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# Re-Storying the Colonial Landscape: Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*

JACK ROBINSON

THE ANISHINAUBAE CREATION STORY, as related by Anishinaubae scholar Basil Johnston, tells that Kitchi-Manitou, the Great Mystery, made the earth from a vision, but that all was devastated by a flood. Then a pregnant Manitou, Geezigho-quaie, or Sky Woman, fell to this water world, and, from the back of a turtle, got the water animals to dive for Earth. From a small clump retrieved by Muskrat, using the power of thought or dream, she created Turtle Island, or North America. She then gave birth to twins who begat the Anishinaubaeg (“Is That” 7). The story represents the task of self-creation that each member of the tribe must undertake in life; as Anishinaubae theorist Leanne Simpson puts it, “each of us must struggle down through the vast expanse of water to retrieve our handful of dirt” (69). Simpson adds that in the colonial context, each individual must undertake this quest for the purpose of reconstructing the tribal community: “We each [sic] need to bring that earth to the surface, to our community, with the intent of transformation” (69). The narratives of Anishinaubae author Richard Wagamese, whether autobiographical or fictional, are representations of his own journey, vehicles of personal and cultural reconstruction. *Indian Horse* is another such narrative. It is, of course, possible to read the novel as being exclusively about residential schools or hockey or both: it does represent prominently the historical trauma caused by residential schools, and it does convey the hero’s encounter with racism in the world of Canadian regional and junior hockey in the 1960s. In order to understand the depiction of Saul Indian Horse’s wounded spirit and of what Eduardo and Bonnie Duran call the “soul wound” of his people, these topics do require attention.<sup>1</sup> Yet close textual analysis is needed to show how the text uses oral storytelling techniques to render Saul’s journey of personal re-creation: his reclamation of a healthy form of Indigenous masculinity, of his visionary power, of a spiritual connection with the land, of relationships with

his extended kinship family, and of a sense of gender complementarity and reverence for the feminine.

Some context is needed for the place of close textual analysis in the study of Indigenous literature. Metis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew comments, "When I began teaching Indigenous fiction from Canada, many colleagues told me that it was too simplistic to study in a serious manner" (146). Indigenous oral stories are sometimes wrongly seen as simplistic, and orality-based literature is misconceived as imbued with the same simplicity. In order to emphasize the social relevance and transformative power of their narratives, some Indigenous authors have chosen to write with what Helen Hoy calls "discursive transparency" (288). Hoy asserts that this avoidance of artifice leads to the misconception that critical analysis is unwarranted, with the result that the text is misconstrued as "an anthropological site" or an unmediated "source of authentic life experience" (288). Because the field is emergent and of political importance, the theorizing of Indigenous literature has assumed primacy over textual analysis. The influence of cultural and Native studies has relegated literature to a role that is ancillary to the examination of culture. Cree/Metis scholar Emma LaRocque warns that the polemical emphasis on a "healing aesthetics" may require a "utilitarian function" from the literature while failing to appreciate its aesthetic qualities (168). This essay conducts a close textual analysis for three reasons. First, it demonstrates the aesthetic complexity that lies beneath the ostensible simplicity of this orality-based narrative. *Indian Horse* has a terseness that may be mistaken for "discursive transparency," but its lyricism and structure merit analysis as an Indigenous aesthetic. Second, it responds to Kimberley Blaeser's call for critical approaches that "arise out of the literature itself" rather than imposing upon the literature "an established critical language" or established genres, categories, or theories ("Native" 53-54). Third, it recognizes the imbrication of content and form. To disconnect the two produces an inadequate thematic analysis because themes can be well understood only as they are expressed in textual details and patterns; a solely thematic reading fails to recognize the text's transformative power because that power inheres in its aesthetic qualities. This is why Sam McKegey, as a self-declared "communitist" (*Magic* 56), insists that "true commitment to 'the literature itself' is a commitment to community, nationhood, and sovereignty" ("Committing" 30).

Saul Indian Horse's story unfolds in five stages: first, his early childhood in the bush of northwestern Ontario with his Anishinaubae extended family; second, his boyhood years in residential school; third, his adolescent life in regional and junior hockey, which brings him to the age of eighteen; fourth, the fifteen years of his young manhood that are spent in emotional confusion and alcoholic drifting; and fifth, his return at thirty-three to his adoptive extended kinship family and his reclamation of Anishinaubae intellectual traditions. Saul has obtained permission from his counsellor at the New Dawn Centre, where he is recovering from alcoholism, to write his story rather than relating it orally (3); most of the novel is the text that he reads aloud to his counsellor and group (207). He opens his reading in the formal manner of the teller of traditional sacred stories: he states his name, his family and clan relations, his tribe, and its traditional territory (1). The text is thus both a written document and an oral story, and it is framed as a sacred story; at the outset, the text invites the reader to conflate casual oral stories, sacred stories, and the contemporary novel. The narrative bears the marks of orally influenced Indigenous literature as identified by Laguna Pueblo and Sioux scholar Paula Gunn Allen: the narrative structure is circular (63, 79); symbols and images are used consistently to conflate the commonplace and the spiritual (69); and pairings of images, symbols, and phrases are used in a repetitive manner in order to transfer to narrative the transforming effects of ritual (63). Allen argues that Indigenous peoples "perceive their world in a unified-field fashion" and that "the requirements of tribal literatures are accretive and fluid" (244). A critical approach is therefore needed that devotes attention to the nuanced relationship between background and foreground: "In the western mind, shadows highlight the foreground. In contrast, in the tribal view the mutual relationships among shadows and light in all their varying degrees of intensity create a living web of definition and depth, and significance arises from their interplay" (244).

With the circularity of oral storytelling, the novel's end returns Saul to the tribal intellectual traditions depicted in the first thirty pages, though his homecoming is still in process. In resisting a dramatic resolution, the text employs what Thomas King calls the "flat narrative line" of Indigenous storytelling ("Godzilla" 245). The plot's irresolution resists an absolutist or purist stance of tribal cultural resurgence; the realization of the healing aesthetic is constrained by social and psycho-

logical realism. Saul's psychological wounds remain deep: memories of sexual abuse still haunt him, and the racism of Canadian society is ongoing in his life. His intuitive abilities as a seer or visionary, developed and enhanced by his Anishinaubae upbringing, have enabled him to become a talented hockey player who can anticipate where the play is going before it gets there. In becoming a successful junior hockey player, he has integrated somewhat into mainstream society. Saul withdraws from that enculturation in order to find an interstitial cultural space in which he can build a comfortable life. Yet the Anishinaubae milieu that he rediscovers is already a culturally mixed one: his adoptive parents have been to residential school; the racially mixed town is driven economically by logging and mining; and the possibility of a traditional life on the land, untouched by settler society, has died with his grandmother's generation.

Saul's hybrid cultural positioning is common for Indigenous individuals in colonial society. Cree scholar Neal MacLeod writes of "Coming Home through Stories" (61) as a matter of "the attempt to link two different narrative locations" (70). He predicts that the need to connect the colonial present with a restoration of the tribal past will continue to challenge Indigenous peoples in the future, so that "emerging forms of Aboriginal consciousness, including Cree ones, will be hybridized" (70). Allen also looks toward the past. She claims that the North American Indigenous individual has faced the following dilemma since the arrival of settler society: how does one participate in an Indigenous tradition that symbolizes "the essential unity of a human being's psyche" while still confronting the "conflict, fragmentation, and destruction" that have damaged that psyche in colonial society? (81-82). Story is the unifying method used in Anishinaubae culture and in most Indigenous cultures to address this dilemma. Story is the traditional means of imparting and preserving Indigenous cultural wisdom; moreover, it provides the adaptability, flexibility, and fluidity needed to cope with extreme cultural transition. Blaeser emphasizes that the noun *story* is simultaneously a verb in her language. As Wagamese does in *Indian Horse*, Blaeser links sacred oral stories, informal oral storytelling, and orality-based print literature:

I claim a storied landscape. I say Indian people do not so much teach, but rather *story* their children. I include in my understanding the mythic, ceremonial, and casual stories, for these seldom if ever

remain separate from one another. The range and reach of these vested words sustain us in vision. (“Wild Rice” 240)

Saul’s grandmother, Naomi, the matriarch of the small band, is the repository of its stories. She tells them to Saul, passing on the “secrets of the cosmos and the basis of our spiritual way” (40). She also narrates the family stories of the shaman Shabogeesik’s “good medicine” (12) and of how Gods Lake became the exclusive territory of the Indian Horse family (18). Sociologist and narratologist Arthur Frank focuses on the capacity of stories to do things in society. He explains that a changed awareness, or an altered “narrative habitus,” can be achieved in the healthiest way through the reader’s dialogical companionship with stories (198).<sup>2</sup> Living closely with the “vested words” of his grandmother’s stories is a lifeline that enables Saul to connect the hybridity of his contemporary cultural position with Anishinaubae intellectual tradition. Similarly, a dialogical interaction with *Indian Horse* and other indigenous narratives of what Anishinaubae scholar Gerald Vizenor calls “survivance” offers a means of healing and cultural resurgence for Anishinaubae and other Indigenous readers, while such interaction inspires all readers to seek justice through social change.

One convenient way to examine *Indian Horse* is to look at the linkage between memoir and fiction. Wagamese’s memoir *One Native Life* attests to the intergenerational reach of the suffering caused by residential schools, which left Wagamese’s parents and their siblings with “a terrible hurt vented on those closest to [them]” (227). As a result of this hurt, his aunt broke his left arm and shoulder when he was less than a year old. Moreover, in February 1958, his parents abandoned Richard and his two siblings in the bush (239). In the novel, Saul’s parents abandon him and his grandmother Naomi in the bush with winter approaching (41). The implication is that they have been preoccupied with drinking, as were Wagamese’s own parents.<sup>3</sup> Like Saul Indian Horse, Richard and his siblings got as far as the Minaki railroad platform; then the police turned them over to the Children’s Aid Society, making Wagamese part of the mass removal of Indigenous children from their homes that was dubbed “the sixties scoop” (even though it continued into the seventies and eighties).<sup>4</sup> He spent his childhood in White homes, dislocated from his Anishinaubae family and kinship structure and from the cultural practices that could inform personal

identity. Although one generation removed from first-hand residential school experience, Wagamese is the prototype for his protagonist.

Saul's cultural hybridity is symbolized by contrasting embraces that exemplify the symmetry of oral storytelling. The first embrace is that of his grandmother Naomi, who perishes while holding him in her arms:

Wrapped in the cracked canvas of an old tent, I huddled in the arms of the old woman and felt the cold freeze her in place. I understood that she had left me and I lay there crying against the empty drum of her chest. (42)

The moment represents the severance of Saul's connection to his Anishinaubae family and culture. The second embrace is that of Father Leboutilier, which crystallizes the suffering Saul endures in residential school. Connecting the second embrace explicitly with the first, Saul recalls his emotional vulnerability and his dissociation from his body at the time of the assault: "As he gathered my face in his hands and kissed me, I closed my eyes. I thought of my grandmother. The warmth of her arms holding me, I missed that so much" (198). As Ann Laura Stoler notes, colonial society invades the most intimate aspects of the lives of the colonized, including the sexual, interpersonal, and familial; Stoler calls these institutionalized invasions "structured violences."<sup>5</sup> Naomi's self-sacrifice is replaced by Father Leboutilier's oppression. Though he claims to have Saul's emotional and spiritual well-being in mind, the priest takes advantage of his position in order to force a sexual relationship upon his charge; this constitutes a violent betrayal of the trust that Saul has learned in his relationship with his grandmother. The impact of this betrayal is life-long: as an adult, Saul struggles to regain the ability to trust in order to re-establish close personal relationships in his life. Foucault uses the concept of "biopolitics" to assert that the site of colonial oppression is the body of the oppressed (see Stoler 13); moreover, as this episode shows, the oppression of the body has complex emotional ramifications.<sup>6</sup> Saul's original acceptance of Father Leboutilier's embrace is soon overlaid by guilt and shame: "When I found myself liking it, I felt dirty, repulsive, sick" (199). The pain of guilt and shame is imbricated with rage when, over time, he is able to recognize his own helplessness and Father Leboutilier's abuse of his power. He attempts to escape from emotional turmoil into the self-forgetting of hockey: "That's why I played with abandon. To abandon myself" (199). Saul insulates himself

from an awareness of his pain by covering it with anger, but hockey soon proves to be an outlet for rage, and Saul must confront the source of the broken trust and shame beneath his anger before he can accept and honour his emotions. Only then will he be ready to care for himself and others within his Anishinaubae community.

As Julia Emberley notes, residential schools and other colonial policies enacted a “colonial violence” that “was instrumental in the destruction of Indigenous kinship relations” and that destroyed Indigenous homes, constituting what Emberley calls “colonial domicide” (236). In 1920, attendance was made a legal requirement for Indigenous children between seven and fifteen; in 1933, officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were made truant officers; these officers were allowed to enter Native homes and issue penalties to parents who refused to send their children to residential school (J.R. Miller 170). Abductions of Indigenous children occurred but were undocumented. The novel’s representation of this historical reality is dramatic: in the late 1950s, two of the Indian Horse children are hunted down in the bush near Gods Lake and abducted by motorboat (9) and plane (11). The damage done to Saul’s life is foreshadowed in the images of darkness versus light that unify the brief chapter depicting his first day at St. Jerome’s. It begins with an image of darkness: “I read once that there are holes in the universe that swallow all light, all bodies. St. Jerome’s took all the light from my world” (43). A contrasting image of light emphasizes the deprivation of a child suddenly confined who has spent his life outdoors: “I was lonely for the sky, for the feel of it on my face” (43). The chapter closes with an image of light removed: “In what seemed like an instant, the world I had known was replaced by an ominous black cloud” (47).

In the orality-based narrative, the repetition of images transfers the transformative powers of ritual to the literary text. While images of darkness versus light mark Saul’s residential school experience, images of calmness, coldness, and indifference depict racism inside and outside of St. Jerome’s. Sister Ignacia beats a boy, saying with “a terrible calm” that “we work to remove the Indian from our children” (46-47).<sup>7</sup> In the world of regional hockey, Saul’s all-Native team, the Manitouwadge Moose, are beaten up and urinated on for eating in a coffee shop deemed to be for Whites only (133-35). In addition to its obvious parallel to the imposition of Jim Crow laws in the United States and to the long struggle of African Americans for racial equality, the



episode is notable for the coldness of the White perpetrators: as Virgil, Saul's brother through extended kinship, reports, "They did it silently. Like it was an everyday thing. I never knew people could be that cold" (136). Saul encounters the same coldness when his junior hockey teammates treat him as invisible: "These guys weren't mean. They weren't vicious. They were just indifferent, and that hurt a whole lot more" (163). These incidents reveal a long-established racial hegemony that the perpetrators expect never to be challenged. Allen refers to the coldness of this outlook by using phrasing similar to that found in the text: she states that colonial historians erase Indigenous peoples from North American history, "except when we are calmly, rationally, succinctly, and systematically dehumanized" (49). Saul's response is to internalize the impersonal hatred expressed by the colonizers. He beats up a racist co-worker on a forestry crew: "I was frigid blackness inside, like water under a berg" (175). Saul is now depicted in the images of darkness and coldness formerly associated with racism; above him is not the light of open sky but the massive whiteness of the iceberg, which symbolizes a monolithic racial dominance (175).

Equally challenging is the conflation of race and gender in colonial stereotypes of the Indigenous male. Brian Klopotek argues that colonizing culture has disseminated a number of stereotypes of Indigenous males that continue to have great ubiquity and influence: "For at least the last century, hypermasculinity has been one of the foremost attributes of the Indian world that Whites have imagined" (251). Klopotek maintains that the Indian, as imagined in colonial society, includes images of "noble or ignoble savages, wise old chiefs, and cunning warriors" that "comprise an impossibly masculine race" (251). Vizenor points out that the very word *Indian* is a "manifest manner" or a "simulation" that reduces all Indigenous individuals to the image of one representative Indian, who is invariably male: Vizenor calls it "the contrivance of the other in the course of dominance" (*Manifest* vii). Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred states that images of the violent Indigenous warrior are foils "for the White conquest of North America" ("Reimagining" 79). The colonizing function of these images of impossible hypermasculinity is to invent a powerful opponent who must be repeatedly defeated. These images pre-empt the possibility of peaceful co-existence with multi-dimensional Indigenous males by establishing mental constructions that predetermine a continued interracial vio-

lence; as Alfred puts it, these images are “not meant to be lived with” but “meant to be killed, every single time” (“Reimagining” 79). Sports writers and cartoonists portray Saul persistently as an embodiment of the hypermasculine Indian warrior: counting coup, on a raid, carrying a war lance, etc. (163). Because he is a gifted playmaker, opposing teams harass him until he retaliates; gradually, his role on the team shifts from playmaker to intimidator or goon: “If they wanted me to be a savage, that’s what I would give them” (164). When benched, Saul walks out of his short junior hockey career and returns to his family and community in Manitouwadge. When he plays again with the Moose, his pain is once more covered by rage. Disconnected from family and community, he goes on the road, finding solace in alcohol, which offers “an antidote to exile” in that it enables him to play the clown and raconteur (181). He exists in fear of knowing himself for fifteen years until he faces his repressed memory of sexual abuse and his alcoholism. This shows how the violence of hypermasculinity arises from pain and shame; as Sam McKegney puts it, “combatting shame in oneself” and discovering “a nurturing manhood” constitute an alternative warrior ethic (*Masculindians* 95). In contrast to the destructive colonial simulation of hypermasculinity, the novel presents this alternative warrior ethic as a way of bringing peace to the lives of Indigenous men.

Saul redefines masculinity as re-establishing caring relationships with others in his Anishinaubae community, especially within his extended kinship network. He rediscovers the joy he found in hockey by giving that joy to the children of his community (212). In devoting himself to being their coach, Saul embraces a non-dominative and nurturing vocation. He affirms an Indigenous manhood that serves the values of communal health and tribal continuance. A crucial part of this redefined masculinity and reconnection with community is his reunion with the Kelly family. His adoptive parents, Fred and Martha, are fellow Anishinaubaeg who had taken Saul into their family when residential school authorities quietly removed him from the embrace of Father Leboutillier: their connection with Saul is based upon their shared history as a family. In returning to his adoptive family home, Saul simultaneously reclaims the Anishinaubae model of extended kinship that residential schools had sought to erase. Alfred argues that the way to counter the definition of Indigenous manhood as the violent foil for White conquest “is to put the image of the Native male back into its

proper context, which is the family.” Alfred explains that “if you put the person back into their [sic] proper context, there are responsibilities that come with that” (“Reimagining” 79). Cree-Metis scholar Kim Anderson adds that Indigenous men’s responsibilities “have been greatly obscured by the colonial process,” suggesting that “it is more difficult for men than it is for women to define their responsibilities in the contemporary setting and reclaim their dignity and sense of purpose” (*Recognition* 239). Speaking of both males and females, Johnston affirms the balance between duties and rights in Anishinaubae communities: “To us, a right is *debnimzewin*. But each right is also a duty” (see McKegney, “Beautiful” 207). Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice also stresses “the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities” for both genders (207). Justice stipulates that kinship is “dynamic, ever in motion” and hence “requires attentiveness” (150).<sup>8</sup>

Family and kinship responsibilities form part of the Anishinaubae version of the good life, called *mino-bimaadiziwin*, which also comprises longevity, good health, and freedom from misfortune; furthermore, as Anishinaubae scholar Cary Miller states, *mino-bimaadiziwin* also involves “establishing relationships of interdependency as widely as possible.” Miller explains that these relationships involve “extended family, animals and plants, the land, and spiritual entities, the *manidoog*” (120-21). Connections to the land and non-human physical and spiritual beings are crucial to the good life. Both are evoked in two place names: the name of Saul’s home town, *Manitouwadge*, means “home of the great mystery” in *Anishinaubaemowin*, and his family’s ancestral home, called *Manitou Gameeng* and later anglicized by missionaries into *Gods Lake*, suggests the multitude of spiritual beings from whom the Anishinaubaeg seek assistance. In another of the pairings of the orality-based narrative, Saul has two prophetic dream visions. The first comes during his early childhood, before his Anishinaubae family and culture were lost to him. While picking rice at the lake with his family, he hears the *Manitous* (the mystery) of the place whispering his name (22).<sup>9</sup> He then has a dream of a larger band that camps at *Gods Lake* and is crushed when the cliff face collapses upon them (24). The apocalyptic vision foretells the impact of the colonial era on his people. More than twenty years later, after confronting the memory of his molestation by Father *Leboutilier*, Saul returns to *Gods Lake*, where he has a contrasting dream that, with the symmetry of the oral tale, also commen-

ces when the Manitou whisper his name (204). He has a vision of his great-grandfather, the shaman Shabogeesik, who bestows a benediction upon Saul's reconnection with his tribal land: "You have come to carry this place within you. This place of beginnings and endings" (205). The first of the "beginnings" is Saul's return to this spiritual place in order to dream, to mourn, and to pray. He allows "every ounce of sorrow, desperation, loneliness and regret to eke out of [himself]" (206). Then he prays aloud, signalling his return to the traditional Anishinaubae stance of the individual who is not alone but connected to numerous spiritual beings. The recovery of the ability to pray is a key point in Saul's recovery of his Anishinaubae heritage. Cary Miller explains that the traditional Anishinaubaeg saw it as human to be in constant need of help from spiritual powers: "such help was perceived as so essential that no performance of any kind of task, whether in the service of subsistence, war, peace, or even love, was interpreted as due to an individual's own abilities or efforts" (122). The related tribal beliefs that all beings have spiritual messages to impart and that animals have much to teach humans are conveyed in the family story of Shabogeesik bringing the people a Percheron horse that became much loved. Through the shaman, the horse imparts two "spirit teachings" to the community: that a terrible change would come (7) and that the people "must learn to ride each one of these horses of change" (9).

Some Anishinaubae scholars relate this tribal power of endurance and re-emergence to the people's social history of migration. Edward Benton-Banai, a Wisconsin Ojibway of the Fish Clan, states that the Great Migration from the east coast to the area of the Great Lakes took place over five hundred years, starting in 900 A.D. (102). Scott Lyons, a Nishnaabe/Dakota scholar from Minnesota, argues that this history created a culture of constant adaptation and diversity:

What does migration produce? As we can see in the story of the Great Migration, it produces *difference*; new communities, new peoples, new ways of living; new sacred foods, new stories, and new ceremonies. The old never dies; it gets supplemented by the new, and the result is diversity. (4)

Vizenor calls this constant sense of cultural movement "transmotion," stating that the word names a key factor in "survivance," his own neologism combining the words *survival* and *resistance* (*Fugitive* 15).

Anishinaubae scholars have described their culture as one of mobility and flexibility that has always been attuned to the variability of truth. Johnston explains that the word for truth and the tribe's name both "convey the philosophic notion that there is no such thing as absolute truth" (*Anishinaubae* x). Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair concurs that the Anishinaubae define truth as "subjective, relative, and mobile" (88) and "negotiable, multiple, and fallible" (89). Simpson adds that truth is always a personal matter of what she calls "heart knowledge" (58, 94). She emphasizes that working together to manage personal truths in a way that promotes peace is essential to the Anishinaubae way of life (95). Saul thus migrates home to an Anishinaubae intellectual tradition rooted in the peaceful negotiation of difference.

Father Leboutilier and St. Jerome's have impaired Saul's ability to form close relationships, sending him into exile from others and himself. Professional hockey in racist White society has replaced Saul's vision with rage, and alcohol has deepened his isolation. Saul finds his way to a peaceful and caring masculinity through the writing and reading of his story to his counsellor and group. Through story, he begins the long migration home to a reconnection with others, the land, and the spiritual world. Saul also migrates home to an Indigenous conception of the feminine that comprises gender complementarity and reverence. McKegney asserts that "the manipulation of gender systems constituted a key element of dispossessive colonial policy," so that definitions of both genders were altered by colonial influence (*Masculindians* 3); for example, the colonial definition of marriage supplanted Indigenous ones: Indigenous women were required to become supportive if not submissive wives in patriarchal nuclear families rather than participants in extended kinship networks. Episkenew notes that "Gender complementarity was more often the norm in Indigenous cultures than was the gender hierarchy that prevailed in colonial society" (48). In this gender complementarity, Indigenous women had a political influence that was lost when patriarchy was imposed upon Indigenous polities. Anderson insists that "women haven't had a place in the official politics or governance of our people for a hundred and fifty years or so." She tells of her experience of working in First Nations politics, where she saw "leadership that was almost exclusively male" whereas the people working at the grassroots, community level were female ("Remembering" 89). In the novel, Saul honours the ability of women to participate in governance

when he wishes that their small band would accept the wisdom of “my grandmother’s guiding voice” (33). This dimension of the novel uses a decolonizing methodology that Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls “gendering” (151), which means revealing the different gender roles and/or relations that existed in Indigenous cultures before conquest. As in many Indigenous cultures, Anishinaubae intellectual tradition focuses on a reverence for the feminine. Saul begins his narrative by paying tribute to the tribe’s legends, which “tell of how we emerged from the womb of our Mother the Earth” (1). Wagamese expresses the same reverence in his other writings. In *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son* (2003), he imparts the cultural teachings that he has been unable to deliver in person to his estranged son (18). In retelling the traditional story of the gift of the drum, which was sent to remind a quarrelling tribe of their responsibility to each other and to all things, Wagamese states the message imparted by the giver. Spirit Woman emphasizes the similarity of the drum to Mother Earth: “It is round like her womb. It is life-giving like her spirit. It is healing like her love, forgiveness, and nurturing” (118). As for his experience of the sweat lodge ceremony, Wagamese says, “I was in the womb of my birth mother and I was in the womb of the Great Mother, Mother Earth” (148).

For the Anishinaubaeg, the land is always alive and in motion, always spiritual and involved in a spiritual relationship with human beings; thus, early in his narrative, Saul mentions the Manitous, or the mystery of the land, and the Maymaygwayseeuk, the mystery of the water (4). As they head toward Gods Lake to harvest rice, Saul and his brother Benjamin revel in their shared spiritual awareness that “the land itself was in motion” (18). Toward the end of their five-hundred-year migration, near what is now called Spirit Island or Manitoulin Island at the west end of Lake Superior, the Anishinaubaeg found the lakes of wild rice beds that had been prophesied as their predestined home (Benton-Banai 101). In accordance with this tribal history, the novel depicts the “dancing of the rice” and the making of rice ties as sacred activities that bring the Indian Horse family and its small band closer together (26, 28).

His spiritual oneness with the land and his Anishinaubae cultural identity (and thus his personal identity) have been taken from Saul Indian Horse by the “structured violence” of residential schools, just as Wagamese’s self-worth was stolen by their aftermath. Many have

suffered this trauma, and many have testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which concluded its hearings in Edmonton in March 2014. The TRC, the government apology of 2008, and the apologies of most of the churches that administered the schools (no apology has been made by the Catholic Church as a whole, though it ran more than 75% of the schools in Canada<sup>10</sup>), are means of consigning residential schools to the past. Keavy Martin notes that the state seeks a premature resolution and asks, “When will the Canadian public and its government agree to remain on this reconciliatory journey in perpetuity?” (55). The TRC hearings were managed by the same government that has yet to adopt what Smith calls the decolonizing methodology of reframing, which means contextualizing Indigenous social problems such as suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and high rates of school recidivism and incarceration as the legacies of colonization (153). Margery Fee comments that “bureaucratic idling” continues to be a “very effective tool of colonization” (6). Effective efforts have barely begun to move beyond the treatment of Indigenous people as bureaucratic clients of the state and to turn those bureaucracies over to Indigenous sovereignty. Richard Epp wonders whether a liberal individualist society, which “posits memoryless, dehistoricized — but equal — persons,” will be able to act on the principle of birthright, honouring treaty obligations undertaken in the name of all Canadians as part of a common past (134). In this cultural context, the study of narratives of survivance like *Indian Horse* may offer a starting point for genuine reconciliation. If these narratives come to be studied throughout the public school system in classrooms of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and if public schools also provide special cultural supports for Indigenous students, such a restructuring may help to transform the present historical moment into what Gods Lake is called in the novel — a “place of endings and beginnings” — not a place of extinguishing Anishinaubae and other Indigenous cultures, as residential schools were intended to do, but a place of ending racist colonialism and restoring Indigenous communities.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Duran and Duran use this term to define the psychic wound inflicted collectively on each Indigenous people, beginning with the occupation of their lands by settler society. Since that initial wounding, the emerging mythology, dreams, and culture of the people express the wound, which is also manifested in the social and health problems of the people over generations of colonization (45).

<sup>2</sup> Westcott and Garroutte point out a fundamental difference between the representational “narrative,” or set of cultural assumptions with which story is approached, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, and the “narrative” of Indigenous sacred stories. The representational story reaches out only to other humans; all representations are mediated; and stories exercise no powers over material reality. Yet Garroutte and Westcott point out that Indigenous sacred stories establish links with non-human beings, conduct humans to an unmediated reality, and literally heal the human body (in addition to the mind and soul) (73-74).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Thatcher uses statistical evidence to prove that fewer Indigenous people drink regularly than those of other populations (23) and that more Indigenous people than others are abstinent (24), but that Indigenous people drink more when they drink (22). Thatcher argues that the excesses of a relatively small group have been generalized to the entire population.

<sup>4</sup> Cindy Blackstock notes that the state’s depredations on Indigenous families continue: the number of Indigenous children now in some form of state care is three times the number it was at the height of residential schools (165); one in ten First Nations children is now in alternative care compared to one in two hundred for non-First Nations; and reserves receive 22% less funding for child care than other Canadian jurisdictions (168).

<sup>5</sup> Ann Laura Stoler argues that the definition of “empire” should not be “based on a British imperial steady-state” model but on “a notion of empire that puts movement and oscillation at the center” (9). She argues that “domestic colonialism” or “internal colonialism” are terms that usefully define different manifestations of empire (12).

<sup>6</sup> Residential schools were rife with evidence of biopolitics: in addition to the sexual abuse, the forcible removal from the home; the prevention of parental visits; the corporal punishment, solitary confinement, and regimentation; the haircuts that made boys look like porcupines and girls like china dolls (Alexie); the replacement of Indigenous names with numbers or anglicized, and usually Christianized, names; the uniform Caucasian clothing, sometimes made by the students from recycled army uniforms; the inadequate diet for students and the sumptuous one for staff; the excessive labour to compensate for inadequate funding; the mortality rate that was reputed to be as high as 50% (*Inconvenient* 120); and the inadequate medical care.

<sup>7</sup> The text here paraphrases the words of the architect of the American residential school system: Ward Churchill records that Captain Richard Henry Pratt, superintendent of the prototype Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, publicly declaimed in 1895 that the goal of the system was to “kill the Indian, save the man” in every pupil (14). Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent general of the Indian Department in Canada, stated before a parliamentary committee in 1920 that the Canadian system had the same objective, saying, “I want to get rid of the Indian problem.” He declared that he hoped to do so by closing the Indian Department and absorbing all Indians into the body politic (Milloy 46).

<sup>8</sup> It is important to affirm a general model of Indigenous maleness that contrasts with colonial hypermasculinity but also important to keep the discussion indeterminate, fluid, inclusive, and open. Thus, as part of a general model, I propose only the fundamental Indigenous value of responsibility to family and kinship networks.



<sup>9</sup> In *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (2001), Basil Johnston notes that the word *manitous* means not only “mystery” but also “spiritual, mystical, supernatural, godlike or spiritlike, quiddity, essence” (xxi). In *Ojibway Ceremonies*, he again notes the evocative power of this word (30).

<sup>10</sup> In 1991, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate made their apology, and in February 2014, shortly before the final hearings of the TRC, the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories offered theirs. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI expressed “sorrow” for the “deplorable” treatment of students at Catholic-run residential schools, but this was not an apology or a statement of responsibility, and there has been no centralized apology issued by the Catholic Church.

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