonicznych przestrzeni.

Z kolei w rozdziale trzecim przeprowadzono analizę dwóch kanadyjskich powieści – *Przerwy* (2016) Kathereny Vermette, autorki pochodzenia metyskiego, i *Birdie* (2015) Tracey Lindberg, która pochodzi z narodu Kri. Refleksja nad niniejszymi powieściami koncentruje się na traumie międzypokoleniowej wynikającej z doświadczenia kolonializmu, której owocem są powtarzające się przykłady przemocy wobec rdzennych bohaterek. Brutalność wobec kobiet, osadzona w obu powieściach w przestrzeni miejskiej, odzwierciedla kolonialne mechanizmy przestrzennej opresji, marginalizacji i wykluczenia. W analizie kluczową rolę odgrywają procesy odzyskiwania zdrowia psychicznego przez bohaterki powieści po przebytych przez nie doświadczeniach traumatycznych. Zwrot ku naturze i terytorium, będący rezultatem autochtonicznych ceremonii, to zasadniczy element obu powieści. Podkreślono także potencjał odnowy zerwanych więzi, zarówno ze środowiskiem

naturalnym jak i rodziną, w procesie kreowania przestrzeni, geograficznej i symbolicznej, stanowiącym alternatywę wobec map kolonialnych.

Podsumowanie przedstawia syntezę wniosków uzyskanych z analizy wybranej prozy. Wyłania się tu głęboki kontrast pomiędzy normatywną kartografią osadniczą a relacyjnym konstruowaniem przestrzeni u rdzennych pisarek. Powieści poddane interpretacji komplikują zachodnie wzorce przestrzenne oparte m.in. na dychotomii pomiędzy miastem a rezerwatem. W podsumowaniu podkreślono ponadto, że istotnym wątkiem podejmowanym przez wybrane autorki jest motyw domu – jego niestałości w życiu rdzennych bohaterek i potrzeby jego odbudowy poprzez odnowę więzi międzyludzkich. Wyróżniam tu także kluczową rolę kultywacji tradycyjnych rytuałów i ceremonii osadzonych w kontekście lokalnych ekosystemów, które służą symbolicznej odnowie indygenicznych przestrzeni. Ponadto w konkluzji zwrócono uwagę na literackie przedstawienie problemu przemocy w odniesieniu do zjawiska zaginionych i zamordowanych rdzennych kobiet i dziewcząt (ang. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls). Proponuję odczytać wybrane przeze mnie powieści jako narracje, które nie tylko upamiętniają kobiety wymazane przez systemową opresję, ale również konstruują ów kryzys społeczny jako traumę kulturową. W podsumowaniu przestawiam również wstępne wnioski dotyczące różnic w obrazowaniu przestrzeni w literaturze rdzennych pisarek w Kanadzie i Stanach Zjednoczonych.