

Dreams and Nightmares in First Nations Fiction

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1 Introduction

Native Studies in Canada were created in order to help lift the denial that this nation was built on stolen land; the inclusion of the nonthreatening, yet eye-opening medium of the verbal arts – both oral and written – will strengthen this educational mandate and grant Aboriginal peoples greater visibility.

Renate Eigenbrod, “A Necessary Inclusion” (13)

The relationship between Native and non-Native populations on Turtle Island¹ is still shaped and deeply influenced by (post/neo)colonial power dynamics, hierarchies, and internalized concepts of each other manifested in ‘us versus them’ dichotomies. Jo-Ann Episkenew names this “invisible boundary between settler and Indigenous society” with the words of John Stackhouse, a “quiet apartheid”² (Episkenew *Taking Back Our Spirits* 190). For non-Native people, contemporary Native literature provides an accessible medium to learn about the realities of current social injustices in North America concerning its Native populations and thus proving that colonialism is ongoing and not a situation of a long forgotten past. This process presupposes the unlearning of the settler’s/colonized way of thinking which is dominated by the “colonial myth of a story of imagined White superiority” (Episkenew *Taking Back Our Spirits* 3). The study of First Nations literature fosters the key process of liberation and reconciliation that has come to be known as decolonization. A conceptualized ‘Dream of Healing’ finds its literary and literal representation in the form of dreams and nightmares in First Nations fiction. Indigenous people and their non-Indigenous allies and activists hope for a (decolonized) future where “Canada’s apartheid” is overcome not only in daily-life but also in schools and universities of Turtle Island and abroad.

The subject matter of dreaming can be regarded as a bridge and opportunity to enhance and improve a dialogue between Native and non-Native people, since it is a topic

¹ The notion of Turtle Island refers to North America, alluding to what the Indigenous populations name the continent, because several Indigenous creation stories, especially of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), describe that the continent was created on a Turtle’s back. Sky Woman, who fell down from the sky, landed on Turtle’s Back which has become the land, peeking out of the ocean. I will use the term Turtle Island as representing the Indigenous perspective of North America that ignores the Western creation of borders.

² For more information, please see John Stackhouse’s *The Globe and Mail* series “Canada’s Apartheid.”

accessible to all people. Its literary representations and functions show the differences and conflicts between Natives and non-Natives but are also embedded in an individual, subjective framework commemorative of Freudian interpretations. As the dreams and nightmares in First Nations fiction predominantly deal with the trauma of colonialism and its effects on Indigenous people, they (and their academic discussion) seem to deepen the existing gap between worldviews, concepts and notions of the colonizer and the colonized. But dreaming also appears to lead the way to reconciliation, not only with the protagonists' selves but also with the collective past of colonization and ethnocide. Contemporary Indigenous writing and its readership can enhance the already mentioned process of decolonization - a concept that is also a process of liberation and healing. The need to acknowledge differences without declaring one wrong and the other right, without the urge to impose only one view on all, is essential to decolonization. This process is especially important concerning epistemology, belief systems and different ways of knowing and researching.

One of the major attempts of this dissertation is to not enhance opposition while declaring right or wrong, to not discard or reject one view over another, but instead to acknowledge that different views exist. I am striving to follow the examples of the literature selected for this study. All of these fictional writings do exactly that: while still portraying differences of worldviews (Western and Indigenous) as the *status quo* they also show that a clear separation is not possible anymore, and that many Aboriginal authors have come to write 'beyond' such confinements and limitations. However, this thesis will lay more emphasis on the Indigenous perspective, since it still is the marginalized viewpoint that needs to be brought forward in order to find common ground. Common ground, however, can only be found when both sides - colonizer and colonized - agree on the need for healing and act upon it (Episkenew *Taking Back Our Spirits* 11). Decolonization and liberation both aim at the healing of wounds induced by more than 500 years of colonization, and so does dreaming in literature. I believe literature to be one of the most powerful ideological tools of decolonization; one that is accessible and open to all people invested in change, liberation and education. Kovach writes: "introducing Indigenous knowledges into any form of academic discourse [research or otherwise] must ethically include the influence of the colonial relationships, thereby introducing a decolonizing perspective to a critical paradigm" (30). When it comes to decolonizing tools, we have to acknowledge a difference in "Third World" liberation/decolonization

referring to liberation sought for in revolutions such as Algeria and Congo, compared to “Fourth World”³ decolonization referring to internal colonies like reservations, Residential Schools, and homelands. The tools here are strictly trimmed to the *ideological* tools of the latter category of decolonization that usually does not involve guns and (the threat of) violence.⁴

Discussing dream discourses in contemporary First Nations fiction also reinforces the importance that it is impossible to fully comprehend contemporary Native literary productions without having acquired prior knowledge about First Nations history, politics, and cultural diversity. Robert Arthur Alexie starts the first chapter of his novel *Porcupines and China Dolls* (2009) with the following words: “To understand this story, it is important to know the People and where they came from and what they went through. The story begins with the Blue People and their legends and beliefs in the time before first contact” (4). Alexie makes an important point and calls for what Hirsch termed “culturally literate” readers as opposed to “culturally illiterate” readers (Hirsch qtd in Lutz *Approaches* 191). Hence, the objective is not to forget or be limited by the Western/non-Indigenous literary theory and normative post-enlightenment concepts but instead display the decolonizing effects of contemporary Native writing. Dreaming in Native literature helps to unsettle these Western concepts, distance Native literature from non-Native literature while at the same time writing beyond the confinements of us vs. them dichotomies and blurring these lines and limits, boundaries and conceptions. The significance of dreaming hence transcends the narrative and content of the prose fiction discussed, and reaches a far more theoretical and immediate discussion of contemporary struggles of Native life in North America.

The fact that words such as liberation, healing, and dreaming are not necessarily used in the same way as in traditional Western academic writing and research calls for some explanations regarding not only the objectives of this study but also its (and the field’s) terminology as well as the broader epistemological and methodological concerns and quandaries when dealing with dreaming.

³ The concept of the “Fourth World“ originates from Manuel and Posluns’ 1974 book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*.

⁴ That decolonization discourses and actions in “Third World” decolonization (here Canada) can also lead to violence and an outburst of hostility and brutality was clearly shown by the “Oka Crisis“ in 1990. The Oka Crisis will be further discussed in chapters four and five.

Objectives and Structure

Since dreams and the process of dreaming are inherently human, dreaming seems to naturally bridge the gap between any Western⁵ concept of human difference. Every human being dreams, and he/she⁶ does it regularly. Sometimes people do not remember their dreams, and sometimes one dream is repeated and remembered for their entire life. Everybody has had a terror-evoking nightmare before and many people know what it feels like to twitch a leg or arm while slowly drifting into the state of sleeping, suggesting a human collectivity and universality of dreaming. It is, however, important to bear in mind that there are many different levels of dreaming. There might be a general human, collective level of dreaming, but there also is a personal level of dreaming, where the content and experience of the dreams depend on the individual who is dreaming. Another level is ‘pan-Native dreaming,’ which refers to the collective meaning and significance of dreams and nightmares as products and impacts of colonialism while at the same time representing the shared dream of decolonization. Hence, there is a shared ‘Dream of Healing’ and there might be healing through dreaming as it is frequently represented by the literature in this dissertation.

When opening up any First Nations book, it is rare that the reader does not stumble upon the word “dream” or “dreaming.” Indigenous populations and cultures have always had a distinct awareness of dreaming, its purpose, meaning and function; it manifests in contemporary First Nations prose fiction by the employment of dreams as a crucial metaphorical plot device. While Western psychology has opened a public discourse on dreaming with Sigmund Freud’s famous *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) (Engl. *The Interpretation of Dreams*), most Indigenous people from North America believe and follow a different dream discourse, as many communities believe(d)⁷ in the powers of

⁵ Here, I want to draw on Margaret Kovach’s explanation of the use of the term “Western“ that also applies to this thesis: “Throughout this text, the term Western is used as a descriptive term for a particular ontological, epistemological, sociological, and ideological way of thinking and being as differentiated from Eastern thought, an Indigenous worldview, and so forth. . . . The purpose is not to propagate unhelpful binaries, but to point out that Indigenous approaches to seeking knowledges are not of a Western worldview, a matter that colonialism (and its supporters) has long worked to confuse” (21).

⁶ In the following chapters, I will use “he” or “she” interchangeably. When talking about general dream discourse both genders are meant.

⁷ The different traditional functions of dreaming will be discussed in the upcoming chapters. It proves difficult indeed to find the correct tense, since many of the traditional beliefs have become redundant in a post-modern world, where the dreams’ tasks and purposes in hunting rituals are no longer needed or relied upon.

dreams to influence ‘real’ life.⁸ Black Elk - just like Freud does for the Western dream discourse - functions as the representative of a Native dream discourse.

The major objective of this dissertation is to show the significances and functions of dreams and nightmares as represented in the selected prose fiction by Aboriginal authors from Canada. Dreams have many different representations, functions, levels and forms. One of my main arguments is that dreaming has cathartic effects and that dreams initiate or constitute essential triggers for the protagonists’ (and also often for the readers’) healing journeys. The notion of healing ranges from forms of cures from sickness to the healing of one’s soul, or the healing of the earth, represented by ecological vigilance. The dreams and the more elaborate process of dreaming also serve as narrative tools to portray still existing collisions of Native and Western worldviews. Dreaming is a very fruitful tool to not only *show* differences in worldviews by its impossibility to be categorized but also to *write back*, *write home* and - using Hartmut Lutz’ concept - *write beyond* (Lutz *Achievements* 94) imposed literary (and more general) theories and concepts. Most importantly the depiction and insight gained through the characters’ individual dreams and nightmares construct significant messages not only essential to the dreamer’s healing journey but also in conveying teachings and messages to the readership.

The stories’ often cyclical narratives liberate the characters from former guilt, shame and internalized colonial self-perceptions that are shaped by self-destructive anger and hatred (represented by nightmares), and slowly enable the process of transforming suffering and pain into meaning and the chance for future change (represented in dreams). Hence, one of the main arguments in my dissertation is that dreams can be therapeutic and lead to healing. The process of dreaming, in whatever form it may occur - nightmares, prophetic, instructive, foreshadowing dreams, day dreaming, dreaming alternative lifeways, dreaming about futures or goals, sleepwalking and so on - all instigate individual as well as collective processes of restoration, of identity construction and thus may facilitate a healing process.

The dissertation’s title *Dreams and Nightmares in First Nations Fiction* alludes to late Alootook’s famous 1993 short story collection *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*. The

⁸ In a following chapter I will elaborate on the “Real World“ and the “Dream World“ and in how far they were (are) and can (not) be separated. For many First Nations communities, dream was just as real as waking life. Often, the dream also served as informing, shaping and thus influencing if not guiding the ‘real’ life. Real - if not explained otherwise - for this thesis will hence refer to waking life. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Inuit writer is not part of the official group category designated ‘First Nations’ but since the borders and boundaries of the official three groups can overlap I do not mean to essentialize, but instead to honour a great Indigenous writer from Canada. Ipellie’s short stories and accompanying drawings focus on the effects of colonization, especially the influence of Christianity, on Native life in the Arctic North of Canada. His stories are based on dreams and enforce not only the necessity of Native reliance on the land, but also the strong significance of spirituality and dreams.

The dissertation is divided into seven major chapters. The introduction provides an overview of the main questions, arguments and objectives of the study. It should also shed light on the necessity of including First Nations Studies (here, literature) into the broader field of North American Studies. The second part offers insight into initial thoughts on dreaming while expressing epistemological and methodological concerns as well as personal positioning. It will elaborate on the terminology of the field and of this dissertation, which is supposed to clarify certain concepts and notions while also portraying arising difficulties when writing within the field of Indigenous Studies. Furthermore, chapter 2.2 will discuss the ongoing collision of Western and Aboriginal worldviews, which in contemporary academic curricula, impose restrictions and eurocentric conventions preventing the peaceful coexistence of more than just one worldview. Native American psychologist Eduardo Duran calls this “epistemological hybridism,” and like many other scholars in the field of Indigenous Studies, I find it imperative to promote a necessary paradigm shift, which will hopefully help to enact Duran’s ‘vision.’

Chapter 2.3 elaborates on the ‘field of dreams’ by juxtaposing Western dream discourse with Native dream discourse, represented by Sigmund Freud for the former and Black Elk for the latter. The Native dream discourse will lead to the exploration of the circle as a transdisciplinary Indigenous concept, which frequently resurfaces in the course of the dissertation. The discussion will also facilitate a short categorization of dreams that helps to structure the thesis and understand the role, function, and impact of dreams in the literature. The introduction will conclude with some notes on the selection of texts for this dissertation as well as the broader contextualization of the topic within Indigenous (literary) Studies research.

Chapter three opens the literary analysis of the selected texts, by first looking at Robert Arthur Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls* and the development of Residential

School Narratives in Canada. This chapter will explore the significance of a shared collective, “pan-Native” past of colonization and the inflicted historical trauma, as well as the influence of oral traditions and other devices in Native culture. The chapter will then expand on the idea of a dream world and a co-existing real world while also discussing whether such a separation is necessary or even natural. Helen Hoy suggests that another approach to the novel is that it can be read as a “Fetal Alcohol (Syndrome) Narrative”, showcasing the effects of historical trauma in Native communities.

The fourth chapter introduces a new and innovative category of dreaming to which I want to give special significance and meaning within Indigenous Studies: ecological dreaming. Ecological dreaming refers to dreams that deal with ecological and environmental circumstances that have turned into nightmares - literally and metaphorically - while offering a critical reading of the texts, linking the fictional plot to environmental disasters in Canada. In Richard Van Camp’s short story “On the Wings of this Prayer,” the protagonist’s dreams warn him of the devastating consequences the Alberta Tar Sands will have on the environment if not stopped. In the subsequent related short story “The Fleshing,” parts of the dream seem to become true as one of the character’s body is seized by what the legends identify as Wheetago/Windigo⁹, a cannibal that - as it turns out - can only be killed by traditional Native medicine. By exploring Native Grassroots Activism through Traditional Environmental/Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and the influences of the Oka crisis on First Nations literature and life it will become more apparent what land, home, and place - as well as dreams - can mean for Aboriginal peoples.

The fifth chapter introduces the notion of existential dreams from Cherie Dimaline’s *Red Rooms* and Richard Wagamese’s *Ragged Company*. It will start off with the explanation of this dream category, by exploring related semantic fields of these works. The chapter also deals with the question of a legal framework - identity politics in Canada - and the dreaming of Native identity and healing in Canada. It will illustrate how Canadian Native identity is manifested and epitomized in the selected prose and to what extent a colonial mindset is internalized by both Native and non-Native people. Furthermore, it will debate how this ‘colonizer frame of mind’ of the characters can - with the help of dreams - be reversed and regain harmony. The chapter will take a closer look

⁹ Spellings vary amongst others from Wheetago, Wetiko, Windigo and Wendigo. In the following I will refer to it as Windigo, because that is what the figure is called mostly in Van Camp’s stories.

at homelessness, alcoholism, prostitution, and suicide in Native (urban) life and how Native cultures and traditional knowledges can be employed as treatment/solution. The literature chosen for this chapter, highlights how dreams act as a connection to (Native) spirituality while offering the possibility to “dream oneself home” or in other words, find healing.

The sixth chapter aims at revisiting the circle as a narrative and literary device. It offers the opportunity to interlace all texts discussed in this study and finds common ground in the representation of dreams and nightmares, as well as the notion of healing by using a circular (restorative) literary pattern as an example of Indigenous spirituality providing continuity. The seventh and last chapter is the conclusion of this study summarizing the dissertation and its most important results. The title also highlights my dream of a decolonized academic environment within which Aboriginal literatures from Canada (and the United States) gain more international attention. This dissertation is written with the belief that decolonization is an endeavour with no end, and demands constant effort.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the words Aboriginal, Indigenous and Native interchangeably when referring to the population originally inhabiting North America. The strict separation of First Nations (Canada) and Native Americans (United States) in current literature proves difficult to use correct nation-specific designations, names and legal confines. What in Canada is named a *band* is named *tribe* in the United States. The “blood quantum laws” in the United States only partly parallel the stipulations for “Indian identity” in the Indian Act(s) of Canada. Even if these clear separations and borders are Western concepts, I will nevertheless try to use the respective terms in order to avoid confusion.

The name Turtle Island ignores (or simply does not acknowledge) the US-Canadian border¹⁰, since boundaries between modern nation states such as Canada and the United States of America symbolize purely Western concepts and separations that did not exist before colonization (also reflected in the many border-exceeding Aboriginal bands/tribes, such as Ojibwa/Anishinaabe/Chippewa, Cree, Iroquois/Haudenosaunee, or

¹⁰ Thomas King’s short story “Borders” deals with the artificial aspect of the US-Canadian borders and questions the concept of citizenship for many Native peoples. As a Blackfoot mother tries to cross the border from Canada to the United States to visit her daughter, she refuses to identify as anything else but Blackfoot and is hence kept trapped in the border space of neither Canada nor United States (King “Borders” 580-588).

Syilx/Okanagan). Nevertheless, we should also bear in mind the fact that most of those band/tribe names and descriptions were developed with colonization and thus tend to generalize and essentialize North America's Indigenous populations as one big culture, which is inaccurate. The tribal¹¹ names commonly used to refer to bands and tribes - as opposed to a more generalized 'Indigenous' or 'Native' peoples help raise the awareness of cultural diversity and distinctive cultural backgrounds. The diversity of different communities, bands and tribes can only be reflected when looking at so-called "tribal-specifics" – one must look at the differences of literary models, oral traditions, cultural myths and legends manifested in the texts as well as considering the cultural background of the authors. I will thus try to incorporate each author's specific cultural First Nations background.

When using contested and highly racialized terms such as 'Indian' and/or 'White,' I refer not to the actual group of people but to the *image* of the group that was established over the years of contact by dominant mainstream society in North America/Canada and Europe/Germany. There exists a highly contested, risky, and challenging rhetoric in the field of Indigenous Studies that is shaped by opposition, conflict, and seemingly unbridgeable antagonisms including the idea of 'versus' and thus suggesting a battle between two large groups. To name a few examples, there is the general 'us versus them' dichotomy, the colonizer versus the colonized, the oppressor versus the oppressed, Indigenous versus non-Indigenous, Turtle Island versus North America, Canada and the United States, "wannabees versus shouldabeens" (Drew Hayden Taylor *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass* 67), hobbyism and "Indianthusiasm,"¹² appropriation and cultural theft, Whiteshamanism and spirituality, and mainstream Western religion versus alternative worldviews and belief systems.

When writing about Indigenous topics, especially Aboriginal literature, the

¹¹ Kerstin Knopf elaborately discusses the term tribal and its common definitions, exposing most of them as "repeat[ing] colonial stereotypes, sediment these stereotypes in neocolonial modern thought, and consolidate superior/inferior dichotomies that sustain non-Indigenous hegemonic ideas. In concordance with the practices of Indigenous academics, I suggest using the term 'tribal' for traditional and modern Indigenous people around the globe, who are certainly not backward and parochial if they do not share Western ideas and values. This concept of 'tribal' can include views that are tied to land and Indigenous environmental ethics, to traditional concepts, to self-governance, and that also stress change, hybridization, and transnational Indigenous perspectives" (*Tribal, Local, Global* 10f). I follow this suggestion and want to add, that the concept of a community has also come to supplement the notion of 'tribe,' especially in a globalized and hybrid state of Indigenous life.

¹² A term coined by Lutz, describing non-Indigenous people who are drawn to and enthusiastic about everything Native.

underlying challenge and fear of essentializing and tribal glossing is high. Being aware of that is essential in order to avoid contributing to what Lutz calls a “pan-Indian mash,”¹³ denoting the outcome when “little if any attention was given to distinct Native cultural traits, and aspects of various cultural regions were blended together” (Lutz *Approaches* 53). This is especially important when considering the fact that I, as the author of this dissertation, am of German decent. Germany, although not immediately part of the colonization of North America like England and France, has nevertheless had a specific, rather one-sided relationship toward Indigenous peoples of North America. The image remains popular of the heroic “Indianer” on a horse, riding through the Wild West and ensuring justice while smoking the “Friedenspfeife” (German word for peace pipe) with his ‘white’ blood brother who never leaves his side. Hence, the German-Indigenous context is mainly informed by projections, fantasies, and romanticized images.¹⁴

If one were only to take into consideration my upbringing in a country that continues to nurture severe stereotypes and rampant fantasies about Indigenous peoples, it is not farfetched for Indigenous peoples to perceive this dissertation as “a new act of colonization” (Blaeser 55) because “even well-intentioned academic discourse [on native issues] can appear extremely arrogant and closed-minded if it does not contain a reflection on its own epistemological interest, that is, reflections on the terminology, perspective, and goals of the presenter” (Calloway et al 8). This leads me to the next chapter, which will further expand on such epistemological concerns including a personal positioning.

¹³ Lutz here references Ralph and Natasha Friar’s 1972 work *The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel*.

¹⁴ In their work from 2002 *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, Colin Gordon Calloway, Gerd Gemünden and Susanne Zantop attempt to explain why and how it is that especially Germans (amongst other European cultures) engage in a rather artificial love for everything Native.

2 Epistemological Concerns

One of the biggest epistemological and methodological concerns is the question of how to approach Native literature as a non-Native academic. As mentioned above, Kim Blaeser, an Anishinaabe scholar stated that the “insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest” (Blaeser 55). Since it is not my intention to perform another “act of colonization” when analyzing First Nations literature but instead foster decolonized readings of Indigenous literature in Germany, I focus on literary criticism and theory written by Native critics or critics affiliated within the field of Native Studies. For me, this is the most important choice before writing a thesis on Aboriginal Canadian literature.

The inapplicability of Western concepts to Native texts raises the question of which texts to include, to purposefully exclude, and where to draw the line. Stating that Native sources will serve as my main foundation does not exclude the necessary inclusion of some Western theories such as Freud, and some concepts and theoretical frameworks of postcolonial theory. As pointed out before, hybridism (a term in itself that - as will later be elaborated on - was coined and still is highly related to postcolonial theory) also means the acknowledgement that more ways of knowing and perceiving the world (and literature) than just one are viable and should be able to coexist without imposing hierarchies. Admittedly, most Western theories discussed in this dissertation will reveal their inapplicability when employed to Native texts.

When it comes to psychological/psychoanalytical approaches of dreams and dreaming as well as the elaboration on dream discourses, it proves difficult to come to terms with Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts of dreaming. The approaches to dreams seem substantially different. Can Western Freudian theory be applied to First Nations fiction? It seems obvious at first to assume that some general facts apply to all people, to all human beings, and it is standard in both Western and Indigenous ‘psychology:’ to look at the (life) story of the individual as key to successful therapy. But such transcultural commonalities are only partly pertinent, since Freud himself was born and raised in a Western environment, without specific knowledge about Aboriginal peoples, and hence one cannot use his theories without prior investigation of cultural differences. Thus, Western psychological approaches are only applicable within limits, and I had to constantly decipher nuances of difference between Western and Indigenous

approaches. Furthermore, how important is it to draw that line and thus enhance the differences between these two groups? (In chapters 2.2 and 2.3 I will try to contextualize the difference in worldviews and knowledge by looking at both Indigenous and Western epistemologies and the respective dream discourses.) While not forgetting about the many Native and non-Native theories, concepts, frameworks and discourses, I intend to focus on the texts and write about what is in front of me: fiction by First Nations authors from Canada who bring forward different functions and significances of dreams and nightmares.

Another methodological concern is the highly contested debate over the involvement of non-Indigenous scholars in Indigenous Studies, and what criticism is ‘allowed’¹⁵ regarding Native texts. I will include a personal positioning, showing awareness about my own cultural context, my objectives and motivations when engaging in Indigenous Studies. Here, I purposefully write Indigenous *Studies* and not only Indigenous *Literature*, because dealing with First Nations literature also means dealing with political, historical, psychological and cultural issues. It appears inevitable to deal with the Indian Act and its ramifications when writing about Aboriginal fiction; it is impossible to understand Native texts produced after 1990 without knowledge of the “Oka Crisis;” it is crucial to understand the significance that First Nations hold for the land when discussing Native literature. Hence, when dealing with Native literary texts properly, I argue that there also needs to be a greater understanding and engagement in Native Studies.

2.1 “Write your own damn stories:” Non-Native Literary Academia

The concern about appropriation looms large in all Native writing, because after centuries of colonial dispossession and oppression, Native people have learned to be suspicious of outside ‘help’ or interest.

(Lutz *Contemporary Challenges* 3)

¹⁵ I decided to put the word “allowed“ in inverted commas because the word brings with it a contested issue. I have experienced literal outrage about the very existence of such a question that arguably denies literary studies the freedom it should inherently have. But I have also experienced disrespectful, uninformed and hurtful “research” of First Nations life and fiction. Although some might argue that it should not be a question of what is “allowed” or not, I am using the word in order to stress the importance of respectful research that takes into consideration a history of justified mistrust regarding non-Native research.

As a non-Native student of First Nations Studies in Canada, I was asked why I was interested in pursuing an academic career in First Nations Studies/literature as there already exists a saturation of non-Native scholars in this field. I was puzzled and did not know how to answer the question. The fellow First Nations (Anishinaabe) student who initiated our dialogue began to explain her aversion towards non-Native literary scholars who, according to her, dare to believe that they were giving a voice to people who are in need. The student stated that she - as well as many other Native scholars - did not want any non-Native scholars to interfere with what Native students can do for themselves. "We do not need your voice," she added. She stated the following sentence that is the title of this chapter: "Write your own damn stories." With these words she threw me into a deep inner conflict that made me come to the solution to either find a legitimate explanation and justification or stop engaging in First Nations and Native American issues and literature.

After a couple weeks of thinking, talking, listening and reading related literature, I came to the conclusion that neither she nor I was right or wrong. I can understand her fear of a non-Native taking and appropriating Native stories and spiritual beliefs. Sadly, I too believe this mistrust is necessary in contemporary society. Lutz explains that within the Native literature context, non-Native authors have too often "appropriated and then sold aspects of Native spirituality in their works" (4). He argues that the need for literary productions solely executed by Native people "appeals for equal opportunity and fair representation in the literary world" (6). William Patrick (WP) Kinsella, a non-Native Canadian novelist, offers one of the most well known examples of appropriation. In his novels and short stories (*Dance Me Outside*, 1977; *Born Indian*, 1981) he writes in the perspective of a Native American who lives on a reserve and thus appropriates an Indigenous voice. The fear of further appropriation or a lack of understanding is reasonable and vital. Too often, Native literature was not taken seriously (during early colonization orality was discarded as primitive) and its complexity disregarded by non-Natives. It is therefore crucial to be aware of Native realities, experiences, and understandings that incorporate history, politics, culture, traditions as well as literature.

I can understand and support the desire for more *Native* literary critics and scholars in general. Vine Deloria accused non-Native academia as being "not only a travesty of scholarship but [as] absolutely devastating to Indian societies" and Pam Colorado stated

that “in the end, non-Indians will have complete power to define what is and is not Indian, even for Indians” (qtd in Churchill *Native Son* 318). The first quotation from Vine Deloria dates back to 1982 and refers to teachers of Native American history in schools for Native students. Deloria’s and Colorado’s criticism is reasonable and important, but Churchill takes these quotations out of their contexts and transfers them to a contemporary ‘dispute.’ The debate of non-Native scholars in the field of Indigenous Studies in North America with special regard to literary criticism (First Nations Studies, Native American Studies and maybe even Indigenous Studies). Sequoya incisively asks after quoting Deloria and Colorado: “Do the ironizing marks imply that people most fully Indian by blood are automatically expert, or more expert than those with less genetic heritage? . . . does American Indian culture travel in the blood?” (458). She consequently adds that “this is unlikely to be the meaning since all three critics [Vine Deloria, Ward Churchill, Pam Colorado] are of mixed racial as well cultural heritage” (458).

Although these two radical statements were formulated almost 30 years ago, similar criticism is still common amongst contemporary Native writers and critics. In the 2001 collection of literary criticism of Native literature (*Ad)dressing Our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures*, editor Armand Garnet Ruffo lays emphasis on the fact that he wanted this collection not only to be *about* literary criticism of Native writing but also to be solely written *by* Native people (6). The 2001 collection succeeds the collection of Aboriginal literary criticism *Looking at the Words of Our People* published in 1993 by Theytus Books and was edited by Native writer and activist Jeannette Armstrong. The publishing company, Theytus Books, is the “oldest Indigenous publishing house in Canada” and since its inception in 1980, focuses *solely* on Indigenous literature (theytus.com). Armand Garnet Ruffo explains this need for another anthology written, edited and published entirely by Native people: “There has been no other collection of literary criticism solely *by* Aboriginal people . . . although there have been a number *about* Aboriginal people. What this means is that the creation, publication and dissemination of such journals and anthologies have been in the hands of ‘outsiders’” (6).

I understand the suggested entire exclusion of non-Native scholars in the field of Native Studies made by my classmate in Canada, and learned from it that respect is crucial. My outsider position remains without doubt. As outsiders, we are offered many learning possibilities. In the end it is through other perspectives, and in this particular case through fostering First Nations perspectives, people may learn to liberate their minds from

narrow-mindedness and start questioning behaviors and mindsets in order to propel the process of decolonization in the broader field of North American Studies. (Non-Native) Critics of Native literature¹⁶ must be aware of this perception of the outsider because only then can reconciliation of former hostile relationships, shaped by oppression, authority, and domination, be achieved. It is important for the non-Native critic to bear in mind that her perspective stems from a Western perspective and that she cannot claim her perceptions and concepts to be Native. Alluding to Deloria's and Colorado's statements, Sequoya concludes her essay by giving her personal definition of a "preferred teacher of Indian students" who would have a profound knowledge of both cultures (Western and Indigenous) and therefore be "fully bicultural" (459).

Before closing this section, I would like to take a closer look at the opinions of two acclaimed Native authors: Maria Campbell and Richard Wagamese. Maria Campbell stated in an interview with Hartmut Lutz and Konrad Gross in 1989 that she has "worked with a non-Native writer" and would "never do it again" (Lutz *Contemporary Challenges* 57). She goes further to say: "I don't think that you have any right to come into my community and tell my stories for me. I can speak for myself. I share them with you, and you can read them. And if you come into my circle, you should respect that you're invited into the circle" (57). Her hurtful experiences with what Lutz calls the "appropriation of a Native voice" seem to have lacked the necessary respect and have - just like my classmate's experiences - inflicted pain, disappointment and mistrust. Out of these experiences, where Campbell felt exploited rather than assisted, she co-wrote with Linda Griffiths the non-fiction work *The Book of Jessica* (1989) in which she displays her professional relationship to Griffiths as a non-Native actress and playwright (41).

Maria Campbell clearly rejects any non-Native writing about anything Native but underlines the importance of non-Native scholars in Native Studies (in this case Hartmut Lutz and Konrad Gross). She embraces the possibilities of these scholars to spread Native perspectives and their history and to help assist with more technical support, such as finding good translators for Native texts or "sensitive" publishers (61). Lutz' perception of non-Native scholars in this field leads back to what he calls the "decolonization of the European minds" (59). This process includes both the Native mind but also the non-Native mind. That is why non-Native critics should always acknowledge their position while

¹⁶ Deborah Madsen gives i.e. a good overview of Native Studies in Europe in her article: "Out of the Melting Pot, Into the Nationalist Fires: Native American Literary Studies in Europe." *The American Indian Quarterly* 35.3 (2011): 353-371.

writing and spreading the idea(s) learned from Aboriginal history and literature. I have met many First Nations students and scholars in Canada who live both their First Nations cultural background and their post-modern Canadian¹⁷ lives to the fullest and (will) make great teachers and professors. There no longer is a need for non-Native scholars to teach Indigenous students about the history and literature of Turtle Island. However, I do see the need to reinforce the implementation of this development. I also see the need for an incorporation of First Nations Studies and texts in the curriculum of German, North American, and Canadian Studies. It is in this area that I want to contribute.

In contrast to Campbell's opinion, Richard Wagamese tries to overcome the line that is drawn between Natives and Non-Natives. In an interview with Blanca Schorcht, Wagamese frequently emphasizes his perception that "everybody is a storyteller" (76). He says: "I could have submitted a manuscript and gotten published because I was Ojibway. I had an Ojibway, exotic sounding name, and I told my stories in a fashion that was, quote, 'Aboriginal, Native, First Nations'" (82). He goes on and says that he wants people to read his books because of his skills as a writer and because they consider his writings as aesthetically beautiful. He affirms that he wants to be a "writer" and not a "*Native* writer" (82, own emphasis). This seems to be a way of liberating himself from the colonial lens directed at his readings, although his literature certainly draws on stylistic devices that can be traced back to Native culture and oral traditions in particular.

Wagamese also stated in this interview that he is no longer willing to read Native literature (83). It might be easy to misconceive his statements and understandable if other Native writers judged him for this blunt conviction. According to Wagamese, it is his desire to read plots where the ethnicity of the protagonists is random, arbitrary, or that the characters "just happen to be black, who just happen to be Arab" (83). Wagamese explains that he is

not going to read Native literature again until I start to see stuff that's giving a life to our people beyond what we assume that we are. We assume that we are survivors, but we are a whole lot more than that. We have done more in 570 years of exposure to the colonizers' mentality than just survive. If that's all we've done, if all we've done is survive, if that's our view of ourselves, then we are really shortchanging ourselves. Because we've done a whole lot more than that, and our literature needs to reflect this. (83)

¹⁷ Which are not or cannot be separated anymore. Each individual I have talked to perceives this differently.

And still, he contributes to the body of literary works that is considered as First Nations literature. Without denying his identity as a First Nations author he criticizes the content and message of what other Native writers might bring across as exclusive, or what First Nations literature as a genre is reduced to by Native and non-Native critics alike.

The opinions from both authors, Maria Campbell and Richard Wagamese, are very different yet not opposing one another. They cannot be compared with regard to their content because the interviews were taken at different time periods and the message stems from two separate problems – criticizing academia (Campbell) and criticizing literature (Wagamese). Nevertheless, it is fascinating how one of the authors abjures *non-Native* literature about Natives and the other author abjures *Native* literature about Natives. The authors’ differing opinions on (non-) Native literary academia and Native literature highlight the many different viewpoints and ways of interpretation. While one author completely withdraws from a debate about Nativeness, the other is highly involved in the definition of Nativeness and the implications that come with non-Native academia.

I want to mention several very important scholars who have and continue to coin and inspire my academic objectives and perspectives immensely. Late Professor Renate Eigenbrod, who was a Professor and Chair of the Native Studies Department at the University of Manitoba until her sudden death on May 8th 2014, published several essays that deal with the “necessary inclusion” of Native literature within the academic curricula and Canadian education.¹⁸ According to her conviction that literature can translate into action and promote positive change, she states:

Creative Writing produces for the reader an emotional investment, an intimacy of experience that does not translate into fixed knowledge, categories, or labels. . . . As social science research tends to dehumanize the ‘objects’ it studies, and as this discourse has been very powerful in Aboriginal contexts generally and in Native Studies specifically, it is time to turn to narratives that reinstate humanity. (Eigenbrod *Necessary Inclusion* 14)

Alongside Eigenbrod, Jo-Ann Episkenew, in her book *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* (2009), centers her studies on the

¹⁸ Examples would be: *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics* (2008) which she edited with scholar Renee Hulan. She also co-edited *Creating Community: A Roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal Literatures* and was the author of *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada* (2005) and co-edited the essay collection *Across Cultures/Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures* (2010). In 2004 and 2009, she received the Arts Celebrating Arts Award for outstanding achievement.

notion and process of community healing. In the opening pages of her book, Episkenew acknowledges the healing functions of Native literature in a (not so post) colonial Canadian society: “Indigenous literature acknowledges and validates Indigenous peoples’ experience by filling in the gaps and correcting the falsehoods in this master narrative” (Episkenew 2). As this master narrative did not only come into being within a North American framework, but also a European framework that continues to falsely portray Indigenous peoples, we must start looking at ourselves and reverse the “dehumanizing” research standard. Episkenew also states that Indigenous literature can achieve more empathy and understanding of Indigenous struggles in “settler readers” (190). She sees such empathy as fruitful ground for a better understanding of both groups, which might lead to “positive changes to public policy” (191). She also stresses the inclusive character of First Nations literature that not only reaches out to Native communities but also to Settler readers and communities alike in order to enhance healing and reconciliation (194).

In his article “A Relevant Resonance: Considering the Study of Indigenous National Literatures,” Daniel Heath Justice explains that “the critical expression of nationhood in Native literatures - literary nationalism - is a powerful extension of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty” (69). He continues:

Placing Indigenous nationhood at the centre of analysis shifts the interpretative lens. Doing so does not assume that non-Natives have no place in the conversation; it does, however, privilege Indigenous sovereignty of expression. Terms such as ‘mediation,’ ‘cross-cultural,’ ‘hybridity,’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ abound in critical studies of American Indian and aboriginal literatures, and, while some good work has been written with a focus on bridging Native and non-Native worlds, the underlying implication is almost always that non-Native authorization is central to the exercise of Indigenous literary criticism. The traffic on those bridges is too often assumed to be one way, and in these cases, once again, non-Natives are given a privileged (and, ironically, often central) place in the discussion, and, when that point of privilege explicitly displaces Aboriginal nationhood and priorities, it renews and replicates the mechanisms of colonialism that many of the critics claim to reject. (69)

With this quote and explanation, Justice helped me to understand the difference of “participation in a relationship of conversation” (69) and ‘performance’ of literary analysis. I believe that a reciprocal dialogue is imperative. Justice also acknowledges that “refreshing and intellectually rigorous counter-narratives to these problematic texts” exist, here in the form of Eigenbrod’s 2015 work *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the*

Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada. Eigenbrod states: “I understand my research as positioned and hence partial, rather than objective” (18). She sets an example - just like Helen Hoy who has published the famous work *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada* - by acknowledging her “positioned subjectivity” as well as her “position of race privilege” (18), as well as Episkenew’s positive outlook on the raising awareness and attention of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples towards Native literature and its ability for healing.

The perspective of “the outsider” - as is mine - is always a limited one that needs above all a respectful attitude and the attempt to engage in a dialogue of reciprocal exchange: it is hence cultural literacy and “cultural initiation, of involvement and commitment” (Ruffo “Inside Looking Out” 174) for which all of the above mentioned scholars strive.

2.1.1 Personal Positioning

An ally, in my understanding, is one who acknowledges the limits of her or his knowledge, but neither cowers beneath those limits nor uses them as a crutch. An ally recognizes the responsibility to gain knowledge about the cultures and communities whose artistic creations she or he analyzes before entering the critical fray and offering public interpretations. An ally privileges the work of Native scholars, writers, and community members - not as a political gesture, but as a sincere attempt to produce the most effective criticism - yet she or he does not accept their work uncritically; she or he recognizes that healthy skepticism and critical debate are signs of engagement and respect, not dismissal. (McKegney “Strategies” 62f)

One very important teaching I received as a non-Native student in First Nations Studies in Prince George, BC, Canada, was introducing myself and telling my story as something like an ‘initiation ritual.’ What seemed irritating to me at first - that every presenter in the field of Native Studies as well as in most other talks or seminars - started their talk with a personal note on where they were from, what brought them to that very event, what their family or relations is/are and what they were doing professionally - became a routine that I appreciate as very friendly, helpful and incredibly respectful. What I once considered un-academic and somewhat out of place, I now consider a highly important academic tool that needs recognition. I want to begin my story with a question: Why am I, as a German PhD student of - strictly speaking - English and American Studies, writing a dissertation

about First Nations literature? First of all, I want to state that I grew up in an environment that was shaped by what is nowadays known as Hobbyism. At that time, it probably was maybe a Hippie matter or plain nostalgia. I grew up with so-called “Indianerfeste” (German for “Indian festivals/Indian camps”) where we, my family and many friends, were divided into different groups and played a game in the nearby forest where the groups had to find and catch each other. Each group had different ‘headquarters’ that were tied to place names and attributes such as “Black Hills,” “Fort Kearny” or “Sandy Creek.” The festival also involved the painting of the kids’ faces and giving them “Indian” names, according to respective characteristics or physical features. When the game - which was often played over the course of up to three days – ended, a huge campfire was lit, stories were told and everybody slept outside around the fire.

In my uncle’s and aunt’s house were Native tobacco pipes, pictures of what was assumed to be Sitting Bull and Geronimo, carved cedar boxes and masks as well as Native leather clothing and moccasins. When entering third grade in Germany, we read a book with the title *Fliegender Stern* (Engl. *Flying Star*) by Ursula Wölfel,¹⁹ which, as Lutz states, “demonstrates the . . . tendency to harmonize conflict. In her book the mission school experience, one of the most painful and destructive collective traumata Native children were subjected to, is falsified and reduced to banality to contrive a ‘happy ending’” (*Approaches* 38). At the age of nine, not yet aware of the ongoing realities in North America, I was captivated by the narrative of the existence of people on a far away continent that lived in harmony with nature and animals, and I consumed every “Indianerbuch” I could find. I am sure a big part of this fascination was that I recognized aspects in the novel from my own family history: growing up in a big family, living close to forests, spending most of our time playing outside riding ponies and playing with dogs, and from time to time engaging in “Indianerfeste” and being told stories about life in teepees on the North American prairies.

As I grew older, my interest in Native stories and books remained and I stumbled upon Lieselotte Welskopf-Henrich’s series *Die Söhne der Großen Bärin* (1951-63) (Engl. *Sons of the Great Bear*), which as Lutz writes “marked a clear ideological departure from former stereotypes. Her works dealt with Dakota history . . . and later focused on

¹⁹ For further information on the depiction and portrayal of Indigenous people in German “Indianerbücher“ (“Red Indian Books“) see Lutz’ article “Images of Indians in German Children’s Books“ in his essay collection *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literature*, Augsburg: Wißner Verlag, 2002. 13-47.

contemporary Dakota reality” (*Approaches* 17). Shocked by the disturbing facts about life on the reservation in North Dakota and the struggle for many Native tribes to survive, I was eager to find out more about what was actually going on and what it actually meant to be Native in Canada and the United States. Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970), which “marked the beginning of literature of a new and more realistic interest in Native American affairs,” (*Approaches* 17) as well as Mary Crow Dog’s *Lakota Woman* (1990) ultimately changed my perspective on Native matters and I developed anger about the misrepresentation of a people, who were exposed to Residential Schools, massacres, and forced to live on reservations by governments that prohibited the practice of traditions, cultural customs, and speaking their Native languages. What left me even more confused was the fact that nobody in Germany who smoked the peace pipe in their self-made teepees, preaching about living in harmony with nature, seemed to know or were even interested in these realities. I decided to study what seemed to promise more truthful information on Native North America: English Studies.

Once again, I was hugely disappointed. During my bachelors degree I did not hear the words Indigenous, Aboriginal, or Native once. During my following Master of Arts degree, called North American Studies, there was only a very short ten minute mention regarding the existence and colonization of Indigenous peoples on the North American continent including the displacement, marginalization and ethnocide of Turtle Island’s Indigenous population. Nevertheless, I wrote every possible term paper on topics that dealt with the ‘shabby’ history of North America that apparently did not seem worth mentioning.²⁰ First with slight protest and then with resignation, my professors accepted this rather uncommon and unpopular specialization of mine. I wrote my BA thesis on the role of the trickster figure in contemporary Aboriginal Writing, my MA thesis about concepts and complexities of Nativeness in First Nations literature. I was convinced and am even more so today that it is only through education that racialized stereotypes, unrealistic fantasies, and harmonized/euphemized images of colonialism can be unlearned. By the same way stereotypes are brought into society through literature, it is possible to use literature to educate society about the falseness of those stereotypes.

During my Master’s degree, I decided to study in Canada for a semester and

²⁰ I am quite aware, that this is not the case for all German universities of course. This is just true for the universities I decided to study at and my personal, subjective observation. Today, almost ten years after I started my Bachelors, there of course are universities with a strong Canadian Studies focus and a specialization on Indigenous Studies.

applied to get funding to attend the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George, BC. I chose this small university 'in the middle of nowhere' because it was built on First Nations territory²¹, the Lheidli T'enneh/Carrier. Also, the school offers a Bachelor's and Master's degree in First Nations Studies, language courses in Cree and Carrier, as well as the annual Weaving Words Festival, an Indigenous Writer's event where many well-known authors share their work through readings and workshops, and are open to dialogues with students. After having received the acceptance from UNBC as well as funding through my home university in Germany and the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), I was finally on my way to Canada. I was extremely nervous and questioned the step I was about to make. I was scared that my images of Native people would be destroyed; I was scared of being unwanted, of being rejected and discarded as yet another non-Native (German) student who has no idea about anything that has happened and is happening to Native people in Canada. I thought it might have been better to just stay in that Ivory tower of mine; and I admit that would actually have been more comfortable indeed. It would have been safer, easier, less vulnerable but also less rewarding, challenging, and enriching. What I experienced in Canada as a Master's student was as humbling, poignant, meaningful and motivating as it was a surprisingly unpleasant and uncomfortable experience. Although I did encounter rejection and skepticism about my objectives and motives, as well as puzzlement and laughter about this undertaking and interest of mine, I was mostly rewarded with a vital community that was so very accepting and supportive; I encountered strength, humour and a striving culture with strong beliefs that surpassed everything I had expected or that was suggested in the books I have read.

The decision to pursue a PhD in Native Literature was the only decision that felt right and the only profession that I could engage in with passion and determination. My goal is to contribute to the spreading of First Nations perspectives in schools and universities in Germany (where that is not the case yet), and that there is a darker side to North American history that although it might be shameful and unpleasant to teach the eurocentric, genocidal policies of Settler society, it is necessary in order to move forward and to achieve healing, reconciliation and further a dialogue of decolonization. For this, I registered as a PhD student of the University of Greifswald.

²¹ Every university is built on First Nations territory but not every university does acknowledge this fact as UNBC does.

I returned to Prince George and UNBC for the first semester of my PhD two years later and it felt like coming home. I returned because people believed in me and believed in the importance of what I was doing, but also because I feel like UNBC is doing an important job in promoting Aboriginal rights and education. There, I had the chance to meet with First Nations authors, listen to many stories of different people, visit a reserve, and dance with the butterfly clan (the butterfly clan is assigned to all those who do not belong to any band or First Nations community, mostly non-Indigenous people) during a community potluck. I learned about the incredible struggles and injustices that were imposed on First Nations bands in Northern British Columbia, witnessed poverty and drug abuse in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, as well as racism and ignorance by many non-Natives in Canada. But I also learned about the meaning of the 8th fire metaphor²² and had the honour of attending a traditional sweat lodge. In summary, I had the chance to listen to people and begin to learn what place, land, belonging and home can mean. I also learned some harsh truths about myself, my upbringing, my family, and my country. Sometimes I was asked to tell my own story, and while at the time I was ashamed of my hobbyist background, I no longer am because without it I would not be where I am today, and would have missed out on the most important teachings I received to this day. I will always return to Canada, to the roots I have developed in Northern British Columbia, where I am hopeful there will never be an end to learning and listening. I want to give a concluding quote from Erica-Irene Daes in Marie Battiste's essay collection *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*: "What is the antidote [of colonization and oppression]? . . . The antidote is travel, the rebuilding of old alliances and kinship across borders, and the discovery of like-minded peoples in other parts of the globe" (7).

2.2 "Decolonizing the (European) Mind": Aboriginal and Western Worldviews Colliding?

the process of decolonizing the European Mind remains what it is: a process, never ending and always providing new and often unpleasant surprises and insights for those embarked on it.

²² "8TH Fire draws from an Anishinaabe prophecy that declares now is the time for Aboriginal peoples and the settler community to come together and build the '8TH Fire' of justice and harmony" ("8th Fire: Aboriginal Peoples, Canada, and the Way Forward," cbc.ca).

This chapter will exemplify why and how Western and Aboriginal Worldviews are founded on and continue to encounter misunderstandings and conflicts. The most influential dream discourses of ‘both worlds’ shed light on how different worldviews can be and how these clashes are enhanced by eurocentric confinements. By choosing to write not only for a German academic audience but also a Canadian Native audience, I attempt to write and debate in a manner that blends both worlds and thus can be approached and related to by both. However, I attempt to decrease the gap that I observe to exist between the two epistemologies (dominated by language and an established eurocentric rhetoric/terminology). Ideally, this gap makes room for many different concepts, notions, perceptions, and beliefs to co-exist, making the many ideas of ‘versus’ redundant.²³ The categorization of dreams at the end of this chapter will introduce a method of blending terms, notions, concepts, and perceptions of both worlds and dream discourses while still letting the texts be the defining influence. In order to be released from eurocentric thinking and limitations, both personally and academically, decolonization is a central concept. Hence, we must delve deeper into the concept of decolonization and its ramifications.

According to Frantz Fanon and his renowned study *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), decolonization contains the intention to challenge the colonial situation and the very act of liberating oneself from this situation (2).²⁴ Fanon further asserts that decolonization is a historical process that “can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance” (2). Acknowledging that the reversal of colonization is impossible, and that there will never be a true decolonized state, “as if colonization never happened,” leads to the fact that colonial mindsets, policies, and general frameworks are still alive and at work today. (Neo)Colonialism and hence decolonization as its antagonist, comprises all levels of contemporary life, including education, politics, courts, literature, as well as our individual behaviour, internalized

²³ I am aware of the fact, that it is incredibly difficult to avoid this increasing gap. Coming from a European and eurocentric background mainly informed and influenced by a post-Enlightenment environment, it proved difficult at times to not fall back into rationalist normative thinking and writing. I hence cannot entirely discharge myself of eurocentric thought and a terminology that favours or establishes the Western as the ‘norm.’

²⁴ “Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The ‘thing’ colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation” (Fanon 2).

mindsets and ways of thinking and perceiving. We have to bear in mind then, that decolonization initially denoted the liberation from dehumanizing colonial systems in the immediate time of colonization; the actual liberation from the oppressor.²⁵ However, the term ‘decolonization’ has come to stand for something broader and timeless. The title of this chapter - as quoted from Lutz - points to the necessity of decolonizing the mind as “a process, never ending and always providing new and often unpleasant surprises and insights for those embarked on it” (*Approaches* 5). This is and will always continue to be unpleasant as it presents the Western scholar with challenges regarding different ways of knowing, thinking and seeing the world. In this thesis the different ways of dreaming and dream awareness, that also present and represent different ways of knowing and healing, may seemingly impose a threat to the comfortable place of judging “us” as right and “them” as wrong. But decolonization - as was established - requires mutuality and reciprocity. I here, want to quote a fellow PhD student from the University of Ottawa - Kelly Black - whom I met during a Canadian Studies conference in the Netherlands, writing his dissertation about Settler society’s perceptions of ‘property’ and the inflictions of such on First Nations communities:

Settler colonials must also begin with the self and their role in dispossession before expanding outwards. Indigenous ways of knowing cannot be stirred into scholarship on settler colonialism without first deconstructing and unlearning settler colonialism – to do otherwise is to feign decolonization. (Bla

Decolonization demands of us to start with ourselves.

James Youngblood Henderson explains the essential notion of eurocentrism as follows: “Among colonized peoples, the cognitive legacy of colonization is labelled ‘Eurocentrism.’ . . . In academic professorate, Eurocentrism is a dominant intellectual and educational movement that postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans” (Henderson 58). Since this is a *status quo* that has a long-standing and deeply rooted legacy in Western thought and academia, it is alive and striving in most educational settings. Conferences covering North American politics, environment, society, history, and increasingly Indigenous topics too often do not include Indigenous speakers nor validate Indigenous methodologies and thus remain in a rather passive state of decolonization. This chapter is called, “Decolonizing the (European) Mind” because I am

²⁵ Please also see Paulo Freire’s important work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

European and this dissertation is written in a European, German academic setting and my worldview remains coined and mainly shaped by these worldviews. Especially within the humanities and liberal arts sector of academia, one must start with the very foundation of our knowledge framework. Mi'kmaq professor Marie Battiste states in her work *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* on Indigenous methodologies in academic settings: "Domination and oppression cannot be altered without the dominated and the dominators confronting the knowledge and thought processes that frame their thinking, their complacency, and their resistance" (Battiste xxiv).

The epigraph to this chapter explains why it is so important to consider decolonization as a *process* that includes a healing, liberating and never ending effort from both seemingly opposite/opposed groups, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The word *process* as opposed to *concept* also designates the aspect of agency and less passivity to the words, colonization and decolonization. Colonization as a process and not a single event and decolonization as a continued effort, emphasizes the fact that decolonization is actually work. One of the main remnants of colonization and major driving forces of ongoing colonialism is eurocentrism. Eduardo Duran hence calls for a "shift of root metaphors" and explains:

Historic Narcissism (the belief that one's own system of thinking must be used to validate other cultural belief systems) continues to be an issue in the relationship between Original People and those who hold power in the academic and clinical life-world. . . . the Original person is expected to fully understand the world of the colonizer simply because the colonizer says so. When it comes to making an effort to understand the life-world of the Original person, the colonizer becomes very creative in using defenses to preserve his Cartesian life-world. (*Healing the Soul Wound* 10)

The "decolonization of the mind" is not about truths or about imposing different definitions and concepts, but about the coexistence of many different truths, and the emphasis on distancing one's self from the urge to define and to label. Georg Hauzenberger, who published his dissertation in 2014 with the title "*It's Not by Any Lack of Ghosts We're Haunted*": *First Nations Gothic and Spiritual Realism*, said that reading and writings on First Nations literature is "reading hybridity" (15). All of the texts that are being discussed in this dissertation confirm his precise statement and lay focus not on writing back or home but on writing beyond, in that they melt all too familiar aspects of contemporary Canadian/North American life with traditional Native myths and

storytelling. They reach people beyond concepts of ‘race’ and human differences by addressing First Nations issues as well as universal human struggles in contemporary societies. What decolonization has come to symbolize is the necessity to dissociate from confining First Nations literature strictly to either traditional or contemporary/post-modern categorizations.

The term healing here displays confinements inflicted by colonization and yet the possibility to subvert them. Eduardo Duran writes:

The concept of ideas existing without hierarchy is key to the liberation and healing process. Decolonizing is a process of liberation. . . . It is important to mention that I believe we must transcend the notion of ‘cross-cultural,’ ‘cultural sensitivity,’ and other such ideas that have been in vogue for some time in our field. It is critical that we engage in epistemological hybridism (literal translation: being able to think and see the truth in more than one way). (*Healing the Soul Wound* 14)

Duran’s focus on what he calls “epistemological hybridism” is also supported by Margaret Kovach (Cree/Saulteaux) who writes in her work *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversation, and Contexts* that “the term epistemology has been most frequently used as a broker word during knowledge discussions that cross the Indigenous-Western divide” (20/21). Just as it is Duran’s and other scholars’ in this field, it is also the goal of this study to try “to provide a bridge” between Western and Indigenous worldviews, rhetoric, theories and concepts and enhance his concept of “epistemological hybridism” (*Healing the Soul Wound* 14).

Because the term healing is central to this thesis, one should take a closer look at the definition and conceptualization of healing. Episkenew tackles the difficult task of defining healing while firstly clarifying that it does not mean that Indigenous people are sick and in search of a cure. Ward Churchill asserts that it is colonization and colonialism that deserves the adjective “sick.” He also introduces the adjective “wounded” as opposed to sick which is later taken up by Duran in his crucial work *Healing the Soul Wound* which has already been discussed previously in this chapter. Episkenew maintains, that “most settlers deny that their society is built on a sick foundation and, therefore, deny that it requires a cure” (11). In an article that questions the *status quo* utilization and implementation of the word and concept of decolonization, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang reveal that this denial can lead to “disguised colonialism” (11). In their article “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang make a crucial and often neglected point: Decolonization has been made into a metaphor that has drifted away from the actual

objective of decolonization, namely the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (21) to a symbolic level that is mainly concerned with the theories and transformation of our mindset. The authors assert that “the metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or ‘settler moves to innocence’, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (1). With this being said, the authors also differentiate between people/settlers who actually refer to Indigenous methodologies, theories, and frameworks from those who do not and thus enhance the “domestication of decolonization” by only “dressing up in the language of decolonization” (2). They maintain that “the easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation” (2). This quote brings to mind Blaeser’s statement that applying Western concepts on Native literature can be considered as just another “act of colonization.” Especially within the humanities and literary studies, decolonization has become a rather fashionable term, broadly used as signifying a supportive mindset in favour of colonized peoples worldwide.

This trend of incorporating a *rhetoric* of decolonization within contemporary scholarship in the broader field of American and Canadian Studies seems to have become a way to avoid the criticism of not including Indigenous struggles and efforts. Yet, the term and its specifics which are inextricably bound to the most important part of Native culture and history - land and place - is neglected, and the hands-on ‘work’, the decolonization process, and approach that involves treaties, repatriation, and identity politics are too easily put aside and ignored. Tuck and Yang make a strong point:

Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain. Thus, relying solely on postcolonial literatures or theories of coloniality that ignore settler colonialism will not help to envision the shape that decolonization must take in settler colonial contexts. Within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth (land, for shorthand, in this article.) Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. (5)²⁶

That there is a need for action and not passive appropriations of the word decolonization is

²⁶ The authors also explain: “Everything within a settler colonial society strains to destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land - this is how a society can have multiple simultaneous and conflicting messages about Indigenous peoples, such as all Indians are dead, located in faraway reservations, that contemporary Indigenous people are less Indigenous than prior generations, and that all Americans are a ‘little bit Indian’” (9).

crucial. Yang and Tuck call this exclusion, ignorance, or lack of analysis of settler colonialism “complicit in the project of settler colonialism” (8).

As the authors explain certain “moves to innocence” that conceptualize the use of decolonization as a metaphor, with the reproach/accusation of a “premature attempt at reconciliation” without really doing something, they also expose the motive of removing settler’s guilt from their minds (9). One of the most striking and wide spread examples being the “Pocahontas Exception” or the “Indian Princess” argument that plays with the uncertainty of ‘Indianness’, the possibility of every settler claiming *some* Native ancestry, and thus “imagining an Indian past and a settler future” (13). Claiming Native ancestry is yet another form of the “wannabe” format, displaying distorted views of honouring Native culture. Non-Indigenous people asserting Native ancestry again establish a “fantasy that is invested in a settler futurity and dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity” (14). The naming of the Washington football team, “The Redskins,” is not only protected but also falsely justified. When the TV Show *The Daily Show*’s host Jon Stewart invited both a handful of Native activists (among them members of the Native American comedy group “the 1491’s²⁷”) as well as fans and strong defenders of the football team’s name, one fan states, “as one twelfth Cherokee I am not offended” by the name ‘Redskins’. This same fan, once she found out that she was supposed to meet Native activists on the show, later felt “ambushed” and falsely represented. As consequence, parts of the show were not shown since she felt uncomfortable being shown on TV. When the host asked the fans present in the interview if they claimed to have Native ancestry, every single one raised their hands high and strong in the air. Later, when the segment was aired, the ridiculousness of this event was all too clear to those familiar with the topic. Jack Forbes, however, stated, that most of the - as the ‘name’ already implies - Euro-Canadians or Anglo North Americans do not identify at all with the Indigenous peoples of their country, but instead “view themselves as ‘white’ and as of European origin” (*Wétiko Disease* 27). Apparently, Anglo Americans do identify themselves as and with the Native population, but only when convenient for them, when serving the purpose of justifying racism and to avoid any emergence of ‘settler guilt.’

The concept of decolonization also calls for the discussion of globalization. In his article “Globalization’s Cultural Consequences,” Robert Holton scrutinizes “the relationship of globalization to cultural life” (141). He reformulates the three positions on

²⁷ See: 1491s.com

globalization's cultural consequences - homogenization, polarization, hybridization - as overlapping, often paradoxical and struggling for dominance (151). Similar developments can also be observed with regards to Indigenous populations and globalization. The decolonization process is not restricted to the country of the Indigenous population but includes the colonizer at "home" and "abroad" (in this case, it would be Canada and Germany/Europe). While global movements and organizations such as *Cultural Survival* or *Idle No More* seemingly enhance homogenization and hybridization in connecting Indigenous peoples and allies from all over the world, they also incite polarization in their opposition to the standardization of a Western dominated world.²⁸ As the world goes through a process of cultural, scientific, and academic standardization, people find more opportunities to unite than ever before while also detecting increasing polarizing features of the Western world and its 'opponents.' However, Kerstin Knopf pointedly observes: "local and tribal people most often do not have a voice in matters concerning themselves, their voices are overridden at higher levels, which is a regular practice of governments lobbied by business players" (*Tribal Local Global* 4). Indigenous peoples around the world have a voice, and it is us - the Western world - that need to start listening.²⁹ This thesis will focus on a few of these creative voices and discuss dreams as an integral part of Indigenous knowledge.

Literary studies scholars remain with the question: how can their work achieve action, take on agency, and thus efficiently change something to ameliorate and help Indigenous populations? Where does Tuck and Yang's article leave me, a European and hence inherently eurocentric literary scholar who seeks to write "in service of decolonization"? What does decolonization symbolize in this study, and how can this metaphorical use be even slightly 'justified' with regards to Tuck and Yang's important article? There is the spreading of knowledge, raising awareness, and the essential

²⁸ Literature surrounding this topic includes: Thomas D. Hall and James V. Fenelon. *Indigenous Peoples and Globalization: Resistance and Revitalization*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009. Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz. *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous People's Resistance to Globalization*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2009, and, Mario Blaser, Harvey A. Feit and Glenn McRae. Eds. *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects and Globalization*. London: Zed Books, 2004.

²⁹ Jenkins maintains: "Central to the postcolonial critique is the issue of voice, of who has the right to speak for an oppressed community. Indians have never lacked voices, in the sense that outsiders have usually been prepared to speak for them, to interpret them to the outside world. The difficulty is that even well-wishers have claimed the right to determine the Indians' best interests, regardless of their own wishes and feelings. . . . The more pseudo-Indians speak on such issues, the greater danger that the general public will mistake their voices for the authentic views of Native peoples, so that once again, Native voices will be silenced" (243).

significance of teaching students about situations that are neglected and ignored because of their unpleasant and often uncomfortable nature. This might also encourage young scholars of Canadian/Indigenous Studies from Europe to actually go to North America and experience their research in real-life, thus obtaining a more personal and less ivory-tower-oriented approach to their studies. It seems rather strict and stern of the authors to dismiss any use of the word decolonization outside of its original objective as useless or signifying complicity with colonization and appropriation. It is better for students to at least know the concept of colonization/decolonization than not know it at all - which is unfortunately too often the case. Since decolonization goes hand in hand with the ideals of healing and liberation (in its many different meanings), Tuck and Yang also quote Audre Lorde: “For Lorde, writing is not action upon the world. Rather, poetry is giving a name to the nameless, ‘first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action’. Importantly, freedom is a possibility that is not just mentally generated; it is particular and felt” (Lorde, 1984, 37 in Tuck and Yang 20). Tuck and Yang later state that it is not their goal to discourage those hoping to increase critical thinking and consciousness but instead to motivate and further question how these critical thoughts and inclusions of a decolonization rhetoric can also form “settler moves to innocence.”³⁰ I think their point of view and important argument leaves us with the possibility to reflect upon our own objectives and word/theory/methodological choices. The critical questioning of the deliberateness of one’s wording is essential to a respectful and meaningful contribution to First Nations Studies. That leads me to the next subchapter which deals with current academic restrictions and the struggle to break free from imperialist, and hierarchically dominated default settings.

2.2.1 Academic Restrictions: The Need for a Paradigm Shift

No matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always other ways of interpreting the world. Different ways of interpreting the world are manifest through different cultures, which are often in opposition to one another. One of the problems with colonialism is that it tries to maintain a singular social order by means of force and law, suppressing the diversity of human worldviews.

³⁰ Please also see Philip J. Deloria’s *Playing Indian*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1998. In this work, Deloria addresses historical events that made use of “Indian Disguise” such as the Boston Tea Party while contextualizing many other forms of Native costumes and “playing Indian.”

(Leroy Little Bear in Battiste *Reclaiming* 77)

Having read about the need of a “shift of root metaphors,” the desire for “epistemological hybridism,” (Duran) and the inflictions of eurocentrism that hamper academic discourses in Indigenous Studies, it is necessary to go one step further and explore what has been done so far and what can be done in future to implement these concepts.

Not only in Native American psychology (Duran) but also in the academic world of North America, people express the need for a shift from conventional, Western and often eurocentric paradigms to a more inclusive and more hybrid approach that lays particular emphasis on the experienced lifeworlds and ways of knowing by colonized - here Indigenous - peoples. In her book, Battiste brings together various scholars and academics from many different backgrounds, discussing Indigenous knowledge systems, methodologies, and cosmologies. Leroy Little Bear - who entitled his contribution “Jagged Worldviews Colliding” - mentions in the epigraph above that it is the strict need for *one* order that implies a clear hierarchy as one of the major default settings, which has been internalized throughout many years of colonialism. The rules, laws, and ways of implementations of such an order are determined and established by Settlers and their governments. Institutions - especially universities and other educational settings - that expect its students to argue for absolute truths are colonizing forces, promoting ethnocentric perspectives and increasing the rift between different worldviews. The shift that needs to be initiated is also supported and called for amongst others such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou, Maori, New Zealand), and her acclaimed work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*; Rauna Kuokkanen (Sami, Scandinavia) and her work *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes and the Logic of the Gift*, Shawn Wilson’s (Opaskwayak Cree) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*; Marie Battiste, and Margaret Kovach’s *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. These works all lay emphasis on the importance of Indigenous knowledges, especially research methodologies that include personal positioning and different research paradigms.

Smith’s work explores why research with Indigenous peoples is important but also that “the word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary” (xi). She explains:

This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected,

classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized. (Introduction 1)

Results of this are Hobbyism, “Indianthusiasm” and whiteshamanism. The false depiction of Native people in children’s literature, as well as the general silence in schools and universities about the dark side of North American history, suggest that the picture we have created must be reversed and rectified by ourselves within a process of *unlearning*. Decolonization (in a liberal arts and research context) aims at exactly that.

One of the most prominent examples for eurocentrism in this thesis is the puzzlement of Western readers and scholars regarding the semantic field used in the literature, and the incapability to accept and appropriately deal with terminologies that are denounced as unscientific and un-academic, which are often misunderstood/misperceived and thereby marginalized and discarded as esotericism. Hauzenberger feels the need to justify the more “esoteric” part of his dissertation on Spiritual Realism as follows:

Rationalism, that too firm belief in provable, or pseudo-provable, fact, is one such trap in the humanities; the discounting of all non-written text as unreliable and/or primitive, and certainly as inadmissible, is another one and in fact the corollary of rationalism. In fact, one needs to be constantly aware that academic discourse is just that - a discourse, and a rather hegemonic, tradition-centered one at that. (36)

The root and birthplace of Native literature, oral storytelling, was and is still easily discarded as unreliable. King writes that the assumption exists that “written literature . . . has an inherent sophistication that oral literature lacks, that oral literature is a primitive form of written literature, a precursor to written literature, and as we move from the cave to the condo, we slough off the oral and leave it behind” (*The Truth About Stories* 100). This postulation - taken as an obvious given - carries an immanent hierarchy that is ingrained into academic and scientific thought processes and general knowledge landscapes of the Western world, and underscores the need for a paradigm shift. King goes even further to assert that although

scholars have taken on the task of considering Native literatures within a postcolonial context . . . , most of us don’t live in the university, and I can only imagine that the majority of Native people would be more amused by the gymnastic of theoretical language - hegemony and subalternity, indeed - than impressed. (115)

The necessity to look at Indigenous concepts - perceived and labelled as peripheral - and

the employed terminology and language can lead to a greater acknowledgement and comprehension of where deeply rooted misunderstandings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society in Canada (and other parts of North America) stem from, and why there is still fertile ground for confrontation and preconceptions.

However, it is not only the worldviews and perspectives that are colliding. The ways in which Indigenous knowledges are gained, stored, and transmitted seem incompatible with Western understandings of knowledge (transmission). In the 2012 documentary *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change*, Elders repeatedly state that “Inuit culture is oral and we keep knowledge in our minds” (min 10:27). Experiential knowledge about the environment is based on interaction. Inuit hunter Noah Metuq from Pangnirtung pointedly states: “Scientists say with great authority: ‘Polar bears are in decline and will go extinct.’ When I am out hunting, I never see these scientists. Not even one!” (mins 39:23-39:40) Western (or from Inuit perspective, Southerner) scientists whose sole concentration on written text, studies, and who only familiarize themselves with the polar bear “from what they read” (min 35:37) seems irrational to the Inuit peoples who have lived with these animals for time immemorial. They actively *know* by means of concrete interaction, observation, and teachings from previous generations. The eye-opening documentary sheds light on the need for a shift in the definition and perception of knowledge. In his article “Traditional Knowledge *Is* Science,” Hobson sums up:

as southern scientists, it is absolutely necessary that we develop a system to provide traditional knowledge with a “scientific” framework that allows native and scientific knowledge to interact in a complementary fashion. Southern scientists must learn that “western” scientific knowledge and native knowledge and experience both have validity, that both must be used if the objectives of scientific research in the North are to be achieved. An effective system must be developed to collect and classify native knowledge, particularly with respect to northern resources, environment, and culture. Means must be found to interpret such knowledge so that it will be meaningful in other contexts without losing its essential native content and value. (1)

While the significance of the inclusion of Traditional Ecological/Environmental Knowledge (TEK) in this thesis will be highlighted, it is imperative to understand that the broader discourse is and should be about our perceptions of (Indigenous) knowledges in general.

Exploring the field of literary studies and its approach to the opposition we are facing, its manifestation of colonization, (neo)colonialism, eurocentrism and

decolonization, one should now elaborate on postcolonialism; or postcolonial theory. Regarding the attempt of blending different approaches, worldviews, and theories, the postcolonial concept of hybridity as well other transcultural/cross-cultural literary approaches to literature produced by ‘subordinated’ cultures may frequently emerge.

2.2.2 Post-colonialism: Rejections and Benefits

Often, First Nations history, cultures, and literatures find attention within the scholarly field of postcolonial studies. This might seem obviously implied within the term itself, incorporating “colonial,” and thus attesting its main concern to be about the power relations of colonizer and colonized in past and present. This subchapter will present some of the main founders/representatives of postcolonial theory and their key concepts that also intersect/play a role with/in First Nations Studies and theory.

Edward W. Said and his core work *Orientalism* (1978) opened public (academic) discourse on European domination, its fantasy constructs of the Orient, and the perception of the Other in everything in/from the East while not only exploring the beginnings and evolution of Western philological foundations but also its striving imperialism. Said maintains: “Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is a veridic discourse about the Orient . . .” (6). The imposition and application of Western literary theories on First Nations literature creates a similar effect. It reaffirms Western superiority and dominance while performing knowledge inspired colonization.

Another ‘founder’ of what is now referred to as Postcolonial Studies is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and her essay “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988). Her texts marked the beginnings of postcolonial theory, the critical handling of the legacy of colonialism, and the marginalization of the “subaltern.” Spivak’s conclusion that “the subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak 104) started significant discussions on representation, appropriation, academic privilege, and imperialist mechanisms. Perhaps most importantly, she raised awareness of the existence of a “subaltern,” which has come to stand for the unrepresented, the marginalized, and underprivileged while uncovering dominant groups and imposed hierarchies that keep the subaltern in a voiceless state.

The third significant ‘founder’ of postcolonial theory is Homi K. Bhabha, his most

well known work is *The Location of Culture* from 1994. The concept of the “third space” might - next to hybridity - very well be one of the most significant ones. Deriving from a racist background where the mixing of blood and races resulted in so-called “half-breeds” or “hybrids,” it is now used “in a cultural sense. . . . It serves to talk about phenomena that elude the given structure of familiar oppositions or to describe processes which transgress central boundaries like the one between colonizer and colonized” (Döring 35). Within this binary opposition and the space of *two* differing notions, emerges the “*third space*” which lies emphasis on the intricacies/complexities within these border(line)s that often create new, *third spaces*. These three spaces are always dependent on each other because the first and second space bring the third space into existence and continue to inform its content and ‘justify’ its existence.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin are the authors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* from 1989, where they discuss the concept of “writing back;” a literature with the goal to write back to the dominant colonial forces and to “undermine its conceptual foundation” (Döring 18). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that “[Homi] Bhabha has similarly asserted that the colonized is constructed within a disabling Master discourse of colonialism. . . . Bhabha has asserted that the ‘subaltern’ people can speak and that a Native voice can be recovered” (175). Here again, the focus is on the facilitation and mediation of an Indigenous voice, in this case represented by Indigenous literature, its struggle, and manifold purposes. Episkenew - who rejects the notion of Native literature as being solely protest literature – puts it into similar words when she describes Native literature as responding and criticizing governmental policies and objecting to what she deems a “master narrative;” the master narrative as “a summary of the stories that embody the settlers’ ‘socially shared understanding’” (Lindemann Nelson in Episkenew 2). This interesting notion of “writing against” (not to be confused with “writing back”) a master narrative leads to another very important conceptual process, which has become a significant educational factor in both Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous Canadian society: Decolonization.

Even before the idea of *postcolonial* studies, Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* introduced the concept of decolonization (see previous chapter). Although Postcolonial Studies and theory argue that it is impossible to achieve a state of “decolonization” since “no society can ever be entirely free of such [colonization’s]

effects” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 194), the term “postcolonial” itself poses difficulties to First Nations writers and scholars. The terminology and rhetoric of First Nations Studies - as used in this study - is shaped by a rhetoric that came into being with the existence of postcolonial theory as one of the first platforms of interest in Indigenous Studies. Dichotomies and binary oppositions such as “us” vs. “them,” the colonizer vs. the colonized, the subaltern and marginalized, West vs. East, Settler vs. Indigenous, can often be traced back to the aforementioned postcolonial theory (scholars). Although Native American Studies, alongside Black Studies and Chicano Studies, originated in the 1960’s before postcolonial theory, the latter has been able to open a broader discourse and established an acknowledged rhetoric.

Conversely, there seems to be a rather critical awareness/conception of postcolonial literary theory by Native literary critics and authors that needs further consideration when writing about a colonized country and people. Thomas King wrote in his article “Godzilla vs. Postcolonial” (1990), that he rejects the labelling of Native literature as postcolonial writing because the term itself presupposes/presumes an *after* state, a *post* state of colonialism, thus negating the fact that colonialism is still a big ongoing part of Indigenous reality and daily life in North America.³¹ He furthermore claims:

And, worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. (King 12)

Other scholars have nevertheless continued to use some of the notions, concepts, and theories that evolved from postcolonial literary theory in order to explain common topics shared by writers that have emerged out of a colonial background. Hybridity³² - a term that was aforementioned (see previous chapter) - is one of the most well known concepts

³¹ In the case of Native literature, we can say that pre-colonial literature was that literature, oral in nature, that was in existence prior to European contact, a literature that existed exclusively within specific cultural communities. Post-colonial literature, then, must be the literature produced by Native people sometime after colonization, a literature that arises in large part out of the experience that is colonization. . . . It also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature” (King 12).

³² Cynthia Fowler observes that Native American author and scholar Gerald “Vizenor’s concepts of postindian and survivance share with hybridity the notion that cultural exchange creates new contested territories that provide a space not only of survival, but also of self-determination for oppressed people” (Fowler 65).

of postcolonial theories, that has brought forward a different approach to postcolonial theory, that weaves together Native literary theory and criticism. Battiste acknowledges the connection of postcolonial theory to Indigenous issues and yet makes a significant differentiation. In the context of First Nations literature and literary theory, she asserts:

Indigenous thinkers use the term “postcolonial” to describe a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality. . . . Postcolonial Indigenous thought should not be confused with postcolonial theory in literature. Although they are related endeavours, postcolonial Indigenous thought also emerges from the inability of Eurocentric theory to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions. Postcolonial Indigenous thought is based on our pain and our experiences, and it refuses to allow others to appropriate this pain and these experiences. It rejects the use of any Eurocentric theory or its categories. (Battiste xix)

So, how does one deal with postcolonial theory in this dissertation? It cannot be left out or ignored entirely, since its terminology and theories are known internationally and they help to understand the literary texts discussed in this thesis, especially for non-Indigenous readers. Also, as explained above there are many suitable and progressive approaches that can serve decolonization. Postcolonial theory should be ‘used/applied’ when suitable and without the danger of labelling or categorizing Aboriginal Canadian literature by Western, eurocentric concepts and theories. But while bearing in mind King’s arguments, postcolonial - as Battiste claims in her quotation above - can also stand for progress and liberation from current (neo)colonial situations. Duran and Duran state: “Put simple, a postcolonial paradigm would accept knowledge from differing cosmologies as valid in their own right, without them having to adhere to a separate cultural body for legitimacy” (Duran and Duran in Battiste *Reclaiming* 87). Hence, the term “postcolonial” can be designated a subversive and thought provoking perspective that’s purpose is to shine light on what is neglected - if not ignored at all - by ethnocentric historical writings and eurocentric academic confinements. Eduardo and Bonnie Duran, in their acclaimed work *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (1995) explain their motivation and objective “to move towards a postcolonial paradigm” (5). Within this phrasing, they concur with Fanon and Battiste that a colonized people (here Indigenous peoples from North America) should not be defined and should not define themselves in the terms of the(ir) colonizer’s value systems. Postcolonial has come to mean the co-existence of differing knowledge systems, whose legitimacy is not questioned (6).

Döring introduces postcolonial *theory* and studies as teaching us to think outside

the box. The ‘box’ here often represents Western, eurocentric, imperialist, and rationalist confinements that call for a certain way of evaluation, often which result in the depreciation of a culture or a literature (Döring 5/6). Postcolonial theories have helped many students to listen to different ways of knowing, seeing, and analyzing; ways that have subversive powers to heal/liberate from colonial mindsets and limitations; ways that help us hear the “subaltern” voices and start acting in manners that conform to these new ways. This is something Indigenous Studies, methodologies, epistemologies and knowledges are doing as well. Nevertheless, Battiste warns us of the importance to stay attentive in order to not confuse postcolonial literary theory and postcolonial Indigenous thought.

With the example of Duran and Duran, who specifically use the word ‘postcolonial’ in a Native American Studies (psychology) frame of reference, and by developing notions and concepts such as “epistemological hybridism,” they demonstrate that postcolonial endeavours are the closest to Indigenous frameworks and lifeworlds. A clear separation from the term and the awareness that postcolonial theory is not Indigenous theory, does not, however, call for an overall omission of postcolonial theory when writing about First Nations literature.

2.3 Western and Aboriginal Dream Discourses

Dealing with Dreaming: Initial Thoughts and Concerns

The “Field of Dreams” needs to be approached cautiously since dreams and dreaming are highly subjective and personal and hence not really measurable and observable. Western education has only called scientific what can be proven, and with that in mind I am sometimes overwhelmed with the impossibility of the project I have embarked on. Dreaming literally happens inside of people, and there is no way of verifying what people dream about and what the exact functions of dreams are. However, dream research is popular and one of the most acknowledged functions of dreaming is to alleviate strain, most often emotional or physical distress (Kuiken et al 259). Dreaming is often connected to personal well-being, spirituality, and more recently psychology and medicine. Here, it is difficult not to enter religious or spiritual grounds, and therefore this dissertation aims to stay focused on the texts and the literary representation of dreams and nightmares.

It is nevertheless important to bear in mind that dreaming is a spiritual matter for many Indigenous cultures (Mills and Slobodin *Amerindian* 138, Mills “Understanding the Conundrum,” Mills “Sacred Land,” Goulet “Reincarnation as a Fact of Life” 157) that is often connected to a different reality of awareness, spiritual connection to ‘higher’ states of consciousness, the belief in reincarnation but also survival (hunting ceremonies and behavioural guidelines). For all these reasons, dreams traditionally created an important tool of communicating with animals and gods that would ensure successful hunting seasons; a cultural rootedness in something that would guarantee survival through food supply as well as the intertribal connectedness of Indigenous communities through rebirth.

The huge field of research on dreams and dreaming covers many different disciplines and helps to understand the framework of this thesis. It is necessary to remember that this is a dissertation in literary and cultural studies, not in psychology, nor in biology or (Western) medicine. The following chapter will give further insight into dream discourses, differentiating between Western dream discourses starting with Sigmund Freud as their representative and in Native dream discourses, represented by Black Elk. Both discussions should highlight the different origins of dreaming perception, focal points of these discourses, possible differences, and overlaps. Most importantly, it should emphasize that it is not as much about the perception and research of dreams, but about the awareness, significance, and functions of dreams and nightmares in literary texts by Indigenous authors.

This project is not about proving wrong or proving right. It is not about proof at all; rather it is about the flexibility and permeability of seemingly closed concepts.

2.3.1 Sigmund Freud: *Ein Traum als Beweismittel*

In 1913, Sigmund Freud published a short essay entitled in its translation “An Evidential Dream” whose original German title is also the title of this subchapter. In the essay he describes the situation of a nurse accidentally falling asleep although she was instructed by her neurotic patient to keep a constant eye on her. When the patient realizes that the nurse might have fallen asleep, she addresses her and asks whether the nurse was actually sleeping or not. The nurse denies. A day later, the nurse tells her patient of a dream she had during the night, which is then analyzed by the patient and considered a confession.

Hence, the dream seems to confirm the patient's suspicion; the nurse did fall asleep. The dream served as a confession and thus as proof. Freud concurs with the patient's dream interpretation and states that during psychoanalytical interpretations of dreams, not only are the final results of the (dream) associations to be considered but also the accompanying circumstances, the dreamer's behaviour before and after the dream, as well as what the dreamer does and says in the therapy session in which the dream is being discussed. His short essay was chosen to represent this subchapter on dream discourses in the Western world because it represents a lot of Freudian dream interpretation as well as laying more emphasis on dream content as significant (what could be more valid than proof or evidence according to Western norms?) containing essential information that would have otherwise remained "unseen" or hidden by the dreamer.

In the course of this subchapter I will elaborate on Sigmund Freud's approach towards dreaming. Freud states that the three dependencies of reality (*drei Abhängigkeiten von Realität*), the Id (*Es*), the Ego (*Ich*) and the Superego (*Überich*) from time to time (especially the Ego) retreat from the external world (reality) by sleeping. Only then can previously unconscious contents find the possibility of entering the Ego and thus also the conscious. What is considered repressed is formerly conscious material that has been dropped, or "pressed away" from the consciousness of the Ego back to the Id. Freud differentiates between the conscious, the unconscious, and the pre-conscious, with the latter referring to material that once was conscious and is now unconscious or vice versa and can switch between states.

A dream can be evoked/induced by either an unconscious desire (from Id) to make itself "seen" within the Ego or by an aspiration from waking life, and hence a preconscious thought with all its conflicts from the waking life, that has found an enhancement or intensification during sleep (33). Each dream - in the moment of its formation - with the help of the unconscious - asserts a claim to the Ego for either the resolution of a conflict, the removal of doubt, confirmation or satisfaction of a drive/instinct (*Trieb*). The Ego, however, is eager to maintain the sleeping state and perceives this claim as a disturbance to its rest and hence tries to eliminate it. It does so by (while seeming to be compliant/"*scheinbarer Nachgiebigkeit*") providing (partly) wish-fulfilment. This replacement of the claim with wish-fulfilment remains the major performance/achievement of dreamwork (37).

Freud furthermore differentiates between the manifest "dream content" and the

latent “dream thought” (*manifestes Trauminhalt vs. latenter Traumgedanke*). The first refers to the obvious, often illogical, confused, and condensed, or even seemingly irrational content of the dream that presents vivid imagery, riddles, and oddly connected events that often do not seem to make any sense when awake.³³ What is remembered from a dream after waking up is the manifest dream content, what the dreamer has seen and experienced in his dream. Consequently, the latent content is what initially invoked the dream: the desire or wish that is hence being (partly) fulfilled; the actual underlying purpose and meaning of the dream.

The process that “transforms” the latter into the former is called dreamwork (*Traumarbeit*) (Freud *Abriss* 33). When the opposite happens, we start to interpret the dream and hence try to ascribe the façade of the manifest content, its latent meaning. When it comes to this actual interpretation of dreams, the psychoanalyst’s work and the dreamer’s associations (links between mental contents and concepts to one another, also connected to Freud’s concept of free association) bridge the gap between manifest and latent content and thus make a dream interpretation possible (36). The initial process of falling asleep and dreaming, the wish-fulfilment and thus turning the latent into manifest content is reversed here. In order to get to the latent meaning we need to deconstruct (via associations) the manifest content. Dream content (what is remembered) is only interpreted as a façade behind which we can find its “true” meaning. That is also the reason why Freud called dreams the “royal road to the unconscious.” In the *Dream Interpretations’* section on why we do forget dreams, he lists a couple of reasons: Often it is due to the weakness of the dream content’s significance (emotionally or otherwise). The dream images might have been too weak to be remembered. Also, humans tend to remember only what has been repeated and since dream content usually happens only once, it can be easily forgotten. Perhaps most important is the fact that dreams do not comply with/to our norms from waking life, our orders, laws, patterns, or mechanisms. They cannot be subordinated by societal norms. Freud also mentions that this is the most likely reason why we tend to fill in gaps and images/occurrences from our dreams that at first glance do not make sense to us. It is possible that much of the dream that we

³³ Freud states that dreams in their correspondence to reality or the exterior world, are shaped by contradictions: On the one hand, the dream with its seclusive, remote and closed character seems to catapult us into a totally different realm that has little to do with the reality of our waking life and yet the dream is always informed and constantly interferes with that reality. Freud and his contemporaries (here especially Hildebrandt) comment on this interdependency that bans any clear-cut separation.

remember was already fabricated by our own mechanisms when awake. Because the dream may contradict everything we know and believe reality to be (32), we are trying to make the dream fit into our conceptions of “logic.”

The Id (Es) represents everything that is inherent; present since birth and most significantly our “instinct” or drive (Triebe). That it has a major effect on the dream formation can be illustrated as follows: First, dream memory is much broader and more extensive than memory in the waking state (Freud *Abriss* 34), referring to the ability to recall things in a dream that cannot be remembered or recalled when awake. Freud refers to this phenomenon as hypermnesia (Dream hypermnesia, Freud *Dream Interpretation*). Second, the dream uses numerous linguistic symbols whose meanings are not clear to the dreamer. We can, however, confirm their sense/meaning from previous experiences. Thirdly, dream memory often reproduces impressions/feelings/experiences from the dreamer’s early childhood that not only have been forgotten but also have become “unconscious” or repressed. Lastly, dreams often evoke content that is neither from the dreamer’s mature adult life nor from his childhood. According to Freud, this content can be considered as being part of an *archaic* heritage,³⁴ connecting the dreamer to the experiences of his/her ancestors while influencing the dreamer even before he/she was born. The dream thus becomes quite an important source for the study of human prehistory (Freud *Abriss* 3434).

All in all, Freud maintains that most - if not all - peoples’ dream content is driven by unconscious wish fulfillment. The dream itself can be seen as a brief, temporary psychosis that distorts, condenses, and often censors the underlying wish/desire by manifesting its latent meaning into manifest dream imagery. He also asserts that anxiety dreams (or nightmares) (Ger. *Angsträume*) are the kind of dreams that usually have experienced the least distortions (39). L.Strümpell (in his work *Nature and Origin of Dreams* 1887) is quoted in Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* within the chapter that is supposed to describe the peculiarity of dreams: “Man muß also zugestehen, daß sich die Seele im Traume ihren Bildern und Wahrnehmungen gegenüber in derselben Lage

³⁴ Compare with Jung’s concept of the “collective unconscious:” “The collective unconscious - so far as we can say anything about it at all - appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations are its real exponents. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious... We can therefore study the collective unconscious in two ways, either in mythology or in the analysis of the individual (*The Structure of the Psyche*, CW 8, 325).

befindet wie im Wachen (43).”³⁵ While “being” in the dream, or being in the state of dreaming, most of the time the dreamer perceives what he is seeing and experiencing as just as real and intense as if it were happening in the waking state.

The chapter concludes with the two following quotes: “Der Traum ist unzusammenhängend, vereinigt ohne Anstoß die ärgsten Widersprüche, läßt Unmöglichkeiten zu, läßt unser bei Tag einflußreiches Wissen beiseite, zeigt uns ethisch und moralisch stumpfsinnig.”³⁶ The dream seems to be a lot of different things at the same time upon which Freud, his contemporaries, and researchers today still do not seem to agree. Freud also writes:

Daß der Traum die intellektuellen Arbeiten des Tages aufzunehmen und zu einem bei Tag nicht erreichten Abschluß zu bringen vermag, daß er Zweifel und Probleme lösen, bei Dichtern und Komponisten die Quelle neuer Eingebungen werden kann, scheint nach vielfachen Berichten und nach der von Chabaneix (1897) angestellten Sammlung unbestreitbar zu sein.³⁷

What is striking about these quotations, is the unquestioned validity of dreams and their consequences on waking life, our perceived reality. The essay’s title, *An Evidential Dream*, illustrates not only the difference of manifest and latent dream content but also the cogency of dreams by being considered as a trustworthy source (of knowledge) and even as providing truth revealing evidence.

Here, the development of dream theory and dream discourse after Freud needs to be considered. Do dreams still have the same validity today? Recent dream theory and research has shifted more to a scientific (as in natural sciences) approach that aims at discovering the different stages and phases of sleep. The discovery of the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) phase in the 1950’s was crucial for dream research (Barrett and

³⁵ “It must hence be admitted that the mind in the dream has the same relation to its pictures and perceptions as it does in the waking state” (my translation).

³⁶ “The dream is incoherent, it unites without hesitation the worst contradictions, it allows impossibilities, it disregards our authoritative knowledge from the day, and displays our ethical and moral dullness” (my translation).

³⁷ “That the dream has the ability to continue the intellectual work of the day and facilitate closure of what has not been settled during the day, that it can resolve doubt and problems, and that it might become the source of new inspiration for poets and composers, seems to be indisputable, as shown by many reports and by Chabaneix’s compiled collection” (my translation).

McNamara *New Science of Dreaming* ix).³⁸ REM sleep occurs after a sleeping time of approximately 90 minutes where, when woken up around that time, dream reports from the sleeping person are most likely. McNamara et al write in their essay “Phylogeny of Sleep and Dreams:” “REM dreams, for example tend to be more vivid, story-like, emotional, and action-oriented than their NREM counterparts. . . .” (54). Biologists and neuropsychologists have researched the correspondence of REM sleep and brain activity that can be related/translated (in)to dream activity; they have found that drugs, especially alcohol, influence and suppress the REM phase and are hence also suspected to interfere with dreaming. Researchers have also learned about the correlation of waking/dreaming state confusions by patients with frontal lobe injuries (Edward F. Pace-Schott “The Frontal Lobes and Dreaming” in Barrett and McNamara 115-154) as well as developed the so-called “‘Theory of Mind’ in REM and NREM Dreams” (McNamara, McLaren, Kowalczyk, Pace-Schott in McNamara and Barrett 201-220) in which “the attribution of intentionality to other apparent ‘agents’ [in a dream] is to assume that they have a mind and are motivated by beliefs, desires, intentions, hopes, and fears like our own. To attribute mind to another is commonly called Theory of Mind (ToM) attributions” (201).

Although there has been extensive research that goes beyond the scope and intention of this study, it is impossible to give a precise definition of dreams and dreaming: “Although there is agreement that dreams are phenomenological, a precise definition has eluded researchers” (Stanford in McNamara and Barrett 222). In western society we have shifted further away from the validity of dreams and the revealing character that was once considered as a source of knowledge. From an early age we are comforted after a nightmare with the words that it was “just a dream” and hence not real; nothing threatening or able to inflict pain or terror in a waking state. And yet dreams haunt us in our waking life. We remember dreams. Sometimes we think about dreams for days and weeks, or share our dreams and nightmares with friends and partners, and sometimes our therapists may ask us if we have had repetitive dreams or significant nightmares. The dream forms a contradiction in itself, not only for researchers but also for us as people. In the subchapter 2.3, a categorization of dreams will expand on Jung’s differentiation of

³⁸ For a more extensive overview of sleep and dream research please see: Hobson, J. Allan. *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep*. New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, 2002.
Webb, Wilse B. and Rosalind D. Cartwright. “Sleep and Dreams.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 29 (1978): 223-252.
Foulkes, David. “Dream research: 1953–1993.” *Sleep: Journal of Sleep Research & Sleep Medicine*, 19.8, (1996): 609-624.

“little” and “big” dreams and elaborate on the significances of dreams, their validity, and their function within the context of the discussed literature.

I want to give the following quotation by Duran and Duran: “The reality of doing cross-cultural investigation is that most of this analysis is performed through the inoculated gaze of a psychology whose discourse is founded on the premise of the universal subject” (5). In their work *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, Duran and Duran critically approach the term “psychology” and the concept of cross-cultural work by complementing the above quote and stating that, “when Western subjectivity is imposed on colonized peoples, not only will the phenomenon under scrutiny evade the lens of positivism, but further hegemony will be imposed. . . .” (6). With that in mind, we have to question the significance of Freud’s research and dream interpretation for this thesis. Even though, as stated above, the dream is and will not be considered a “phenomenon” due to its connotations and judging characters, the quote emphasizes once again Western subjectivity. While Freud cannot be ignored as parts of his research may be of immense insight and value on the functionality of dreams, the subjectivity that comes with this purely Western dream discourse³⁹ now demands further investigation of (a) Native dream discourse(s).

2.3.2 Black Elk’s Dreams and Visions

In 1932 John G. Neihardt (Flaming Rainbow) documented the tremendous life story of Nicholas Black Elk (Hehaka Sapa) in the famous book *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Black Elk, a far cousin of famous Oglala Chief Crazy Horse, was a participant in the Ghost Dance Movement and witnessed the massacre of many innocent people of his nation on the Pine Ridge Reservation at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890 (Neihardt 196). He was a medicine man who received visions and dreams, one of which became the guiding force in his life and posited him as one of the

³⁹ There are several “Dream Encyclopedias“ that discuss and exemplify many different aspects of contemporary dream research. I would consider Deirdre Barrett and Patrick McNamara’s *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreams: The Evolution, Function, Nature, and Mysteries of Slumber* (2012) the best one. Others are: Pollak, Charles P., Michael J. Thorpy and Jan Yager. *The Encyclopedia of Sleep and Sleep Disorders*. 1991. 3rd edition. New York, Infobase Publishing, 2010. And: Kushida, Clete. *The Encyclopedia of Sleep*. London, UK: Elsevier, 2013.

main representatives of “Native spirituality.”⁴⁰ In the book’s foreword, Vine Deloria Jr. underscores the work’s significance:

The most important aspect of the book, however, is not its effect on non-Indian populace who wished to learn something on the beliefs of the Plains Indians but upon the contemporary generation of young Indians who have been aggressively searching for roots of their own in the structure of universal reality. . . . Black Elk shared his visions with John Neihardt because he wished to pass along to future generations some of the reality of Oglala life and, one suspects, to share the burden of visions that remained unfulfilled with a compatible spirit. (Neihardt XV)

While talking about dreams, a Tsimshian Teaching Assistant for the “Aboriginal Peoples of Canada” course at UNBC, suggested this book. Although I had already heard a lot of it and browsed through it before, his insistence on the book made me ponder the significance of Black Elk, his persona, and the book. In following years, after my sojourn at UNBC, I have heard and read the name so many times, that his role in Native dream discourse seems as manifest as Freud’s in the Western discourse. This is why I chose to juxtapose Freud and Black Elk.⁴¹

Before discussing Black Elk’s contribution to Native dream discourse, it is important to take a closer look at the concept and “Aboriginal” definition of the term ‘medicine’ and medicine men. King writes: “within the Christian dichotomy, good and evil always oppose each other. . . . within the Pueblo world, evil and good are not so much distinct and opposing entities as they are tributaries of the same river” (*Truth About Stories* 109). By emphasizing the Pueblo way of perceiving good and evil as not

⁴⁰ Although Black Elk was of Oglala Lakota and hence Native American descent, his significance is not limited to the Indigenous populations of the United States of America. His teachings have influenced Indigenous peoples across the Canada-USA borders. Nuu-chah-nulth author E. Richard Atleo published two books on Indigenous theory, concentrating on the Nuu-chah-nulth concept *Tsawalk*, referring to his nations worldview, denoting that “all is one”. Please also note that Atleo references and draws on Black Elk’s account: Atleo, E. Richard. *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004 (xvi, xvii, 30).

⁴¹ For a more extensive and critical reading of the (circumstances of) book please see: Holler, Clyde. Ed. *The Black Elk Reader*. New York: Syracuse UP, 2001. In this essay collection surrounding Black Elk, his work and his significance, the appropriation of Native culture as well as Black Elk’s dual religious affinity (he converted to Christianity/Catholic religion later in his life) is critically discussed. I especially recommend the following essays: Dale Stover’s “A Postcolonial Reading of Black Elk” (127-146) unveils the colonial mindset that is embedded within *Black Elk Speaks*. It is crucial to be aware that Neihardt’s work also includes “the often still unrecognized dynamic of colonizing discourse that assumes its continuing competence to interpret Lakota realities” (129). Nevertheless, the book has been and is still taught and referred to by Native and non-Natives in schools and universities and held/holds e.g. strong symbolic meaning for the American Indian Movement (AIM) (149). Frances W. Kaye’s “Just What Is Cultural Appropriation, Anyway? The Ethics of Reading “Black Elks Speaks” (147-168) elaborates on cultural appropriation as a general danger to Native spirituality and critically contextualizes Black Elk’s/Neihardt’s account of a Native medicine man’s (who was also an active Christian) life story.

eliminating one another, King asserts that Native writers demonstrate that there “are other ways of imagining the world, ways that do not depend so much on oppositions as they do on co-operations, and they raise the tantalizing question of what else one might do if confronted with the appearance of evil” (110). This is especially important since Aboriginal knowledge surrounding medicine suggests that it can go both ways - good and bad. Medicine can heal or damage, and so can the medicine man. King, further adds: We [King and Louis Owens] both knew that stories were medicine, that a story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure” (92). All of the novels that will be analyzed in the course of this thesis will highlight the importance of both - good and bad medicine - in that they expose Western binary oppositions by subverting them with the (narrative, literary, and literal) help of dreams. This excursion to the meaning of medicine assigns and underscores the responsibility of medicine men and women; an aspect which will be discussed in more length later on.⁴²

In the book, *Black Elk* immediately starts to talk about dreams and visions in a very natural manner. Convinced of their significance, he advises not to let them be ignored: “But if the vision was true and mighty; as I know, it is true and mighty yet; for such things are of the spirit, and it is in the darkness of their eyes that men get lost” (2). After his recount of a vision by a medicine man that foresaw the downfall of animals and the Native population, he concludes by stating: “Sometimes dreams are wiser than waking” (9).

Black Elk frequently refers to dreams and visions as synonyms, often in the same paragraph or story in which he replaces one with the other. Hence, it is difficult to separate these two concepts. For *Black Elk*, however, there seems to be a natural separation that needs no explanation. Whenever he equated a dream with a vision, the dream showed “what was to be” (9), turning it into a vision. One could assume that whenever a dream predicted the future or showed the dreamer what was supposed to happen, it could also be referred to as a vision. In the second example, *Black Elk* intentionally stresses that he did not have a dream but that “it happened” (15) while he later states that he did not tell this “vision” to anybody (16). Apparently, according to *Black Elk*, a vision can be a dream, but a vision is not necessarily always embedded within a dream. Hence, a vision is not tied to

⁴² Later in the thesis, the term and concept of healing - which goes hand in hand with medicine - will be discussed in relation to traumata and the Residential School experience.

the state of sleep and can “happen”⁴³ when awake, thus not every dream is a vision and not every vision is a dream.

Black Elk receives his personal “Great Vision” (17, title of chapter) at the age of nine, where two men who later turn into geese come again (he has seen them before in what he conceives as his first visionary experience) and this time lead him to the Six Grandfathers (representing the Powers of the four directions East, West, South and North, as well as the Sky and the Earth). As DeMallie points out, the Geese Men also represent *Wakinyan*, the Thunder Beings, something that was not mentioned or “minimized by Neihardt” (DeMallie 61/65). In this vision, every single one of the Grandfathers either talks to him, gives something to him, or shows him something of importance. Their teachings help Black Elk understand his significant role in the future of his nation:

So I looked down and saw it [the Earth] lying yonder like a hoop of peoples, and in the center bloomed the holy stick that was a tree, and where it stood there crossed two roads, a red one and a black. ‘From where the giant lives (north) to where you always face (the south) the red road goes, the road of good,’ the Grandfather said, ‘and in it shall your nation walk. (23)

Both his “entering” and his “leaving” the vision are neither introduced by falling asleep or coming to him during sleep nor by ending by waking up. Later, after his extensive and elaborate vision (extending over 16 pages in the book), his parents tell Black Elk that he was “lying like dead all the while” (37). Hence, a vision seems to be considered as separate from waking life and yet as something as real as waking life. The concept of an *extended* reality pervades his account of the vision and especially his relationship towards it in retrospect. Black Elk remembers that he was sad “because my mother and my father didn’t seem to know I had been so far away” (36). It is obvious to him that he was physically present and yet spiritually gone to a different (or altered) visionary realm as just a *different* manifestation of reality (Allen 246). He seems confident in the validity of his vision and does not subordinate its significance to physical reality. At the same time, Black Elk is scared to tell people about his vision since he is just a kid and afraid that nobody will believe him. On the one hand, there is the critical awareness of the subjectivity of a vision, that can only be “proven right” with time in that the events of the vision either happen or do not (which also heavily relies on the “dreamer” who chooses to

⁴³ In the course of this chapter and also in the following discussion of the selected texts, the study will elaborate on reality conception/awareness and its ramifications.

share or not to share and hence to enact or not enact his vision) (Briese 171). On the other hand, there is the undoubted reality of his vision that needs implementation and agency. The fact that he received his vision at a very young age as well as his fear of disclosure somewhat protected him against any accusation of fraud or swindle.

Instead of taking pride in the special role assigned to him by spiritual beings, his innocent confusion and worry make him trustworthy and his vision more credible for Western readers. The passivity and lack of control of such visions that simply impose themselves on their young “dreamers” is also reported in Jerry Mohatt’s “Lessons on Healing” in which he postulates “the vision as the source of power” (qtd in Briese 168). Mohatt also confirms Black Elk’s sensations of fear and confusion by recounting medicine man Joe Eagle Elk who himself received a vision at the age of seven and “ran from it” (as qtd in Briese 168) until his 19th birthday, when he finally approached some Elders who could help him find the meaning of his dream. Mohatt’s account of becoming a medicine man furthermore intensifies the responsibility that comes with receiving visions that urge the “enactment”⁴⁴ of such: “So in the Lakota tradition, one is sought by the spirits and the vision seeks the healer. He is both chosen and must choose” (qtd in Briese 169). The inextricable connection of dreams/visions and healing is emphasized while also repudiating especially the deliberate or intentional “vision quest,” and insisting on its insignificance in attributing or designating someone as (n)either “shaman” (n)or “medicine man” (Briese 171).

Strikingly, Black Elk - while explaining his Great Vision - talks about his literal “leaving”/“going away” by following the Geese Men/*Wakinyan* who repeatedly appear and who bring him to the Six Grandfathers⁴⁵, and the “returning”/“coming back” by being led back into the tepee where he lies in sickness. This literal as well as metaphorical terminology of leaving and returning is still used when describing unconsciousness and/or a drug induced trip (“to be gone” nowadays refers to being unconscious or non-reactive). The metaphorical reading of this terminology would, however, rob his vision of all credibility as well as responsibility from the person receiving/experiencing the vision. This is especially important when considering the fact that a vision most often conveys a

⁴⁴ Enactment is here referred to the dreamer’s response to the vision or the communal sharing. Enactment does not necessarily mean the materialization of the dream: “Among the Dene Tha of northwestern Alberta, an adverb meaning ‘probably’ is used in the narration of prophetic dreams to indicate that they may not materialize” (B. Tedlock 92).

⁴⁵ For more information and explanation, also see DeMallie, Raymond J. Ed. *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk’s Teachings Given To John G. Neihardt*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1984.

special task, power, or assignment to the dreamer, often without the dreamer being able to influence or choose the vision (Martinez 83). That one can be gone while one's body is not seems obvious to the child. At the same time, his fear that no one will believe him and his vision prevents him from sharing his vision until he is seventeen years old (Sixth Grandfather 6/7).

When Black Elk is sixteen he develops a fear of thunder and lightning. Neihardt explains that obsessive fear of thunder is followed by a necessary enactment or performance of the vision before a dreamer is able to use the powers given to him by the spirit beings. This enactment is usually supposed to be a ceremony in which the vision is shared with the community "as a public testimony" (Neihardt 125, Note 3). In the *Sixth Grandfather* it is even asserted that due to his fear of thunder,⁴⁶ Black Elk's father came to the realization that his son must have had a dream vision of the Thunder Beings/*Wakinyan* who now request him to enact his vision on the earth. If the (Thunder) dreamer does not do what the thunder beings or the spirit powers want of him, he may be killed by thunder and lightning as punishment (*Sixth Grandfathers* 6). The thunder functions as a reminder to the dreamer to share his vision, to enact or perform it, to take responsibility to make it a "communal" or "tribal" matter.

Black Elk's parents at some point also utter worry about their son's health and behaviour since he seems to have changed considerably after his "sickness," the time he received the vision (*Black Elk Speaks* 126). The vision quest is supposed to be a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood (Hodgson and Kothare 112).⁴⁷ This would also contribute to the definition of a vision as a sought dream. A dream, that usually "comes" or "happens" involuntarily, is a vision when one purposefully evokes, waits for it, thus *seeking* it. Black Elk, however, was too young to have gone through this ritual and nothing

⁴⁶ For more information on the Lakota belief of this so-called Thunder Dreamers please see: Walker, James R. *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1980: 54-61; 155-157.

⁴⁷ "About the time of puberty a boy was encouraged to go into the forest or the hills for several days at a time, fast during the day, and dream at night. . . . Embarking on the Vision Quest, the youth would first enter a sweat lodge and go thorough a body purification. Then clutching sage grass in his hand, he would climb on an elevated site, either on a hilltop or in a perch in a tree, high above the world. There the youth would pray and fast waiting on the Great Spirit. Eventually, he would make contact and communicate with his spirit, symbolic of his spiritual identity. Through this vision he would come to terms with his innermost self and accept his strengths and weaknesses" (Hodgsons and Kothare 112). For another important account on the Vision Quest please see chapter four "*Hanblecheyapi*: Crying for a Vision" of Joseph Epes Brown's *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (pp. 44-66) in which he describes the difference of the vision quest as a "lamenting" in order to e.g. get a better understanding for things bewildering the individual or prepare for special events that demand courage and strength as opposed to visions that only holy (*wakan*) men/people receive.

is written about the purposeful enhancement of the dream state. Black Elk's spontaneous vision as a young boy would nowadays be causally connected and ascribed to his "sickness." His vivid dreaming would be considered a result of fever, substantially weakening its meaning not only for Black Elk but for the Indigenous significance of dreams and visions. Again, it becomes obvious that there is a variety of different visions/dreams that one must separate from a sought dream/vision and an "imposed" vision, which often means the assignment of a medicine man (Briese 67ff, 170/171). Choice and agency are the decisive and determining factors that differentiate both concepts of a vision. Black Elk hence establishes the difference between "spontaneous" - they just happen - versus "sought" visions - as sought deliberately in a vision quest.

His visionary out-of-body experience (OBE)⁴⁸ taught Black Elk not only the "sacred circle" and the sacred pipe, which gave him a different name (his spirit name is Eagle Wing Stretches, Neihardt 26), but also taught him the Red Road and the Black Road. The Red Road, until recently, was one of the most important and well-known principles and concepts of Native spirituality. To "walk the Red Road" has come to be used in reference to fighting alcoholism and drug abuse. Similar attention and significance has been ascribed to the "peace"⁴⁹ pipe" (22). The pipe is especially used in prayer. The Red Road and Native Spirituality as an imposed and "essentialized" concept will be further discussed in chapter four.

In his 1993 article "Dreams and Visions in Indigenous Lifeworlds: An Experiential Approach," Goulet claims that Indigenous societies are

societies in which people talk about their dreams and in which other people readily interpret them . . . a society in which ghosts and spirits are as 'real' as merchants and clients, a society in which accounts of dreams and their interpretation are a normal process of interaction and decision-making. (172)

Goulet continues to explain that dreams had an impact on daily life and decisions in order to guarantee survival. His objective was to explain and educate ethnographers about

⁴⁸ The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term "out-of-body" as follows: "relating to or involving a feeling of separation from one's body and of being able to view oneself and others from an external perspective" (merriam-webster.com). Blanke et al write that OBEs "may be defined as the experience in which a person seems to be awake and to see his body and the world from a location outside the physical body" (Blanke et al 243). This definition also proves true to Black Elk's experience since especially in his return from the vision, he can see himself lying in his tepee.

⁴⁹ It is only on page 22 that Neihardt/Black Elk refers to the pipe as a "peace" pipe. In the rest of the book they use the term "sacred" pipe. Maybe the popularized version of the pipe has come to influence the author of this work.

Native-Western differences in lifeworlds, perceptions, knowledges, concepts, and belief systems. Furthermore, he states that the lines between the “world of everyday life and the world of dreams are simply not drawn” (173). I would argue that according to Mahott and Black Elk’s accounts, differentiations were drawn. It is the validity of both worlds, both realities that know no difference. Traditions (Goulet based this article on research and fieldwork he conducted among the Guajiro of Colombia, South America and the Dene Tha of north-western Alberta) induced sleeping/lucid dreaming and prophetic visions and dreams were part of “social development” (173).⁵⁰ He also brings one of the most well known and most widely spread dream “applications” in Native traditions/communities as one example of the significance of dream patterns. The James Bay Cree people are said to use dreams as a form of communication where certain codes told the dreamer and his community what to do. Here, to dream of one’s opposite sex was “an indication of game close at hand” (Tanner, 1976:220-221 qtd in Goulet “Dreams and Visions” 176). The male dreamer would tell the community about his dream of a woman and everybody, without further explanation, would understand this dream to mean the community should prepare for the upcoming moose hunt.

In this example, dreaming is a tool of communication that goes two ways. First, the appearance of a person of the opposite sex in the dream revealed to the individual dreamer the possibility of nearby moose. Second, the dreamer communicated his dream to his community who in reaction gathered their hunters to follow the dream message (Goulet “Dreams and Visions” 176). Here again, the communal disclosure of one’s dream/vision makes way for its actual enactment, in this example, the preparation of hunting. Goulet asserts that many Elders reported dreams as experiences or different states of consciousness that broadened the perspective and one’s knowledge as “‘knowing with the mind,’ a normal and recurring feature of nonverbal communication in their lives” (183/184). The statement “I knew with my mind” from Elders often meant that a dream led the Elders to something they otherwise could not have known about (184). This special “way of knowing” will help to understand the following chapters of this study. The next part will elucidate the significance of Black Elk’s Great Vision by contextualizing its content.

⁵⁰ Please also see Babara Tedlock’s essay “Sharing and Interpreting Dreams in Amerindian Nations” in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming* pages 94ff in which she explains that for many Native cultures (examples from Kwakiutl, British Columbia) lucid dreaming has always been specifically distinguished from ‘regular’ dreaming.

The Sacred Circle: A Transdisciplinary Indigenous Concept

. . . the great Voice said: 'Behold the circle of the nation's hoop, for it is holy, being endless, and thus all powers shall be one power in the people without end.'

(Neihardt 28)

The Sacred Circle or Sacred Hoop - nowadays a well known concept that was coined by Black Elk and has since been taken up, redefined, reviewed and applied - is a concept that can be used to demonstrate the differences in worldviews of both the "Western," (as in Euro-Canadian) and Indigenous (Aboriginal Canadian) worldviews. It is part of Indigenous identity - Indigeneity. Indigeneity as a concept is characterized by Armstrong (Syilx) "as ethos, rather than simply an aspect of location and ethnicity" ("Kwtlakín?" 30). Armstrong relates to the term Indigeneity especially through the Syilx language Nsyilxcen and the term for land:

tmxwulaxw. If broken down to determine meaning, the word is made up of two images: (tmxw) is a shortened version of tmixw (life force of the land) and ulaxw (the physical-earth). . . . The whole word tmxwulaxw, interpreted for meaning, could be described as saying "from nothing, the life force spreading outward, is here in continuous cycles.' (30)

Here, we have a band specific definition of Indigeneity that focuses on the relationship to the land, the environment, and each other as Syilx people, that incorporates cyclical thinking drawing from language, place, and identity as reciprocal and continual by nature. Armstrong summarizes:

My Indigeneity 'places' me, in an ecologically particular knowledge or ethos and my 'stories' sustain, not only the land, but its people. I argue that Indigeneity and the 'literature' arising from an Indigenous 'place' must reflect connection to and knowledge of the land and its requirements for the human to exist in health and that 'Indigeneity' has to do with 'place' in that particular way. (33)

Indigenous identity is hence intricately tied to land, place, environment, kinship and stories. Emphasis lies on relationality, often presented by the phrase "All my Relations" (e.g. King) translated from the Lakota saying "Mitakuye Oyasin" (Lincoln and Slagle 97), connecting an individual to his/her relational, ancestral, familial, and community's bond. That this connection encompasses not only other related humans, but also land and animals will be portrayed in the literary analysis.

The focus of the Sacred Circle lies on the belief in a circular pattern, representing in its simplest conception the interconnectedness of all beings and things. The concept opposes the Western linear worldview - Briese refers to it as (a) square (171ff) - where everything has a beginning and an end (Native: The end is also the/a beginning and vice versa). Within this concept of “no end” that might seem repetitive but does not deny nor avoid mutability (it is rather the opposite), “interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time” (Little Bear in Battiste *Reclaiming* 77). Little Bear continues: “The idea of all things being in constant motion of flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world” (78). The “constant motion of flux,” is very reminiscent of nature and the environment. Ecocriticism is actually one of the most famous critical approaches that has adopted (and adapted) the Sacred Circle as a transdisciplinary concept. The emphasis here lies on the interconnectedness not only of all human beings, or of a nation’s communal survival and persistence as was exemplified by Black Elk’s vision, but also the interdependencies of humans to animals and nature without hierarchies, which does not accredit more value to one group over another.⁵¹ Black Elk is quoted in *The Sixth Grandfather*: “You realize that in the sacred hoop we will multiply. You will notice everything the Indian does is in a circle. Everything that they do is the power from the sacred hoop, but you see today that this house is not in a circle. It is a square. It is not the way we should live” (290). The *square* house - just as Briese’s word choice - epitomizes general Western (Settler) society that postulates the sacrifice of the circular pattern in order to position the square before the circle, hence ‘clearing the way’ for Western concepts of hierarchy and superiority. The resulting imbalance that has overtaken the environment and the Earth, including all its inhabitants, is the core concern. Traditional Environmental/Ecological Knowledges (TEK)⁵² aims at the renewal and resurgence of circular patterns (of sustainability) within ecosystems and its relation to human populations.

In the very first sentences of his life story Black Elk mentions that “it is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-

⁵¹ Black Elk speaks: “It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit” (1).

⁵² Later in the thesis, environmentally conscious and ecocritical writings by First Nations authors as well as ecocritical readings will be discussed. Center of the debate is what has come to be called Traditional Environmental/Ecological Knowledge and in how far not only Indigenous populations reclaim but also in how far the Western sphere can learn from Indigenous Knowledges.

leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit” (1). The belief in a correlation and interrelationship of everything also suggests and hence brings us back to the different perception of - or rather awareness⁵³ of - reality. What Western society labels as ‘unreal,’ as strictly demerged from ‘reality’ while also imposing a semantic hierarchy. Whatever is labeled as ‘unreal’ is considered unreliable and as not having a direct or concrete impact on what is labeled reality. This view does not account for many Native cultures (Allen 242). Paula Gunn Allen writes in her essay “The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective:”

American Indian thought makes no such dualistic division, nor does it draw a hard and fast line between what is material and what is spiritual, for it regards the two as different expressions of the same reality, as though life has twin manifestations that are mutually interchangeable and, in many instances, virtually identical aspects of a reality that is essentially more spirit than matter or, more correctly, that manifests its spirits in a tangible way. (Allen 246)

She takes up, rewrites, adds, and reevaluates what Black Elk has experienced with his visions. Native reality awareness seems much broader than Western reality conceptions. The relationship of ‘real’ and ‘unreal,’ ‘magic’ and ‘concrete,’ ‘supernatural’ and ‘material,’ ‘spiritual’ and ‘physical’ - the Native perspective being of ‘twin manifestations of life’ - are in a mutual relationship that informs life in a different but equally valid way. Indeed, concrete separation of the ‘realities’ becomes redundant within Native ways of knowing. The literary analysis of dreaming in examples of First Nations fiction will show that these differences of reality awareness, impedes (or at the least poses difficulties to) Western readings of the texts but allows deeper insight and teachings when acknowledged.

Black Elks recalls his father’s story of a medicine man - with the name Drinks Water - who had the vision of all the animals dying and the Native populations living in “square gray houses, in a barren land, and beside those square gray houses you shall starve” (*Black Elk Speaks* 9). The medicine man, according to Black Elk, predicted the future, because he is convinced that this state has now arrived. The medicine man is said to have died from sorrow. The Sacred Circle has not been kept alive, due to the all-encompassing imbalance derived from the colonization of the land and its Indigenous peoples. Black Elk states that “because of living together like relatives, we were just doing

⁵³ The word ‘perception’ seems to adhere to the labeled semantic hierarchies that underlie Western rational thought and hence imply the too subjective connotation that a perception is not necessarily true but instead always a rather subjective stance.

fine. . . . Of course at that time we did not know what money was and we got along just fine” (288), thus implying that with the first appearance of the Settler’s way, misery and the bitter fight of the First Nations followed.

Goulet writes in his essay “Reincarnation as a Fact of Life among Contemporary Dene Tha:” “The topic of reincarnation certainly takes us directly to the heart of Native world-views and to deeply seated Native convictions and hopes” (172). Antonia Mills, who worked for Ian Stevenson⁵⁴ and ever since followed his research methodology regarding reincarnation and rebirth studies, has conducted substantial research among the Gitksan and Witsuwit’en First Nations of British Columbia. Regarding the hazy, slightly esoteric, as well as highly religious undertone of reincarnation studies in Western academic discourse, Mills states that it is not so much about finding evidence of reincarnation, than it is, to be open to different world views, better understanding shamanic cultures and thus representing the “idea of the interconnectedness of all life-forms” (Mills “Understanding the Conundrum” 174/186). Important for this study are the findings of research among the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island that reincarnation and rebirth are often announced to the family or a person close to the deceased individual by dreams (Mills *Amerindian* 138, Mills “Understanding the Conundrum,” Mills “Sacred Land”). In many cases it is the woman who will give birth to the reincarnate of the deceased person who is receiving these “announcing dreams” (Obeyeskere xviii). The dreaming can happen before, during, or after the pregnancy. The dreams are however not restricted to the mother of the newborn but can also come to relatives and/or close friends of both the deceased and the newborn’s family (Goulet “Reincarnation” 157). Richard Slobodin states:

Most informants agree that reincarnation must occur within a year of the death Usually at some time during the year, a pregnant woman will dream of the deceased. The first dream occurs when she feels the foetus move within her. At first she dreams of the deceased as a very small foetus; in repeated dreams, the deceased will appear larger each time. Just before parturition, the dead person will take the form of a small creature – some say a mouse – slip into the tent of the woman in labour, creep under her blanket, and enter her vagina. (Slobodin 138)

Significantly, reincarnation and rebirth were to secure the survival and the continuity of a

⁵⁴ According to Haraldsson and Abu-Izzedin’s 2012 article “Persistence of ‘Past-Life’ Memories in Adults Who, in Their Childhood, Claimed Memories of a Past Life” the late Ian Stevenson from the University of Virginia is the pioneer in reincarnation research and past life memories (985).

community, representing the beginning and the end as a circle that unfolds while providing meaning to death and simultaneously making room for the mutability of life (Obeyeskere xviii). This is also why newborns and children in their early ages reveal rebirth markers; signals of being the reincarnate of a deceased person that was close to the child's family or a famous personality of the band/community (Mills "Rebirth and Identity" 211). The process of recognition (of who has been reincarnated) is often a gradual process that relies not only on birthmarks and announcing dreams but also on the child's personality and its language.⁵⁵ Reincarnation belief research is extensive, yet difficult to grasp and further investigation would definitely go beyond the scope of this thesis. The recognition of its existence and its possible significance in ensuring communal (tribal) continuity further enlarges the concept of the circle. Especially in the literary analysis of Cherie Dimaline's short story "room 414," rebirth and reincarnation play a significant metaphorical role that highlights traditional⁵⁶ Indigenous knowledges and beliefs. However, to state that reincarnation belief is substantial and extensive among many First Nations bands would be untrue and essentializing, since research has not covered nearly enough bands prescribing to these beliefs.

The concept of the circle is a transdisciplinary one because it can be 'applied' and traced back to many different areas of Indigenous lifeworlds. The concept of the circle has also been adopted in literary studies. In both narrative and plot/content, the circle is an underlying, yet omnipresent concept that is manifested in many different ways. The most striking manifestation is the frequent framing of stories and the connection between

⁵⁵ The following quote should exemplify such intertwined and interdependent rebirth signals: "Dene Tha accounts of reincarnation indicate that the identification of someone as being a particular person reincarnated is sometimes a gradual process. In some cases, one crucial event is remembered as the final evidence that an earlier identification was correct. Consider the following example: Beverley, the woman who gave birth to her father's brother, also gave birth to one of her father's hunting partners. Her father had dreams of his deceased partner, and he suspected this man might soon be born again to his pregnant daughter. The child had reached a stage when it was grasping things and bringing them to her mouth; one day, it began to cry and could not be consoled by anyone in the household. Many objects were offered to the child, who simply kept crying. The baby's grandfather then said, 'try to give her an onion.' The mother gave the child an onion, and the child, she said, 'grabs it and ... eats it. She is really happy' (field notes, verbatim: 07 May 1982). According to my informant, except for the baby's grandfather, everyone in the family was surprised at this ending to an unusual spell of crying. The grandfather had had a dream of his hunting friend wandering around his house, but he had kept the dream to himself. Soon thereafter his daughter had become pregnant. Hence, his suggestion that the child be given an onion, as the deceased hunting partner was known for his pronounced taste of onion. After the child ate the onion, the man told the family that the baby was his hunting partner . . . The fact that this child did precisely that is interpreted as evidence that a hunting partner is back and alive, growing among them as a young girl (Goulet "Reincarnation as a Fact of Life," 163-164).

⁵⁶ I will use the terms local, traditional and Indigenous knowledges interchangeably; all of them referring to the communal, permeable and flexible epistemic knowledges of Indigenous peoples.

beginning and end; suggesting the circle comes to a full closure. Furthermore, there is the common portrayal and notion of ‘homecoming’ in each of the texts, suggesting again, that there is a holistic approach to finding a place and a home. In his essay “The Circle as a Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction,” based on a discussion of Native American novels, Lutz approaches the circle as a literary paradigm by means of contents and story-line, suggesting that the circle unfolds within six stages: 1. Tribal Identity, 2. Separation, 3. Alienation, 4. Conflict, 5. Return, and 6. Renewal Ceremony/Ritual Act (Lutz *Approaches* 203/204). Lutz asserts:

the novels seem to maintain that the circle exists and show exemplary ways to regain harmony. They do so by first depicting the protagonists’ origins and expounding their relationship with the world around them, which tends to break up the sacred hoop if the person hasn’t lost it already, but they also show that there are ways for continuity through Native spirituality. (206)

All of the six stages are also present in the selected novels within this study. In relation to the six stages and the circular pattern, dreams could be considered as the very element of spirituality that restores balance and refurbishes the Sacred Hoop. However, Lutz is aware that the circle as a transdisciplinary concept and especially in its application to literature tends to essentialize or relegate Indigenous cultures and their diversity. It is for this reason that the essay serves as a reference point for my analysis while remaining open to digressions of and from any applications of concepts such as the Sacred Circle or the suggested six stages that over-emphasize a Pan-Native literary principle.

In concluding this chapter on *a* Western as well as *a* Native dream discourse,⁵⁷ I want to quote Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen who - in her work *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* - resumes and complements “Spivak’s notion of productive crisis and interruption: the idea of bringing various, even opposing discourses together in such a way that they critically interrupt one another. With this approach we aren’t required to keep one discourse and throw out the others” (xiv).

⁵⁷ *A* discourse as opposed to *the* discourse is supposed to reflect the subjectivity of this chapter. I hope it has become clear that the choice of Sigmund Freud and Black Elk is of strategic nature and not supposed to neither postulate any sort of theory or typology, nor should the chapter aim to establish the one and only dream discourse for Western and Native dream perception and awareness. The chapter should have instead served as exemplification of colliding worldviews and how this dichotomy impacts readings of the selected primary sources.

2.3.3 A Categorization of Dreams

Blending the Irreconcilable

I want to clarify that even though Freud “can rightly be credited with ushering the dream into the awareness of the Western world at the outset of the 20th century, his approach to the dream kept the dream subservient to the rational ego, a move that comported well with the increasingly radical individualism of the West” (Barrett and McNamara *Encyclopedia* 81). The Western dream discourse serves as a good - ‘pan-human’ so to speak – foundation, while still presenting limitations that hamper the understanding of different dream discourses, awareness, beliefs, and knowledges. In their 2012 *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreams: The Evolution, Function, Nature, and Mysteries of Slumber* Deirdre Barrett and Patrick McNamara also write about “Dream Relevance,” the significance or importance that is ascribed to dreams and the “Continuity Hypothesis,” the belief that dreams and waking life are connected, mostly by the dream’s reflection of daytime struggles, decisions, relationships and other emotional disturbances (77). Barrett and McNamara also state studies show that although Western culture tends to “deem dreams as insignificant and meaningless,” (*Encyclopedia* 77) new studies have shown that there is a common belief in the relevance of dreams and the connection to waking life (77).

The Jungian differentiation between “little” and “big” dreams that “even primitives distinguish” (Jung “On the Nature of Dreams” 76) differentiates between meaningful dreams and their less meaningful counterparts. His derogatory remark on “primitives” forms a major reason for this study to not consult Jung,⁵⁸ although admittedly, Freud too used disparaging terminology that situates both psychoanalysts in the midst of the dominant Western colonizing mindset. In the article “The Influence of Impactful Dreams on Self-Perceptual Depth and Spiritual Transformation” Don Kuiken, Ming-Ni Lee, Tracy Eng, and Terry Singh argue that there are three types of significant or impactful dreams that are distinguishable “by coherent profiles of attributes involving feelings and emotions, motives and goals, sensory phenomena, movement characteristics, and dream

⁵⁸ Please also see Marco Briese’s chapter on C.G. Jung “9.1 Der Rassismus des C.G. Jung” in which he reveals racist texts of Jung on “Primitives,” a category that includes African Americans who are said to symbolize the inferior side of the personality within the dreams of American patients reducing the “Primitive” to infantile characteristics (Jung qtd in Briese 123). His notion of “Primitives” includes African Americans, but also all “Indianer” (Briese 124). This alone justifies the reasoning to mostly disregard Jung’s theories and approaches in this thesis.

endings“ (259). All of these dream types are supposed to have a certain effect or impact on the dreamer that will eventually lead to personal change and transformation. The first dream type is the nightmare or also often referred to as “anxiety dream”⁵⁹ (259). The second type is called “existential dreams” (259) and the third type is the “transcendent dream” (259). For Freud, the categorization or the labeling of dreams was not considered helpful, since he was convinced that only the dream’s façade (the manifest dream content) could be labelled, categorized, or distinguished into different types, and not the actual meaning of the dream (the latent dream content) since the latter was - according to his hypothesis - always informed and directed by an underlying wish fulfilment, somewhat manipulating the dreamer (Freud *Ein Traum als Beweismittel* 4/5). The given article however, categorizes different dreams into types according to their attributes and the impacts on the dreamer in waking life, which is helpful for the dissertation.

Here, the study’s interest also lies in the dream belief, in the fictional characters’ dream awareness; what functions do their dreams and nightmares have for the characters in the novels, and what relevance or significance ascribed to dreams can be contextualized within the discourses discussed. In order to introduce the manifold representations and levels of dreams represented in the selected novels and short stories, I will try to categorize the different forms of dreams and dreaming in this chapter into “nightmares,” “telling dreams” (both “instructional” and “prophetic”), “ecological” and “existential” dreams, according to their main characteristics, functions, as well as effects on the characters who are also mainly the dreamers.

One of the main and most prominent categories is the nightmare, which Freud designated as “Angsttraum” (anxiety dream). The nightmare in Indigenous contexts usually contains the painful re-experiencing of sexual abuse, humiliations of Residential School that incorporate the alienation from the dreamer’s Native culture and family ties, the loss of a friend or relative, as well as terror and fear-invoking dangers of violence, death, guilt, and loss of control. Nightmares often embody repressed or suppressed memories that are being forced upon the dreamer.

My second category would be what I call “telling dreams.” This is a category that also has some - however loose and not clearly separated - subcategories. The first subcategory is the instructing dream, which tells the protagonist and in this case the dreamer what to do in order to attain healing, and thus improve her current situation in

⁵⁹ For a more elaborate definition of anxiety dreams relevant for this thesis also see Ross et al.

life. The second subcategory is announcing dreams; a category that is mainly concerned with dreams, which teach the dreamer about what will happen in the future, hence tell “what is to be” (Neihardt 9). The telling dreams announce events in the future, and thus prove as a prophetic, foreshadowing element in the narrative text, which helps to further develop the plot while transcending both the narrative as well as the plot/content. Telling dreams all share a teaching or telling character, an attribute that also plays into the concept of a vision. The dream always tends to convey a specific message to the dreamer, which will help him to discover truths, lies, or attain significant realizations.

A third category is “ecological dreaming,” incorporating a grassroots and activist component to the list of categories. Here, the protagonists often dream about the consequences of resource depletion and environmental destruction, often in service of capitalism. The ecological dream hence serves as a call for ecological vigilance while surpassing the confinements of Western dream discourses by ascribing a visionary “third-space” role to dreams.

My fourth category is “existential dreaming,” i.e. dreams of a goal or a better life, which is usually represented by daydreaming or escapist fantasies somewhat hidden and subtly suggested by the broader semantic field connected to dreams such as shadows, spirits, souls, and holes. This category deals with existential questions of the protagonists who are dealing with poverty, homelessness, misery and isolation. The existential dream negotiates the relationship of the past with the present in order to trigger personal transformation and the coming to terms with the character’s life story. The concepts of healing and identity are essential for this category.

It is crucial to realize that this categorization is tentative. It is not supposed to be a rigid or finite typology with clear-cut separations. Since most of the categories overlap and often go beyond the scope of their label, a finite categorization is not intended or possible. However, the categorization prior to the actual literary analysis of the texts will help to gain a better understanding of the drastic differences as well as approaches among the representations of dreams in the selected novels. For example, the ecological dream can also prove to be a telling dream; the nightmare might stir up some crucial existential questions for the dreamer and hence transform him in waking life. All four categories are not imposed onto the text; rather, it seems to be the other way around. They evolved out of the texts and are fluid and permeable in their types and characters. The given categories serve as thematic orientations and a terminological help to shed light on the nature, impact

and power of the respective dreams.

2.4 The Sample

Of all the First Nations (as well as Native American) literature I have read, almost every work included the mention of dreams. Whether that be Chrystos' writing in *Dream On's* (1991) foreword/epigraph that it was because of a dream that she decided to write this book, or Joseph Boyden's protagonist Elijah's traumatic post World War I nightmares in *Three Day Road* (2001), or Tomson Highway's play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989) in the form of a dream. In all texts dreams were either mentioned *en passant* (while not undermining their importance) or were central for both narrative structure and plot. But not once was the existence nor the significance of dreams and dreaming in doubt. Thomas King, Drew Hayden Taylor, Lee Maracle, Joy Harjo, Lousie Bernice Halfe, Gregory Scofield, Eden Robinson, Jeannette Armstrong, Beth Brant, Tomson Highway, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, Maria Campbell, Ruby Slipperjack, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Sherman Alexie, Paula Gunn Allen, Vine Deloria (Jr.), N. Scott Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, James Welch and many more cover the realm of dreams, nightmares and/or visions in their novels. While writing my Masters thesis about "Concepts and Complexities on 'Nativity' in Contemporary First Nations Literature" I was confronted with the frequent appearance of dreaming in the selected primary sources. While trying to find out more about Indigenous, First Nations dream beliefs and dream knowledges I came across many of the aforementioned texts. They ranged from anthropological and ethnological research papers, to Black Elk's recount of his vision, to rather personal accounts of Native cosmology and spirituality all aiming at change and liberation.

After the decision to write my dissertation on the representation and significance of *dreaming* in contemporary Aboriginal literature in Canada and while diving deeper into the topic as a Research Assistant for the First Nations Department at UNBC, I continually came across trauma theories (here especially definitions and effects of intergenerational trauma) and Indigenous epistemology, theory and knowledge. Touching spheres of dreaming, the examination of trauma in literary texts (e.g. Fagan, Hill, Visvis, Eigenbrod) as well as the implementation and reinforcement of Indigenous epistemologies and

methodologies (e.g. Ermine, Atleo, Smith, Battiste, Episkenew, Kovach) has helped me to approach dream discourses and Indigenous Studies. All of these concepts seem to come together and are somewhat connected through one concept: healing.

The most significant differentiation in this 'field of dreams' is made between dreams and nightmares, hence the shift in this study's title from "Dreaming in" to "Dreams and Nightmares in First Nations Fiction." The separation of the almost inseparable - contradictory or not - pair 'dreams and nightmares' also hints (besides alluding to Ipellie's work) at the critical approach of this thesis: The juxtaposition of trauma (represented by the nightmare) and healing (represented by the dream) allows for the critical binary of colonization and *decolonization*. While attempting to separate the inseparable, it proved essential to also methodologically and epistemologically blend the irreconcilable as was discussed in previous chapters.

However, not much seems to have been written specifically on dreams in First Nations literature. They are briefly mentioned in the context of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (e.g. Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*) and with regard to Native spirituality (e.g. Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*) but nobody has yet dedicated a whole book to the (literary) significances, representations, and functions of dreams and nightmares in First Nations literature. I intend to change that.

On the selection of the texts

I selected two novels and two short story collections to be the focus of the dissertation's literary analysis. The analysis will start with Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*, which was first published in 2001 and then republished in 2009. The novel portrays contemporary realities of a remote Indigenous community and the damaging residual effects of the Residential School system. Discussing the legacy of Residential Schools and the spiral of alcoholism manifested in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) provide a good start to introduce and inform the reader about the level of devastation that colonialism has imposed on Canada's Indigenous peoples.

The thesis will then discuss two stories from Richard Van Camp's short story collection *Godless but Loyal to Heaven* (2012) that are titled "On the Wings of this Prayer" and "The Fleshing." Both stories are intertwined and offer a more complex approach to dreaming, since the dreams also convey an environmental warning to the dreamer who thus becomes a mediator between past, present, and future as well as the

enactor of nightly messages that were brought to him via vivid dreams/visions.

The dissertation will then proceed to its third and concluding part of literary analysis that focuses on two texts which both represent the category of existential dreaming. The first text is the short story “room 414” by Cherie Dimaline from her book *Red Rooms* (2007), in which Native identity concepts and (de)constructions - reflected in the process of dreaming - will be discussed. The analysis of the short story will be paralleled by Richard Wagamese’ novel *Ragged Company*, published in 2008, which highlights the existential dream of an alternative life or identity. Special emphasis lies in the importance of reconciliation and ‘sharing;’ that by ‘finding home and common ground’ healing will set in and foster personal transformation. In *Ragged Company* dreams are often equated with movies and thus presented as something purely fictional. In contrast to that, the protagonist of the story purposefully listens to her dreams, and on their basis brings the other four main characters together to form the “ragged company.” The concept of healing is to be understood in its most literal form, since this chapter also offers the discussion of alcoholism, homelessness and drug abuse among Indigenous peoples in urban environments.

3 Robert Arthur Alexie: Trauma(tic) Anxiety Dreams

He was in a room that looked familiar. Even the smell was familiar. *What is it? It smells like...Oh fuck, it's his room.* He tried to turn, but couldn't. Someone or something was keeping him there. He knew what it was. He knew who it was. He tried to move. He couldn't. He didn't want to look, but he had no choice. *Oh fuck, it's his hands!* Soft, warm white and hairy. He was being led over to the bed. *Oh fuck, lemme out!*
(Alexie 46)

3.1 PTSD, FASD, and Residential School Narratives

PTSD and FASD

When dealing with contemporary realities of both urban Native life and life on a reserve, addressing the term and concept of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as historical trauma (HT) is inevitable. The terminology itself gives most information about origin and consequence: It is a mental disorder that induces great amounts of stress after a traumatic event. Waldram in his work on the depiction and overall discourse on Aboriginal mental health entitled *Revenge of the Windigo: The Construction of the Mind and Mental Health of North American Aboriginal Peoples*, explains and summarizes PTSD as follows: “Developing out of the Vietnam war experience of soldiers exposed to a variety of battle-related traumas, it has subsequently been extended by others (e.g., Herman 1992) to encompass a wide variety of stressful human experiences” (213). Not only were these specific, originally war-related traumatic events stressful at the very time of experience but they also continue to distress the individual and hence, are categorized as an anxiety disorder. The dream categorization of this chapter as well as its title “Trauma(tic) Anxiety Dreams” allude to (re)experienced trauma impacts in and on dreams. The traumatic experience is re-encountered during nighttime and the dream itself while revealing deep anxieties is another form of a traumatic incident, enhancing fear and stress.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) released by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) identifies “the trigger to PTSD as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation” (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, dsm5.org). In the newly complemented definition

of PTSD in the fifth volume of the handbook, new focus is on the “four distinct diagnostic clusters” that accompany PTSD and are described as “re-experiencing, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, and arousal. Re-experiencing covers spontaneous memories of the traumatic event, recurrent dreams related to it, flashbacks or other intense or prolonged psychological distress” (dsm5.org). Ultimately, these described “clusters” lead to “myriad feelings, . . . a persistent and distorted sense of blame of self or others, to estrangement from others or markedly diminished interest in activities, to an inability to remember key aspects of the event” (dsm5.org). The aspect of re-experiencing one’s trauma is, in the context of Alexie’s novel, represented by nightmares that keep haunting the protagonist as nightly copies of his sexual abuse and that leave him stuck in old patterns and addictions.

Although these definitions by the manual give a broad overview of origin and impacts of trauma and PTSD, Episkenew and other Indigenous scholars and writers, such as Duran and Duran, Dawn Maracle and Joseph P. Gone, point to the unique history of colonialism and a colonial trauma that needs further consideration and distinction. Episkenew argues that

the term PTSD is not suitable for describing the Indigenous peoples response to historical trauma and suggest another term, ‘post-traumatic stress response’ (PTSR). They explain that the term PTSD ‘individualizes social problems and pathologizes traumatized people’; whereas PTSR as a ‘diagnostic profile provides a useful tool in confirming the long-term impact of colonization, which may increase access to appropriate healing resources.’ . . . Perhaps the most accurate term to describe Indigenous people’s responses to long term historical trauma would be ‘postcolonial traumatic stress response.’ (Episkenew 9)

PTSR (in Episkenew’s definition), HT, and Historical Trauma Response (HTR)⁶⁰ as well as their symptoms are manifested in the protagonist’s haunting nightmares. Barrett and McNamara complement: “Nightmares are one of the key symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a disorder that 8 to 20 percent of people develop after experiencing a

⁶⁰ The abstract of Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart’s article “The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration” (2003) gives another helpful definition of the terminology: “Historical trauma (HT) is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences; the historical trauma response (HTR) is the constellation of features in reaction to this trauma. The HTR often includes depression, self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions. It may include substance abuse, often an attempt to avoid painful feelings through self-medication. Historical unresolved grief is the associated affect that accompanies HTR; this grief may be considered fixated, impaired, delayed, and/or disenfranchised” (7).

traumatic event. Posttraumatic nightmares are highly distressing . . .” (Barrett and McNamara *Encyclopedia* 215). The narrative also shows that it is not an individual’s suffering but a collective form of a shared trauma affecting whole communities. It is therefore necessary to lay emphasis on the ‘collectivity’ of the trauma induced by the Residential School System as well as its continuing cumulative spiral that is not only a concern of the past but also for the future (Gone 687). Duran defines intergenerational trauma as follows:

These concepts [intergenerational and historical trauma] all present the idea that when trauma is not dealt with in previous generations, it has to be dealt with in subsequent generations. . . . not only is the trauma passed on intergenerationally, but it is cumulative. Therefore, there is a process of whereby unresolved trauma becomes more severe each time it is passed on to a subsequent generation. (Duran 16)

In this context, the descriptive term “intergenerational” seems more appropriate than “historic,” since historic focuses on the past/the history and seems to disregard the influence on present day realities. Intergenerational trauma today includes symptoms such as depression, anger, anxiety, mental distress, internalized oppression, domestic and institutional violence, as well as alcohol and drug abuse, often leading to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) or more broadly known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). When an unborn child is exposed to alcoholic substances the consequences will often result in children affected by FASD. The mother’s alcohol abuse during pregnancy has immediate consequences on the child’s mental and possibly physical development (Chasnoff). Although FAS(D) is not listed in the DSM-5 yet, especially in North America⁶¹ a FAS(D) discourse is inevitably necessary. FASD can result in “disabilities including cognitive and behavioral disorders (e.g., impaired memory, adaptive behavior, executive dysfunction, and attention and mood disorders) that can result in life-long difficulties” (George et al 139). These behavioural disorders and the long-lasting effects on community life will be a central issue in the following literary analysis. But in order to give this devastating status quo the context it needs one has to consider the circumstances that led to it: Residential Schools and the attempted genocide of Canada’s Indigenous

⁶¹ The numbers of children with FAS seem to be high in North America. Native communities especially are affected by FASD, due to higher rates of alcoholism and prevailing trauma. For further reference and statistics: May, Philip A. and J. Phillip Gossage. “Estimating the Prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: A Summary.” *Alcohol Research and Health* 25.3 (2001): 159-167.

peoples.

Col. Pratt's famous maxim, "kill the Indian, save the man", becomes apparent in its cruellest form in the Residential School era (D. Barker 1, Churchill *Genocidal Impact*). Barker explains that the Residential School system was a "process of education that . . . has emotionally and spiritually devastated generations of American Indian people, setting in motion a concatenation of repercussions, including cultural genocide and generations of family pain" (47). It is crucial to realize that not only the child and parents suffer, but also the following generations, as well as the generations yet to come. Basil H. Johnston, author of *Indian School Days* (1988), writes about the disturbing effects of Residential Schools:

there was no childhood. They were snatched from their homes and cast into a grown-up world, living in an institution, doing what adults told them to do. They learned nothing of the outside world and its ways, learned nothing of the ways of families and the make-believe world of children. That part of their lives that should have been theirs was stolen from them. When later, by ten to twelve years, they were released into the world, they knew nothing that they ought to have known. It was an alien world that did not readily accept them. Their communities had forgotten them; they did not belong; their families had forgotten them; they didn't know their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters; they had no identity. They were broken in heart, mind, and spirit, unready for the world outside an institution. (qtd in McKegney *Magic Weapons* xi)

The quote illustrates the vicious circle whose starting point was the Residential School. Parents, who experienced Residential School themselves, struggled to be caring and loving parents, after never having experienced these values as children themselves. A generation, whose Native identity was forcefully taken away from them, was now supposed to teach their children who they are and where they come from. The endeavour to teach children about being Indigenous in Canada when there was simply nobody around to serve as a role model to emulate left many families trapped in a cycle of alienation.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF), who has issued the study "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Among Aboriginal People in Canada: Review and Analysis of the Intergenerational Links to Residential Schools," clarified that there are undeniable links between Residential Schools and alcohol and drug abuse. Many of the survivors, as well as the parents who lost children to these schools, were prone to alcohol and drug addiction. It could also be observed that some of the students who have experienced

sexual abuse in Residential School later adopted that behaviour and became sexual perpetrators themselves (1f). The report also explains, “that the residential school system further contributed to alcohol abuse among subsequent generations of Aboriginal people, including women of child-bearing age” (1f). The high rates of FAS(D) in Native communities must be considered within this given context. The intergenerational trauma still effects Aboriginal life and will continue to do so.

Maggie Hodgson, who was quoted in Sam McKegney’s book *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School* states that Residential Schools are “the foundation of loneliness and hopelessness, alcoholism, and suicide in Native communities” (31f). To grasp that the roots of contemporary problems in Native communities as well as for individual First Nations lie in the genocidal strategies and dogmas is imperative for understanding Native literature, life, and reality.⁶²

In his novel *Porcupines and China Dolls* (2001/2009) the late Robert Arthur Alexie (Gwich’in) picks up the trauma discourse and poignantly displays its effects on an entire community. Helen Hoy argued in a recent journal article that Alexie’s novel could be read as a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Narrative, written in the perspective of a First Nations man affected by FAS(D). Helen Hoy describes that several of the most prominent FASD characteristics can be found in the novel’s main character, such as: “impulsiveness, attention deficit, memory problems, poor judgment and limited self-reflection. . . . difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality, lack of inhibition, recklessness, disregard for rules, . . . fail[ure] to learn from consequences” (Hoy “‘Never Meant To Be’” 98). The novel’s structure and plot as well as the depiction of the protagonist’s struggles can be analyzed as both a PTSD and FAS(D) narrative, but it is relevant to keep in mind that the ‘diagnosis’ of such mental disorders remains problematic. Does the diagnosis of such disorders mean the irreversible damage of mental and often physical health? Especially as FAS(D) with its numerous possible symptoms remains difficult to assess and diagnose in

⁶² Episkew comments: “Duran and Duran list a host of scholarly articles that hypothesize why Indigenous people suffer disproportionate rates of alcoholism. The list includes ‘poverty, poor housing, relative ill-health, academic failures, cultural conflict with majority society, and racism.’ They also note that it is significant that ‘these articles usually do not make mention that these problems are the direct result of the policies of the...government towards Native American people.’ Today, multiple generations of Indigenous peoples live with intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder, which is the direct result of multiple generations of colonial policies all focussed on dealing with the ‘Indian problem’” (Episkew 9).

its respective degree.⁶³ The literary analysis will therefore emphasize and scrutinize the relation of Residential Schools, trauma and dream. Ultimately, the urging question that imposes itself is why the trauma has not yet been ‘dealt with’ and what needs to be done in order to achieve the ideal of reconciliation and healing. Without denying, nor supporting the assumption that one cannot successfully recover from trauma - the traumatic event can never be made undone - Alexie’s novel underlines the experienced subjugation of a culture and its resulting ravages on Native community life in Canada.

Residential School Narratives

The genre of Residential School Narratives started out with autobiographic life writings, the most important and well-known ones being (amongst others) Basil H. Johnston’s *Indian School Days* from 1988 and Tomson Highway’s autobiographical novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* from 1998. Episkew asserts that autobiographical writings as accounts of Residential School experiences and testimony of colonialism triggered not only a new wave of Aboriginal writing in Canada but also started a healing discourse. The ethnocidal policy of ‘scooping’ children away from their families and trying to assimilate them into white Settler society was supposed to ‘mute’ the Aboriginal in the human (Lutz *Achievements* 40). Placing children in foster homes in the 1960’s⁶⁴ was just as devastating to the children as was Residential School and played a big role in estrangement, marginalization, and wilful neglect of Native culture, needs, and rights. The foster home experience has also been taken up by many First Nations writers, as Beatrice Culleton Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* published in 1983 or Richard Wagamese’ autobiographical books *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son* (2002) and *One Native Life* (2008).

Residential School survivors’ autobiographic writings “publicly expose[d] the destructive effects of internal colonialism” (88). The government did not only fail its Indigenous peoples, it attempted to erase them. Johnston, Highway, Culleton Mosionier, and Alexie display and represent “collective survival and resistance” (Rymhs 68).

⁶³ For more information: Philipp A. May et al. “Prevalence and Epidemiologic Characteristics of FASD from Various Research Methods with an Emphasis on Recent In-School Studies.” *Developmental Disabilities: Research Reviews* 15 (2009): 176-192.

⁶⁴ For more elaborate information on the adoption of Aboriginal children between 1960 and 1980 and the “Sixties Scoop,” please see: Raven Sinclair’s article “Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop” (2007).

Although the Residential Schools have destroyed many forms of Native communities by literally tearing these apart and (dis)placing family members away from each other, the collective trauma has, as Johnston asserts, also created a new form of community that is shaped by the collectively experienced suffering and the survival of such an era of genocidal policy. Native American author, critic, and scholar Gerald Vizenor with his concept of *survivance* argues that “the character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry. Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere action, however pertinent” (Vizenor *Survivance* 1). Within Residential School narratives and early Indigenous autobiographical writing, the very act of writing down one’s own or other’s experienced life story, makes room for healing, reconciliation and sometimes revitalization. Episkenew states: “It was only when stories of abuse became public and the rest of the country became aware of experiences that were all too familiar to the Indigenous people that the term healing became central to any discourse relating to the Indigenous peoples of this country” (11).

Only after Native people started to write down their experiences with the Residential School System and how it affected and still affects their lives in Canada, a First Nations literary genre started to evolve. This happened in two crucial steps: The first step encompasses autobiographies that established former Residential School students as survivors. The second step comprises the Residential School Narrative that goes further by disclosing sexual and mental abuse in Residential Schools, publically ‘proving’ by providing ‘evidence’ of the extensive trauma that survivors had to and continue to endure. A Residential School Narrative - a trauma narrative - genre started out as autobiographic life writing and is now - mostly in fiction - concerned with the spiral of dysfunctional communities, intergenerational/historical trauma induced by oppression, genocide, ethnocide, marginalization and land-theft by Settler society. Nightly dreaming in the most distressing form of nightmares represents not only the inner torment but also the attempt to repress memories and not feel emotions such as guilt, shame, and emotional pain. Lutz describes “the concept of repression and denial as psychological *reaction formations* [my emphasis] to unpleasant or shameful memories” (Lutz *Approaches* 72).

As the subsequent analysis of Alexie’s novel will show, the collective trauma and the collective anxiety dream is encountered and challenged by collective disclosure and the restoration of faith and love within the community. Especially as children who are still

developing and growing under the guidance of their parents and relatives whom they trust and often copy, the Residential School priests and nuns have instilled a mistrust, confusion, and profound uncertainty - to say the least - in the minds and hearts of the survivors. Kai Erikson explains that “the experience of trauma, at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community, . . . in the larger logics by which humankind lives” (198). But what has caused a collective dysfunction can also only be resolved by the collective - from both sides.

As one of the most devastating consequences or symptoms of a (post)colonial trauma, alcohol plays one of the main roles in the lives of almost every character in the selected literature for this thesis. It is inevitable to take a closer look at the critical handling of alcohol(ism) and Aboriginal peoples. Waldram dedicates a whole chapter to the topic, which he provokingly called “The Alcoholic Aboriginal.” Waldram explains: “No single Aboriginal mental health topic has dominated the research and discourse as much as alcohol, and none has generated such a combination of perverse curiosity, genuine concern, and outright absurdity, not to mention racism” (134). Waldram’s section on presumed biological susceptibility, takes the stand that Aboriginal North Americans are biologically more susceptible to alcohol and ranges from examinations of alcohol metabolism to “comparisons of the Aboriginal population with Asian populations” (138). As this proves, the discussion on ‘Indians’ and alcohol discloses overt racism and generalizations that have infiltrated not only cultural aspects but physical/biological aspects as well. These techniques of scientifically researching Alcoholism among Aboriginal peoples, seems to be helping the colonizer to spurn any blame and instead find biological reasons that secure their own innocence.

To the epidemic problem of alcohol addiction among Aboriginal peoples and whole communities, Waldram adds, that alcohol “was deemed to serve an important social function in an otherwise empty existence” (144). He (alongside with other scholars like Berreman, Kraus and Buffler, Curley, Mohatt) summarizes that alcohol was thought to have served as a sort of “behavioural glue” (Curley in Waldram 144): “Alcohol for these peoples, and especially its consequences of occasional fighting and sexual activity, added ‘spice’ to their lives” (144). This quote seems rather ignorant as it discards any knowledgeable approach that would incorporate colonization, ongoing colonialism and trauma. It may be reminiscent of *Porcupines and China Dolls*’ general atmosphere and the

toxic uses and consequences of alcohol and drug abuse, but it ignores the underlying presence of a deeply devastating trauma, and its purpose of numbing, or “erasing the pain and suffering associated with cultural change and degradation” (Waldram 145). For a culturally, historically, and politically literate reader of the novel, however, the horrors and lingering pain of colonialism are decisive and should be a core regard of any analysis. It might prove true that for many Aboriginal people alcoholism became a way to cope with trauma and the only way a social order and engagement could be sustained, but the quote sounds falsely euphemistic and simple (while also heavily ‘othering’ Aboriginal peoples as ‘these people’ and ‘their’ problem). It is however important to reflect upon the given quote, as it portrays the tone of the discourse on alcoholism among Indigenous peoples. That this mentioned “cultural change” was forced upon Native peoples when the first Settlers set foot on the continent is often neglected. Waldram concludes his chapter as follows:

The observation that Aboriginal peoples drink is frequently used as evidence of social disorganization, or that populations are under acculturative stress, or that they are anxious. Seldom is it determined first that these conditions exist, and then if alcohol abuse is the cause, the result, or [sic!] [are] related in any way. Alcohol studies demonstrate the quickness with which we researchers are prepared to assume that Aboriginal peoples are dysfunctional. (166)

It seems to have become the norm to look at the symptoms of alcoholism within Aboriginal communities ahistorically, disregarding the root of the addiction that has been caused by the injury of colonialism. The quote also emphasizes the prejudiced tone that established the stereotype of Aboriginal people as “dysfunctional” and “sick.”

Duran offers a different stance as he approaches alcoholism amongst Indigenous peoples as a spiritual disorder. He explains: “Jung describes alcoholism as a state of possession . . . the craving for alcohol is the equivalent of a spiritual thirst for wholeness that can be exemplified by the medieval image of a union with God. Jung continues by making the point that the Latin word for spirit, ‘spiritus,’ by which also alcohol is known, is the word for religious experience” (Duran *Healing the Soul Wound* 63). In his fifth chapter called “The Spirit of Alcohol: Treating Addiction” Duran ascribes *spiritedness* and *vividness/vitality* to alcoholism. The longing that is immanent in addiction signifies a “soul wound” that finds its symptom or expression in the craving for alcohol. Duran

explains that his so-called “Root Teacher”⁶⁵ has provided him with an entirely different approach to the “definition” and thus treatment of alcoholism; one that helped to open up notions and concepts of alcohol addiction to other theories of origin and reason. His teacher’s approach goes back to the essential definition of medicine and/or spirit as concepts that are neither good nor evil, or even more so, as encompassing both, good and evil sides. Alcoholism represents the negative and evil side of the spirit, which has been “activated” by the person affected. While the addiction exerts control over the individual, the “contract” between them is mutual. According to his teacher, the spirit longs for something that needs to be given to it in return and while not recognized for its spiritedness, it starts to take what it assumes to be a legitimate “deal:” the individual’s liver and eventually the person’s life (60ff). Duran then paraphrases his teacher who said that alcoholism and its drastic effects on human life are “for the purpose of changing the karma planted by the owl dreamers (a type of dreamer that has access to the underworld or the unconscious and can operate in a dreamtime awareness or an awareness that is available to Shamans)” (62). The advice his teacher gives him is for the respective patient to change her relationship to the spirit, acknowledge it and not turn her back towards it. By involving the spirit of alcohol in ceremony (here also: therapy) the spirit might be appeased and abstain from taking the individual’s life. The addictions as the spirit’s negative side can slowly be turned around as the longing is satisfied with what it actually needs and the positive side of the spirit comes around.

Duran’s approach appears to be more holistic and incorporates the ‘dialogue’ with the spirit and the affected person. But then what can heal the Soul Wound? For this thesis and in the context of the selected texts, I would argue it is liberation, dialogue, and reconciliation that can initiate healing. Darien Thira establishes what he calls the “fourth wave of colonialism” and argues that

a fourth medical wave of colonization and genocide has been created - a social welfare industry made up of therapeutic foster homes, treatment facilities, and consulting mental health and social service professionals (not to mention researchers and academics) who have shifted the label from ‘savage’, ‘heathen’, and ‘deficient’ to ‘sick’ Indian and/or community (Milloy 1999; Ward 2001). (Thira n.p.)

Facing status quo problems such as FASD within Native communities, homelessness and

⁶⁵ Duran continues to talk about his “Root Teacher” as a “holy man” and Elder who trained him besides his formal doctor training (ch 5, 60). In his work *Buddha in Redface* (2000), Duran elaborates on this relationship and the teachings he has received.

alcoholism in a vacuum that excludes colonialism as the root cause by ‘treating’ affected First Nations peoples as sick and by means of Western standard treatments will not achieve healing but instead foster alienation.

The term healing hence displays confinements inflicted by colonization and yet the possibility to subvert them. What is considered as healing then is to break free from colonial structures, the marginalization and continued oppression of First Nations rights. The idea of decolonization as the processual endeavour to liberate Canada from the oppression of colonial structures, mindsets and consciousness, emphasizes both healing and activism as interdependent concepts.

The following section will scrutinize the interrelation of Residential School trauma and alcoholism as a vicious circle. Here, dreams play a crucial role in triggering the process of self-awareness and healing. The protagonists’ nightmares lead the way out of seemingly hopeless situations and eventually turn into dreams. This differentiation of nightmare and dream will be further discussed in the following chapter.

3.2 Dream Reversals

He looks dead. She looked at his crotch, then at his eyes. *He’s dreamin’.* James wasn’t dreaming. He was having a nightmare. He was still and quiet on the outside, but on the inside some serious shit was starting to happen, and he didn’t want to be there. . . . it was as real as it could be. (Alexie 46)

They were still there. . . . She reached out and touched his face. Her hand felt warm. . . . He felt a hand on his shoulder and his dad smiling at him. . . . Shadows. *Is’at what I see in my dreams?’* (Alexie 177)

Porcupines and China Dolls is set in Aberdeen, a fictional town in Canada’s Northwest Territories and home to the also fictional Blue People First Nations. The community members’ lives are depicted as being shaped and dominated by sex, drugs, and alcohol abuse. One individual - James Nathan - and his daily routines and uncontrollable dreams represent the community’s disturbing past with its most devastating roots in the Residential School System.

The argument that *Porcupines and China Dolls* is not only a Residential School

Narrative but also a *Healing* Narrative is mainly exemplified by the obscure, yet intricate link to dreams and dreaming. The choice to use either the verb 'dreaming' or the noun 'dream' throughout this study is hence applied purposefully. While the former as a noun often proves to be too restrictive, the latter exceeds the restrictions of the noun 'dream' that only encompasses the actual dream, its content, and dream plot, suggesting a closed entity or unit. 'Dreaming' hence includes the process that precedes and follows the dream. A lot of the characters - and especially James - do not follow the standard 'dreaming procedure' and do not have what is considered 'regular' dreams. The familiar Western 'dreaming procedure' contains steps that seem rather obvious: falling asleep, dreaming, waking up, remembering or not remembering the dream. In most of the novels discussed here, many characters do not seem to have control over this process. Sometimes they cannot separate dream from reality (fictional/*Romanwirklichkeit*) - as a main symptom for PTSD and FASD - and sometimes dreams seem more like visions or time-travels transcending not only time but also space and general physical constraints.

The following chapter will elaborate on the topics mentioned above while approaching the different divisions and shifts as dream reversals - dreams shift from nightmare to dream and stagnation becomes transformation. In order to fully grasp the novel's plot and the role and importance of dreams, it is essential to elaborate on the influences of oral traditions and traditional storytelling - 'orature' - in Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* that drastically affect and sometimes (mis)guide the reading experience. Furthermore, orality in the text illuminates and clarifies particular narrative structures, frames, and plot progressions. The next subchapter will then discuss the striking differences made between the Dream World and the opposing Real World and tackle the questions of why and by whom these distinctions are made, and whether those distinctions are necessary/natural or not, and if so, why? The concluding part of Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* will explain the gradual shift from a trauma(tic) anxiety dream to curative dreaming.

3.2.1 Orality in the Novel

James Nathan stands for both the individual pain of his personal Residential School experience as well as the collective, shared agony of a lasting trauma spiralling itself

deeper and deeper into community life and modern-day dysfunctions. The community, its members, as well as their relationships, are dominated by this trauma. It imposes an artificial coat to the surface of Aberdeen's community life and workings in order to function and exist without digging too deep into what is emotionally straining the inhabitants. The resulting dichotomies and rifts present in Alexie's novel are especially enhanced through various devices of orality in the text. The main devices exemplifying orature are ample repetitions on a narrative and content-related level, a plot dominated by frequent dialogue (with self and others), hyperbole, a frame narrative, and the incorporation of colloquial language and vernacular.

Orature, that "lies at the heart of Aboriginal ethnic identity" (Lutz *Achievements* 37), features various different aspects that unfold a linguistically complex, un-linear narrative which reveals not only a whole community's troubled past manifested in present symptoms but also helps expose the false assumption of colonialism as a static event. Oral traditions and storytelling⁶⁶ inform the listener about "who the respective Indigenous people are, where they come from, and how they must conduct themselves in order to live meaningful lives and ensure survival in the future" (37). Inherently unique (a story is/can never be told exactly the same way), flexible, and adaptable, stories relate the people to their ancestral communal past and emphasize kinship, respect and environmental ties to specific places. However, - due to the results of what Episkenew calls the "colonial myth" ("of a story of imagined white superiority," Episkenew 3) - that hierarchically placed written literacy above oral - Aboriginal literatures are written in English as the established *lingua franca*. However, orature in contemporary Aboriginal literature is of great significance in that it conveys traditional Indigenous epistemologies and establishes a connection to ancestral ways of knowing, teaching, and telling.

The use of colloquial language and what is known in North America as "Indian Talk" or "Rez English" does not only present the reader with a familiar voice but also reinforces the collective aspect of an 'Indian' voice that is not restricted to the protagonist but to the tribal collective, the community of the Blue People in Aberdeen. The use of colloquial and vernacular language (e.g. "Prob'ly takin' care 'a business. *Wish somebody'd take care 'a my business,*" 37, orig. emphasis), and a plot that is dominated by constant dialogue, enhances the effect of (a sensed) orality in the novel. Another oral

⁶⁶ Penny Petrone's book *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present* published in 1990 serves as a well known and often consulted source on the history of Native narrativity and literature in Canada.

storytelling device essential in the novel's structure is a narrative frame, often used in orally told fables, parables, and short stories. Page one and page 303 present the reader with exactly the same 10 paragraphs with exactly the same words:

With no hint of hesitation he got down on one knee, put the barrel in his mouth and pushed the trigger. He watched the hammer fall and closed his eyes. He tensed and waited for the explosion. It came. He heard it: metal on metal. It was the loudest sound he'd ever heard. It shook his entire body and deafened him. He took a deep breath, dropped the gun and exhaled. He heard it: the peace and the silence. He waited for his ultimate journey to hell. (1f/303f)

While on page one the reader is left alone with the assumption that James has killed himself, the recurring paragraph at the end suggests otherwise. Not only does the novel's plot rely on this circular pattern by exposing the character's internal progress, but it also provides a narrative closure. Similar narrative frames can be observed in almost all of the texts that are being discussed in this thesis. Providing the stories with a frame - an ending that ties back to the beginning - reflects the circular structure signifying Aboriginal literatures as previously discussed.

The novel's frame indicates yet another orality device - probably the most dominant in this novel - the use of repetition. Repetitions of words or sentences such as "like a million porcupines crying in the dark," "the Old Ones"/"the Old Ways," "the future was unfolding as it should," "his survival depended on it - literally," "same ol'," "where am I?," "the fog," "Hump City," "Hello, Dreams" or "Hello, Dream World," "Hey, James" are abundant. Many of the sentences in the novel habitually start with the same phrasing in a simple recurring syntactical structure of noun and verb (Subject Predicate Object) underlining the impression of spoken word and the process of storytelling: "Jake walked to the table," "Karen had on an old sweatshirt," James made it to his table," "James didn't have any living relatives," "James and Jake listened to the music," etc. The phrasing, the general storyline and events as well as the plot structure, is shaped by highly repetitive patterns in order to enhance the monotonous and 'lifeless' existence of the protagonist, which is spent predominantly in a comatose condition induced by alcohol and drugs. The motionless tone of the story's beginning starts to change when the protagonist commences his personal journey of liberation; liberation from his(story's) established 'default-setting' by starting to face what he tried to suppress so forcefully.

Further enhancing the impression of orality is the polyphonic, multi-voiced storytelling. The different narrative styles are probably the most striking features in the

structure of the novel, as the story is told and depicted on various levels. Starting the novel in a fact-related documentary style, the reader is informed and educated about the fictional Blue People First Nations band, their geographic placement, environment, and the respective shared Residential School history that intricately connect the characters and sets the tone of the plot. The novel then develops into a fictional, and at times highly metaphoric and symbolic narrative of a community's struggles.

The direct connection of land to people is highlighted by the name giving process that identifies people according to geographical place: "They got their name from the fact that they lived in the Blue Mountains to the west of the Mackenzie River in a land of majestic mountains, rolling hills, wide-open valleys and tall-standing trees" (4). Storytellers often introduce themselves first with their tribal and land/environmental affiliations before starting to tell their stories. *Porcupines and China Dolls'* opening chapter called "Legends, Beliefs and Newcomers" concludes on page seven with the following words: "Soon after, the first mission boat arrived in Aberdeen, and thirty-five children were herded out of the Blue Mountains and dragged off to mission school. . . . The point is that years later, twenty-four of the thirty-five would return. More importantly, eleven wouldn't. . . . The future was unfolding, as it should" (7). In King's chapter "Like A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark" of his work *The Truth About Stories*, he comments on Alexie's documentary style: "For the non-Native reader, this briefing is too little to do much good. For the Native reader . . . who knows the history and the way the weight of this knowing settles over the rest of the book, it is simply a way of saying 'once upon a time'" (116). In separating Native and non-Native reading experiences, King does not accuse *non-Native* readership of not understanding the novel properly, but an *ignorant* readership of staying at a superficial level, which makes deeper comprehension of the novel inaccessible. Painfully ironic, he establishes the Residential school experience as an irrevocable part of Native (hi)story in comparing it with the meaning of the common introductory lines of the Western fairy tale.

As an exemplification of the bigger issue, James' life and dreams present intimate insight into an individual's sufferings by providing the reader with an intense connection to the protagonist and his subjective experiences, visually and narratively separating thoughts from 'spoken' words. James' being torn between private and public persona is portrayed by differentiating the characters' inner monologue from a public dialogue with other characters, which confronts the reader with the outer and inner lifeworld of the

protagonist (and one or two other main characters). These lifeworlds are clearly separated visually by the use of italics for inner thoughts and regular font for dialogue or storyline. Representing the first voice, a rather impartial third person narrator portrays the character's daily life, including regular 'business' of an alcoholic and his social environment. The second voice engages with the protagonists' thoughts, emotions and inner conflicts, which are being revealed by what I designate as an 'off voice;' a voice that is not restricted to James, but strongly focuses on him. The inner lifeworld is most often dominated by impulsive reactions to what is happening on the outside, employed like a secret code and voice, helping the reader realize the profound level of denial and memory repression. Through these reflections of outer events, and by giving a more honest and authentic response via verbalizing inner feelings displayed in italics, the novel conveys the impression of a clear cut separation of two voices or personalities that seem to be irreconcilable, manifesting the people's disunity and emotional fragmentation. At some point the confusion is so overpowering that it seems as if two people are having two completely different conversations, only still distinguishable by the visual demarcation of italics. For example, when James requests another beer from the waitress at the bar, his italicized thoughts reveal a more sexual innuendo underlying their body language: "Gimme beer'n a pack 'a smokes," he said with a grin. She opened the cooler and gave him a good view of what he was missing. She turned and he was eying her crotch. *Wanna sniff?* He looked at her and smiled. *Lemme sniff.* He gave her a twenty, and she gave him his change. He turned serious" (39). Here, the reader gets an idea of the off-voice's central task to disclose underlying innuendo - revealing relational information and offering insight into the community's workings - and sub(con)text.

The following quotation offers another example of the polyvocal storytelling device as it transfers essential understandings of James' inner life during the gathering of several community members after a young Native man has shot and killed his own father:

They pulled out and he was alone with Sam. *I wouldn't be surprised if I woke up 'n this was all a nightmare.* He looked at the thirty or so people who had gathered on the road. *Get back to your bingo games.* George Standing was parked on the side of the road. *Get back to your bootleggin'.* Neil was standing a little farther down. *What're you lookin' at?* A Couple of people came over to see if there was anything they could do. *What else is there to do? We're killin' each other 'n ourselves. It would be easier if we all moved to the South American jungle and drink some fuckin' grape juice!* (120)

The off-voice discloses James' genuine feelings of contempt for and estrangement from his community - including himself - while it remains obvious that the public is not aware of his inner reasoning. However, his actual rejection remains passive and he continues to play the games he is used to and 'good' at.

The narrative device of building two levels within the novel's plot, ('outer' and 'inner'), something done or said in contrast to what people feel or would not dare to say aloud, creates an atmosphere of constant dialogue inside of the people; a dialogue and negotiation they have with themselves but also at a different level of covert communication: "*I am talkin' to myself*" (74), "*I wish I could stop talkin' to myself. Wish in one hand'n shit in the other. Fuck you!*" (75), "*I wonder if other people talk to themselves in their heads*" (121). Just as his nightmares manifest his anxieties and passivity, the inner dialogue shows his insecurity and the constant need to ponder his life, past and future. James' inability to externalize his internal wishes, desires, and needs result in further denial and consequential bitterness that feed into the spiral of alcohol and drug abuse. The subliminal off voice as (self-) proclaimed self-talk, however, also symbolizes generally repressed thoughts and feelings as well as the denial that represents the greater damage caused by Residential Schools.

Accordingly, the first person narrator replaces the third person narrator when it comes to feelings and thoughts that are subordinate to the intimacy of private thoughts. This delegates a significant role to the off-voice as it seems to represent the inward, the impulsive, and the natural, all of which are repressed by James. By integrating the more personal and delicate first person narrator, it enables the reader to better connect with the protagonists and grasp the internal pain and suffering of James as a Residential School survivor. The narrative mode frequently switches and thus undermines the character's ambiguity and inner torment. James' double voice denotes his inner torment and separateness.

The novel is divided into three parts: "The Dream World," "The Awakening" and lastly "The Real World," consisting of a total of 33 chapters. The three parts reflect James' journey and healing process and emphasize the division and blending as well as the progress from Dream World to Real World. A thematically unrelated story of an old wolf that got left behind by his pack parallels the main plot. The single wolf tries to survive in the wilderness on his own and in his isolated fight against starvation, mirrors traditional storytelling and the struggles of the novel's protagonist (the wolf sequences stretch over

the following pages: 32, 47, 89, 107, 128, 146, 154, 170, 178, 186, 189, 192, 210, 219ff, 223, 230, 236, 238, 243). Throughout the second part of the book framed by “The Dream World” and “The Real World,” every chapter starts with a couple of sentences that describe the wolf’s situation and often his emotions and feelings. Chapter five “A Typical Night” introduces the wolf story: “The old wolf watched as the pack moved into the hills. He’d seen it coming, but he’d given the younger male the benefit of the doubt. He shouldn’t have. He was now alone and an outcast. He was also old and tired, but he didn’t know that. He was just a wolf” (32). The quote exemplifies the continued personification of the wolf by providing him with human features such as feelings of loneliness, anticipation, and regret. Conversely, he is downgraded to being “just a wolf.” This presentation seems incoherent since it posits the wolf as a wise ancient traditional presence and then portrays the manifestation of a degradation of the wolf. The perspective that personifies the wolf portrays an Indigenous relationship to animals while the other in relegating the wolf as inferior to humans presents a non-Indigenous (Settler/Western) perspective. Thus, the wolf story reflects the presence of both perspectives within James, provoking conflict and disunity. James downplays and often even ignores his Native roots, since the connection to his Residential School sojourn is too pain- and shameful for him to bear and because colonization/Residential School taught him to despise his own culture.

The urgency of a renewal of the “Old Ways”⁶⁷ becomes especially obvious when the phrasing of the Residential School plot and the wolf story prove to be strikingly similar. On page ten it is emphasized that learning English for the Native children in Residential school was essential: “Their survival depends on it - literally.” On page sixteen, this is reversed in that in this situation, focus lays on the relearning of the boys’ (James) Native mother tongue which is summarized again with the words: “His survival depends on it - literally.” On page 128 the starving wolf ‘decides’ to not wait for them but to track down the caribou because “his survival depended on it.” This morbid connection of the literal fight for survival of the Old Ways - be it the survival of Residential School, the wolf’s search for food, or avoiding the loss of and alienation from one’s native language - demonstrates the necessity of the restoration of the Old Ways, the reconciliation with Residential School experiences, and the rekindling of communal relations as the cure to the present imbalance. Since the wolf story is written in italics

⁶⁷ I will from now on use the term Old Ways without quotation marks. It has been established as the common concept for traditional values, worldviews and knowledges.

throughout, it structurally correlates to the novel's off-voice that depicts James' inner feelings, thoughts, and emotions. The presence of the wolf in a parallel story of survival, isolation, and the lingering threat of death - by starvation or suicide - as well as the presence of dreams, both stand for traditional values, ways of knowing and transmitting these knowledges.

In chapters 19 and 22 the wolf story is further extended as it intermingles with the actual plot, when the wolf hunts the same caribou as James and his companions and later goes to their abandoned fireplace where he "went to sleep for the last time" (143). This quote also concludes the second and introduces the third part of the book: "The Real World." As the progression of the wolf sequences shows, the story culminates between pages 210 and 243 during which the old wolf's and James' fate blend as one survives and the other does not. The novel's second part called "Awakening" symbolically ends with the wolf's death and begins with James' sober life after he has started his personal healing journey. As James buries the wolf in the traditional way of his people by burning him, his passing paves the way for James to enter the "Real World." Even though the story surrounding the wolf may be perceived as desolate because of its end by death, the symbolic essence of his death is natural and depicts the realistic circle of life. It also reminds the reader of the eleven children who did not return to the Blue Mountains after Residential School and when Alexie writes that their "life depended on it," no metaphor was involved. Residential School could have and did result in death for many Aboriginal children. The wolf, in his loneliness and incapability to survive without his pack, mirrors James's struggle and provides the novel with the possibility for an alternative ending. James' future lies in his sobriety, the acceptance of his past, and the healing nature of truth, disclosure, tradition, family, and love.⁶⁸

In the course of this chapter I continuously came back to the paralleling wolf story and drew connections to James and the different stages of both his physical and emotional development. The following chapter will contextualize the novel as a Residential School Narrative while providing essential analysis of the novel's dream discourse and the reversals mentioned in the main chapter's title.

⁶⁸ In Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's novel *In the Shadow of Evil* (2012) it is also the wolf and the interaction of wolf and human, that highlights the wolf as a teacher of family values, courage, and loyalty.

3.2.2 The Novel as a Residential School, PTSR and FAS Narrative

The novel's title *Porcupine and China Dolls* is supposed to graphically illustrate what Native children looked like after they had been dressed, shaved, and treated by the Residential School's teachers, mainly nuns and priests:

The boys are bathed in cold water, and another missionary puts some white powder on them. They don't know what it's for. Some of them wonder if the powder will make them white. After their baths, they're given clothes and realize they all look alike. They all look like porcupines. (9/10)

The same happens to the girls: "The young boy looks for his sister, but he can't recognize her. The girls all have the same dresses and the same haircuts. Years from then, he'll say they all looked like china dolls" (10). Depriving the kids from their outer 'Nativity,' which was formerly often manifested by their long black hair, Residential Schools and their leaders took the first step in the attempt to make them 'white.' They physically became nothing more than standardized/homogenized dolls and toys, lacking any individual human identity.⁶⁹

The novel's first phrase "it sounded like a million porcupines crying in the dark," that repeatedly refers to the novel's title, symbolizes the inner state of both the protagonist James and all other Indigenous people who have suffered from Residential Schools in North America. Its repetition strikingly burns the phrase into the reader's mind and trenchantly underlines that Aboriginal suffering and trauma are still common in contemporary Native Canadian community life. When the phrase appears for the first time at page eleven, it is added that the "cries are silent" and that "they'll always be silent" (11). The fact that the author uses the metaphor of porcupines and china dolls to describe the outer appearance of Indigenous children in Residential Schools highlights the disturbing and humiliating tools and effects of the schools, the schools' leaders (which would be in this case the Catholic Church and beyond that the Canadian government for implementing such policies). After having been shaved and dressed, all kids look alike. Everything is taken away from them that formerly defined their Aboriginal identity, and

⁶⁹ For many Plains cultures, especially the Plains Cree, mourning was often expressed by cutting one's hair (Mandelbaum, David G. *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study*. 1979. Winnipeg, Hignell Printing Lmt. 2001, p. 298). The fact that the children's hair was cut is even more morbid when bearing in mind the signification for some Aboriginal cultures.

what set them apart from each other as individuals. This accounts for not only their outer appearance, but also mentally, since they are not allowed to play, to speak in their Native languages, or to interact with their siblings. The girls' physical resemblance to Chinese dolls stresses Native Americans' similarity to Asian/here Chinese people and therefore deprives them of their Native identity, instead imposing a racial generalization. The same can be said for the boys' appearances. They are labeled as porcupines, which clearly objectifies their existence as animals, and not as humans. The girls are assigned the role of dolls and hence objects, and the boys are animals that lack any human skill. Even the children realize the school's attempt to "make them white" (Alexie 10) when they are covered in (what they do not know to be) white delousing powder. The children's Native appearance was literally erased (shaved/cut off). Furthermore, the children had to learn how to read and write in English and forget their community's place names since they were often in Native languages: "They cut his tongue out, and he can't talk about it" (15). The memories of their parents and homes were forcefully erased from their minds, creating emptiness and solitude that would not even fade away thirty years later: "For as long as he lives, he's never going to forgive his parents for sending him away. . . . He's never going to forgive the church for putting him through hell" (15). The feelings of guilt, anger, shame, disappointment, and estrangement that the Residential School survivor felt as a child is the same as he feels in adulthood with the only difference, that his mechanisms to suppress these emotions have further developed and are displayed in abusive behaviors.

One very important quote of the novel adequately summarizes the significant role of dreaming and manifests James' anxiety dreams as the identification marker for PTSD: "He thought about the dream. Fuck it. Can't remember it, can't hurt you." Having survived sexual and mental abuse in Residential School, James is now a heavy alcoholic and lives a life that is as monotonous and repetitive as his dreaming. The quote succinctly portrays not only James' detrimental coping behaviour but also that his traumatic past lingers in every aspect of his life in the form of past memories in present nightmares. He tries to protect himself using coping mechanisms, such as alcohol, drugs, and sex that help him to keep up the mental (and probably also physical) "fog," (41, 43, 44, 47, 63, 78, 83)⁷⁰ which in turn allow his psyche/mind to deal with everything except his past.

⁷⁰ The fog is not only related to his drug and alcohol addiction, but to the division - or lack of it - of dream and real, which will be discussed in more detail in the course of this chapter.

In his nightmares, James is forced to relive the abuse, resulting in self-condemnation and self-medication, thus pushing himself even further into the spiral of alcoholism. Due to the recurring images and issues of the dreams and nightmares, one can figure out what happens in the characters' "Real World" and his "Dream World," and in how far one informs, shapes, and controls the other. James' dreams are about his sexual abuse, the absence and death of his parents, and other painful experiences he had to go through in what he calls the "hellhole" or "shithole," (7, 16, 18, etc.) referring to the Residential School. Being already a heavy alcoholic, the plot setting is restricted to only a few places at the beginning, one being the local pub "Saloon" (33) where James gets drunk regularly. Using numerous sexual encounters as a means of comforting as well as silencing his own mind, he tries to forget what has happened without having to admit and face the trauma caused by the devastating policy of his own government. While alcohol is known to cause and used for dream inhibition, James' nightmares are the most prominent symptom of his trauma and hence are not successfully impeded by his alcohol abuse.

Lutz resumes that when once an awful event happens to a person, despite forcibly trying to suppress, it can never really be forgotten:

Rather, even forgotten or repressed memories, are stored in the pre- and subconscious parts of one's psyche, and from there continue to influence one's feelings, thoughts and actions. The more psychic energy we use to push aside or "press under" memories, especially traumatic ones of guilt, loss, pain or shame, the less will we be able to understand adequately ourselves and reality around us, and the more likely we will become to react inflexibly, intolerantly and in an irrational, often authoritarian manner. Unrealistic and inadequate actions are most likely to occur when those parts of our soul . . . are touched upon, which we are most anxious to suppress, i.e., when repressed past experiences are called back to memory by similar or related events in the present. (Lutz *Approaches* 72)

The patterns described in Lutz' quote will be discussed as major aspects nurturing the vicious circle with which the protagonist James finds himself. His inflexible behavioural patterns that are supposed to further suppress and restrain his painful memories eventually lead to self-destructive tendencies. The delusive pattern of repressing - with the help of alcohol, sex and drug addiction - painful memories, along with living in denial rather than facing the trauma, and his emotions are exemplified in *Porcupines and China Dolls*.

The tone of the novel portrays the community as resigned and stuck in old patterns: "Same shit - different decade" (53). This rather smart analysis of his community and his

own situation reveals not only dysfunctional behaviours but also the effects of PTSD. The community's chief David ponders: "Wonder what sort 'a shit my People created for me last night. He dreaded waking up to more assaults, breaks and enters, child neglect, child abuse, sexual abuse, spousal abuse, Elder abuse, more abuse than he cared to think of" (89). Aberdeen serves as the epitomized reaction to postcolonial stress induced by Residential Schools. In their alcohol, drug, and sex-dominated social lives, the members of the Blue People First Nation are wrapped up in response mechanisms that keep them stuck in the very situation from which they want to get away. James sums up: "Been there, saw it, sucked it" (63). Nothing is new in Aberdeen, and nothing looks like it is changing anytime soon. When James calls his nightmares "*Big fuckin' Indian dreams*" (105), it becomes obvious that the nightmares are tied to 'Indian' experiences and more specifically to 'Indian' Residential School experiences. He adds: "*Guaranteed to keep you in apathy 'n self pity the rest 'a your life. Or in booze. Or both, if you're lucky*" (105). Analyzing his own state of mind so relentlessly highlights his smart analytical skills, self-awareness and inability to transform these skills into action. Being aware that the shared colonial history and Residential School legacy are the reasons why he and his community are trapped in mostly emotional, spiritual, but also physical disorders, still does not enable him to take charge and change the course of action, at this point.

The reoccurring images of a past overshadowed by alienation, loss, and abuse are further underscored by the repetition of selected sentences throughout the book. The phrases "it sounded like a million porcupines crying in the dark" (11, 14, 82, 90, 136, 144), "Same ol', same ol'" (48, 54, 90), "*Hump City*" (53, 55, 75, 86) as well as "the future was unfolding as it should" (7, 306) occur up to eight times each. The last phrase as framing device represents the future as being twofold and ambiguous since the reader is presented with two different outcomes. One ends with death, the other with love and a (rather) 'happy ending.' The story may aim at showing how the future unfolded when Native children were taken away from their parents and heritage as First Nations people, as well as the future when the very same children found peace and reconciliation with their past and painful memories. It is not about the impossible task of 'undoing' the past, but to learn to live with it and find one's place in the world as is. The guideline of dealing with present struggles in order to resolve past conflicts seems difficult to implement because emotions of guilt, blame, and shame are too ingrained into the children's minds and hearts. Even as adults the leap occurs to be too hazardous to risk it alone.

The other two recurring phrases, “same ol’ same ‘ol” and “*Hump city*,” mainly occur in the book’s first chapters. They stand for the daily life of the main characters and their reoccurring patterns of going to the bar, getting drunk, smoking, fighting, and having sex with one another. Who had sex with whom, and who is married to or divorced from whom, is confusing, and the reader often encounters difficulty in following the complex relationships portrayed in the story. This confusion over relationships plays with a common stereotype that Native people are all related to each other.⁷¹ The fact that the stereotype is embraced by the characters of the book also portrays that this very stereotype has been reversed in a time where drugs and alcohol drown out morality, since the orally transmitted knowledge of who is related to whom in a tribal context is gone.⁷² At one point a character even makes fun of this preconception when his daughter tells him about her new boyfriend:

’You know he’s your first cousin? her dad asked.
‘What?’
‘Just kiddin’’, he said. (165)

James states that he gets drunk to get rid of his dreams and to stop thinking about what happened to him. Distracting their minds builds a routine for the characters in which everybody has his and her fixed roles: the heartbreaker, the ‘slut,’ the woman to marry, the father figure, and the little brother who needs protection. The blaring monotony of their lives is shown by the statement that nothing really changes over time and everything stays “the same ol’.” Only when disclosure of the traumatic events of sexual and mental abuse during the community’s healing workshop happens, the repetitions decline in frequency, and the novel’s atmosphere changes from desperation, anger, and monotony to hope, healing, and action/movement. Later on, this change is further reinforced by James’ departure, leaving his community in the Northwest Territories behind and moving to Alberta in order to attend art classes at university.

However, the change in James’ life does not make his nightmares disappear and so remains the struggle to live with his trauma. At the end of the novel the reader is faced

⁷¹ In his debut novel *The Pale Indian* (2005), Robert Arthur Alexie wrote about the difficulty of a young couple that finds out that they are siblings.

⁷² Maria Campbell’s poem “Jacob” from *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (1995) addresses the same problem: “My granfawder his name he was Kannap / but dah whitemans dey call him Jim Boy / so hees Indian name he gets los. / Dats why we don know who his peoples dey are. / We los lots of our relations like dat. / Dey get dah whitemans name / den no body / he knows who his peoples dey are anymore” (Campbell in Moss & Sugars 478).

with exactly the same scene with which the novel began: James has stopped alongside a highway with the intention to commit suicide. While the scene in the beginning ended abruptly without revealing whether James is dead or not, the ending scene gives clarity about the outcome: Louise, the woman James loves but never had the courage to tell, stands next to him and confesses her love: “It was the last voice on earth he thought he’d hear. It was the voice of a reason. It was the voice of hope” (305). He did not commit suicide and instead is saved by a value as simple as love.

Due to his sexual abuse in Residential School, James represents a whole generation that suffers - often unknowingly and untreated - from PTSD. The novel’s early announcement that the children who came back will never be able to talk about it is further established in the novel by the prevalent silence and the urge “to get rid of the past” (Alexie 151) which results in self-medication and a stagnation that keeps whole communities stuck in their disorder, alienated from Native traditions and ancestral relations to land and place. While the ‘lost children’ also represent resulted ‘lost identities,’ James’ self talk reveals a deeper level of understanding between the correlation of his identity and his nightmares. Hoy comments on the novel: “Alexie's explicit focus is on the direct line between generations of residential-school damage and contemporary pain and dysfunction. Too often Native people have heard the ignorant, uneducated and eurocentric speech to “finally get over it” (97).

The very act of constantly discarding his instinct and knowledge/self-awareness and instead trying to undermine and repress his nightmares increases their power over him. “He’d pushed it so far back in his memory that it was nothing more than a dream. But it was real and he knew it” (100). It becomes obvious that the spiral of alcohol and nightmares keep James captive in what seems to be a fatal trap. The quote demonstrates James’ awareness of his attempt to repress and the failure of it. His efforts to euphemize his nightmare(s) as “nothing more than a dream” is not successful and the further the novel proceeds, the more obvious it becomes that his irritated/angered statement about his dreams - “can't remember it, can't hurt you” - is actually not true. Quite the contrary is the case. His defense strategy of suppressing painful memories and disregarding his nightmares is what leads him to several suicide attempts. Self-destructive and suicidal behaviours are common in many Aboriginal communities and affect mostly young Native

adolescents. Ronald Niezen, who studied cluster suicide⁷³ incidents in Aboriginal communities (villages), states that suicides are often generated by parental neglect, child abuse, loneliness, and the impression of being invisible or not important (179). *Porcupines and China Dolls* reinforces this impression and furthermore displays, that via this shared loneliness and experiences of abuse, evolves a kind of “perverse sociability in which self-destruction itself becomes a basis for linkage” and solidarity (179). Given the fact that basically all of the characters in the book have endured sexual abuse - often even by the same priest - underlines the sad effects of such shared, yet often unrevealed, experiences.

James tries to commit suicide several times throughout the novel, which he indicates with the symbolic expression of a “one way trip to the hills:”

He reached under the sofa and pulled out the homemade gun case his mom had made in another time and another place. He smelled it, and the memories returned. Tanned moose skin! Mom! Dad! The Redstone! Home! He didn't fight the tears this time. Mission Schools! Residential Schools! Hostels! Hellholes! Shitholes! He closed his eyes and hung his head. Dark rooms! Hairy hands! False promises! Little boys! Shower rooms! Once again he dropped to his knees. The pain! The foul stench of his breath! His hairy hands! The scream that came had been bottled up for many years and then some. Why? You know why. Fuck off! He wiped the tears from his eyes and took out the gun. Why not? Why not! Nothin' to it. 'Course not. Put it in my mouth 'n pull 'a fuckin' trigger. (141/142)

The numerous suicide scenes - as a constant way for the main character to feel in control of his life - “He'd done it a million times. It was almost natural” (227) - reveal James' deeply ingrained feeling of utter despair. What he repeatedly calls his “ultimate journey to hell” (1f, 303f) promises on the one hand to provide him with “*one nanosecond of pain, then peace. Forever. No pain. No memories. No feelings*” (227) and on the other hand to be just another experience of what triggered his urge to kill himself. His conviction to be going to hell and not to heaven is tied to his experiences at Residential School - that he also commonly refers to as the “hellhole” (16, 18, 142) - and hence means a similar experience as hell after death. Obviously, his intense feelings of guilt and shame by condemning himself to be going to hell hamper change and positive outlook on life. The ambiguity of his urgent need to repress the memories from the “hellhole” and yet wanting to kill himself which would lead to “hell” reappears when he is confronted with other

⁷³ Niezen defines “cluster suicides” as a “high number of self-inflicted deaths occurring in temporal *and* geographical proximity” (179).

community members' confession to have also endured sexual abuse.

Deep down he might be aware of the fact, that the second after-death-hell will not ease the pain of the first Residential School-hell. Although he wants to and tries to kill himself numerous times, he never manages to do so. Even when he starts his personal healing journey within a communal framework, he is not entirely liberated from either his memories from the hellhole or the desire to end his life. Just as the wolf is not "just a wolf" and his dreams are not "just dreams," the process of meeting this conflict of two worlds is the novel's major plot development. In the following subchapter, James' liberation process as well as its triggers will be discussed in more detail.

"Hello dreams:" The Dream World vs. the Real World

He almost fell off the couch. He looked around for Brenda. *Did she go into the Dream World?*" (63); *"Did it really happen? Maybe it was a dream.* (100)

There is an explicit distinction between the Dream World and the Real World, structurally as well as contextually separated. The structural outline that separates the Dream World from the Real World in different parts of the book, the use of language, and the 'two voices' often give clues about James' state of mind - wakefulness versus sleeping and hence dreaming - and his personal progression. Although the text and language suggest a clear distinction, even the protagonist himself often does not know whether he is dreaming or not. As the reader relies on the narrator to grasp and convey the separation of 'dream' and 'real,' he is repeatedly let down. James often fails to differentiate between the two 'worlds' himself.

That the recurring fog is clouding his vision/eyesight and clarity of his mind is especially obvious in his inability to separate dream from real: "The fog enveloped him, and he time-travelled or went comatose. He didn't know which, and he didn't care. . . . 'Wake up,' Jake said. *Where 'a hell am I?*" (41). His confusion that coincides with the fog makes him constantly question his current situation: "James emerged from the fog and was on the road. *Where am I?*" (43). The fog also highlights James' passivity in both his dream world and his real world. It is the fog that "envelopes him" and the fog that "swallowed him" (83) which again exposes James' helplessness and lacking agency vis-à-vis the fog's superiority. Otherwise, at one point, James "walked into the fog. *Hello,*

Dream World” (78), symbolizing his resignation and desolation while being at the mercy of his dreams.

The fog serves as a signal for enhanced alcohol abuse, and maybe even an identification marker of FAS, and narratively announces the blurring of dream world and the real world. Often, the fog occurs when James either wakes up and hence leaves the *dream* world or falls asleep and leaves the *real* world. His fluid - yet often uncontrolled - exits and entrances from “one world into the other” at the beginning present James with unsolicited memories of his past and at the end provide him with the possibility to reconnect with his late parents and the opportunity to find reconciliation.

The novel’s narrative structure does clearly distinguish the “Real World” and the “Dream World.” Structurally there is - as already discussed - a clear separation in the novel’s three parts. This separation, however, cannot be retained plot-wise since the lines between wakefulness and sleeping, dream and reality, are regularly blurred. Especially at the beginning of the novel, the reader finds himself struggling to find out what is dream and what is real, but within the course of the story, it becomes easier to differentiate between the two parallel worlds displayed in the fictional plot.

In *Porcupines and China Dolls* the presentation of dreaming is mainly focused on nightmares which I loosely categorized as anxiety dreams. The clear distinction between dreams and nightmares in the novel is significant. James’ dreams deal with his childhood and his time at Residential School. His dreams, induced by traumatic incidents, are often detailed replicates of what actually happened to him. Freud has already stated that anxiety dreams/nightmares are the least distorted by dream imagery and Barrett and McNamara assert that their contents are “often exact replications of the original traumatic event, although they may get more symbolic” (*Encyclopedia* 219). Dreaming, therefore, forces James to live through his sexual abuse by a catholic priest over and over again. The dreams and nightmares have become constant companions: “He laid his head on the pillow and was out. *Hello, dreams*” (61). Not only does this quote portray resignation towards the recurring nightmares, but it also highlights how this introversive process of dreaming serves as yet another form of dialogue with one’s dreams and hence one’s past, present, and future.

A dream has several connotations but generally serves as a rather neutral umbrella term and is hence - contrary to nightmares - not limited to negative feelings of terror and fear. Nightmares are regarded as solely negative and haunting; unwanted reminders that

often include true incidents that are being reflected and processed during one's sleep (Freud *Interpretations* 7, 27, 302) and also replicas of past events from real life occurrences. The constant juxtaposition of dream world and real world suggests a constant battle, a somewhat emotional collocation of two different states of consciousness that entail different emotional conditions and convey James' powerlessness. René Descartes in his first Meditation has "famously argued that because of the realistic quality of sensory experience during the dream state, it would never be possible to distinguish dreaming from wakefulness on empirical grounds" (qtd in Windt and Metzinger 193). In their article "The Philosophy of Dreaming and Self-Consciousness: What Happened to the Experiential Subject during the Dream State?" Windt and Metzinger claim that the differences between dreaming and waking consciousness "mainly concern the subjective quality of the dreaming experience. . . . one must ask in what sense dreams can be considered as conscious experiences, and what happens to the experiential subject during the dream state" (194). They also assert that especially through the help of lucid dreaming, dream research now differentiates between waking and dreaming consciousness.⁷⁴ In order to be able to comprehend James' complex dreaming state and dream consciousness, Windt and Metzinger's article will help to illuminate some contemporary understandings of the state of dreaming and its relation to consciousness. It will also be necessary to elaborate on the concept of lucid dreaming.

James' dreams could be interpreted as lucid dreaming since he constantly questions the reality of his dreams and hence demonstrates awareness of the fact that what he is experiencing in his dreams does not actually happen in the external real world. That James is a lucid dreamer becomes especially obvious through his repetitive questioning of being in the "real" or the "dream world": "*She real or part a' my dream?*" (44/45), "*Hello, dreams*" (61, 78), "*What's she doin' here? Is she a dream?*" (78), "*Hello, Dream World, Hello Shadow Land. Hello, shadow People. Hello...Holy Shit!*" (84). There are many more examples that show James as a lucid dreamer. He also seems to subconsciously find comfort in lucid dreaming as he can reassure himself that whatever happens in the dream situation he 'finds himself in' is not 'real.' "The lucid dreamer is fully aware of the fact that the world he is currently experiencing is not identical with external physical reality"

⁷⁴ Hurd, Ryan and Kelly Bulkeley. *Lucid Dreaming: New Perspectives on Consciousness in Sleep*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, ABC-CLIO, 2014.

(Windt and Metzinger 211).⁷⁵ There are different levels and degrees of lucidity that Windt and Metzinger designate as A-lucidity and C-lucidity:

According to the concept of lucidity . . . information becomes available when introspective *attention* is directed at the construction process that creates phenomenal representations. . . . Let us call it ‘A-lucidity.’ A much stronger concept of lucidity - let us call it ‘C-lucidity’ - would involve the additional capacity to form *mental concepts* and engage in *abstract thought*: if we are C-lucid, we can cognitively ascribe the property of ‘lucidity’ to ourselves, because we are not only introspectively aware of certain aspects of the very construction process that brings the phenomenal contents about but can also form mental concept of ourselves as currently being a lucidly dreaming subject. (222, orig. emphasis)

When reading the two block quotations from the novel at the beginning of this chapter, it is pretty easy to say that James can be considered a C-lucid dreamer. He is not only able to realize and cognitively comprehend that he is dreaming, he is also actively directing/interacting/leading the last dream while being aware of his lucidity condition when dreaming. It is essential, however, to note that the development of James’ dreaming from A-lucid - being aware that he is dreaming but not able to act and or change or control it - to C-lucid dreaming - being able to act and change what happens in his dreams - is a process throughout the book which reflects the character and plot development which parallels his healing process. The process of gaining control within his dreams parallels his ability to gain control over his waking life, which is mostly represented by his sobriety, breaking with old behavioural patterns, and leaving the community and his toxic relationships.

Lucid dreaming is predominantly associated with ‘positive’ dreaming experiences that one consciously wants to prolong and control - a state of dreaming that has brought forward numerous forums and webpages that claim to give successful advice in order to attain lucid dreaming. Only later in the novel, the dreams’ origins - the sexual abuse by a catholic priest - are revealed and their symbolic meaning starts to become visible. James seems to have resigned and accepted the haunting nightmares as a distressing but inevitable part of his daily life. His pragmatism also reveals a level of powerlessness, not being able to control when he is drifting from wakefulness to sleeping. Lucid dreamers, in

⁷⁵ The quotation presumes a Western scientific separation between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ as a given fact and ignores possible Indigenous epistemologies and reality awareness. The next subchapter will extend on the ramifications of such demarcations.

contrast, have control or can gain control over their dreams, which can enable them to leave the dream when choosing to do so. The initial quote to chapter three of this thesis exemplifies the sudden empowerment of James to take action within his dreamed experience, stepping up the level of his dream lucidity. So, for James, lucid dreaming progressively becomes a tool of liberation and action, which mostly correlates to dreams of his parents. At first, these recurring dreams make him feel paralyzed and unable to take control: “She was smiling and holding out her arms, enticing him to come to her. He started running, but he couldn’t run fast enough. The fog was everywhere” (63). The fog, as it stands for his alcohol abuse, his trauma, and the resulting clouded vision, rob him of a reconciling experience with his mother. As the dream continues, it turns into one of his nightmares in which he “smelled it: his breath. He turned just as his hand touched his shoulder” (63). The reader is by now so familiar with his repetitive anxiety dreams that the ‘hands’ are easily assigned to Tom Kinney, the sexually abusive priest.

James’ nightmares dominate and control his dream world as well as his real world. A similar dream situation happens again when James finds himself in the shower room where he was raped and suddenly sees his mother, runs towards her, and hugs her: “After what seemed like forever, he slowly let go and looked up at her. It wasn’t her. It was... *Oh fuck!*” (91). Other dream sequences of his parents on page 93/94 and 110/111 end abruptly by turning into nightmares as his parents transform into Tom Kinney or as James proves unable to help or reunite with his parents. It is only on page 177, after the disclosure of his best friend Jake, that during a dream of his parents he “looked up. They were still there. . . . She reached out and touched his face. Her hand felt warm. . . . He felt a hand on his shoulder and his dad smiling at him. . . . Shadows. *Is’at what I see in my dreams?*” (177). His comment at the end of the quote proves his lucidity and hence awareness of dreaming. By categorizing James’ dreams as nightmares or distinctively as trauma(tic) anxiety dreams, they become identified as being parts of his past and therefore as something that is part of his lived experience and reality during wakefulness. In the above quotation, James recognizes his nightmares as his ‘truth’ and acknowledges that he cannot change the fact that he is forced to relive his traumatizing past time and again. The feeling of comfort by the alleged conviction that he is *only* dealing with dreams allows him to physically but also emotionally detach himself from his dream world. He is neither willing nor able to take causal action and instead succumbs to the dream’s overpowering emotionality.

The repetition of the dreams and the recurring images are striking as they represent the haunting characteristic of James' anxiety dreams. Kristina Fagan writes about the use of repetition - while usually referring to the repetition of *stories*, and hence asserting the narrative, story-like character of dreams as well as their equivalent power:⁷⁶

Repetition serves as a means of thinking through a story's implications. . . . The characters replay their abuse over and over, often in humorous ways. These imitations are a form of resistance, but they also continually connect the characters back to their abusive pasts. ("Weesageechak" 211)

James' nightmares that have taken control of both his sleeping and waking life direct the plot until the moment of disclosure, and they are personified in their consuming character.

James' dreams can also be regarded as attempts to communicate with himself and his innermost thoughts and desires. Maybe it is also the other way around: The dreams as representing his emotions, memories, and wishes impose themselves onto him in order to make him reunite outer and inner life, inciting congruency and action consistent with his feelings and not in order to suppress his past. James, who is unable to listen and to understand his dreams in the first place, tries to drown them and their effect on him through alcohol abuse and other dysfunctional behaviours. Only when he starts to not repress and deny his dreams but instead to let them happen and listen to what they might tell him, he begins to understand that he will soon die if he does not find reconciliation with his past: his self-destructive tendencies will eventually lead to his death.

When James once again wants to pull the trigger of his gun, he suddenly finds himself in one of his dreams. This time, however, James faces his younger self and re-experiences his feelings after being raped in the shower. At the same time another young boy appears in the shower, which puzzles James and prevents him from committing suicide, and furthermore reveals that he was not the only young boy who experienced sexual abuse by the priest. Seeing himself as a little boy, dressed in the same pyjamas he was wearing during his time at Residential School and trying to strangle himself in the shower where he was sodomized, is one of the most painful memories and dreams James has to face. His desire to commit suicide both as a child with "empty eyes" (143) and as an adult where "anywhere is better 'an 'is fuckin' place" (142) emphasizes that nothing has

⁷⁶ In her 1999 study *Dreams of Fiery Stars: The Transformation of Native American Fiction*, Catherine Rainwater postulates - based on Anna Lee Walters 1988 novel *Ghost Singer* - dreams as "synonymous with the art of storytelling" and points out the essential "equation of dreams, medicine power, and storytelling" (121).

actually changed in his life. He is haunted by the same nightmares every night and still wants to die. However, what seems to strike James the most is the other young boy in the shower - indicating that other boys were raped as well - and portending the imminent disclosure of his friend Jake, Chief David, and other community members.

It is in the second dream, in which he sees himself as a child again, that he interacts with his younger self. The supposed “Dream World” and the “Real World” blend by interweaving plots that end in James’ picking up his grinning younger self and feeling “a peace he’d never felt in his life” (177). Proceeding from A-lucidity to C-lucidity, the concept underlines James’ reconciliation and his regaining ability to take action and break the circle of repressing memories, dreams, and nightmares. Only by his recognition, his turning towards his nightmares, does he face his past and embarks on a healing journey that helps him to find peace and reconciliation. The *nightmares* do not go away but they transform into *dreams*, breaking the repetitive spiral of his abuse and instead unfold the circle by James’ literal embracing of his younger self.

The interface of dream and reality is intermingling, while affecting change and internal transformation in which James faces his innermost fears and feelings of guilt. Showing affection and compassion for himself and to what happened to him as a child mirrors James’ progress that will ‘externalize’ what has been suppressed and trapped for so long. The vital step towards accepting his own past and his dysfunctional life was by not downplaying them as ‘only’ dreams, but instead to let dreams influence his waking life and his emotions. Before that dream, James was resolute in distinguishing his Real World from his Dream World and tried not letting one affect the other.

While this scene of a reciprocated embrace with his younger self has served to illuminate James’ degree of lucidity during his dreams, it bears a striking symbolic power in that it restitutes agency to James. His stagnation, figurative impotence, and passivity slowly transform into action and progress.

Dreams and Disclosure

Fagan ascribes a mediator role to stories that enable the person telling the story to say something without really saying it out loud. A similar role is attributed to dreams in Robert Alexie’s novel, strengthening the correlation of dreams, stories (or storytelling), and relationship to land as significant parts of traditional Native life. The anxiety dreams offer a tool to deal with trauma without directly talking about it. In the novel, however, the

disclosure through dreams is only the first step towards liberation and healing. The climactic process is only completed by the pivotal public and honest disclosure that is portrayed by the fight with demons (which is ironically much more story-like than any other part of the text, as it makes use of numerous metaphors, analogies, personifications and irony).

Fagan also observes repetition and mimicry to mirror a circle of the abuser and the abused (“Weesageechak” 218). The abused often mimic the abuse that they suffered and repeat their traumatic past in different ways in their present. This seems also to be happening for James. He had to endure sexual abuse in residential school, a disturbing and deeply troubling experience that he translates into a sex addiction that hurts him comparably in his present life. He uses sex as a tool, like he used to be a tool himself. Freire explains: “during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors’” (27). James does not physically abuse women, but he uses them, and they use him, which could be regarded as emotional abuse. Sexuality in the novel is described and portrayed as something humiliating and even manipulative. The women use sex to bind the men, to get the men, to make men love them and stay. The men use sex as something that offers them a sense of possession and control, yet it is described in its most disgracing and almost embarrassing form, that produces feelings of shame and pity in the reader. Remarkably, the protagonists are able to perform sexual acts in all their varieties including all the degrading and humiliating aspects which are usually perceived as the most intimate and most private parts of human life, yet they are unable to communicate their feelings and past traumata. Sexuality is used as a seemingly protective shield and tool that offers the characters a disturbing yet productive way to evade the emotional from the physical, the outer from the inner. It is ironic that the sexual abuse in Residential School has triggered this behaviour, or has taught the victims to do so. The circle of abuse that is fuelled by repetition is also broken by repetition when James is frequently faced with his past through his repetitive dreams. This repetition ends when there is no way around facing his demons and his past, through public disclosure and ‘witnessing’ the past while contributing to a more community-oriented approach that speaks to Aboriginal ways of restoring community health and harmony.

The sharing of traumatic events such as sexual, mental, and physical abuse is not

often easy and does not come natural to many First Nations peoples, communities.⁷⁷ Fagan reports about the highly neglected fact surrounding cultural rules in Aboriginal communities when it comes to disclosure, psychological disorders, trauma and what she refers to as “witnessing” (“Weesageechak” 207). She states, that in many First Nations communities (she is relying mainly on Clare Brant, a Mohawk psychiatrist, and Charlie Fisher, the first Aboriginal Justice of the Peace) it is rude to talk too much and dig into very personal topics, such as trauma, mental disorders, or dreams. This code goes against the urge of Western psychology to ‘disclose’ in order to deal and ultimately overcome one’s trauma. Fagan maintains:

Storytelling and humour offer responses to this dilemma, and can act as alternatives to witnessing. They offer Aboriginal people indirect forms of communication, giving them means to show their pain, anger, and criticism in a non-confrontational way. In particular, humour allows the communication of the hidden and taboo without openly revealing deep negative emotions and without directly interfering with, criticizing, or blaming others. Through a joke, one can both say something and not say it at the same time. (“Weesageechak” 210)

Indirectly talking or revealing trauma certainly provides a way to start the process of healing. In her article, Fagan poses the following very important questions: “Can traditional principles of communication become repressive or damaging? Are there circumstances in which speaking out about trauma is necessary for individual and community health?” (“Weesageechak” 223). In the case of James in Robert Alexie’s novel, I would answer that last question with a ‘yes’. It would be damaging for James to not speak up publicly and openly about his abuse and it would make healing impossible. But there is also no hint at tribal principles or standards of how to deal with traumatic situations or experiences. So although Fagan’s concerns are valid within a tribal specific and (quantitative) research, where certain codes and regulations need to be considered, her article proves to be a very valuable source that creates awareness of differences between Western and Aboriginal worldviews. In the context of Alexie’s novel and the other selected works for this study, disclosing is the major tool to restore personal and communal faith. The manner in which the disclosure is portrayed is, however, reminiscent of traditional storytelling where hyperbole, humour and personification are often applied in order to bring across a serious message.

⁷⁷ Or any person or community suffering trauma.

In 1990, then Chief of The Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Phil Fontaine, publicly announced in an interview on television that he experienced physical and sexual abuse during his time in Residential School. The media covered the story extensively in the next days (Spear, n.p.). His confession triggered a growing number of similar confessions by male Aboriginal Residential School survivors. One of them was Garnet Angeconeb, an Anishinaabe man from the Lac Seul First Nation who himself attended a Residential School. When he read about the Chief's disclosure, he admitted for the very first time to a present colleague that he too was sexually abused in the School. He recounts:

Then, as if a floodgate had been thrown open, I cried uncontrollably. It was the first time I had ever told anyone that as a little boy I had been sexually abused at residential school. For the next year I tried to figure out how to deal with that admission. I had to tell my family (I have been married since 1978 and had never spoken of the abuse to my wife). (qtd in Spear n.p.)

The chain reaction that develops when the novel's character, Chief David, discloses his own sexual abuse by Tom Kinney, the same priest who molested many other boys - including James - during a community workshop, almost violently sets the community free (196f) and mirrors the events of October 30th in 1990. Garnet Angeconeb has since set up a website ("Garnet's Journey: From Residential School to Reconciliation," garnetsjourney.com) on which the visitor can view up to 30 short video clips in which he talks about his upbringing at Lac Seul and the experiences at Residential School where he was sent when he was seven years old. The far-reaching effects of Fontaine's disclosure have changed Garnet's life and he has found the courage to fight for the justice and recognition of sexual abuse survivors during the Residential School era. Leonard Hands, the priest who abused Angeconeb is frequently referred to by only his last name 'Hands' which also forms a striking resemblance to the novel's abusive priest Tom Kinney. James remembers predominantly his hands, which come to signify his abuse: "*Oh fuck, it's his hands!* Soft, warm, white and hairy" (46), "They [his dreams] came smelling of hopelessness, despair and death. They came with big, fat hairy hands and false promises" (127), "*His hairy hands!*" (142,143, 227). Whether or not this mirror of actual events and name resemblance was done purposefully to recount the significance of Chief Fontaine's public disclosure and his literary counterpart, Chief David, it exemplifies that sexual abuse was not an individual case but affected entire communities. The following excerpt gives

insight about the emotional and yet detached style of the scene of disclosure:

Chief David grew thirty feet tall and spoke of suicides, killings, and death. He spoke of anger, rage and terror. He spoke of hurt, shame and sorrow. He spoke of demons, dreams and nightmares. He spoke of the future, hope and healing. . . . He reached deep down into the very depths of his tormented and fucked-up soul, pulled out the rage, anger, hate, sorrow and sadness by their roots and threw them on the floor for the world to see. He then proceeded to choke the little fuckers like they deserved it. (197)

Chief David's disclosure finally encourages Jake and James, the two main characters, to reveal their own experiences of sexual and mental abuse and by doing so, trigger a metaphorical fight with dreams and demons to burst out. This battle forms the climax and also the changing point of the novel. A few impressions of a fight that stretches over several pages might already highlight its symbolic and spiritual power: "The demons, dreams and nightmares gave serious thought to fucking off elsewhere in search of easier prey" (199); "Today he would make his demons, dreams and nightmares pay" (202); "The demons, dreams and nightmares shivered in their rubber boots and looked around to make sure the others didn't fuck off. They had no intention of fighting this fucker alone" (204); "James Nathan was slamming dreams into the floor. Dream blood was splashing everywhere. One little demon fell in front of Margaret and Jane. They jumped on the little fucker and slammed its two heads into the floor as if they were daubing the winning number at a bingo game" (205).

Especially the last quote accentuates the communal factor of the fight and its significance not only for each individual that is about to share but also the entire community that witnesses the battle. The following section will explore the shift from individual to collective and in how far this processual development is essential for the entire community.

From "Silent Cries" to Echoing "Screams": Individual and Collective Dreaming

The metaphoric and highly figurative description of the men's disclosure stresses the importance of collective memory and a collective healing journey for Native peoples. After James has finally found the strength to accept his past as his reality, with the help of his dreams, and when he openly talks about what happened to him, he gives voice to his sorrow, pain, and rage and frees himself from guilt, shame, and oppression. Knowing that he was not the only one who was raped, enables him to also realize that he is not to blame

and that the Residential School's systemic violence will continue to control him and his life, if he does not learn to let go of his self-hatred. With the help of his community and the courage of his fellow comrades, who suffered the same torment, he makes their former silent cry become audible and heard by the public: "Their voices were high, loud, proud and mean. It sounded like it came from the mountaintops. . . . It sounded like it came with a fucking vengeance. It sounded like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing *The Messiah* on acid" (206).

So, right from the beginning it becomes clear that the children's silent cries remained silent and unheard for most of the Euro-Canadian public until that moment. But the metaphorical silent cries of all the Native children do not stay silent forever. They become loud when the children have become adults, who face their past with courage and with the help of their community that has come to replace a family they lost to the Residential School System. Their cries are finally heard when Chief David disclosure initiates a series of other testimonies: the former "silent cries" of a million porcupines turn into what sounded "like a million Plains Indians all singing at once" (206). The uproar echoes not only through Aberdeen's community hall, but through every member and even the Canadian public, as reporters will transport this 'scream' of outrage and pain beyond the community borders and out into the world. Only when the truth starts to infiltrate public Canadian consciousness - as was the case when Phil Fontaine gave his interview - justice and reconciliation for the survivors becomes realistic. A million porcupines were replaced by a million singing Plains Indians, which symbolizes the reclamation and retrieval of what was taken away from them in the Residential Schools and beyond: pride, community, and most importantly, an identity that includes dignity as a Native community. They have become a tribal collective whole and connected by every piece of the chain, and every individual community member as part of the bigger circle.

The many binaries mentioned in the text have by now all shifted: the invisible has become visible, the silent cries have become loud and clear, solitude has been replaced by community and solidarity, and hate overcome by love. The repeated sentence is also transformed in that it reverses the victims with the winners: "It sounded like a million demons screaming at once" (201). By exposing them to the public, his demons - in the disguise of anxiety dreams - are successfully defeated (which does not necessarily mean their everlasting disappearance). This externalization empowers James to strip his demons of control over his mind, heart, and body and regain control himself, which makes him

grow “one hundred feet tall, picking up a war club and daring his dreams and nightmares to come out and do battle” (218). The “war club” which is actually a Talking Stick (212) represents not only the power of words but foremost the power of public disclosure and testimony. The instrument being a traditional weapon of war or communicative tool respectively ascribes tremendous meaning to Indigenous traditions/the Old Ways as they provide the talkers/warriors with the necessary strength.

The metaphoric confrontation with his demons and nightmares also results in his literal meeting of them as he must go to court and face priest Tom Kinney for a formal complaint and legal trial against him: “It was then he knew that he would have to meet his nightmares for the first time in thirty years” (249). His awareness, that his nightly nightmares were not really met in the community disclosure, presents him with another upheaval of doubts, the desire to “just eat a bullet and fuck it” (267) and the hope of “exorcise[ing] his demons once and for all” (249). When Jake, James, Louise, Chief David and other community member encounter Kinney in court, Jake and James cannot hold back and yell at the priest in rage and pain: “The screams that came from the pits of their souls sounded like they’d passed through hell on their way out” (282) which - when considering their description of the Residential School as hellhole - is true since it was the exact source for their misery and torment.

As the circle unfolds, communal healing is achieved, or at least initiated, by dreaming. At one point during the metaphorical battle with the demons, dreams, and nightmares, Jake addresses James and says something really important, which epitomizes James’ and his community’s struggles. Every dream and every nightmare was also part of a necessary healing journey for the protagonists and therefore a central component to liberation: “Healin’ is a journey – there is no end!” (201). In accordance with this saying, James’ dreams slowly transform from trauma(tic) nightmares to healing dreams, a separation that seems redundant and hazy at first but that occupies significant meaning in the context of the novel’s progress. The precluding quote displays the main character’s general stagnation, manifested in recurring nightmares that recount his experience of abuse as well as his loss of agency and literally detain him. The following quote stands in stark contrast to the first as it implies progress and even presages reconciliation and the beginning of a healing process:

What is this? No one answered. It’s a vision. It’s a dream! . . . He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, and everything went quiet. They’re gone. The dream’s over. He opened his eyes and they were looking at

him. *How can they? This is a dream!* He looked at his mom and she smiled and the tears came. Years of sorrow, sadness and anguish poured from his soul and he slowly sank to his knees. *I'll wake up. I always do.* After an eternity, he looked up. They were still there. . . . He expected to see the little boy gone, but he was still there. James looked at the moose-skin moccasins and smiled. *I still have 'ose at home.* The little boy looked up. . . . He held up his arms as if he wanted to be picked up. . . . James picked him up and became one with the dream and with himself. He closed his eyes and felt a peace he'd never felt in his life. (Alexie 176/177)

In the dream he is also reunited with the family he lost due to Residential School. With the help of his adamant nightmares he has learned to let dreaming happen and maybe even turn the dreams into meaning. His openness - reflected also in his C-lucid dreaming state - allows resolution and at least some peace. The quote illustrates not only James' healing journey but furthermore documents the novels' dream discourse as a fundamental tool to trigger this very process.

Dreams and/in Therapy

As a psychologist and therapist Duran is mostly concerned with the treatment, the healing of the spirit and the 'soul wound.' Therapy sessions demand openness towards healing methodologies as well as a dialogue that might reveal root issues.

Duran, as opposed to Western therapy methods, takes what he calls "Inpatient 'Dreamtime Groups'" (74) as an introduction to his healing methodologies that allow his patients to reflect, share, and talk indirectly about their trauma and addiction. First, Duran explains why he believes dreams to be an essential tool within his therapy methodology:

Dreams are important to how we proceed on our healing journey. All of us dream. There is a reason for dreaming. . . . As human beings, we have lost the ability to communicate with the sacred because our egos have become so full of themselves. For this reason, Creator has invented a way in which she can go around our ego and still talk to us. (*Healing the Soul Wound* 75)

Duran continues to explain that as soon as we fall asleep and start to dream, the language of communication changes and we cannot relate to this language anymore - Freud probably expressed this shift of language as manifest and latent dream content, whereas the latter is much more difficult to understand. Duran maintains:

in Coyote fashion, Creator invented a tricky language that ego cannot understand and is full of symbols and images from the past, future, and

whatnot. When we wake up and remember a dream, we usually have no idea what it's saying. . . . When you have been under the influence of substances, this adds another layer to the problem of interpretation. The dream, has to go through the fog of alcohol and at times it's difficult to really see what the dream actually is conveying. (75)

Dreams are presented as therapeutic tools and messages, as well as a form of communication between two worlds, two cultures, daily wakeful life and dream life, past and present, Western and Indigenous. Dreams seem to offer a dialogue, which needs to be listened to in order to reconnect with oneself, one's past, cultural background, and situation in life. Alcohol, described as a fog - reminiscent of the fog in *Porcupines* and *China Dolls* that precludes dreaming and hints at alcohol and drug influence - blurs the vision and enhances the difficulty to connect with one's dreams, or the message of the dreams. The fog is at the same time a protector and oppressor, as it keeps the addicted person in a seemingly safe space that ignores negative emotions while not being able to grow and move away from the addiction. However, it remains imperative to be aware of the fact that it is due to colonization and colonialism that the connection to dreams and visions is disrupted and with that the ability to share one's innermost thoughts. Traditional dream awareness was cut off as the children were forced to unlearn their languages, ceremonies, and cultural traditions. The following section will take a look at the aspect of disrupted dream awareness and how it can be restored.

3.3 Truth and Reconciliation: Mission (Im)possible?

(Un)Necessary Divisions?

He [Crazy Horse] became chief because of the power he got in a vision when he was a boy. When I was a man, my father told me something about that vision. Of course he did not know all of it; but he said that Crazy Horse dreamed and went into the world where there is nothing but the spirits of all things. That is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world. . . . It was this vision that gave him his great power, for when he went into a fight, he had only to think of that world to be in it again, so that he could go through anything and not be hurt.

(Neihardt *Black Elk Speaks* 67)

In the following section I want to discuss whether a division of the Real world and the Dream World as we know it (within the novel's analysis) is necessary or not. It is somewhat generic and accepted to separate dream from reality, since one happens in our un- and/or subconsciousness during nighttime, and the other in the 'only' reality we believe there is. But as the Black Elk quotation shows, for many Native and First Nations cultures, dreaming was just as real as reality and had effects on daily life routines. The dream reality was perceived as different from waking reality yet not undermined in its validity as *another* reality. In Alexie's novel, a constant clear separation is not possible because the nightmares evidently deal with things that have happened in reality. Even though the division of dream and reality seems to be James' goal, as it would give him an increased sense of control over his confusing dreams and troubled present, it is the acceptance of both as intertwined and inseparable that sets him free. The reversal from nightmare to dream, the shift from dreaming as a lingering threat to dreaming as providing the possibility to be set free, is both linguistically and symbolically manifested: "They now heard it in their dreams" (214), "the five of them looked and listened as if it were all a dream" (214/1215), "It was like a dream in slow motion" (216), "No one wanted to wake up it was a dream" (217), "They dreamed in Technicolor, Panavision and stereo" (218), "he looked at the bottle as if it was a bad dream" (230), etc. The last quote especially highlights the notion that 'dream' has not entirely transformed to a positive experience, but something that also bares painful memories and reminders of a life dominated by addiction.

The anxiety dream, as a symbol for colonization and the long-lasting ongoing effects of colonialism, has now shifted to dreams as decolonizing tools and symbols of liberation. Whether or not the novel distinguishes between dream and reality, the crux of the question is whether such a distinction is necessary or not. Being trapped in two opposing cultures - Western and Indigenous - the protagonist symbolically becomes lost between the blurred lines of dream and real world. James remarks: "Dreams were starting to come true for some. For others a nightmare was about to begin" (92). Seeing himself as part of the isolated periphery of society who does not get to dream but has to endure the nightmare, James' future is not bound to change. His attitude does not change entirely and the novel does not provide the expected resolve. Even after the public disclosure during the community workshop and the symbolic "return of the drum," (237) his nightmares still haunt him "and they were bigger and scarier than ever. Things were normal. Things were

fucking normal” (280). At the very last page of the novel, James does not commit suicide because Louise arrives at the scene and confesses her love. He is able to reciprocate these emotions and verbalize them. As he throws away his gun and looks “out over the land of his People . . . he wondered if this was still a dream” (306). The influence of dreaming in his life never really disappears, but his confidence in the dream world and the real world as two different but inseparably connected forms of reality help him to find peace and personal reconciliation: “James’s journey had come full circle” (306).

The dreams in the novel also have a telling character, in that they (fore)tell events. James learns and realizes through his dreams that the same priest who raped him has raped his best friend, Jacob, and his band’s chief, David. Knowing this triggers a whole new perspective on his suffering that eventually helps him to open up (or disclose his experiences) to his community and not feel alone.

Wilson writes, that “individuals dream in the symbols of their society, as they think in the categories of their own language” (Wilson qtd in Goulet “Dreams and Visions” 188). What that might imply with regard to the novel is that James may have unlearned or most likely never learned the language of his culture and that only by relearning to listen and entering a dialogue with his dreams can healing occur, and he feels enabled to leave his stagnant situation and move forward. Having been snatched from one culture and forcibly exposed to an entirely different one, Native children have not been able to conform to either of these cultures, leaving them stuck in-between two conflicting worlds. Nobody had the chance to teach him about the language and significance of dreams, so he has no knowledge that enables him to deal with the imposing dreams.

James’ urge to divide real from dream, and further dream from nightmare, dissolves when he realizes that dreaming is an integral part of his being that is also able to reconnect him with his past and renew ancient traditions. The previous chapter on Native dream discourses has shown that just as the term medicine or spirit, also stories and dreams can be good and evil as they can injure and heal.⁷⁸ The nightmare of colonization evoked the evil spirit of alcoholism and continues to hurt James. Within the numerous reversals triggered by his dreams, the dreams themselves start to change and the decolonizing dream of parental love and reconciliation with his past sets James free.

⁷⁸ Also see: Blaine, Martha Royce. “Native Voices: ‘They Say He Was Witched’.” *The American Indian Quarterly* 24.4 (2000): 615-634.

Back to the Old Ways

We remember by telling stories. Storytelling is not something we just happen to do. It is something we virtually have to do if we want to remember anything at all. . . . It is in the storytelling process that the memory gets formed. . . . To put this another way, the stories we create are the memories we have. Telling is remembering. (Schank and Abelson 33f)

“Decolonization is not a metaphor,” this previously mentioned paradigmatic title of a journal article resonates throughout this study and finds expression in the outcry of James’ painful journey to self-knowledge and traditional dream awareness. The healing narrative plot of the story provides suggestions on how to achieve reconciliation. The Old Ways here are intricately tied to place - Blue Mountain First Nations - and the environment - the ‘hills’ and animals. Especially the porcupine, the caribou and the wolf play a significant role in the novel, as they all represent the Old Ways. Robert Alexie’s band the Gwich’chin from the Canadian Northwest Territories⁷⁹ translates into “one who dwells” (Osgood in Wishart 791) but is also often referred to as “people of the caribou, an apt name for a cultural group that largely relies on this mammal for a major part of its economic sustenance” (“The Gwich'in of Alaska and Canada,” arcticcircle.uconn.edu). The affinity and relationship towards the caribou is also said to be a deeply spiritual one as

the modern day manifestation of this spiritual belief is that ‘every caribou has a bit of the human heart in him; and every human has a bit of caribou heart.’ As such, humans will always have partial knowledge of what the caribou are thinking and feeling; and equally, the caribou will have a similar knowledge of humans. Thus, at some times, hunting the caribou is very easy; while at other times, it is very difficult. (arcticcircle.uconn.edu)

At the very first pages of *Porcupines and China Dolls*, the narrative voice gives a short account of traditional life of the fictional Blue People First Nations, that reflects the “synthetic” relationship of their human existence to the caribou: “The Blue People believed they followed the caribou each spring to the Arctic Ocean and brought them back to the mountains before the winter winds came” (5). Following the animals that provide food and hence survival symbolizes the subordination to one’s environment without disrupting the natural cycle. The implicit trust and importance of ecological conditions

⁷⁹ Wishart explains: “The Gwich’chin Nation is divided into populations who live in Alaska, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories and each has different rights to territory and subsistence harvesting” (80).

displays a different perception of nature.

Wishart elaborates on the different perceptions of nature and environment as opposed to 'wild' and 'wilderness' of Western society and Gwich'in cultures. We (non-Aboriginals) consider 'wild/wilderness' as something separate and even opposite from us ('civilization') that needs to be controlled and or tamed, whereas

'wilderness' is a horrific concept for Gwich'in because it refers to situations where people can no longer enter into relationships with animals and starvation and social breakdown are imminent. . . . Instead what is considered beneficial is that one comes to understand something about the proper interrelationships that occur on the land . . . between animals and people. (Wishart 86)

The connection of the Gwich'in - caribou relation to the novel becomes especially significant when one considers the name of the type of caribou that used to be a main part of Gwich'in sustenance: Porcupine caribou. Both animals occupy a special meaning in the novel: the porcupine's name and physical resemblance to the shaved Native boys in the Residential School, and the caribou hunt as the connecting element of James and his friends to the land. On page 237, when the Aberdeen community bury one of their members who committed suicide in the Old Ways, and "an old tradition was reborn from the flames" as they witnessed "the drum return," it is obvious that the community is returning to more traditional ways of life. On page 239 "Old Pierre brought out the drums and for the first time in fifty years, the People sang the old Songs in the mountains for the caribou. . . . The caribou heard this and stood as if hypnotized." The renewal/reunification of an ancient connection between caribou and the Native community⁸⁰ initiates the long awaited "return home" (238/239). That the caribou's reaction to the drums leaving them paralyzed reinforces the reciprocal relationship between Gwich'in and caribou. With colonization, when the outsiders imposed their beliefs and techniques onto First Nations people, "the drums, songs and funeral practice went underground" (6). When the Blue People First Nations in the novel finally uncover their old traditions of the drum, the

⁸⁰ For yet another intriguing example of animal-human relations see Hartmut Lutz' article „Whom Do you Eat? - Thoughts on the Columbian Exchange, and ‚How Food Was Given’” in *Contemporary Achievements* (142-153). In his article, Lutz tries with the help of the Syilx story called 'How Food Was Given' to "understand the environmental ethics underlying the great achievements of American Indigenous peoples to grow, harvest and utilize foods from their environment" and why it is that we, as non-Aboriginal people, have not yet learned "this lesson" of an environmental ethics.

songs, and “the⁸¹ language”, it helps the community to find a healthier and happier lifestyle congruent with their traditional ways of living (104).

Considering Black Elk’s, Paula Gunn Allen’s, Margaret Kovach’s, Rauna Kuokkanen, Richard Atleo’s and other Indigenous writer’s accounts, dreams are an integral part of the Old Ways. Ermine argues that dreams and visions for Aboriginal people “allowed people to understand and provided the necessary meaning for the continuity of the community. This is reciprocity between the physical and the metaphysical, the wholeness” (*Epistemology* 109). Reciprocity of James’ dreams/nightmares and his real life, and thus “wholeness,” is achieved through his last dream, symbolized by the image of embrace, deriving from what was considered lucid dreaming. Only the symbiosis - embodied by the embrace of young and adult James - of past and present, acknowledging the interconnectedness of both, lends James the power to find closure and finally move on.

When James reconnects to dreams as not “just dreams or nightmares” but as his past, his memories, his truth, as his consciousness and awareness beyond the confines of waking time, the dreams’ instrumental purpose is emphasized. The anxiety dream reminded James of his unresolved past and the impact on his present life that was dominated by dysfunction and addiction. Only by facing his dreams as his Indigenous reality and not discarding them, he is able to find partial resolve. The dream has become a signal of “the long journey back to the Old Ways” (214). It is only by revitalizing ancient connections - to the land, the animals, the dreams - that Aberdeen’s community is able to reconcile with the past, start changing the present and providing for a better future. While fictional Aberdeen told its story, the question arises of how Canada is telling the story.

What Story is Canada telling?

Shockingly, the last Residential School was only closed in 1996⁸² (“Residential school graves research a daunting task,” cbc.ca). If the Residential School system is considered the very embodiment of colonialism imposed on the Indigenous population in Canada, we have to wonder if the years that have passed after the last closure are enough to now call

⁸¹ Having heard many Aboriginal peoples talk and write about Native language using the definite article in front of “language“ is a sign of deep respect and connection as it refers to the respective mother tongue. So, when somebody said something in “the language,” most Aboriginal people know that and even more so, which Native language is meant (depending on the talkers band affiliation).

⁸² Exact dates vary between 1988 to 1996.

the status quo *postcolonial*.

Without doubt, the struggle against the devastating consequences of Residential Schools is still ongoing, and it needs not only the acknowledgement and recognition by the Canadian government, but also a strong Native community that helps its members to deal with their collective past. On the 11th of June in 2008, then Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, publicly apologized for Residential Schools, or for what he called “a sad chapter in our history” (“PM cites 'sad chapter' in apology for residential schools,” cbc.ca). He stated: “The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal Peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly” (O’Neill and Dalrymple). Phil Fontaine, who was Assembly of First Nations Chief at that time, responded amid tears: “Finally, we heard Canada say it is sorry” and therefore accepted the apology on behalf of the Indigenous Population (“PM cites 'sad chapter' in apology for residential schools,” cbc.ca). The apology was a first step towards reconciliation between the Native and non-Native population in Canada and will hopefully trigger more concrete actions that diminish the existing rift between the two groups.

In 2010, Canada was among one of the last four (USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia) countries that signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Being in Canada at that time, and having talked about the Declaration and its meaning for Aboriginal communities and life as well as Native/non-Native relations, Canada’s signature seemed significant. Expecting that the Declaration - which the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)⁸³ had worked on for years - would grant more visibility to Native issues in Canada and thus put more international pressure on Canada, the signing was a joyous event. Now, almost four years later, little has changed. Canada signed the Declaration while at the same time affirming that the document was “non-binding,” and this was already a forecast about what was to happen in the future: not enough. Aboriginal people believe in the healing power of stories and words and have hence received Harper’s words as a significant step towards recognition of colonialists’ genocidal actions. However, in order to advance social justice and overcome “quiet apartheid” in Canada, concrete action is necessary. The Attawapiskat ‘crisis’ and the *Idle*

⁸³ The RCAP issued their final report in 1996. For a full version of the report please see the website of *Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada* (aadnc-aandc.gc.ca).

No More movement⁸⁴ did receive substantial (international) media attention, and yet Stephen Harper and his government continued to support ongoing colonialism in ignoring Aboriginal rights and needs.

In June of 2015, when the Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada titled *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (trc.ca) was released after a total of six years of work and research, the first voice to be heard talking about the executive summary was Justice Murray Sinclair's, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "The schools are failing our kids and they have been failing our kids for a long time. . . . But we think that just as education was used as a tool to divide us, we think that education is the tool that is going to bring us back together. But this is going to take a long time" (Sinclair qtd in Tasker). He also asserted that the evidence of Cultural Genocide is mounting and that Canada can no longer deny it. Chief Justice Beverley McLachlan's remarkable statement that the Residential Schools were supposed to kill the Indian in the Child solidifies Canada's "ethos of exclusion and cultural annihilation" as cultural genocide (Fine).

Although Thomas King fears "that native people will be left, once again, with vague and lumpy promises 'to consider the issues at a later date'" (King "No Justice" 2), the power of statements like that which at least address genocide and trauma will enhance a dialogue between the Canadian government and Indigenous communities. But has anything drastically changed after the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? Will anything drastically change after the release of the summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? When "any recommendations with price tags attached - funding for improved health care on reserves - or recommendations that might open the government to legal action will be ignored" (King "No Justice"), then most likely nothing will transform Native life in North America for the better. However, I praise the TRC's summary and Sinclair's as well as McLachlan's powerful *public* statements. The media coverage, the many witnesses, the writing of such a report, forces people in Canada to face their government's past and Native people's present and future.

Native people and allies will continue to tell their stories and fight for justice and

⁸⁴ Numerous online newspaper articles explain and discuss the 'events' of Attawapiskat, which started with the complaint of Indigenous people from Attawapiskat about the desolate housing conditions and developed into a hunger strike from chief Theresa Spence. She has ever since become a symbol for the *Idle No More* movement, which will be discussed further in chapter four. (For more information, see for example: David P. Ball "Aboriginal Housing Crisis in Canada Threatens to Explode," indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com.)

while doing that, we will hopefully open our ears and our hearts and start listening and learning. I want to conclude with a quotation of the Truth and Reconciliation Report summary, that redefines reconciliation as a Canadian and not an Aboriginal endeavour:

Reconciliation must become a way of life. It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, . . . the relearning of Canada's national history . . . , but also needs real social, political, and economic change. Ongoing public education and dialogue are essential to reconciliation. . . . Reconciliation begins with each and every one of us. (240/241)

4 Richard Van Camp: Ecological Nightmares

I pray you remember this when you wake up. You must remember this. You must stop the Tar Sands. Do not bring cancer to our Mother. Do not unleash them. On the wings of this atomized prayer, we reach to you with all we have left. Now, they have expanded their range to the fullest here and are crossing the ice of time to reach you - you who live in the time before the sun twins, when fish only had one mouth, when moose knew who they were. You *can* change the future. Now wake up.

(“On the Wings of this Prayer” 16f)

4.1 The Windigo

Before taking a closer look at Richard Van Camp’s (RVC) short stories, it is necessary to know about the mythical figure of the Windigo.⁸⁵ The following chapter aims at explaining and contextualizing the Windigo while highlighting that it is not only a feared evil spirit mystified by stories and tales of Indigenous cultures, but a figure that has also accrued into a mystified symbol for Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous peoples, especially when it comes to mental health. Furthermore, the Windigo has also transformed into a metaphor for different contemporary evils and has been taken up as such by different Indigenous scholars and writers. The following chapter traces these developments, serving as the foundation of the proceeding literary analysis.⁸⁶ First written records of the Windigo date back to the early 19th century, which will help to introduce the nature of the Windigo figure and the figure’s ramifications.

Nelson

George Nelson, a “fur trade clerk” (Brown and Brightman 3) for the Hudson Bay Company between 1802 and 1823, documented his life as in the Canadian ‘wilderness’ and especially his encounters with and observations of the Indigenous population. His writings were edited in a work called *‘The Orders of the Dreamed’: George Nelson on*

⁸⁵ Spellings vary from Wheetago, to Wétiko, Witiko, Wendigo and Windigo. I decided to use the common forms Windigo and Wheetago because they represent the predominant spellings in Van Camp’s stories.

⁸⁶ The order is not chronological since Forbes’ published his *Wétiko Disease* before Waldram - but instead the chapter follows the development and relevance of the Windigo figure with regard to the following literary analysis.

Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823, in which the editors write about Nelson:

Yet while attending to business in an evidently competent manner, he also became a good observer and recorder of both the native and non-native people around him. His manuscripts are an invaluable and scarcely tapped resource on all the parties involved in the fur trade social sphere - and particularly on the Indians. (3)

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that those are scripts by a non-Native observer who - although possibly in close(r than usual) contact with Native people at that time - also comes from an entirely different worldview and belief system and should hence always be treated as biased reflections (Brown and Brightman 20ff). His observations are however valuable because they contain some of the earliest written records and perspectives on the Windigo as well as the significance of dreaming in Native communities. It is rather difficult to find actual origins of the Windigo, because - similar to the trickster figure - it has since been used to represent and symbolize everything except for what it once used to be. Brown and Brightman estimate the prevalence of Windigo belief among Indigenous (Canadian) bands and list Ojibwa groups in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and Cree around Hudson and James Bay, Quebec and Labrador (160). They also acknowledge the fact that the concepts and beliefs of the Windigo have most likely changed with European contact, which might have consequently led to the confusion of varying First Nations Windigo beliefs and accounts by European settlers. Nelson describes 'the belief' in the Windigo as follows:

There is a kind of disease (or distemper rather, and of the *mind* I am fully persuaded) peculiar to the Crees and Sauteux's, and of which they have the greatest dread and horror [sic]. . . . They term *this* Win-di-go . . . - the proper signification of which, to me at least, and no one I think can doubt it, is Giant. . . . Suffice it to say that they are of uncommon size - Goliath is an unborn infant to them; and add to their *dread*, they are represented as possessing much of the power of Magicians. Their head reaching to the tops of the highest Poplars (about 70, or 80, feet) they are of proportionate *size*. (85/86, orig. emphasis)

George Nelson emphasizes the abnormal size of the "giant" who has magical powers while also immediately expressing judgment of the Windigo as being a mental illness. He describes the Windigo as a product of imagination due to mental "distemper" of Indigenous peoples, hence downgrading it as something that is peculiar to the Native people he encountered, and something that does not actually exist outside of the mind.

That his perception of the Windigo as a mental disease or a myth rather than fact, highlights the necessity to treat his writings with care and to differentiate between his factual recounting of the Windigo and his judgment of such. He seems to exclude himself from this ‘phenomenon’ and is implicitly portrayed as immune to the disease, probably due to ‘enlightened’/rationalist thought that provides him with the necessary ability to see through the irrational fear, invalidating its existence outside of Native mythology and psychology.

Nelson continues to report, that “it seems also that they [Windigos] delegate their Power to the Indians occasionally; and *this* occasions that cannibalism which is Produced, or proceeds rather from a sort of distemper much resembling *maniaism*” (88, orig. emphasis). The Windigo is said to be an evil monstrous spirit that originates from the north and wanders the forests of Cree and Ojibwa territories, looking to attack and feed on humans (Ray and Stevens 122). According to Nelson, the Windigo is said to be a non-human power or being that can take possession of human beings which results in cannibalistic behaviours of the possessed person. He further states that there seem to be three forms of the Windigo possession, including the crucial transformation process: The first of the three turns into a Windigo due to (the threat of) starvation and is hence led to cannibalism, feeding on the (corpses) of (dead) people (88).

Another feature of becoming a Windigo reverses the above description in which is said that only when one has already turned into a Windigo, cannibalism occurs. Brown and Brightman, however, maintain that “famine cannibalism,” can be causally tied to becoming a Windigo as a prior ‘condition.’ The *process* of transforming from human to Windigo and its many indications are central and posits the question of human identity and its confinement as an essential focus of the Windigo discourse:

Although some windigos are seen as members of an autochthonous nonhuman race or class of harmful spirits, it is believed that many windigos were once human beings who were transformed into their monstrous conditions by committing famine cannibalism, by dream predestination or spirit possession, or by death from freezing or starvation. It is thought that a person who ‘goes windigo’ initially retains a conventional appearance, but ultimately loses human identity and cultural knowledge. (159)

In the chapter entitled “Windigo Dreams,” Nelson describes the second and third kind of Windigo as intricately tied to dreams of the North, the Ice or even both. The North as the location of the Ice remains a hazy concept that not only serves as a foretelling motif within

the affected people's dreams but, as we will see later, also seems to have taken over the Windigos' bodies during and after transformation as their heart and lungs are depicted as having turned to ice. Nelson continues to recount the perception of the Ice as being in the very center of the Earth, "the Parent of Ice . . . at a great depths and never thaws - all ice originates from this" (90). That the Ice forms the origin and representative innate fear of the Windigo is resumed in RVC's first story to be discussed in the course of this chapter: The Ice is being dug open/torn up by the Tar Sand's machinery and hence resurfacing from the "great depths," setting free the evil spirits of the Windigo. According to Herbert Schwartz and Norval Morrisseau, who documented Ojibwa/Cree Windigo stories (tales),⁸⁷ the first ever Windigo used to be a normal Ojibwa trapper called Windigo who, due to a hard and very cold winter, nearly starved to death, prayed for help, and received 'help' from a malevolent spirit within a dream. The spirit turns him into the evil giant who then goes on to devour a whole village of people (transformed into beavers) and growing more hungry with every human (beaver) he eats (Schwarz 11). Carl Ray and James Stevens narrate similar events that recount a medicine man - using evil sorcery - was able to transform a woman into a Windigo by digging up "the snow which had turned into a ring of ice. Using a stick, he picked up the ring of ice and held it to his forehead" (125). They further state that Windigo possession is marked by extensive hair growth, ice inside the person's body and the "craving for human flesh" (122).

Nelson also reports of a "Windigo Execution" where the sick or possessed person would remind his friends - being afraid of what he will or had already turned into - to "remember what I told you all - it is my *heart*; my *heart*, that is terrible, and however you may injure my body if you do not completely annihilate my *heart* nothing is done" (92). When his friends try to kill that man and aim at his heart with a spear, no blood comes from the heart and the man stays alive: "The Ball went through and through, but not a drop of blood was seen - *his heart was already formed into Ice*" (93, orig. emphasis). The heart is the center of humanness and humanity, the one organ that keeps us alive, but also semantically linked to human compassion, emotionality, and capability to distinguish between good and evil. When it transforms into ice, the body is incapable of living a physically human life and robs the possessed person of the fundamental human characteristics of empathy and commiseration.

⁸⁷ For an elaborate examination of the 'trend' to edit oral traditions in the forms of 'tales,' 'legends' or 'fables' by "self-appointed experts" (Lutz *Contemporary Achievements* 40) of non-Native descent, please see Lutz' subchapter I-II in *Contemporary Achievements*, pp. 40-50.

Brown and Brightman maintain, that starvation and cannibalism are significant markers and motifs of what they call “Windigo complex” while asserting that it does not solely derive from “ecological coordinates” (171):

Ojibwa and Cree conceptions of windigo are organized in terms of strong metaphorical and metonymic associations linking winter, the north, ice, starvation, cannibalism, insanity, and human identity. He [Nelson] formulated it in terms of the contrast between the universally human and the culturally specific. (171)

The growing intermingling of Windigo and identity as well as psychology also partly explains Western interest in the Windigo with its urge to rationalize, confine, and define the Windigo as a ‘phenomenon’ or a construct of the psyche. James Waldram and his notion of a “Windigo psychosis” later take up Brown and Brightman’s phrasing/perception of a “Windigo complex,” which will be shortly discussed later in this chapter.

Fiddler

A significant account of a Windigo case from 1907 is narrated in the book *Killing the Shamen* written by Chief Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens. Here, the story of Jack Fiddler is told, “a shaman and leader of the Sucker clan⁸⁸ from . . . what is now northwestern Ontario. Joseph Fiddler, Jack’s younger brother was charged. Their alleged crime was the killing of a possessed woman who had turned into the dreaded windigo” (vii). Chief Thomas Fiddler, Jack Fiddler’s grandson met with James Stevens in 1971 and gave a personal account of Jack Fiddler as clan leader and shaman and the events that led to the trial of 1907. Joseph and Jack Fiddler were arrested by the North West Mounted Police (now Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RCMP) and taken to Norway House, Manitoba to await their trial in which both were found guilty of murder and sentenced to death (75ff). Edward Rae, a relative of Angus Rae who testified in Joseph Fiddler’s court trial, reports: “To the clans, Windigo was satanic and universally feared in the forest. For Windigo was a human possessed with cannibalism and a voice so evil that its sound paralyzed human beings” (50). The paralyzing sound or cries of the Windigo are also present in most Windigo tales (Ray and Stevens 122) where mention is made of “blood-curdling yells” (Schwartz 11) that “will paralyze a man, preventing him from protecting

⁸⁸ Sucker clan is now part of the Manitoba based Sandy Lake First Nation, Anishinaabe/Ojibwa in northern Ontario.

himself” (Ray and Stevens 122). The cry of a Windigo is hence described as a rather animalistic sound that is used as a weapon against humans who are its prey.

Rae continues to assert that Jack Fiddler had special powers, which were given to him during his dreams, providing him with the rare knowledge and ability to kill Windigos. Rae goes on to describe in more detail what Jack Fiddler used to do in the event of a Windigo transformation/possession. One case especially exemplifies and revisits the connection to ice and the North: One man who was turning into a Windigo was successfully ‘diagnosed’ because “ice pressured, scraped, scrunched inside this man’s body. People heard this happening. This man was taking real deep breaths. He was getting ready to scream and in the moment that he would scream, he would be windigo” (Fiddler and Stevens 51). The tale called “The Windigo Woman” supports ice as evidence of the transformation process into a Windigo. The woman in the story “could feel the cold ice forming in her body.” When she realizes that she will be a Windigo soon, she decides to kill herself (Ray and Stevens 125).

These identification markers of the Windigo transformation are essential since powerful medicine men often had the ability to reverse the process. The process can be stopped - as Rae recounts an intervention by Jack Fiddler - by making loud noises and singing in the language (Jack Fiddler’s native tongue was Ojibwe/Ojibwe/Anishiniimowin), while throwing the man on the ground. Instead of a sound, ice was coming out of the man’s mouth and while Fiddler was hitting the man with a whip he talked insistently to the man and scolded him: “If you turn into a windigo, I’m going to kill you. I have the power to do it!” (52f). The man did not turn into a Windigo and Jack Fiddler was successful in reversing the process of Windigo transformation. In the story of the Windigo Woman, the Medicine man later reverses his Windigo spell on the woman with the help of heat, basically exposing the woman to a ceremonial sweatlodge that results in melting the ice within her (Ray and Stevens 123). The power and knowledge to kill a Windigo did not necessarily mean to kill or murder the possessed human but aimed at killing the spirit or power that was possessing the man or woman and thus separate the beast from the human, killing the one while saving the other. The tales of Windigos suggest both the ultimate death and the recovery of Windigo possessed people. The case of alleged murder of which Jack and Joseph Fiddler were accused includes the strangling of a woman - Joseph Fiddler’s daughter in-law - who had turned into a Windigo and could not be saved otherwise (Fiddler and Stevens 88). According to Windigo tales

and Fiddler's account, it occurred very often that both the relatives of the sick person and the Windigo himself/herself beg to be killed and hence to be taken out of their misery (113). It is also reported - mainly in Angus Rae's testimony - that the body of the killed would be burned afterwards.

Jack Fiddler, before the beginning of the trial, disappeared one morning and was later found dead; assumingly suicide through strangulation.⁸⁹ Joseph Fiddler, after his verdict, remained imprisoned for over two years and eventually died, never knowing that he was granted pardon just shortly before his death after several people pleaded the government to do so. The significance of the story of the Fiddlers lies not only in informative reports on the Windigo but especially on the ridiculous and absurd workings of early Settler society. The "cruel handling" (viii) of such as case of 'murder' exemplifies the "colonial myth" of white superiority as well as the far-reaching consequences of colliding world views and cultures. The book does not only illuminate the discussed Windigo case but also tells the story of the Sucker clan and its leaders from early 1800's to the end of the 1900's.

Waldram

James Waldram explains that the "Windigo Psychosis" forms one of the most prominent examples of what Western psychology calls "Culture-Bound-Syndrome[s]" (*Revenge of the Windigo* 190ff). Waldram's emphasis on the culturally specific occurrence of the "syndrome" or the "psychosis" denies any physical existence of a Windigo. He explains: "Windigo psychosis was characterized by an individual's belief that he or she was turning into the cannibal monster, as evidenced by a compulsive desire to eat human flesh" (192). But Waldram nevertheless also asserts that there are very few data and very few - believable and trustworthy - accounts on this "Windigo Psychosis." Fortunately, "recent studies have shown that windigo psychosis is as mythic as the windigo itself, existing only in the imagination of white researchers" (Jones 353). The last quote demonstrates critique on "white research" of the Windigo while also portraying and implying negation of the Windigo by patronizingly downplaying it as being a mere product of Indigenous

⁸⁹ In the book, Thomas Fiddler writes: "But, Jack Fiddler has the power: he will free himself from the agony of capture. He has decided that Manitou alone will be his judge, not some stranger from beyond his lands" (81).

imagination.⁹⁰

Dreams in Nelson and Fiddler

In all given sources of Windigo descriptions, cases and stories, dreams play a significant role in association with the Windigo. On page 34, Nelson generally describes how “among the Sauteux or Cris or Crees” the seeking of dreams in order to conjure life events or to learn their age of death is a common ritual and provides a personal observation or description of visions. Nelson recounts that the dream seekers leave the village and at some distance “make themselves a bed of grass” (34). They do not eat and drink until the desired dream has come to them. Nelson also commonly refers to *the Dreamed* instead of simply ‘dream’, hinting at the messages from higher spirits that are inherent in most dreams: “If they want to Dream of the Spirits above, their bed must be made at some distance from the Ground - if of Spirits inhabiting our Earth, or those residing in the waters, on the Ground. Here they ly [sic] for a longer or shorter time, according to their success, or the orders of the Dreamed” (34). His phrasing implies the significant task of the dreamer as well as the dream itself to conjure something and to communicate with dream spirits who are to tell the dreamers what to do or expect. The passivity inherent in the notion of “the Dreamed” partly frees the dreamer of responsibility and puts more agency on the dream or the dream powers/spirits who are supposed to come upon the dreamer.⁹¹ A dream is something that is/can be sought and concurrently something that one cannot always control; one can seek it but the ‘coming’ and ‘happening’ of dreams, their content, and what is supposed to happen relies heavily on the “orders of the dreamed.” Furthermore, the content of the sought dream is a dialogue with higher beings or spirits who are to lead the dreamer into a specific direction, serving as guides. Their “orders” are then to be performed by the dreamer, and the responsibility is transferred to ‘after’ the dream, with the significance of ‘enactment’ that the dreamer is supposed to implement. This account of dreams also resonates with the previously discussed “vision quest,” thus reinforcing the often overlapping link between dream and vision.

⁹⁰ For a current account on Algonquian Windigo discourse and a critical examination of such please see: Carlson, Nathan D. “Reviving Witiko (Windigo): An Ethnohistory of ‘Cannibal Monsters’ in the Athabasca District of Northern Alberta, 1878-1910. *Ethnohistory* 56.3 (2009): 355-394.

⁹¹ This is also reminiscent of Freud’s early terminology and recounts of people’s dreams where it says in German “es träumte mir” as in “it dreamed me” and hence suggesting a passivity of the dreamer. The dream hence used to be generally referred to something that was under no control but had agency and imposed itself upon the dreamer.

Brown and Brightman assert: “To Nelson’s Saulteaux and Cree informants, the Windigo condition and the famine cannibalism incident that catalyzed it were prefigured in dream experiences with specific malevolent beings who functioned as spirit guardians” (167). The prediction of Windigo transformation via dreams establishes the significant link of dreams to the Windigo. Nelson concludes his description of the Windigo types pointing out that whoever is to become a Windigo will eventually dream of such beforehand (90). He maintains that these predicting dreams usually involve the offering of meat that is disguised and pretended to be animal meat but is actually human meat. Only when the dreamer is successfully fooled and accordingly eats the meat he will later become a cannibal. Consequently, later in their life when the person dreams of children eating ice (or snow) in their tent, they will know that their time of becoming a cannibal is close (91). That (these) dreams are neither tied nor subordinate to earthly concepts of time is also conveyed in “the idea that events which transpire in dreams may be subsequently reproduced, sometimes many years later, in the dreamer’s waking life” (167). Predicting dreams thus form an important means to identify Windigo transformations. The considerable link of dream and Windigo will become vital for the analysis of RVC’s stories because it is within the junction of dream and Windigo that the malignant spirits both invade and are defeated. The dream serves as a platform for the evil to permeate human life and space but also as the provider for medicine so that healing and restoration can take place. Nelson’s interpretation and reading of the word ‘medicine’ is also helpful, as it appears numerous times in RVC’s stories as well as in the other prose in this thesis. He interprets it, or even equates it with “healing” (171). Medicine might serve as a more tangible definition of healing as it often suggests concrete methods (e.g. chanting, dancing) and palpable medication (e.g. herbs).

During Joseph Fiddler’s trial in 1907, the testimony of “Reverend Edward Paupanakiss, a Norway House Cree” who converted to Christianity and since worked as a missionary, gives details of a conversation he had with Jack Fiddler (103 f). Answering the court official’s question about what beliefs the Cree people would follow, Paupanakiss refers to Jack Fiddler’s statement “that they believed their dreams,” affirming that “that

was their religion;⁹² their dreams are their religions” (104); “that everything they dreamed was right for them; and that by virtue of their dreams and singing and conjuring in the tent that they would see meat, moose and deer” (105). The placement of dreams as the most dominant ‘belief’ to ensure survival, continuity, relational spirituality and in this case healing serves as the identification marker of Windigo existence. This did not find acceptance nor comprehension by the white court and was simply ignored and judged as invalid, one of the common results of imparting colonialist ideology on other cultures. Both Joseph and Jack tragically died due to a harsh and imbalanced collision of two worldviews and epistemologies.

Jack Forbes’ Wétiko Disease

Leaving behind Western and Indigenous discourses of the Windigo, this subchapter will take a closer look at the Windigo as a motif used by Indigenous scholars and authors. Focus will be on Native American (Powhatan-Renapé and Lenape) scholar and activist Jack D. Forbes’ work entitled *Columbus and other Cannibals: The Wétiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism* (1979),⁹³ in which he maintains that the wétiko disease is alive and well, even thriving in contemporary societies around the world. Forbes bluntly states the emergence of the “wétiko disease corresponds to the rise of what Europeans choose to call civilization” (ch. 4) and calls “Columbus Cannibal and Hero of Genocide” (title of ch. 3). What Forbes terms Cannibalism or wétiko disease, he also describes as “the sickness of exploitation” (Introduction) and “the greatest epidemic sickness known to man” while showing symptoms of “Imperialism, colonialism, torture, enslavement, conquest, brutality, lying, cheating, secret police, greed, rape, terrorism” (Introduction). “Civilized Wétikos” (45) and the Windigo in general, according to Forbes, have hence come to (amongst others) portray and represent (especially for Indigenous peoples who are familiar with the workings of the Windigo) colonialist attitudes, mechanisms, hierarchies and continue to shape eurocentric perceptions, histories and the textbooks of schools and universities (37). The use of the adjective “civilized” thus

⁹² Jack Forbes writes about the notion of religion: “Most Native languages have no word for ‘religion’ and it may be true that a word for religion is never needed until a people no longer have it. . . . our religion is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think - all of these things - twenty-four hours a day. One’s religion, then, is ones life, not merely the ideal life but the life as it is actually lived” (ch 2, n.p.).

⁹³ A German version was published with the title: *Die Wétiko-Seuche: Eine Indianische Philosophie von Aggression und Gewalt* (1989).

signifies the ambivalent structures underlying the origins of the terminology used to describe Columbus' arrival and the brutal colonization of a continent and its people. The ethnocentric history that teaches people about precious civilization that "has reached the promised land" while bringing smallpox and alcohol as "gifts" as Jeannette Armstrong sarcastically states in her poem "History Lesson"⁹⁴ (qtd in King *Inconvenient Indian* 1).

The Windigo constitutes a motif or symbol of not only colonialism but also capitalism and imposed eurocentric hierarchies that are concerned with the consumption of the 'other' who is considered inferior and can be manipulated in order to enhance one's own revenue. Duran, who conceptualized trauma as a "soul wound" asserts:

It is important to note that the soul-wounding process has left an emptiness in the soul of the wounded person. That emptiness of soul or spirit is seeking to fill the void with spirit. In our culture we see the quest for this fulfillment not only in craving substances, but also in other behaviors that become addictive, such as consumerism. (Duran *Soul Wound* 78)

The workings of the wétiko disease are also termed as rape; rape of a land and of the people it exploits feeding the Windigo with profit, leading not only to consuming but *overconsuming/gluttony*, defined by an urge to "feed on" more than is necessary. The unnecessary killing of animals simply for fun, for trophies, or profit, has been one of the most prominent realities of early Settlement that bewildered the Indigenous populations.⁹⁵

Forbes mentions another important scholar, Paulo Freire, author of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and compares Freire's notion of "dehumanization" with his conceptualization of the wétiko disease or psychosis, reinforcing that the main consequence of Windigo disease is the deprivation of a human identity. Interestingly then, the Windigo or the wétiko disease and the dehumanization process is only *possessing* human beings and their societies, imposing itself upon them, hence implying the possibility of a resurrection from beast to human. The antidote to this dehumanization for Freire is the contrary concept of "humanization" that calls for an education that incorporates the realization of being oppressed (here possessed), enabling the subject to

⁹⁴ Armstrong's poem as quoted in King goes: Out of the belly of Christopher's ship/ a mob bursts/ Running in all directions/ Pulling furs off animals/ Shooting buffalo/ Shooting each other /.../ Pioneers and traders/ bring gifts/ Smallpox, Seagrams/ and rice krispies/ Civilization has reached/ the promised land" (1). The poem serves as a wonderful example of why King asks his readers to "forget Columbus" in his chapter. It reverses mainstream history lessons and questions who really were the "savages" and what good civilization has brought to the continent. The poem challenges ethnocentric historical teachings and postulates a narrative that discloses continuing colonial mindsets and education.

⁹⁵ See Armstrong's above poem: "Pulling furs off animals."

free him/herself from oppression. For Forbes, the antidote lies in human empathy, love, environmental vigilance, and the consciousness of one's responsibility in the circle of all forms of existence. Forbes writes: "I can accept 'humanization' as an ideal only if it embraces the concept, as cited earlier from Luther Standing Bear, of becoming aware of one's relations and learning to live in a non-exploitative manner towards all living things" (ch. 4). Forbes also emphasizes that this raging "cannibalism" is *not* our default setting, underscoring the disease as something that we have "learned" as opposed to something we are born with (ch.1). This imposes an even greater responsibility and shows the result of adopting familiar forms of learned behaviour passed on from generation to generation. According to this conception, the learned can also be unlearned to defeat the Windigo. Forbes can be credited as being the first to apply the Windigo figure to colonialism and (ecological) capitalism.

Forbes, however, is boldly and relentlessly claiming that the wétiko is a mental disease, a psychosis, a contagious illness and that without acknowledging this diagnosis, no reversal of the "Windigo transformation" is possible. He supports Freire's concept of education to foster a "critical consciousness" which will eventually lead to liberation from oppression. Forbes complements Freire based on Shawnee leader Tecumseh's teachings, that a cure of the sickness is needed before a better future is possible. This cure is represented once again by the concept of "the good Red Road" (171).

Clinton Westman goes into more contemporary detail and posits the Windigo as a manifestation of resource- and in particular petro-capitalism⁹⁶ represented by the Oil Sand Region in northern Alberta while focusing on its effects on First Nations communities (and the changes within the concept and definitions of community) in the region: "the oil sands' synthetic crude is required as the *sine qua non* of our consumptive economy, becoming, like money, a kind of master commodity: a highly liquid symbol of transformation and possibility" (218). Monster projections and emblematic stories of zombies are not entirely new and scholars have often taken up the beast - capitalism equation.⁹⁷ Westman argues, that "the logic of petro-capitalist extraction resembles the predatory logic of the Windigo, a dangerous (and rapidly growing) entity that has lost its

⁹⁶ In this article, Westman defines petro-capitalism (according to Valdivia) as follows: Petro-capitalism is "a capitalism that hinges on the production, exchange, and consumption of petroleum" (Valdivia 2010 qtd in Westman 213).

⁹⁷ Please also see: Newitz, Annalee. *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (2006), or David McNally's *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism* (2011).

humanity and proper sense of relatedness to others” (221). This specification of Windigo manifestation in contemporary society will be crucial in the analytical part of this chapter since RVC too locates his Windigo characters in the immediate context of the Alberta Tar Sands.

Although Forbes’ concept of the Windigo as mental illness and disease encompasses *all* forms of evil in the world,⁹⁸ the focus of this study lies on the ecological/environmental disasters that are symbolized by the Alberta Tar Sands. In RVC’s stories that will be discussed in the following chapter, the significance and power of dreams is reinstated while also portraying the danger of the Windigo as the main manifestation of literal as well as metaphorical ecological nightmares. The chapter will first examine the implementation of dreams as a narrative tool and plot device and then continue to elaborate on the Windigo and its role within the ecological dreaming discourse.

4.2 Two Stories, One Nightmare

Four Blankets Woman has thrown two dreams now: one for you and the other to prove it. . . . You must stop the Tar Sands. . . . You *can* change the future. Now wake up.

(“On the Wings of this Prayer” 16/17)

This was my dream. Last night. The tar sands. The Shark Throats. It was all coming true! . . . She held up rat root. ‘Snowbird gave seven of us medicine.’ My jaw dropped. ‘This was all part of a plan.’

So it was true. The dream was unfolding through all of us.

(“The Fleshing” 39/40)

Dreams as Plot and Narrative Device

In both short stories, dreaming is of crucial importance and plays a role in both the plot and the narrative level. The first level includes dreaming’s potential to bring to light matters that would have otherwise remained concealed. In Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls* it was sexual abuse in Residential School that was slowly being resurrected and

⁹⁸ Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road* (2005) for example also uses Windigo-Cannibalism as a metaphor for the terrors of war and the trauma as well as consequential drug addiction.

disclosed through dreams. In RVC's stories, the Ojibwa and Cree figure of the Windigo that was buried within the depths of the earth comes back to life through contemporary effects of (neo) colonialism, and urge the protagonists to act, to go into battle against the evil forces that have taken control of the world. RVC uses dreams (here *one* particularly significant and powerful dream) to connect both stories that are the focus of this chapter. The first story called "On the Wings of this Prayer" represents the dream itself. Phrases such as the following underline the story's dream allocation: "Not even in this dream" (14), "This message comes from the future. From the Dream Thrower" (15), "Four Blankets Woman has thrown two dreams now: one for you and the other to prove it" (16). The short story ends with the words: "You *can* change the future. Now wake up" (17). Consequently, the second story called "The Fleshing" starts with the words "'You should be sleeping,' said Ehtse⁹⁹ as he dropped me off in his Suburban. I rubbed my eyes. 'Can't.' Those damned dreams, I thought, and that voice: *they can remember faces*. What the hell did that mean?" (18). While the dream in the first story captures the reader within a surreal apocalyptic setting that reminds us of fantasy fiction, the dream now transcends the sleeping state and infiltrates the waking life of a teenage boy.

The first story involves several groups of 'figures' and characters: The Shark Throats, the Boiled Faces, the Hair Eaters, zombies, and the Wheetago/Windigo. However, within this group of names, it is not instantly clear whether they are used as synonyms for one larger group or actually for different groups/characters. It is clear that this group is 'the evil' that was set free and aims at killing every human still existing. Thinksawhile and Four Blankets Woman are individual characters that seem to be helping the narrator and the protagonist, thus forming a group of three that is on a mission to stop the first group. Within this group, Four Blankets Woman seems to be the most important figure since she is also referred to as a "dream thrower" '(14) who 'threw' the dream (as the first story) back to the dreamer, the protagonist of the second story.

The first story "On the Wings of this Prayer" proves to be very complex and at times difficult to grasp since its narrative plot is multilayered and written in a non-linear fashion while connecting multiple storylines, numerous characters from past, present, and future with often multiple interchangeable names. It is only after almost six pages into the dream, that the reader finds out that the story is a dream (14). The impending problem of

⁹⁹ According to the Dogrib/Tlicho Dictionary, ehtsèe means "grandfather, old man (polite word)" (*Tlicho Yatii Enihl' è: A Dogrib Dictionary* 19).

identifying dream as apart from story-in-the-dream and correlating the different narrative and plot levels builds a mystifying web of competing storylines, myths, realities, and their respective characters. The first story in the general frame story (the dream) talks about an old trapper who lived in the Tar Sands area (in and around Fort McMurray, northern Alberta, Canada) and who has “gone to white and had eaten his own lips and fingers” (10). When a family who lived close to the trapper visits the ‘infected’ man, he instructs them to burn his heart and scatter his ashes. The family fulfills this task but due to the Alberta Tar Sands, its tailing ponds and huge excavators, his remains are dug up and his corpse is accidentally reassembled. The trapper’s teeth were given the possibility to later bite the mother of the family. In return, she - also infected - becomes the birth giver, mother of all the so-called boiled faces/Shark Throats/hair eaters/zombies/Wheetagos hatching new zombies through her mouth. The Wheetago is a name only mentioned once in relation to the zombies in this first story (12). Without giving further explanations on what the Wheetago is, the story goes:

If you are reading this, please know that I tell you these things because I love you and wish for the world a better way. I have sent this back to tell you this, my ancestor: the Tar Sands are ecocide. They will bring Her back. In both stories, it is the Tar Sands to blame. This is how the Wheetago will return. . . . You must stop the Tar Sands. At all costs. If you read this, there is still a spirit with a starving heart there. Waiting to be resurrected. (12)

Not only does the story in “if you read this” address an active ‘readership’ or an individual reader in this quote but it also implies the dream’s setting in an apocalyptic future, that is “sent back” to warn the dreamer. The interconnected content and semantic field of both stories - the story of the trapper and of the bitten mother - is reminiscent of the Windigo story of Schwarz in which he recounts that “once lived an Indian trapper by the name of Windigo” (11). At numerous points within “On the Wings of this Prayer” it does not become entirely clear who is speaking and who is being addressed, which plays into the polyphonic/polyvocal narrative enhancing orality in the text. Sometimes the speaker talks of himself in the singular and at other times in the plural, most likely referring to himself, Thinksawhile and Four Blankets Woman. It seems obvious that his ‘speech’ is directed towards the dreamer/protagonist - who remains unidentified until the beginning of the second story - when the dream voice reveals the dream’s purpose. In the previous quote, however, the readers are addressed as “you,” which evokes an even more intense sensation of urgency and a plea to act. The dream’s revelation depicts the world’s desolate future

and also ascribes the dream's visionary characteristics. This becomes especially obvious when the dreamer in the second story finds out that his dream is becoming true and "was unfolding through all of us" (40).

Here, the significance of dreams is remarkable and needs to be differentiated from the previous perception of dreaming in Alexie's novel, since dreams do not seem to be an entirely safe place in these two stories. So far, dreams have been something very private, individual and subjective that could be separated and excluded from one's 'public' life. Whether repetitive nightmares or imaginative daydreaming, they all had one thing in common: their 'uninvasiveness,' or literal inaccessibility to others, to outsiders. Although the dreams' content has most often brought forward pain, shame, and suppressed memories that were unwanted, it was always a private space that seemed unattainable for outsiders. The previous dreams constituted a form of ownership, offering a safe space, invisible to others. The notion of dreams as a private and intimate realm is entirely reversed in RVC's stories since the anti-heroes - the zombie cannibals hunting people - infiltrate human dreams which enables them to find the human's location. At the same time, dreams also serve as a means of communication, when they instruct several characters how to end the evil that has swept the Alberta Tar Sands, and the oil industry, the entire earth.

The dreams are not a safe personal place but instead have become a state controlled by others, by a more mythical and impalpable force that can be positive or negative, good or evil.¹⁰⁰ Dreams can introduce evil and serve as platforms for zombies to track and influence their victims. But dreams can also serve as medicine for the very evil that threatened to invade this mental zone. Dreams serve as a portal or gateway that needs protection and considerate respect. Dreaming can be "thrown" to a dreamer, without that person being in control of when or what dreams will come. The following quote strengthens the impression that dreams in RVC's stories do not just happen but are assigned to the dreamer for a purpose (16). The passiveness that is ascribed to the process of dreaming seems unnatural and rather foreign to Western perceptions of dreams, where

¹⁰⁰ RVC's story, by introducing and applying the Windigo in the sense of Forbes' wétiko disease seems even more prophetic when analysing dreams as a mirror of a contemporary, Information Technology (IT) dominated society. The notion of the 'transparent citizen' who leaves numerous tracks in the online world often unknowingly discloses intimate and private information that helps to create user-defined profiles. In the futuristic story this has developed even further in that the 'tracking' of humans by the zombies has invaded the human psyche, and the dream world.

dreaming is not necessarily controllable either but at least somewhat guarded by the person who is dreaming. Black Elk has stated that sometimes “dreams are wiser than waking,” (9) presaging that only when one pays careful attention to one’s dreams can they actually provide help and guidance.

Nightmare Messages

Only in the second story it is revealed that the Shark Throats/Boiled Faces/Hair Eaters/zombies actually *are* the said Wheetagos. However, it is already suggested that there is a deeper relation between zombie and Windigo since the blame for the destruction of the world is put onto these vaguely defined creatures that have almost exterminated the human population. The collective plea from future humanity - as represented by the dream’s group of three - states: “We wish you luck. The future is a curse. There are no human trails left. I was born running from them as they are born starving and hunting for us” (16).

As the above given quotation discloses, the visionary dream and its dream character who is speaking to the dreamer while also addressing the reader, portray an apocalyptic zombie future where humans are defined by their frequent flight from the ever-present starving zombies hunting them down. The urgent request and insistent plea of the futuristic dream personality is to stop the Alberta Tar sands: “Remember, there is a hard way and an easy way: stop the Tar Sands and that old man’s body from waking up. He - not she - is the beginning of the end” (15). The dreamer is hence faced with the future consequences of his (and humankind’s in general) present behaviour and the constantly looming question of “What if ‘we’ do not act and change the future?” Thus, the quotation is not only a plea but also an instruction on how to prevent the future depicted in the dream in becoming a reality. The “dream thrower” reminds the dreamer - still unidentified at this point - that it is not ‘her’ - the ‘mother’ - who is the origin of the evil but it is ‘he,’ the old trapper who is “the beginning of the end” (15). The evil threat of the overconsuming Windigo, that Native cultures have known for time immemorial and is “older than Jesus” (37), represents an ecological nightmare that contains two messages: the warning of what kind of future is impending when nothing is changed, and a message of hope, that there are possibilities to refute this fate. The evil that was resurrected by the Tar Sands points to the origins of the ecological background of the story, connecting it to Canada’s contemporary reality as a “petrostate” (Nikiforuk 1). This dazzlement of

fantasy/horror (Windigo) and fact/reality (Alberta Tar Sands) leaves a profound impression on the reader while he/she is presented with the task to change the outcome of a “cancered earth” (14): stop the Alberta Tar Sands.

The dreamer furthermore gives specific information about what the zombies are scared of and how they can be defeated. Butterflies play a big role in scaring the zombies, but also in proving the dream character’s predictions to be true. Accordingly, the releasing of “a million butterflies” causes them to “run screaming” (16/11). In the future, the absence of butterflies signifies that ‘the end’ is coming closer: “Soon the butterflies will leave (where do they sleep at night) and they will find us” (15). The dream character is teaching the dreamer that once the butterflies are released, this is when his future starts to become reality for the dreamer. The butterflies form a connection, which signals the fluid shift from future to present and vice versa. Not only does the butterfly represent and indicate transformation and change - from caterpillar and cocoon to butterfly - but in many cultures they also symbolize the soul (greek, ‘psyke’/’psykhe’, oed.com).¹⁰¹ This would also explain why zombies fear butterflies: The soul or the psyche is a quintessential human feature, which the zombies do not have, and it provides the most powerful weapon to ‘defeat’ the zombie disease.

RVC also talks about certain characters of his stories as being “contraries,” a figure that he also defines as “a doorman . . . a man between two worlds - a contrary. . . . A contrary is also a ‘Clown’, a teacher, one who lives his or her life backwards to remind others of many things” (Vranckx and VanCamp 10). The dream character - who could be interpreted as a ‘contrary’ - also explains that Apache is the “common tongue for the Known People” (11) - whereas it stays rather unclear who exactly the Known People are and whether they are part of the boiled faces or of the human race. He or she indicates that s/he is of the Dogrib/Tlicho First Nation and that s/he can still speak the Dogrib language but that it is only Apache that has a deterring influence on the Hair Eaters (11): “it slows them when you sing or talk to them or chant in the first tongue. It’s like they are listening. They weaken when you chant and that’s when you take them. . . . our drums drown them out. If you drum you can stop their mewling cry, turn it to ice in their throats” (11). Dogrib/Tlicho and Apache are both part of the Athabaskan language family, where Apache is described as a “southern relative” of Tlicho (*Tlicho Yatì Enihl’ è: A Dogrib*

¹⁰¹ I also remember Richard Van Camp telling a story of a deceased daughter whose spirit/soul came back as a spirit and as such tickled her father’s neck who then recognized the butterfly as his daughter. He told this story during the 2012 ‘Ut’loo Noye Khunni - Weaving Words Celebration at UNBC.

Dictionary xv). The implied Pan-Native aspect to the stories as it mixes languages, band names, and territories becomes even more obvious when one takes a closer look at the origins of the Windigo legend, which can be traced back to mostly Cree stories. The changing of both peoples' cultures and traditions as well as environmental changes affecting communities inspired RVC to write about the Windigo:

I think because we have such a new migration of animals (we now have coyotes in Yellowknife; we have a new walrus in the Eastern Arctic who hunts seals and not clams; we now have hummingbirds visiting Fort Smith for the first time, etc.), it's opened up borders for me on new visitors (like the Wheetago or zombies) who find my characters or communities. There is a story about an encounter between a man and a Wheetago outside of Fort Smith published in *Tapwe*, a former newspaper in the NWT, so I used that chilling account as a springboard for 'The Fleshing.' (13)

RVC hints at a greater communal collaboration of different First Nations by suggesting a merging of mythologies, animal populations, and diseases that used to be unnatural. That Indigenous cultures with their oral traditions, ceremonies, and survival strategies were not static but instead flexible is demonstrated in the interdependencies of humans with the natural world. Native communities adapted to environmental changes and hence negated any form of human reign over nature. With the newly imposed hierarchy of the colonizer disguised as proclaimed civilization, this balance would turn upside down and transform into a self-destroying mechanism that is still at work today. The prominent manifestations of such can be found in resource depletion and the constant need to subjugate nature.

The transformation processes in RVC's stories also ascribe new meaning to the category of 'ecological dreaming' where the zombies symbolize the effects of globalization and capitalism that have come to infect the world's human population. The connection between human and zombie seems rather supernatural to the non-Native reader. Not only do the zombies invade human dreaming spheres but according to the dream character, they can track humans with their senses: "Their sound: it rings through what is hollow inside you. It finds your marrow and squeezes it to weaken you. And I think once their song touches you, they can hear what you are thinking" (13). The zombies seem to be able to invade the most sacred and personal spaces humans 'own.' The reversal of everything private into the most vulnerable platforms of a zombie attack evokes a sense of desolate helplessness while conveying that the cure is also the sickness. They invade through dreams and thinking, but it is also through dreams and prayer that the cure is

transmitted.

Furthermore, the land that has served as a comforting link to one's own physicality and a community's continuity by providing food, shelter, clothes as well as the foundation for visionary experiences during the vision quest, now offers the dream personality a means to access his vulnerabilities, and thus somewhat undermines nature's comfort. Instead, the land and the environment evoke a sense of irreversible conquest and comprehensive danger having been conquered and subordinated by the zombies: "They also spoke of lakes now, filled with humans swimming in their own blood. Hundreds of women, men, children, elders, harpooned and buoyed by jerry cans to keep them floating" (15/16); "At night, when I lower myself to the cooling earth, as I breathe through my palms to cool my roaring head, my finger burns. I think this is how they are tracking us" (15). The comfort of the earth remains and yet, the trust is broken as the land too is under the dominion of greedy monsters.

The question remains whether the boiled faces are able to track their prey through the meeting/touching of earth and body or via direct bodily contact, such as the burnt fingers that once touched a body part of a zombie (15). What once provided the people with a sense of security, shaped by a close relationship with people and land - including animals, and dreams - has now become a space of mistrust and constant threat. The reciprocal trust between these entities - human-animal-land - which once provided nutrition and shelter has evaporated with the emergence of the 'zombie epidemic' and the correlated ecocide. The balance has been destroyed.

The instructions given to deter and scare away the zombies go back to what is so often referred to as the Old Ways in First Nations literature and in the fictions: "That's how we knew to stop the boiled faces with the old ways" (10). The Hair Eaters that have found their way into the human world and now threaten to extinguish the current state of the world can only be stopped with the help of drumming, chanting in Apache, traditional roots, and tattoos. These Old Ways constitute a sort of 'cure' to a 'disease' that goes back to traditional ways of First Nations communities and that supports both Forbes' and Episknew's as well as Churchill's assertion that it is the 'system' (of colonialism) that is sick and needs curing, not the Native person affected. The role of the Windigo as a symbol of this sickness and disease is underlined by its predicament of (non)human identity. In the legends as well as in both stories, the borders of what is human and what is zombie/Windigo are blurred: "Could be human, could be them" (14). The humans that

have been taken over by the Windigo spirit in RVC's stories show awareness of the evil that inhabits their bodies and ask to be helped or killed. This also correlates to both Fiddler's and Nelson's recounts as well as anticipates the Windigo discourse of the second story "The Fleshing" where the Windigo possession of a young boy from the community is its central storyline.

The Windigo's physical, bodily connection to humans suggests that everybody can actually turn into a zombie/Windigo - which in the end only came into fruition by humans (greed): "Four Blankets Woman had tattooed our tongues, so the Hair Eaters could not hear us speak. Not even in this dream" (14), "we poked their halfway-human-and-mean-as-starving eyes out so they wouldn't see you the next time. We sliced the tips of their ears off and hung them high so they wouldn't hear you the next time" (12). Here again, it is the rather mystical figure of Four Blankets Woman that helps the dream personality and his companion Thinksawhile to be protected from the Hair Eaters.

The name Four Blankets Woman comes up in Native American history in connection to Sitting Bull, the famous Lakota Chief who was murdered in 1890 as a result of the then called "messiah craze" or what we know nowadays as the Ghost Dance movement. Four Blankets Woman was said to be his wife, adding yet another tribal connection, this time to the Lakota. It is noteworthy that RVC - bringing to light the ongoing blending of band/tribal customs, traditions, medicines, myths, legends - chose a name related to the Ghost Dance movement which resulted in the massacre of Wounded Knee,¹⁰² where more than 300 innocent Native people were massacred. The Ghost Dance Movement was a Pan-Native movement that aimed at uniting a broader Indigenous community to perform a dance that was supposed to restore a past before contact. The well-known Paiute "messiah" Wovoka (also called Jack Wilson¹⁰³) dispersed his experienced spiritual journey to the Great Spirit who told him to spread his message. The message was conceived via a dream and contained the vision of a revitalized traditional life in a world where 'the whites' disappeared and the buffalo and ancestors returned (McLoughlin 27). This would only happen if all Native Americans believed in the vision and practiced the given trance-seeking songs, dances, and ceremonies. McLoughlin

¹⁰² For more extensive information on Wounded Knee please see: Brown, Dee. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. 1970. London: Vintage, 1991.

¹⁰³ For more information on Wovoka's influence on the Sioux see Brown pp. 406-407. For Wovoka's (Jack Wilson's) biography see Waldman, Carl. *Biographical Dictionary of American Indian History to 1900*. p. 424.

describes the 1890 movement as syncretistic, i.e. the attempt to reconcile the many different ideas and religious beliefs of numerous tribes. The movement illustrated Native Americans as forging newly shared values and religious/spiritual identities even after colonization had rearranged previous cultural orders. Furthermore, the Pan-Native account in RVC's stories alludes to the necessity to work together and 'reunite' in the fight against the evil that effects not only one band or peoples but all of humanity and will eventually lead to the destruction of the very foundation of all our lives: the environment.

The Ghost Dance Movement as a "desperate plea for supernatural intervention" (McLoughlin 25) is revisited in *Four Blankets Woman's* power to "throw" the dream character's message to the protagonist in the form of a dream from the future. The dream in the story offers a warning and a hope to cure the sickness that 'white' people have brought and that has infected humanity with: Petro-capitalism and the resulting destruction of the earth and humanity.

In both stories, the author makes use of words in First Nations languages often without explanation or translation. Examples would be "tattooed in the way of *Kakiniit*, ghost marks" (12). With no further explanation given in the novel, the homepage of *Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated* offers a broader explanation. The word is an Inuktituk term that

represents a mark or tattoo a person gets on their body as a symbol of something important in their life. It's like a record of an important event. If an Elder is asked about their tattoos, they likely have a story to tell about what significant event it represents in their life. ("What is *Kakiniit*?")

By intermingling different languages as well as narrative levels, RVC's stories often evoke the impression that the reader's cultural literacy lags far behind the story line, its characters, language, time frame, and narrative outline. It is implicitly presumed that readers know what terms such as *Kakiniit* mean, what "rat root" (first mentioned on page 23), yarrow (13) is and "*In le*"¹⁰⁴ (14, 36) mean. Lutz asserts that this strategy of not explaining, let alone give translations, is part of the "writing home" paradigm that

¹⁰⁴ According to the context, the word must be Tlich/Dogrib and mean "no" since the term comes up in a refusal, accompanied by the character snowbird shaking his head (36).

postulates a literature for Indigenous communities while excluding illiterate outsiders.¹⁰⁵ Rat root¹⁰⁶ is used as medicine/medication by many First Nations bands. It is an inevitable part of First Nations' tradition, used for various little sicknesses and is said to cure not only headaches and sore throats but also used in sacred ceremonies.¹⁰⁷ When medicine is brought up, especially in the form of roots and herbs, we are once again reminded of the interconnectedness of nature and human. Reading RVC's stories, but even more so understanding these stories, it is essential to have prior knowledge about First Nations culture, traditions and beliefs, as well as the relationship to land suggesting "an implicit environmental ethic" (Baird Callicott 1). Being a "culturally literate reader"¹⁰⁸ is desirable and yet sometimes very difficult to be. In these two stories especially, the present code-switching includes not only one Native language but several (Apache, Tlicho/Dogrib and Inuktitut).

The protagonists in both stories had yarrow tied around their wrists and ankles (explained in more detail in the second story). In "On the Wings of this Prayer" yarrow was first introduced by Four Blankets Woman: "She rubbed my back with palms of yarrow. 'We need new medicine'" (13). Yarrow and rat root are established as medicine and protection against evil forces. Here, too, a specific root that is often tied to the famous Oglala Lakota¹⁰⁹ rituals of the Sun Dance during which the dancers have sage tied around their ankles and wrists is woven into a different and ceremonial context. It is only with the help of the earth's natural supplies/resources and traditional practices that the evil can be deterred: "That was how we know to stop the boiled faces with the old ways" (10). The

¹⁰⁵ For more information on the "writing home" paradigm, see: Hartmut Lutz "'Writing Back,' 'Writing Home,' and 'Writing Beyond?': Native Literature in Canada Today." In *Despite Harper: International Perceptions of Canadian Literature and Culture*, Suchacka, Zagratzki, and Hartmut Lutz. And: "Aboriginal Literatures in Canada: Multiculturalism and Fourth World Decolonization." *Contemporary Achievements*. 83-104.

¹⁰⁶ Elder in Residence (2011) Bertha Skye for the Aboriginal Student Health Services talks about the utilization of Rat Root in the Youtube video: "Elder Bertha Skye talks about the Rat Root," youtube.com.

¹⁰⁷ Nelson testifies: "They are sent, . . . 'to teach Indians their use and virtue,' &c, without which 'they would be very ill off, whether to heal or cure themselves, or expel the charms by which other Indians may have bewitched them,' &c . And tho' they are acquainted with many of these roots &c, the use and the virtue of some of which I can no more doubt than those used by the Faculty in the Civilised world, yet they tell me there are several which they use to different, and some to diametrically opposite purposes" (38/39). Here again, one should pay attention to his reference to the Western world as "the Civilized world" and subsequent differentiation from Native people, reminding the reader of the biased background of the observer.

¹⁰⁸ Lutz. *Approaches* 191.

¹⁰⁹ Please see for more information: Walker, James R. "Lakota Belief and Ritual." Eds. DeMallie, Raymond J. and Elaine A. Jahner. Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1980. Pp. 176-184.

return to a traditional¹¹⁰ life in the Old Ways serves as the protagonists' survival tools and its strategies and manners ensure protection. Four Blankets Woman plays the most significant role in providing medicine: "She knew which root and moss to braid to make wick for cooking and heat. Her medicine was rabbit medicine. When she was thirteen, she saved the life of a doe. In turn, she was given Gah [rabbit] medicine" (14). The quote illustrates the mutual reciprocity between nature, animals, and human while portraying the ethic of gifting people in order to show gratitude or respect. This balance has been disrupted by the very act of disrespecting the reciprocity of the relationship: The Alberta Tar Sands, taking more than 'needed,' destroying the environment and impacting surrounding communities undoubtedly puts men before nature, plant and animal, without giving anything back. Mutuality and reciprocity were substituted for greed and maximizing profits as capitalism's driving force.

While the first short story epitomized the dream or, as the title suggests, the "prayer", the second short story "The Fleshing" is about the dream's influence and significance, as well as its manifestations in/on the protagonist's life. On the first page of "The Fleshing" the main character, Bear, says: "Those damned dreams" (18). As he recalls whole sentences of the first story, his dream, it becomes immediately evident that Bear and especially his (inner) lifeworld is now the focus of the second story. Similar to Alexie's novel, the feelings and thoughts of Bear are revealed and highlighted by an off voice, written in italics. The protagonist is this time however in a wakeful state and remembers pieces of his dream: "*They can remember faces. . . . I'm sixteen. Why are these dreams so real?*" (19). The character is obviously struggling with his dreams and does not understand their content or their messages. They deprive him of his sleep and haunt him during daytime. Bear recalls another vivid dream that was not - at least not at first sight - part of the first story in which a child tears a raven¹¹¹ apart, dealing with a similar topic of destruction, death, and despair through disrespect brought by evil

¹¹⁰ Peter Rasevych defines a "traditional" Native person as follows: "A 'traditional' Indigenous person is someone who has attempted to live as best as one can in the way of one's ancestors, and who has retained one's language and much of one's culture, in partial rejection of Western religions and cultures. Traditional people keep Indigenous culture alive by living and embracing the values that they espouse. Many Indigenous people have accepted Western attitudes and behaviours in what has been referred to as 'selective retention' or 'controlled acculturation,' thereby retaining much of their own cultural identity in the process" (vii).

¹¹¹ Also note Richard Van Camp's book for children *A Man Called Raven*, 1997, in which he explains why one should never hurt raven.

magic.¹¹² It is significant that the character seems to have interpreted the dream as “the end of the world” although that was never explicitly worded as such in the previous story/his dream. The apocalyptic atmosphere seems to have established the assumption of an urgent matter that is threatening all life on earth.

At the beginning of the story the protagonist is convinced that his dreams are arbitrary and random. However, the story outline proves the opposite to be true, when on the last pages, Bear realizes: “This was my dream. Last night. The tar sands. The Shark Throats. It was all coming true!” (39). He goes on: “He saw all of this in his dream” (40). In order to grasp how this crucial awareness developed and how far Bear’s role as the elected saviour unfolds, the (literal) growing of the Wheetago requires a more elaborate discussion.

Windigo in the Stories

While Bear questions the unusual behaviour of the animals in his community and repeatedly asks himself, “Why?” (19, 20), his initial ignorance about being the ‘chosen’ medicine bringer and healer of the emerging evil of the Windigo is reflected in his young age and his puzzlement regarding his dreams. Bear’s reflections so far have no consequence and he remains rather passive and introverted. His real name is never revealed but the nickname’s connotation of the young protagonist as “*bearing*” the burden of his tormenting dreams that confuse and haunt him signifies his role as the ‘chosen one’ to save his companions. Furthermore, the appearance of a pregnant bear, who foresees the upcoming evil and who bangs on people’s windows, links two special ways of knowing: the first would be knowing through dreams and the second would be knowledge obtained from animals. Bear and the pregnant bear *know* things due to their respective and yet similar, introverted ways of knowing. With the bear also being a namesake to protagonist “Bear,” the telling character of the dreamer’s name is revealed. The name ‘Bear’ is also evocative of one specific Windigo story as retold and written down by Schwartz and Morrissette. In the story, the character Big Goose finds his village destroyed and its entire people devoured by the Windigo. After he prays for help, he receives special powers by a medicine man called “Bear Medicine Man,” “carrying a very large medicine bag. The

¹¹² “In this dream a raven was flying home. The child let out a whistle - a call? The raven was pulled from the air towards the child. The raven flapped wildly, but it was pulled towards the child who grabbed it with the force of its call” (19).

Bear Medicine Man put his arms around Big Goose and blew his supernatural powers into him” (12). With this newly given power, Big Goose successfully sets out to destroy the Windigo, and with that he also retrieves all of his village’s inhabitants in their human form (12). This connection reinforces Bear’s essential role in the story, while also bestowing him with the knowledge and the responsibility to cure the evil.

The only significant difference lies in the ‘unasked’ bestowment of the dream’s manifold messages. Bear, as a young adult, did not discover the evil, nor prayed or sought the vision. However, Bear in RVC’s story and Bear Medicine Man in Schwartz and Morrisseau’s story both lay the foundation for the Windigo to be defeated. This fact may also play into the previously discussed Native dream discourse, where none of the big medicine men actively sought out visions, but rather they were visited by dream spirits and animals during perceived sickness at a young age.

The second story’s plot sets off with the adolescent protagonist being invited to a party and asked by the host to bring as much meat as possible. What the main character finds at the house party is a bunch of terrified youth sitting around the “town bully” Dean (22) who has transformed into something referred to as “it,” already denying Dean his human identity (24 ff). When Bear sees the possessed town bully for the first time he remarks: “Somehow he was taller. Taller than me now” (22) and later in the story he describes: “Dean had grown. He was now taller than all of us. His arms did not fit his body. They were too long. His hands were so long they looked like feet” (29). This description does not only remind us of the Shark Throats and giant Windigo accounts but furthermore estranges Dean from his human body and soul. Dean’s outer appearance has changed to something that is closer to an animal than a human being as he keeps vomiting food back into his mouth to chew and then swallow it again for up to four times, a common behaviour of ruminants. The people “it” (Dean) is keeping captive have to continue feeding him meat and alcohol in order to keep it/him in control and distracted (24):

It was like he had molars in his throat that could grind it all over again. He grinned. His lower teeth were thick and jagged with points. He started moving his lower jaw back and forth, as if he could saw through bone if given a finger or limb. (25)

Here, the first connections to the Shark Throats from story number one can be drawn. The descriptive quote reminds us of the zombies who have throats like sharks, with rows of teeth that can bite through anything, even human bones. According to host Rupert, the

more “it” eats the hungrier it gets, and the more it drinks the thirstier it gets. There is a constant need for feeding, or it will attack the humans present as food. If it does not get (human) meat, it will face starvation. The Windigo’s main feature of cannibalistic over-consumption and gluttony is exposed when Dean desperately starts to feed on his own lips and hands. Forbes’ motif of the wétiko disease as epitomizing all evil in this world, including alcoholism, violence, capitalism and oppression is evocative in Dean’s excessive alcohol consumption and his self-destruction. Alcohol, as one of the most devastating “gifts”¹¹³ of colonization and Settler society, portrays a destructive spiral with devastating consequences such as FAS(D), discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. It is further labelled and summarized by Kanien’kehaka writer Beth Brant as “colonization through addiction” (18). Here, alcoholism as part of Windigo features in the story and wétiko disease as motif, is dominated by the increasing need for more in order to satisfy the needs of body and mind. Physical dimensions of alcoholism and addiction hence form the symptomatic bodily dimensions of Forbes’ conceptualized notion of the Windigo as a mental sickness. When interviewer Sylvie Vranckx asked RVC about the appearance of zombies in relation to the Wheetago he responded:

I think zombies are already here. We see it with our family and friends who are lost in their addictions. Have you ever talked to someone you love who’s addicted and high on Oxycontin? They’re gone. It’s their body and who they used to be but they’re gone. So I think that zombies are a manifestation of who we love and who we knew and “the other” as coming to eat you alive. (12)

This ambivalent nature of the Windigo, in his characteristic of a human parasite that hides and transforms the human from the inside, also portrays the destruction of what was once known and loved. Further supporting Forbes’ concept is Dean’s (as Windigo) enjoyment of seeing Saddam Hussein being publicly executed on television: ““He likes this. Do you think it was an accident that they released footage of Saddam Hussein being hung?”” Saddam Hussein, as a global “embodiment of evil” (Williams) implicates the stage of infection of the mental disease that has many projections. Later, Bear observes: “Saddam looked scared, like a little boy. . . . Saddam looked around, all business, but deep down I could feel how terrified he was” (24/25). By calling Saddam Hussein by his first name and equating him with a little boy while projecting feelings of fear and terror onto him, Bear sheds light on the extensive scope of evil in the world that tends to objectify perceived

¹¹³ See: Jeannette Armstrong’s poem “History Lesson” as was quoted in footnote 94.

evils. Bear's humanization of something evil also exposes the evil of people who claim to be good while publicly murdering and showing footage of the execution as a demonstration of power (25). And once again, this passage reinforces the predicament of identity within a Windigo discourse that affects not only the Windigo but also the people fighting it. The Windigo is objectified and deprived of any human identity, but only because the Windigo itself treats humans as objects that can be devoured, using the excuse of starvation that actually reveals gluttony and over-consumption.

It is only in the end of the story, that Severina explains to Bear what the Wheetago actually is:

The Wheetagos are cannibals. They're from the south but the people there are strong. Their medicine and Wheetago hunters have pushed them north. These...things, the more they eat the hungrier they become. Maybe they got bit or cursed. But they suffer. If they don't eat, they will chew on their tongues and lips, gnaw on the insides of their cheeks, bite their own fingers off at the joints and suck on them just to feed. (39)

By the time Severina gives these details on the origins and workings of the Windigo, all of the said characteristics have already been displayed in Dean's appearance and behaviour.

Furthermore, the Windigo's connection to Ice is also taken up by the first story/dream, since it is through the melting of ice - "during the time of the warming world" (9) - that the corpse of the trapper resurfaces and is able to bite the mother on her way to get water. After being infected herself, the mother gets thirsty and demands water, but never drinks it. After her escape from her family who had tied her down, the story goes: "She'd torn her binding and fled, but the strangest thing - the oddest thing - were the glasses of water he'd brought her. They'd all turned to ice" (9). The second story subtly addresses the significance of the ice by Bear's repeated mention of feeling "cold seep into me" (27), "I was cold inside and shivering" (28) and "It was like someone poured ice water all over me" (30). The inner feeling of coldness is also indicative of Dean's transition from human to an inhumane, emotionless, heartless, cold Windigo monster. That he is ascribed the role of "town bully" reveals that he probably was not the most compassionate of youths, which again might explain his receptiveness to the evil spirit that bit him and none of the other kids.

The trapper, who lived close to the Alberta Tar Sands, and who turned into a zombie/Windigo before his corpse bit the mother, was killed, and according to the story "they had to burn his heart and scatter his ashes after they cut his head off. . . . We don't

think they burnt his heart to ashes because they saw him again and he killed many, many people by biting at them” (10). The story not only gives away the most common way to get infected by being bitten but also provides a way to cure and kill the Windigo spirit. The burning will also be central to the second story when Bear is instructed to burn everything that the Windigo had asked (36). The burning and subsequent destruction of the infected person’s heart and of all things it asked as well as Dean’s pleas to save him and the zombie’s mother’s plea to be killed help to identify Dean as a Windigo.

Yet another marker of Windigo identity is the paralyzing cry. On page eleven it says: “Their wild, rolling cry is used to paralyze.” In the second story it is also the sound that has a haunting and paralyzing effect on the characters as they plea: “Don’t let it make the sounds” (24) and state, that “it’s cry paralyzed. Its cry was a weapon” (26). When at some point Dean/Windigo does his “mewling” scream (30), Bear nearly surrenders but then takes his “Tlicho Power belt and buckle” as a weapon to “go whip him in the skull” (34). This scene is reminiscent of Fiddler’s recount of Jack Fiddler whipping and scolding of a man who was about to transform into a Windigo and hence defeating the evil spirit, reversing the transformation process.

It becomes obvious, that underneath the inhuman ‘thing’ there still is a human part of Dean, since the half-human talks at some points as Dean himself, begging Bear to save him. He states: “Help me, Bear’ . . . ‘Something bit me’” (32). Furthermore, in both stories the possessed humans beg either for help or to be killed. The bitten mother from story number one pleads: “Kill me now. Kill me now or I’ll kill you all before the sunrise. . . . Your meat is magnificent and what roars in your veins is calling me. It’s calling me to drink you open and warm me so sweetly” (9). Nelson’s and Fiddler’s accounts of people who were ‘infected’ or ‘transformed’ into a Windigo also emphasized that the people still had human characteristics and were consequently not easily distinguishable from ‘uninfected’ humans. The human “who ‘goes windigo’ initially retains a conventional appearance, but ultimately loses human identity and cultural knowledge” (Brown and Brightman 159). This explains why in the second story, Bear struggles with recognizing, as well as separating the evil spirit - the Windigo - from the human being - Dean - underneath.

When Bear finally realizes that it is his task and responsibility to save the kids in

the room, he reassures himself: “I had the power of my ancestors and I had Sensei’s¹¹⁴ training. I knew what I had to do” (33). The Old ways he is referring to as “powers of my ancestors” come to him as the natural comfort and healing power to the evil he is facing. That he is instinctively relying on the Old Ways might also be due to his ability to recall his dream, in which it was stated that the Old Ways are the way to defeat the Windigo.

In the course of “The Fleshing,” a voice speaks to Bear and tells him what to do while facing the dangerous situation, telling him to take the tooth that the Windigo has lost; a voice telling him that it will help him. It is never revealed whose voice it is speaking to Bear, but it might be the dream personality’s voice as well as Elder and medicine man Snowbird or his unidentified sensei’s voice. Maybe all the voices are united in one communal voice? All of them refer to an ancestral and relational connection: “I have sent this back to tell you this, my ancestor: the Tar Sands are ecocide” (12). Time in both stories is a rather complex concept. It is - as the previous quote already explains - constructed in an un-linear, backwards fashion, starting with the future and ending with the present. By depicting a future of absolute terror, blood lust, and omnipresent destruction, the dream messages’ urgency shines light on the immediacy to “change the future” (17).

It is only at the end of the story that the protagonist comprehends that it is Snowbird who was “thrown” the second dream, the dream “to prove it” (16). “The dream said it was sent to two people. After, we’d have to decide what to do about the tar sands. We had to stop them. We had to”(42). Bear’s initial astonishment when Severina tells him that Snowbird saw all that had happened in a dream also informs him that Snowbird planned this beforehand. The above quote hence illustrates his comprehension of the ‘bigger picture’ while also adopting a “we” rather than the previous “I,” stressing a *communal* fight against the evil. Bear’s initial bewilderment and isolation have been replaced by pride and the acceptance of his role in the fight for communal continuity. Snowbird as a medicine man is aware of the power of dreams and hence understands the dream messages more quickly than young Bear. For Snowbird, it was clear what had to be done and what his and Bear’s role was, and he was able to give Bear rat root as protection against the Windigo two nights before Dean’s possession (38). As colonization has cut many Indigenous peoples off from traditional ways of living and behaving, such as to

¹¹⁴ Sensei is a Japanese word for “before birth” (oed.com) but is used to address one’s teacher and or professor, one’s master or trainer, also often used in martial arts (Birnbaum 12) which is later also taken up again when Bear takes on his “Bear Stance,” (33) ready to fight the Windigo.

incorporate Indigenous epistemological ways of knowing and transmitting this knowledge, the younger generation has also lost contact to their traditional ways of relating to their community and ancestors. With Bear's acknowledgement of his dreams as messages and his implementation of such he also re-enters into relational dialogue with his Indigeneity.

That the characters of both stories are intricately intertwined is subtly unveiled in the course of the second story, especially by means of familiar descriptive vocabularies and a similar semantic field. One of the second story's first allusions to the first story is Snowbird's blindness, which is evocative of the apocalyptic world in the dream, where "all Known Elders turned blind" (14). It remains unclear who the "Known people" are, and whether they are part of evil or good. Is Snowbird a Known Elder who has turned blind in the future and has now returned to the past/present in order to provide medicine and help people to cure the world from the Windigo? Or is his blindness rather a sign of his senses and his spirit being directed inwards and not outwards? Snowbird's connection to the protagonist is not revealed when he is mentioned first, but because of his blindness, and because he gives the protagonist and his grandparents rat root as medicine, we may assume him to be a 'known elder' to the community. Severina, the object of the protagonist's secret crush and collaborator, later states that Snowbird is her adopted grandfather and a "Wheetago hunter" (39). Severina also explains that Snowbird and his helper, Torchy, need to blind the Windigo in order to make it leave Dean's body, which makes Bear ponder whether Snowbird himself was once a Wheetago (40). Severina is also the one telling Bear that Snowbird believes him to "have medicine and we will need it" (40) which puzzles Bear at first and yet elevates him to "the warrior I'd [he'd] always wanted to be" (42). Severina and Bear, as the young warrior couple who need to find their own path to deal with traditional and contemporary sickness and cure, find resolve and help in legends and stories, medicines and people that point them towards their Indigenous resources.

RVC stated in an interview that he is "half Dogrib and half pop culture" (Van Camp and Muro 308), which also becomes evident in his writing, here especially in his use of the word "zombie." Just as Waldram, Rasevych and Forbes, Vranckx relates the Wheetago and the zombie figure to trauma and colonialism, represented by horror and an apocalyptic setting in the two stories. Vranckx asserts: "To some extent, I think the

‘unrealistic’ language of horror and of the Gothic¹¹⁵ is the most realistic way of representing colonialism, because people went through an apocalypse that overwhelmed their belief systems” (Vranckx and Van Camp 13). While equating the traditional Windigo figure with the contemporary popular zombie figure, RVC obscures past and present, tradition and Popular Culture. The zombie imagery makes his short stories more accessible to a broader, contemporary, and non-Native audience and acknowledges that a clear-cut separation of traditional life and (post)modern life has become impossible. His character blends both traditional and modern as he “loved to drink ice cold Coke while ripping into dry meat” (18). Fluidly and almost effortlessly, RVC’s writing blends traditional storytelling devices (such as repetitions, directly addressing the reader as well as code-switching) with aspects of modern life and pop cultural imagery.

In her article “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies,” Elizabeth McAlister explores the shift from the Haitian mythological “zonbi” figure to the popular image of a zombie-cannibal bringing destruction, disease and death. McAlister states: “In both contexts, zombie narratives and rituals interrogate the boundary between life and death, elucidate the complex relations between freedom and slavery, and highlight the overlap between capitalism and cannibalism (458/459). In RVC’s stories it is also the overlapping of living and dead, human and inhuman, as well as destruction and cure that strikes the reader as shockingly vivid and almost fluidly influencing each other. Not even the main characters are able to draw lines between good and evil, dead or alive, human or possessed spirit: “What the last hunter brought was a hand that could be bear with an eye sewn backwards into the palm. Could be human, could be them. Knuckle sockets sucked dry. I touched one and singed my finger. It burns at night when I sleep” (14/15). The metaphorical use of the zombie also ties in with Forbes’ wétiko disease and helps to illuminate the underlying threat of “the synthetic reality of a death culture“ with a warning and the instruction to transform back “into the natural reality of a culture of life” (LaDuke vi). The zombies, Shark Throats, and Windigos are representatives for capitalist actions in Canada’s province, Alberta, whereas the human (body) is the ‘host’ for this evil.

¹¹⁵ Kerstin Knopf’s habilitation is entitled: *The Gothic Canadian Century: Unhomely Beginnings and the Female Gothic in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Related to the exploration of Gothic conventions is the concept of Magic(al) Realism, which is elaborately discussed in Agnieszka Rzepa’s work *Feats and Defeats of Memory: Exploring Spaces of Canadian Magical Realism*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009.

Canada's heavy involvement in the oil industry and Prime Minister Harper's approval of the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline in June 2014 as only one recent example is producing "low growl[s] from the cancered earth" (14). The personification of the earth - which is most likely only considered such by Western and non-Indigenous readers, as many Indigenous cultures view the earth as a 'being,' we commit cannibalism in the sense that the earth, nature, and our environment are a part of *mother* earth. Inuit Elder Sheila Watt-Cloutier describes: "According to my knowledge and research, pollution is like a blanket over our earth. Our earth is having a hard time breathing and then overheats" (Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change, mins 18:40-18:50).

As we greedily devour our own mother, the land that nurtures us is being degraded to serve capitalist purposes. The Tar Sands machinery digging up the earth for oil with giant machines and producing huge toxic tailing ponds, whose crude bitumen oil is transported throughout the country with pipelines and then with crude oil carriers into the Ocean and to China or other countries in order to fulfill the growing demand for oil has become the embodiment of natural resource depletion and destruction. McAlister also asserts that the zombie figure in contemporary scholarship has come to be the most well known and most often used figure in representing Western capitalism by their uncontrollable urge to "hyper-consume" (474). She describes that

In 2007, a zombie flash mob invaded a San Francisco Apple store to stage an anticonsumerist performance piece where zombies pretended to eat the computers on display. . . . Zombies are all around us. Americans have brought to life - or death, if you prefer - a proliferation of monsters who are doing a fair amount of cultural work. (460)

The cultural work that the zombies are doing in RVC's stories is both a literary and literal 'wake up call' ("Now wake up," 17) to stop the Alberta Tar Sands and petro-capitalist overconsumption at the expense of humanity and the environment.

Strikingly, the "zombie originates in Afro-Haitian religious thought and practice, and is traceable [in part] to colonial-era Kongo religion from central Africa (McAlister 461). Unlike other ghostly creatures, like Frankenstein's monster or vampires, the zombie cannot be traced back to European literary traditions. This 'unrootedness' of the zombie in Western traditions makes it an even better tool to mirror Settler society's infliction on Native lands, lives, and resources. The image of the Tar Sands 'raping' mother earth becomes even more striking when in RVC'S first story, the zombies are depicted as giving birth through their mouths as well as the lakes that are now used by the zombies as a

display of dead human corpses, floating along the surface reaching further than one can see.

The uprising of the Wheetago/zombies and thus the striving capitalist Oil industry as represented by the Alberta Tar Sands, denote a shift in morality. Limits and boundaries are blurred as it becomes less obvious what is good and what is evil. That all of the infected people and characters, are still able to realize something bad is happening to them and to express the need to be helped or killed, makes it more difficult to separate human from monster, obfuscating the lines of beast and human. What is essential is the recognition that without human wrong doings, the Wheetago would not exist. It would not have been excavated from its grave and Coyote would not have bitten Dean. Such environmental changes would not occur either without humankind and its industrial progresses. Climate change and global warming pose major threats to the environment and are featured in the story as these changes bring the ice to melt and the zombie to come alive again.¹¹⁶ That the Windigo poses a threat to nature as well as (human) identity is evocative of Forbes' conceptualization of hierarchic and imperialist societies and modern capitalism as a "negative appraisal of human life" (37). It devours the "mysterious circle, that makes life possible" (183). The personification of the capitalist system as a "hungry" and "over-consuming" monster stands in stark opposite to its rather objective and neutral structures (like company structures, political entities involved in decision making processes etc.) that eventually result in dehumanization while providing further means and justification for destruction through resource extraction and the allegedly satisfaction of materialist needs. It also opposes the also personified role of *mother* earth. The personification of both, sickness and patient, emphasizes the human problem while also suggesting a human solution. We destroy the environment but we can also save the environment.

Dean, being both human and Wheetago at the same time, epitomizes the "disfigured body disposed of its soul, will, agency, and hence its interiority and its very

¹¹⁶ In the already mentioned documentary *Inuit Knowledges and Climate Change*, Elders recount that as children, their first task of the day was to go outside and take a look at the sky. They were supposed to read the weather and to greet the environment and animals. Due to climate change, many Elders are unable to read the weather anymore. They state: "I told him I can't forecast the weather anymore. He said he also gave up on that. With all these strong winds, it's hard to know where they are coming from" (mins 13:21-13:30). They also observe that "all the glaciers by the shore are now gone" (min 21:56) and that "multi-year ice no longer exists in this area" (min 23:28). One elder argues: "Climate change won't only affect ice and glaciers but the land too due to melting permafrost. It looks like land, but it's frozen underneath. If this heat continues, so will the melting" (mins. 28:16-28:40).

humanity” (McAlister 472). This (‘occupied’) space between good and evil, between human and inhuman gets confused when its imagery is applied to the Tar Sands, because they are in the end supported, implemented and performed by human beings. In Cariou’s short story “An Athabasca Story” the Cree and Ojibwa “culture hero” (R. Innes ch.1) Elder Brother stumbles during an especially cold winter upon the Tar Sands and describes the scenery as follows: “enormous yellow contraptions that clawed and bored and bit the dark earth and then hauled it away to the big house” (171). His personification of the Tar Sands’ machinery as “yellow beasts” that he realized had people inside (172), supports the Windigo imagery and portrays not only mother earth talking to him but also the beasts, whose movements and actions are executed by humans, or a human’s body when one thinks of the Windigo as both a possessive malignant spirit and a mental illness (of imperialism, capitalism and destruction).¹¹⁷

Throughout the second story, repeated moments of clarity allow Dean to momentarily regain control over the ‘evil spirit’ and to beg for help. That the human body hosts the Windigo also suggests that there still is a vacant soul and consciousness, which conveys hope that with the help of the right ‘medicine’ the process can be reversed. The main task for Bear seems to be to save Dean, making a clear separation between boy and beast: “I had to save Dean, whatever was left of him inside that thing. . . . ‘Dean, . . . What is left of you, I’m trying to save” (34). Bear’s compassion for Dean and his ability to see through the beast and reach human Dean, helps as it was possible for Dean to give Bear the advice that the Windigo does not like the sound of running water. After Bear successfully saved all the other kids and is alone with Windigo Dean he is able to retrieve a tooth that Dean had lost which will later provide an essential tool for Snowbird and Torchy in order to kill the Windigo. Whether Dean is saved or not, remains unresolved.

While the zombies in contemporary pop culture show the ‘American zombie’ as irrevocably ‘dead’ and not involved in any sort of social order and/or emotionality, the Wheetago’s spirit can take possession of a human character and body without entirely extinguishing the human soul. The ultimate ‘other’ hence becomes not so different from

¹¹⁷ Here are metaphoric parallels to Leslie Marmon Silko’s famous short story “Storyteller” in which environmental destruction by resource extraction is also symbolized by yellow machines: “The metal froze; it split and shattered. Oil hardened and moving parts jammed solidly. She had seen it happen to their big yellow machines and the giant drill last winter when they came to drill their test holes. The cold stopped them, and they were helpless against it” (195). While here, the cold serves as protection against the unleashed evil that aims at destroying Mother Earth, in RVC’s stories, the cold does and cannot serve as a shield against this evil, due to climate warming and the effects of thawing permafrost.

humans, which might form an even bigger threat since with differentiations, diagnosis seem to become more difficult and a cure almost unattainable. RVC's first story suggests that there is nothing 'human' left in the zombies, and that the only way to kill them is "with the Decapitator through the skull. It's a long harpoon with a cross-axe on the hilt to ram and split the skull so zombies can't grab you. . . . Scramble the brain" (10). The brain, as McAlister explains, is considered to be the center of 'white people,' who are judged as being "ruled by their head" (Richard Dye qtd in McAlister 60). While the brain as the instrument to objectify is killed, the heart that had turned to ice comes back to life, thus representing the resurgence and recovery of humanity.

Medicine, as a central word and concept that helps to alleviate if not cure the evil, can be many things and transcend Western notions of pharmaceutical medicine or medication. RVC states:

Medicine power is still here. We all have power every day to help others. Storytelling is medicine power. So is forgiveness. So is making amends. So is trust. So are children. I like how in some of my stories there's a sense that even the most marginalized person can be given medicine power. There's hope for everyone in my stories. (Vranckx and Van Camp 15)

RVC's storylines hence reaffirm that just as there is bad medicine and evil spirits, there is also good medicine. His emphasis lies in human compassion that too often gets lost in the dominant strife to make a living in a capitalist society. The stories' emphasizing the fact that nobody can be spared from the Windigo and can be infected at any time reminds the reader that we all feed into Windigo society and contribute to capitalism and the loss of 'humanity.' But just as we are prone to get bitten by the Windigo, we are also inherently able to make amendments that mitigate its power. McAlister concludes her article with the following words:

the zombie has been part-human, inhuman, slave, revolutionary, cannibal, monster, destroyer, and that which it is moral to destroy. Insofar as the zombie is a cipher, it can be cast to form any number of meaning-sets; it is always shifting signification and yet it can be said to hint at something of the original. After all, we all know what a zombie is. (483)

The zombies, Shark Throats, Boiled Faces, and Windigos can be just as arbitrary in their different meanings. RVC uses the denotation zombie because of its visual associations and effects on the contemporary reader due to the popular imagery that has 'infiltrated'

television programs, movie theatres, and literature, and thus has reached widespread audiences.

McAlister maintains that zombies not only represent the danger of capitalism and the ruin of any social order, but also constitute a warning: “From the etymology of *monster*, the Latin *mon[st]ere* [sic!], we find ‘to demonstrate, or to warn.’ The monster gestures, inherently, to a sort of prophetic revelation” (474). RVC’s comments that his dreams reveal the end of the world as we know it: “We have a warning from the future sent by a Dream Thrower warning us and two of the characters to stop the Tar Sands at all costs” (“I’m Counting on Myself to Tell the Truth,” rabble.ca). He not only reveals the warning of his stories’ characters but also stresses that we as readers are warned as well by providing the reader with a link to our shared reality, the Alberta Tar Sands. The stories end with the persistent impression that “They were all trying to warn us: things were going to get bloody and worse. I knew, . . . that deep down inside this was not over. Not yet... No way....” (42), indicates that with awareness, more action needs to follow and that the fight has just started.

The most essential medicine in the novels is the power of dreams, because it is only through the dream that the protagonists know what and how to handle Dean as Windigo. It is also with the help of his dream that Bear learns about the medicine and that the dream connects him to Snowbird, “the blind holy man” (37). The dream serves as a connection to the past as well as to the future. The past - often referring to the Old Ways - and medicine was transmitted from Dogrib/Cree/Apache ancestors. The medicine used by Bear, Snowbird, and Torchy hence derives from many different ancestral lineages and relations: “They were using dog medicine” (41) refers to the band name Dogrib (Tlicho). Yarrow, tied around ankles and throat, alludes to the Lakota Sun Dance ritual; the Windigo is originally observed among Cree legend and the chanting to subdue the Windigo has to be in Apache. Concerning healing and medicine, Richard Van Camp states that “all of these characters are finding their own power and grace in the shadow of some

horrible people and situations” (Vranckx and Van Camp 11).¹¹⁸ Finding power correlates to Bear’s revealed predestination to help the world so that the Windigos are not resurrected. His revelation is part of both a personal individual healing journey and a journey to find communal and ancestral strength; a strength that is still alive in Indigenous Traditional (Ecological) Knowledge. In how far Dreams are a form of T(E)K will be further discussed in the following chapter.

4.3 “Dreams and Traditional (Ecological) Knowledge: Ambivalent Messages?”

Analytical approaches drawing on imaginaries, magic, myths, monsters, primordial urges, and strange happenings help us question the Western narrative about the supremacy of scientific knowledge and just-in-time technical solutions, and so have much to contribute to a political-ecological critique of environmental crisis. (Westman 228)

Dreams as/and T(E)K

The storyline of both short stories is mainly triggered and developed by the process of dreaming and later the recalling of dream content, which ultimately leads to the blurring and conceptual overlapping of dreams and stories. So let me, within the next section, equate stories with dreams for the purpose of recalling the power of dreams to inform and shape reality. Fagan summarizes: “Stories, told and retold over generations, contain complex teachings about Aboriginal history, science, ethics, spirituality, and methods of survival. . . . stories can provide means of both articulating and understanding traumatic events. However, stories rarely express their embedded knowledge explicitly or directly” (5). Fagan references Kimberley Roppolo who refers to this as “indirect discourse” and

¹¹⁸ As RVC repeatedly refers to his reappearing, un-linear characters as “gladiators” that go into battle with evil spirits, it is in both stories the Windigo and the Alberta Tar Sands - as part of government policies - that are the evil to be fought. RVC comments: “I hope the time we live in is just a bad dream and we’ll all wake up and go, ‘Wait. So there were no omnibus bills that sold this country out to the highest bidder? There wasn’t yet another wave of extinguishment bills on our Treaty rights and survival?’ I don’t think that Harper’s government ever considered that these all out attempts to put this gorgeous country of ours up for sale would unite both Canadians and Aboriginal people in the way it has. I think most Canadians are realizing that it is the Treaties that will protect so much of Canada. What an ugly time for our country” (Van Camp qtd in McNabb).

quotes: “A common Aboriginal American speech phenomenon in which the speaker avoids directly stating something to the listener or listeners, instead implying meaning and expecting those hearing to make meaning for themselves” (Roppolo qtd in Fagan 5). RVC’s story as a dream implicitly draws upon and calls for Traditional Indigenous Knowledge. On the plot level of RVC’s stories, the young protagonist has to find out about his dreams’ meaning on his own. While at first puzzled by their vivid imagery and the repetitive sentences that seemingly want to tell him something, his journey proves the dream to be the major source of knowledge and healing. Only when Bear starts to ‘believe’ his dream does he open the possibility to master the situation and save the kids from the Windigo. His reliance on the dream as knowledge reveals his special role for an entire community that both elevates his position in the world and bestows on him a greater responsibility. His prophetic dream, while he is progressing from adolescence to adulthood, is reminiscent of the Vision Quest often performed as a rite of passage. Bear stresses that he was chosen and did not choose to have this powerful vision that changed his life.

Fagan furthermore asserts, that stories and their “indirect discourse” are not acknowledged by Western theory standards and are hence deemed unscientific and unreliable. Margaret Kovach confirms and further explains: “I struggled with the appropriateness of bringing an oral-based knowledge system into an academic world that has only recently become open to it” (12). Other Indigenous scholars, writers and activists such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou, Maori, New Zealand), Rauna Kuokkanen (Sami, Scandinavia) and her work *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemologies and the Logic of the Gift*, Shawn Wilson’s (Opaskwayak Cree) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*; Marie Battiste (Mi’kmaq), Jeannette Armstrong (Sylx Okanagan), Jo-Ann Episkeneew (Métis) Margaret Kovach’s (Plains Cree and Saulteaux) *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* and many more stress the significance of incorporating Indigenous Knowledges, especially Research Methodologies that include dreams as knowledge sources. Kovach elaborates on her personal perception of dreams:

I can identify this knowledge source in my own life. Early in my research, I had a powerful dream that was particularly relevant. I knew, culturally, not to dismiss the knowledge coming to me in this form, for within Plains Cree knowledges dreams matter. In conversation with Graham Smith about the intersection between holistic philosophy and research, he said, ‘I just see that as part of Indigenous knowledge,

frameworks. You need a way to write them in, obviously, but part of the cultural context. I see dreams as being part of oral culture.’ (57/58)

While not only connecting dreams to research and an academic environment, she also explains the significance of dreams as part of a broader Indigenous knowledge: “Ancient knowledge is still alive in Cree communities. The most sacred form comes through dreams, fasts, sweats, vision quests, and during sacred ceremonies” (66). This accounts not only for the authors, scholars and Elders but also to the characters of the present writings of fiction. With the help of “ancient knowledge” a dream can “offer[s] guidance or assistance” (66/67).¹¹⁹ That the instructions for Bear on how to defeat the Windigo are being passed on via dreams and stories uncovers and reaffirms dreaming as a major tool of communication in order to instruct, predict, conjure and warn while being able to surpass spatial, timely, and relational (ancestral) generations. With the reference to the traditions, myths, legends, storytelling, medicines of his ancestors, and how they incorporated dreams and nightmares in their storytelling, RVC “establish[es] meaningful relations between past and present in a culturally and socially appropriate way” (Kenny 167 in Fagan). Dreaming here is yet another form of communication, of being and passing on knowledge, of finding a connection to one’s own spirituality and innermost desires, fears and traumas, as well as providing essential knowledge to sustain the circle.

Connecting knowledges and the concept of the circle leads back to the conception and perception of Traditional Ecological/Environmental Knowledge (TEK). TEK is a concept that has recently found a lot of attention by media and scholars in fields such as environmentalism or eco criticism (Johannes 33, Ermine et al 66, Lutz “‘They talk, we listen:’ Indigenous Knowledges and Western Discourse,” forthcoming). Defining the term is rather difficult because once again, the urge to define and confine complex concepts is rooted in Western rational thought and not necessarily part of Indigenous epistemologies, proving that definitions too often restrict and hamper possibilities to ‘think outside the

¹¹⁹ In an interview with Junko Muro, professor of English literature in Japan, Richard Van Camp also talks about what influences and significance dreams have for him as a writer and how dreams can channel, evoke, guide and inspire his writings: “I had a dream one night about sailors falling in love with mermaids. The sailors were so in love with these mermaids that they dived in to cross the ocean to be with them. Some of them drowned. I saw these sailors carving steps out of Chinese jade, beautiful steps for the mermaids to sun themselves on. . . . After I had that dream, I sat down and was trying to think of my “in” into the story - How would I write it? What was the voice? Who was going to be my hero?” (306). He describes that the following creative process involves the choosing of which ‘hero’ or ‘gladiator’ goes along with the story and its plot. His dreams have laid the foundations for plotlines, illustrating the author’s belief in and inspiration from dreams.

box.’ Many First Nations people (McGregor, Battiste, Henderson) discard the terminology surrounding Indigenous environmental and ecological consciousness and ‘refuse’¹²⁰ (or at least struggle and distance themselves from) giving a definition that limits their knowledge and relationship with the natural environment to the scope of the (English) language and Western science. Kovach asserts: “I struggled with the appropriateness of bringing an oral-based knowledge system into an academic world that has only recently become open to it” (12). However, Martha Johnson - former executive director of the Dene Cultural Institute in the Northwest Territories - gives one of the most accepted and used definitions. She describes TEK as

a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. It includes a system of classification, a set of empirical observations about the local environment, and a system of self-management that governs resource use. The quantity and quality of traditional environmental knowledge varies among community members, depending upon gender, age, social status. . . . traditional environmental knowledge is both cumulative and dynamic, building upon the experience of earlier generations and adapting to the new technological and socioeconomic changes of the present. (Johnson qtd in McGregor 393)

Many Western scholars simply define TEK as “the knowledge of Native people about their natural environment” (McGregor 393) hence neglecting the reciprocal nature of Indigenous knowledges. Therefore, the main difference in defining and recognizing TEK is the perception of ‘having’ TEK, and ‘doing’ or ‘being’ TEK. Relationality, accountability, and “land-locked Indigeneity” (Lutz “They Talk, We Listen”) form the foundational principles of Indigenous knowledges that are also highlighted and represented by the dream discourse in RVC’s stories. And because the third principle underlines that Indigenous identity - Indigeneity - is profoundly tied to geographic places and their respective ecosystems, we should take a closer look at TEK as one subcategory of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge.

It seems to have become a common joke amongst Native people of Turtle Island to mock Settler society and the Western scientific world with their announcements of “recent

¹²⁰ Gross points out: “Non-Aboriginals often have next to no understanding of an oral culture and hence no grasp of Indigenous stories in which TEK has been stored, while Aboriginals who have had no exposure to scientific training find the proper communication of their traditional knowledge difficult” (139).

discoveries.”¹²¹ These ‘jokes’ expose ongoing paternalistic colonial mindsets that continuously patronize Indigenous knowledges. The major “Settler discovery” that started all other discoveries being the ‘discovery’ in 1492 of a ‘New land’ that was inhabited by numerous Indigenous cultures. How can one discover a land that people already lived on from time immemorial? Today, Western scientists slowly ‘discover’ that nature is interconnected, interdependent and involved in a circle of life, which includes the environment, animals, and human beings in a circular and non-hierarchical network of relational co-existence. Facts that used to be dismissed as esoteric and marginalized by stereotyped images and fantasies of the “green Indian” (Gross 131) are now often proclaimed as ‘new’ Western scientific discoveries. Fagan gives the following quote by Alfred Taiaiake: “White people are just starting to discover that yes, we do have a lot of answers, and we did have really elaborate, complex systems that spoke to every aspect of life” (Taiaiake qtd in Fagan 14). Kovach complements with a rather positive stance and outlook:

As the academic landscape shifts with an increasing Indigenous presence, there is a desire among a growing community of non-Indigenous academics to move beyond the binaries found within Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action. (12)¹²²

TEK and its recent ‘discovery’ by Western scientists also makes it imperative to look at the persisting danger of performing tribal glossing and essentializing Indigenous cultures. The term itself comes with a presumption of a common Native trait encompassing ‘special’ ecological knowledge, interest and activism, “assuming there to be a single value for all of aboriginal North America” (Harkin 215). Harkin and Rich’s essay collection *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian* hints at the prevailing image of the nature loving “Indian,” naively protecting his land and living in close contact with nature. Harkin states:

the assumptions of the ecological Indian paradigm - that is, ideas of

¹²¹ A recent example would be a 2014 online article with the catchy title “Science Catches Up With Inuit Oral History, ‘Discovering’ Ancient Paleo-Eskimos.” The article highlights that only with the recently conducted “analysis of mitochondrial DNA“ the existence of the so called Paleo-Eskimo (Siberia origins) is proved and hence ignoring or judging as invalid Inuit oral traditions who mention and pass on stories of the existence of the ‘Tunit’ peoples for centuries (indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com).

¹²² Lutz however, observes ironically that “Indigenous knowledge apparently needs to be accredited by Western science” (Lutz “‘They Talk, We Listen“). He gives a recent example that exemplifies his assertion and continues in an attempt to find answers to the question why we “as Europeans or Westerners apparently (have) been unable to listen to and learn from Indigenous knowledges?”

paternalistic resource management combined with Levy-Bruhlian notions of mystical attachments to nature - are culturally specific discourses that will bear little resemblance to actual cultural orders of American Indian societies. (Harkin 216)

We have to constantly bear in mind that it is these simplistic and condescending stereotypes that prevail in mainstream imagination and deeply impact belief systems while nurturing cultural definitions of 'the other' and thus further marginalizing the marginalized by pushing them into the corners of society, and leaving them invisible, unheard and often falsely represented.

In his essay "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and the Image of the Green Aboriginal," Konrad Gross explores the development of this preconceived idea of Aboriginal peoples as inherently conservationist and "ecological by nature." He explains, that its [TEK'S] "white discovery" (134) was mostly due to proposed pipelines and the resulting threat to Aboriginal communities and the surrounding ecosystems while pointing to the differences of "earth wisdom" (134) and TEK, as well as the difference between TEK and (Western) science. It has by now become obvious that land and the environment are not only "used" differently but that the relationship and perception of land to Indigenous peoples differs from Western perceptions.

First Nations scholars and Elders emphasize that TEK is something you do and that its importance lays in the reciprocal *relationship* to and with the environment and nature. TEK is nothing that you own but is instead a relationship that needs proper acquisition, education, and 'nurturing.' The acquisition usually happens through means of teachings by Elders who pass on their knowledge to the younger generations, integrating not only a relational but also a social and communal level: "the natural environment is the foundation for the social environment. According to the Elders, this link is most clearly expressed in the idea of community" (Ermine et al 64), or "it is unnatural, and equivalent to death and destruction, for any person to be isolated from family or community" (Atleo 27). This understanding of relationality also goes hand in hand with accountability, which translates into the humans' responsibility to sustain ecosystems in order to keep the reciprocal nature of a 'dialogue' as opposed to a 'monologue' with nature. That these two principles are tied to "land-locked Indigeneity" is nicely portrayed in a short documentary called "Yukon King" (globalonenessproject.org) that follows an Elder of the Yup'ik (Alaska Native) who explains that environmental changes such as less precipitation also means lower river levels which results in lower King Salmon (Chinook) occurrence. The

King Salmon has since time immemorial provided the Yup'ik's sustenance and is now difficult to find at all. The Elder, however, in transmitting his knowledge to his grandkids, hopes for them to be able to sustain Indigenous knowledges and withstand ecological alterations.

Just as McGregor, Atleo, Gross, and Lutz, so does King emphasize the practical over the spiritual relationship many Indigenous people have with the land that “balances respect with survival” (King *Truth About Stories* 113). TEK is not to be considered as a school, but rather as a basis of knowledge on how to practice a respectful and meaningful relationship with the land, the environment, and its ecosystems in order to further advance and develop this mutual relationship individually as well as within the community (Castellano qtd in McGregor 388). Ermine et al stress that “community life revolves around the rhythms and patterns of the natural environment” (64). Within this arrangement where the implied order gives precedence to the natural environment, the adaptation of community life is highlighted as flexible and dynamic.¹²³ During an interview with RVC, interviewer Vranckx mentions that the Wheetago is part of Algonquin and Cree mythology and not Tlicho/Dogrib mythology. The intermingling of both Indigenous languages, myths, traditions, ceremonies as well as animal populations is also subject in the story: “Coyotes. . . . They'd moved up here two winters ago and we could hear them at night. They too were not from here. Nor did they belong here. But they were” (41). In an interview RVC states, that he wrote “On the Wings of this Prayer” after having spent some time in Pangnirtung, Nunavut. He asserts:

After seeing how much the world has warmed and by listening to the elders talk. There is a new walrus now who hunts seals; there are hummingbirds in Fort Smith; we have coyotes in Yellowknife. The world is changing and I was so worried after hearing that there was a Wheetago buried near the Tar Sands of Alberta and that if we are not careful, it will return and all the bullets in the world won't stop it as it starts to feed. (“I'm Counting on Myself to Tell the Truth”)

RVC's concern is reflected in his futuristic apocalyptic stories when this said Wheetago is unburied. The connection to the North, the Ice, and climate change makes it possible to

¹²³ Elder Joanasie Karpik from Pangnirtung states: “In our camps, prior to moving to settlements, activities were directed by weather and environment. Hunters had this awareness of the environment within them” (*Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* mins 9:10-9:22). Another Elder states at the end of the documentary that the climate and with that the environment and the animals will continue to change and that the Inuit people have to and will continue to adapt to these changes. The contamination of food, however, will have negative effects that threaten not only the traditional diet of the Inuit but a whole way of life.

envision the increase of animal populations (such as the polar bear) and the decrease of people living in these areas due to contaminated foods and the destruction of necessary housing infrastructures. An Inuit hunter states: “Due to climate change, the floating ice is melting, and bears are forced to come ashore. Bears are now visible everywhere on the land. Even inland. It was not like this before” (*Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* min 33:28).

Environmental changes since colonization - whether natural or synthetically¹²⁴ (La Duke) imposed by industrialization and materialization of the natural world - display the threat of these changes for Native communities while also portraying the adaptability of many Indigenous communities. That with ‘civilization,’ humankind has made it its goal to tame and subordinate nature, use it for profit and expect the environment to bend and adapt towards human favour constantly leads to natural catastrophes and ecological nightmares such as the Alberta Tar Sands.

RVC’s stories have shown that dreams as Traditional Indigenous Knowledge, serve as a source of information. They are deeply entrenched in Indigenous epistemology and convey warning and instruction. The dream, as T(E)K, conveys the first message of an existing problem while also providing possible cures or medicines that would help to revive and sustain the disturbed equilibrium of community/humanity and its natural environment. King sums up the relationship to land: “It is an ethic that can be seen in the decisions and actions of a community and that is contained in the songs that Native people sing and the stories they tell about the nature of the world and their place in it, about the webs of responsibilities that bind all things” (*Truth About Stories* 114).

The storyline also subtly addresses TEK as a concept: From the very beginning the second story conveys the sense that something must be wrong or out of order, since the characters observe unnatural behaviour in animals: A pregnant bear is banging on windows, refusing to be chased away by the inhabitants; moose are witnessed as if running away from something, Bear dreams of children killing ravens, and later on one of the characters maintains: “It’s all bad medicine. Those kids were praying for power and it came to them as a coyote. It spoke to them and bit Dean” (38). The awareness that stories, dreams, and medicine can also be dangerous and destructive - here assigned evil or bad -

¹²⁴ In her “Preface: Natural To Synthetic And Back Again” to Ward Churchill’s edited collection *Marxism and Native Americans* the Anishinaabe environmental activist and novelist Winona LaDuke wrote thirty years ago: “On this continent we have come from the natural to the synthetic. We must find our way back again” (ix).

is highlighted by Black Elk, Willie Ermine, Thomas King, Schwartz/Morrisseau and Jo-Ann Episkenew. In Black Elk's Great Vision, the good Red Road was paralleled by a dangerous Black Road, and the character named Windigo in Schwarz/Morrisseau's story only turns evil via a dream: "He had a dream, and in his dream an evil spirit promised to help him by bestowing him with supernatural powers" (11). The dichotomy of good versus evil unfolds when Big Goose receives help by Bear medicine man, bestowing him with good powers that enable him to defeat the evil Windigo.

That dreams as a form of medicine are platforms for both evil and good, for terror and for hope, underlines the ambivalent nature of their messages. Brant Castellano broadens such a concept by writing that "Aboriginal people know that knowledge is power and that power can be used for good or for evil" (26). The communal and relational approach of knowledge is also reflected in the dream as Traditional (Ecological) Knowledge is "thrown" to two people and serves the greater purpose of saving a whole community. Bear's responsibility is alleviated with his growing realization that he is part of 'something bigger,' of a plan that he plays a crucial role in but that is not limited to his individual character. That neither the evil Windigo nor the healing and destruction of it is tied to him as an individual entity, simultaneously lessens and enhances his responsibility. The scope of his mission becomes a greater one but he is also not alone in his fight.

The evil that is represented by the Windigo figure which again represents uranium extraction, fracking, Tar Sands, and poisonous tailing ponds as symptoms of broader (petro) capitalism destroys the earth like an evil magician. Many Indigenous communities that follow traditional approaches to sustain traditional ways of life are also more susceptible to detecting/noticing these changes. Only those who understand the different conceptualizations of the interdependence of nature - human - animal, will also understand when this balance is disrupted and in danger of collapsing. Indigenous authors have continuously made this receptiveness the subject of their writings. Prominent examples of fiction and non-fiction would be Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and *Almanach of the Dead* (1991), Jack Forbes' wétiko disease in *Columbus and Other Cannibals* (1979), Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* (2000), or Warren Cariou's "An Athabasca Story" (2011).

Also necessary to mention is the intricate connection of the Earth and dreaming in the stories. The position of the dreamer and his/her proximity to the Earth (bed of grass, covering himself with grass) are tied to the outcome of the dream and can have influence

on the dream content. Only when the story's "dream thrower" lies on the ground, can he feel the pain in his finger and find himself vulnerable to the evil spirits who are also able to enter his dreams. Nelson maintains that "the purpose of these Dreams is to dive into futurity. Every thing in nature appears unto them, but in the Shape of a human being" (35). The quote reminds us of the dream character's description of the past (which is 'our present' so to speak): "in memory of the One Sun" (12). The instructive character of the dream and the "dream thrower" becomes even more unmistakable when the second story slowly builds its plot around the previous story and reveals exactly what it is: this "contrary" figure with which Bear and his fellow "gladiators" are confronted. Similar to the butterflies from the previous story - and the fact that the Shark Throats tend to attack and kill dogs first (11) - the unnatural behaviour of animals in this story highlights that the natural connection to the ecosystem might be disturbed and out of balance. The perception of an interconnectedness of humans, environment, plants and animals as a reciprocal relationship is essential to understand the stories' deeper implications.

Here, it is also essential to mention the community-based aspect. When the protagonist utters that "the dream was unfolding through all of us", the dream suddenly does not only involve the dreamer or the two dreamers alone, but has spread to everybody involved: The triplets in the living room, possessed Dean, Rupert, Snowbird, Torchy, Severina, maybe the whole community or even all of humanity. From a single dream the plot expands to the devastating effects of the Tar Sands and the oil industry affecting the earth, the environment.

The Alberta Tar Sands have already been discussed as metaphor and epitome of Canada's bigger oil industry and petro-capitalism. The following chapter will take a closer look at the realities of the Tar Sands, which includes its frequent and somewhat morbid comparison to cancer as well as including the voices of people living in the vicinity of the Tar Sands. Furthermore, the chapter aims at highlighting the junction of T(E)K and activism while providing recent examples of how the former can translate into the latter.

4.3.1 The Tar Sands

the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but

is reasserted each day of occupation. . . . settler colonialism is a structure and not an event. In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage. (Tuck and Yang 5)

The comparison of the Tar Sands to cancer and the land to a Mother (RVC: “You must stop the Tar Sands. Do not bring cancer to our Mother,” 16; “and there was a low growl from the cancered earth that trembled us,” 14) is not uncommon, not only because the Tar Sands region resembles giant tumours that grow each year, but because tailing pond leakage affects the Athabasca river region and people (downstream) have begun to see a correlation between the Tar Sands and increased cancer rates in surrounding remote First Nations communities (Timoney and Lee 65f). *Taber’s Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary* defines “cancer” as follows:

malignant neoplasia marked by the uncontrolled growth of cells, often with invasion of healthy tissues locally or throughout the body . . . as cancer cells proliferate, they become increasingly abnormal and require more of the body’s metabolic output for their growth and development. (368)

This definition highlights not only cancer’s visual metaphoric value with the Tar Sands region but also as an often invisible/interior sickness that grows substantially, taking possession of the body and needing more substance to ‘feed on’ the bigger it grows. Cancer, as it is literally ‘inhabiting’ different parts of one’s body, is evocative of the malignant Windigo spirit who invades the human body and takes over both the mental and physical domains. The uncontrollable dispersing of its ‘evil’ is exemplified by Windigo’s insatiable hunger for human flesh; the consequence of which is often self-destruction. The tumour, or the ‘infected’ tissue, makes its way to and destroys the brain, lungs, and other organs, and is here perceived as ‘eating’ the body from the inside. In “The Fleshing,” the execution of a whale by a couple of Shark Throats is visually described using a similar word field:

I saw a grey whale once, rolling in shallow water. Hundreds of Hair Eaters poured over the body biting, ripping at the barnacles and sea lice. Others clawed and reached into the eyes and blowholes. One dove into its mouth. Then others. Then more and more. It thrashed and couldn’t get away. The Shark Throats ate their way from the inside until I could see its skeleton. I watched a mile away and heard it scream. Their cries are supposed to be subsonic but I heard it. I still hear it. (16)

Just like cancer, the Shark Throats attack the body and weaken their victim while the slow decay of the attacked person/animal can be observed with painful, visual clarity and detail that includes a lot of blood, ripping skin off, and tearing guts out of the victim. When you see pictures taken of the Alberta Tar Sands and the destructive, dark, and intimidating appearance of the region around Fort McMurray in Alberta, the (not so) metaphoric meaning is striking as it resembles a tumorous landscape, covered in dark spots of oil, crude, bitumen and the “synthetic” pipelines facilitating the spreading of the oil/disease that appear so out of place in nature. RVC said in his interview with Vranckx that he writes about what breaks his heart (7) and about “what’s hurting us and what’s harming us” (6). In the two stories presented here, harm is (re)presented by the Alberta Tar Sands using and consuming the environment¹²⁵ as well as its Indigenous peoples who live on and from the land.

In his article “Oh, Canada: How America’s Friendly Northern Neighbor Became a Rogue, Reckless Petrostate” Nikiforuk critically claims: “But a dark secret lurks in the northern forests. Over the last decade, Canada has not so quietly become an international mining center and a rogue petrostate. It’s no longer America’s better half, but a dystopian vision of the continent’s energy-soaked future” (1). This proclaimed future is very close to becoming the present already, and Van Camp’s dystopian visionary story of an apocalyptic future is, too, not that futuristic anymore. If Canada’s government continues on this path, this is the reality that is bound to happen.

Warren Cariou, in his documentary *Land of Oil and Water* (2009) portrays the effects of petro-capitalism on First Nations communities by interviewing people from communities close to the Tar Sands, including LaLoche (Saskatchewan), Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan (Cree, Dene, and Métis communities in northern Alberta). The film poignantly portrays the predicament many community members are facing. The

¹²⁵ In their article “Does the Alberta Tar Sands Industry Pollute? The Scientific Evidence,” Timoney and Lee give extensive explanations of what the Tar Sands entail. They list 11 major sources of pollution: “(1) permitted (licensed) discharges to air and land; (2) seepage from tailings ponds; (3) evaporation from tailings ponds; (4) leaks from pipelines; (5) major spills of bitumen, oil, and wastewater; (6) stack emissions; windblown (7) coke dust, (8) dry tailings, and (9) tar sands dust; (10) outgassing from mine faces; and (11) ancillary activities such as transportation, construction of mines, ponds, roads, pipelines, and facilities, and landscape dewatering” (65). Their article’s loud and clear “yes” to its initial question also calls for more extensive research on the quantitative contamination within the Athabasca river and surroundings (78).

consensual conviction that the Tar Sands will not close down soon but will rather expand over the next years, forces younger Canadians to take advantage of them and find good jobs with the companies. However, First Nations community members see and experience substantial environmental changes everyday that affect an entire way of life. Arsenic pollution of the Athabasca river as well as considerable lower river levels elicit fear of securing safe hunting and fishing. One of the Elder's expresses his main concern what will be left for future generations. Another community member from Fort Chippewyan, Russell Kaskimin, observes that "it's all about the almighty dollar," hence implying the never-ending spiral of Canada's oil industry until "it's all gone" (39:12). His remarks also represent and recapitulate the other interviewees' stances, which convey the urgency of the prevalent desolate situation. In yet another documentary entitled *From Tar Sands to Tankers*, Art Sterritt, Executive Director of Coastal First Nations, aptly summarizes: "If our environment is damaged, we fail to exist" (11:05). The incomprehensible damage that is done by the Oil industry continues colonialist struggles and clashes in a contemporary setting. What many people and especially Canada's government do not understand is that the Tar Sands' inherent danger not only denotes the destruction of the environment but also of a people's identity and existence; a way of life that cannot be separated from the land and its resources.

In order to understand contemporary Indigenous - government relationships, Aboriginal significance of land, and Indigenous activism, one has to take a closer look at the "Oka crisis" of 1990, which was a milestone in Native Activism in Canada. Media coverage was so extensive that the Mohawk/Kanien'kéha:ka struggle and the blunt racism of their non-Aboriginal neighbours finally reached people 'at home' in Canada and abroad. It is one of the most striking examples of the existing tension between Canada and its Indigenous populations. At first, images show a couple of Mohawk First Nations on folding chairs, non-violently blockading a dirt road leading to a sacred burial ground, which the city of Oka wanted to use for an extension of their golf course. Soon, the situation escalated and the images were replaced by the threatening and tense pictures of a Canadian soldier and a Mohawk activist staring into each other's eyes, only inches away from the other's face.¹²⁶ The blunt racism of inhabitants from the neighbouring town

¹²⁶ For more information on the please see: Simpson, Leanne and Keira Ladner, *This is an Honor Song: 20 Years Since the Blockades*" (2012), Alanis Obomsawin's documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 years of Resistance* available via the National Filmboard of Canada (NFB), and Gerald Robert Alfred's *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (1995).

Chateauguay who were shouting ‘savages’ (French: ‘sauvages’) while burning the effigy of a Mohawk warrior, as well as the government’s handling of the event led to the bursting of the “‘multiculturalism’ bubble . . . right onto the TV screens. . . the Canadian public could no longer forget or deny that they were complicit in a structure of internal colonialism” (Lutz *Achievements* 90).

Ever since the Mohawk people of the Kanehsatake reserve in Quebec stood up in order to protect sacred lands from being transformed and once again colonized by Euro-Canadian authorities into an extensive golf course, many other events¹²⁷ have taken place that display Native activism. The quote by Tuck and Yang that introduced this chapter illuminates Settler society’s colonialism as both an event and as ongoing. Time and again it is the Western notion of ‘property’ and ‘land ownership’ that collides with Aboriginal worldviews and land rights. Out of these misunderstandings result what Russel calls “flashpoint events:” events that “occur[s] when members of the Aboriginal community see that government, without settling the long-standing dispute, is permitting activities to take place that ignore Aboriginal interests in the area and, in effect, deny Aboriginal or treaty rights” (29). The Aboriginal activist movement known as *Idle No More* forms one of the most prominent and recent examples of political, environmental, and human rights activist movements that resist ongoing colonialism. The group that started with “a series of teach-ins throughout Saskatchewan to protest impending parliamentary bills that will erode Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections, has now changed the social and political landscape of Canada” (Caven). In 2012, the grassroots movement was initially founded by three First Nations women and one non-First Nations woman, Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean, in order to oppose the 2012 Jobs and Growth Act, or also called Bill C-45. In an article on the *Idle No More* movement on the website culturalsurvival.org¹²⁸ it said that Bill C-45 was “the government’s omnibus budget implementation bill that includes changes to land management on the reservations. It attacks the land base reserved for Indigenous people, removes protection for hundreds

¹²⁷ Ipperwash (1991) serves as another example: The “Ipperwash crisis” was a land dispute where residing Natives occupied the Ipperwash Provincial Park in Ontario, unleashing violent confrontations between some members of the Stoney Point Ojibway protesters and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). One unarmed protestor, Dudley George, was killed (Russel 37).

¹²⁸ Cultural survival “advocates for Indigenous Peoples rights and supports Indigenous communities’ self-determination, cultures and political resilience, since 1972” (culturalsurvival.org). The NGO and Enterprise makes it its main purpose, as executive Suzanne Benally says, “to continue our efforts in creating a world in which Indigenous Peoples speak their languages, live on their lands, control their resources, hold on to their culture, and whose rights are honored in participating in broader society. We believe this entails deliberate collaboration. It is all about building bridges” (culturalsurvival.org).

of waterways, and weakens Canada's environmental laws" (Caven). The women created a Facebook page, which today¹²⁹ has more than 141,000 likes and a Facebook group that grows every day with a current number of 54,333 members. The movement is overlapping borders, has reached Native peoples worldwide, and finds many non-Native allies with the same environmental values, human rights principles, aims and objectives: "to assert Indigenous inherent rights to sovereignty and reinstitute traditional laws and Nation to Nation Treaties by protecting the lands and waters from corporate destruction" ("The Story," idlenomore.ca).

Two very recent and concrete examples of how TEK may translate into concrete action (with the help of movements such as *Idle No More*) - which might also form one of the main reasons of why TEK gains more and more importance and attention - is anti-Pipeline activism. There are two major Pipeline proposals that would affect First Nations communities while posing a huge threat to the environment. The first is the so-called Keystone XL Pipeline Extension Proposal, which is a 1,897 km crude oil pipeline extension proposal by TransCanada. The pipeline would go from Hardisty, Alberta down to Steele City, Nebraska. The "Cowboy and Indian Alliance" protested with thousands of people in Washington, D.C. in order to prevent the passing and implementation of this proposal.¹³⁰ The other project is the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline, a 1,777 km crude oil pipeline proposal, which was conditionally approved on June 17th 2014 by the Harper government. The pipeline would go from Bruderheim, Alberta to the coast of Kitimat, BC, where super tankers will carry billions of barrels of crude oil through the tight and dangerous Douglas Channel. The pipeline would cross more than 20 First Nations territories and sacred hunting grounds, as well as many rivers and streams, and it poses a high risk to the Canadian environment. Eden Robinson, author and inhabitant of Kitimat, BC, wrote an article about the pipeline's consequences for many First Nations communities and states:

The Harper Conservatives . . . have punted their responsibility to address unextinguished aboriginal title and concerns to the First Nations residing along the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline route and the coast of British Columbia. The government has done so by distancing

¹²⁹ (July 21st, 2016)

¹³⁰ The event was even covered by German media (which is most likely due to the fact that it fed the (German) "Indianthusiast" stereotype of the "ecological" Indian while also presenting the readers with images of Natives with long braided hair, some dressed in traditional garment, some even riding horses alongside Cowboys wearing Cowboy hats and boots. The pictures/reports are clearly focusing on what is recognizable by a German audience/readership.)

itself from the political backlash following the June 17 conditional approval of the project and the resulting flurry of court cases. (Robinson “Gateway Fury”)

The proposal has sparked unprecedented opposition from people across BC, many First Nations bands and communities have formed substantial opposition. Even more resistance will come up now that the proposal has been approved this June (2014) with “209 conditions” that have to be met (Payton and Mas). The Indigenous population opposing the pipeline has come to see themselves as “the wall that Enbridge and Harper cannot pass,” as Chief of the Carrier Sekani/Lheidli T'enneh Tribal Council Terry Teegee said recently (Lewis). Not only did Canada’s international reputation suffer a substantial change through its development into a petrostate, “shackled to the hubris of a leader who dreams of building a new global energy superpower, the Boy Scout is now slave to his own greed” (Nikiforuk 6).

In the previous chapters and the following subchapters, I have developed the dream category of what I called ‘ecological dreaming’ referring to the narrative and literary use of dreaming and dreams in order to show ecological/environmental knowledge, use, and relationship. Whereas the ecological *nightmare* highlights the concerns and despair when observing environmental challenges and threats such as the pipeline proposals described above and the striving oil industry in Canada, the ecological *dream* conveys hope that Indigenous TEK may facilitate increasing environmental vigilance and incite action/activism. The literary ‘wake up call’ transcends into a literal wake up call, suggesting a crucial connection of the texts discussed and contemporary Indigenous realities. RVC comments on today’s challenges: “Everything's for sale and food and water security and safety is something we should all be concerned about. I've never seen so much horrific greed that is legal and accepted. We really do live in a time of ecocide” (McNabb). He links his stories’ plea not only to general capitalism and the reign of money as one main predicament but also specifies his concerns with which I want to poignantly conclude this chapter:

I had no idea I was so outraged by the oilsands of Alberta. I don’t consider myself an eco-warrior, but reading “On the Wings of this Prayer” after it was written made me realize how horrified I am that we are letting this happen. We are giving our Mother cancer. Not only that, we are all witnessing it every day and it’s causing cancer with the effluent and it’s just so sad that we have a measured in minutes slow motion mutilation of paradise. (Vranckx and Van Camp 13).

5 Richard Wagamese and Cherie Dimaline: Existential Dreaming

My boys . . . were pointed out to me by dreams. . . . We were four, as close to a definition of family as any of us had ever reached. The street prevents that mostly, but we were bounded by the power of dreams and the shadowed ones all about us.

(Wagamese *Ragged Company* 38ff)

In her dream, she was sitting in a room, a wide room that smelled of cedar and heat. Her shoulders were bare and her hair was long and smooth, like the sleek ferns that grew down at the shore behind her auntie's house. Out the window she watched the full moon breathe as it sat in the sky - the wide, round, star-filled sky. . . . And she saw there, dodging the other shadow men like a wild streak of wind, the shadow of her deceased brother.

(Dimaline "room 414" *Red Rooms* 10f)

5.1 A Legal Framework of Native Identity in Canada

In Richard Wagamese's *Ragged Company* and in Cherie Dimaline's short story collection *Red Rooms*, identity is a central topic that can be scrutinized on many different levels. One of the most significant discrepancies within the concept is outer versus inner identity - how do society, environment, government and others define the protagonists and how do they define themselves? How are identity constructions and perceptions shaped by exterior elements, and when does self-determination play a role? What role does a *Native* identity play? Before taking a look at both texts and their identity discourses represented by existential dreams and nightmares, it is helpful to take a closer look at the legal framework of Native identity in Canada.

The existence of Native populations on the North American continent has not only been attempted to be erased by the early Settler society but remains pushed into the invisible margins of contemporary society. The 'quiet apartheid' of a present day Canada is tragically revealed in existential struggles of Native peoples who often find themselves in situations of homelessness, drug abuse and alienation as colonialism obstructed the possibility of developing a holistic identity as First Nations peoples. The result is fear, doubt and accusations inside and outside of Aboriginal communities. Waldram gives an example:

A Special type of marginality was described as the ‘apple syndrome’ by Westermeyer (1979), exhibited by individuals who were raised in non-Aboriginal families and hence had no Aboriginal cultural knowledge or experience (they were seen as ‘red’ on the outside and ‘white’ on the inside). As young adults they attempted to express their non-Aboriginality but met with racism, yet having no Aboriginal background they were viewed disfavoured by other Aboriginals, leading to problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide. The problematic nature of this marginality best finds expression in the phenomenon of being ‘caught between two worlds.’ (Waldram *Revenge of the Windigo* 115/116)

The insult of being ‘an apple’ prevails in Indian country,¹³¹ representing identity perplexities as well as deeply entrenched mistrust. These struggles to find a place in society are rooted in Identity politics that were supposed to set up clear identity markers and geographic boundaries but instead - because implemented solely by Settler society - essentialized, confused and excluded, and lastly failed Canada’s Indigenous peoples.

The Indian Act of 1876 was the first attempt of the Canadian government to tackle the difficult task of defining who is considered ‘Indian’ and who is not. It was first enacted under chapter 24 of the Constitution Act of 1867. It declares amongst other things the taxation on ‘Indians,’ the definition of reserves and bands. After the first version of 1876, the Indian Act was revised and changed several times. One of the most important changes was the introduction of the so called “Indian Register:” Any Native person who wanted to be legally recognized and approved as ‘Indian’ had to apply to the Register and after approval would be listed in the “Indian Register,” organized and controlled by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AADNC, former name: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, which was changed to “Aboriginal” instead of “Indian” in 2011). Only when the person’s name was listed in the register would he/she be considered to be a legal “status-Indian” and have the ‘rights’ and ‘benefits’ that are declared in the Indian Act (Indian Act, laws-lois.justice.gc.ca).

The Certificate of Indian status, more commonly known as the status-card, is “an official form of identification” for those who are listed in the Register (*Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada*, aadnc-aandc.gc.ca). So, who can actually claim legal Indian status in Canada? The Indian Act of 1876, under the points 2.h and 11 states the

¹³¹ In Sherman Alexie’s novel for young adults *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), the young protagonist explains, that people from his reserve call him an apple because he decided to go to an all-white school outside of his reserve (p.26).

following:

The expression 'Indian' means-

First. Any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band;

Secondly. Any child of such person;

Thirdly. Any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person. (2)

It further gives details about the marriage regulations, especially concerning Native women:

Any Indian woman who marries any person other than an Indian, or a non-treaty Indian, shall cease to be an Indian in every respect within the meaning of this Act, except that she shall be entitled to share equally with the members of the band to which she formerly belonged, in the annual or semi-annual distribution of their annuities, interest moneys and rents; but such income may be commuted to her at any time at ten years' purchase, with the consent of the band. 43 V., c.28, s.12. (3)

It is particularly crucial to know, that without proved and legally recognized Indian status and the band membership that comes along with it, nobody was allowed to live on land that was considered to be a reserve and therefore assigned Native land. The implication of that was the inevitable exclusion from one's own Native community and thereof served a removal or assimilationist policy (Lawrence, "Regulation of Native Identity" 6). The profound meaning of such exclusion and disconnection with respective 'homeland' becomes especially clear when considering the importance and meaning of land for Indigenous people and their self-identification.¹³² The previous chapter has already discussed Lutz' concept of "land-locked Indigeneity" which gets to the heart of Indigenous knowledge and identity, highlighting to what extent the Indian Act has crippled Native self-determination and identity.

The second quotation from the Indian Act (1876) is (nowadays considered to be) highly misogynistic since it lays emphasis on male lineage and neglects, if not completely disregards, the female line. Consequently, the document does not adjust the same rights to women as to men. The Native man thus retains his Native status regardless of his wife's status, no matter whether she is Native herself or not. Additionally, when a non-Native

¹³² There is an abundance of studies by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars and activists exploring the "land-locked Indigeneity" (Lutz) of Aboriginal people(s) in North America, e.g. Jeannette Armstrong's doctoral dissertation and her article "Kwtlakín? What is Your Place?" (in: Lutz, *What Is Your Place?*, 29-33). See also the articles and bibliographical references entailed in section II, "Peoples, Stories, Places" (105-153) of Lutz' *Contemporary Achievements*.

woman married a Native man, she and their kids would become ‘legal Indians.’ The same does not account for the Native woman. She is hence instead even ‘encouraged’ (the verb ‘forced’ might even be more appropriate) to either only marry Native men if she wants to keep her legal status as an Indigenous person or marry a non-Native man and give up her legally acknowledged status as an Aboriginal woman, which would be (in)directly supporting/affirming/realizing the assimilationist policy latent in the early Indian Act. Jay Makarenko states that

the first *Indian Act* adopted an explicit vision of assimilation, in which Aboriginals would be encouraged to leave behind their Indian status and traditional cultures and become full members of the broader Canadian society. In this context, Aboriginals were viewed as children or wards of the state, to which the government had a paternalistic duty to protect and civilize. (Makarenko)

This system of classification was based upon “racial apartheid, on emphasizing racial difference, white superiority, and ‘Native’ inferiority” (Lawrence, “Regulation of Native Identity” 8). Alongside the ward and guardian notion, the very act of a governmental rule of regulation regarding a rather complex and abstract concept such as ‘Native identity’ also disregards any Indigenous diversity and discounts Indigenous perspective - there is no such thing as a universal, essentialized notion of only one *Native* identity.

The children of Native women who married non-status or non-Native men therefore no longer had legal rights to identify with the label ‘Indian’ and were *de jure* made ‘white.’ Lawrence writes in her article that this “gendered regulation” has deprived tens of thousands of Aboriginal women in Canada of a possible life within their communities and resulted in the following generations’ struggle “as urban mixed-race Native people . . . to situate themselves with respect to their mother’s and grandmother’s communities within a discourse of Indianness that denies their realities” (6).

The restrictive and dishonouring as well as highly controlling treatment of women was partly rectified, when in 1985 the so called *Act to Amend the Indian Act* or Bill C-31, was passed, making it possible for approximately 100,000 women to regain “Indian-status” (9). In this document it was asserted, that “women could no longer gain or lose Indian status as a result of marriage” (Makarenko). However, according to Lawrence, Bill C-31 was met with mixed reactions among the Indigenous populations in Canada. The redefinition of ‘Indianness’ through Bill C-31 raised further issues about who can be considered “pure” Indian or “half-breed” and who had the right to regain Indian status and

a life in a community or reserve (14). A rising concern and anxiety about the new regulations became evident in many Aboriginal communities. From the early Indian Act in 1876 until Bill C-31 was passed in 1985, many of the women and their children who lost their legal Native status lived and grew up outside of communities, often in rather urban settings, and hence (were believed to) lack a mental/spiritual and cultural connection to their Native roots, traditions, and lands. The opportunity to reclaim their status evoked opposition and “unease on Native communities” (15) since outsiders were considered to pose new challenges and even threats to an established community life. It becomes also evident to what an extent the racist and sexist regulations of the Indian Act have been internalized¹³³ in that they dominate certain ways of thinking (Gruber 62). The seemingly paradoxical thinking and attitude - for there is rejection of the Indian Act in itself and there is opposition to the more liberal Bill C-31 - is a rather natural reaction when taking into consideration that the Indian Act used to and unfortunately still does define significant matters of Native life, Native identity, and Native land. It thus can be explained by the resentment to colonial regulations on the one hand and the anxiety of any “opening up’ of the boundaries of Nativeness” on the other hand (Lawrence, “Regulation of Native Identity” 21).

This distorted gendered mindset as a protection mechanism also established relationships/feelings mainly shaped by distrust of Native peoples (in this case mainly women) toward ‘white’ people (and especially men). The deeply entrenched thought and fear of losing Native status when marrying non-Natives led to the conclusion that in order to maintain their own Nativeness it is necessary to marry Native men only. Lawrence states that “these beliefs are only rendered more powerful by the strongly protectionist attitude towards preserving Native culture . . . where outsiders may be seen as profoundly threatening to community identity” (15). This reaction and desire to protect one’s cultural background, that could be taken away by the government simply due to the choice of life partner is not only arbitrary, racist and sexist but has also turned into what Settler society

¹³³ In her article “Identity/Politics: Literary Negotiations of Canadian Indian Policy and Concepts of Nativeness,” Eva Gruber states that “one facet has not received sufficient attention so far, and that is the way in which colonial legal definitions and political agendas have been accepted or even *internalized* [by] Native people themselves” (61-62, orig. emphasis)]. My following literary analysis will try to take a look at these underlying internalizations of especially concepts of Native identity in urban environments and with regards to home(lessness).

nowadays refers to as “reverse racism,”¹³⁴ exclusion and discrimination by Native people or policies that is said (by many non-Indigenous, Euro-Canadians) to ‘favour’ Indigenous peoples. This construct appropriately and sadly portrays the biased and ignorant lens of white privilege.

However, point 13 of the Indian Act 1876 also denied legal status to the “half-breed in Manitoba” (Indian Act 1876, epe.lac-bac.gc.ca) referring to the Métis people who are of mixed European (often French) and Indigenous (First Nations) descent. It becomes obvious that the main problem of the Indian Act (now and then) lies in the authority that claims the right to define and thus constrain Aboriginal identity in Canada. We also have to always bear in mind that none of these concepts, regulations and methods were anywhere close to Native perceptions and methods: The very construct of the legal entity and nation state called Canada, the act of writing down contracts and bills, the limiting need to define, control and form clear cut hierarchies. All of these things were new and foreign to Aboriginal nations within Canada and yet were supposed to ‘represent’ them in a distorted/indistinct collective. It is the government that, with the controlling regulations of the Indian Act, classifies and regulates who is considered Indigenous and who is not and hence reaffirms the patronizing ‘ward and/vs. guardian’ dichotomy established with colonization. Native people, to whom this regulatory system and manner must have been completely new, were once again pushed back/down and forced to hold the position of passive observer. The Native population is simply afraid to forfeit “the last vestiges of Native distinctiveness” and therefore accept and try at best to control/steer the concepts of Nativeness that were imposed on them by a eurocentric, colonial government (Lawrence, “Regulation of Native Identity” 21).

In his article “The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State” Adam Barker elaborates further on terms such as Settler society and contemporary Canadian colonialism in order to emphasize that these problems are in fact *contemporary* and with that supports Thomas King’s view that

¹³⁴ Amy E. Ansell defines “reverse racism” (especially with a background in African American history and ‘white’ reactions to affirmative action in the United States) as follows: “While traditional forms of racism involve prejudice and discrimination on the part of whites against black, reverse racism is alleged to be a new form of anti-white racism practiced by blacks” (136) and other marginalized and oppressed groups. She clarifies: “The concept reverse racism misguidedly suggests that racism is a meta-concept that is the same no matter the social context or intended purpose. But white racism against blacks was practiced with the aim of subjugation while preferences for blacks are granted a part of a program of redressing the racist past” (137). I believe this concept to be one that goes hand in hand with what Tuck and Yang have established as “settler moves to innocence,” downplaying white supremacy and privilege and misusing a terminology, ignoring its context and appropriating it for yet another privileged concern.

Canada is still far away from a post-colonial state. Barker's article also helps to understand the existing rift between Native and non-Native people in Canada by explaining the different perceptions and understandings of the two groups, too often portrayed as binary oppositions and hence establishing a terminology that reflects and even deepens this gap. He explains that "much of Western¹³⁵ philosophy. . . . starts with the acceptance that humans have a priori dominion over the Earth and that the natural world is something to be tamed and controlled; in essence, the spreading of control is both a right and a duty" (342). When the Native population, the people Indigenous to the land are therefore considered part of what should be tamed, the Indian Act serves as another controlling act of the colonial government which attempts to prevent possible dangers (342).

That Indigenous groups may pose a threat to the Canadian 'peace and order' proves to be true when standoffs and resistance movements occur, such as Oka (1990), Ipperwash (1991)¹³⁶ or recent Indigenous environmental activism (e.g. *Idle No More*, amongst other things protesting against resource extraction, pipelines, etc.). According to Barker, it is Western philosophy and its deeply rooted desire for order that repeatedly triggers violence and numerous arrests since non-Indigenous and especially governmental Canada treats these incidents of resistance as "law-and-order problem[s]" (342). Barker states, "the existence of the 'Other' was enough to suggest that chaos lurked wherever the colonizer had not established absolute control" (345).

However, without denying the importance and significance of a federal regulatory law that was certainly needed (within the given circumstances, here: colonialism), it is obvious that the Indian Act speaks in no way to the traditional Native ways of identification, especially referring to the essential meaning of land (Lawrence, "Regulation of Native Identity" 3/4).

¹³⁵ A. Barker also explains the terms "Western" or "Western Society" which are often used as opposing Indigenous communities as referring to "a recognition of the incredible amount of influence that Western imperialism has had on contemporary global realities and the obvious connections between political imperialism and other aspects of Western society" (340). He also asserts that not every "Settler" is also a "colonial" since the first "is a statement of situations" and the latter refers to behavioural patterns, somebody "who actively participates with empire" (339).

¹³⁶ The "Ipperwash crisis" was a dispute over Native reserve land, which had been appropriated by the Canadian government after the War Measures Act, but which the government had failed to give back to the reserve after the war was over. In protest against this land-theft, some residing Natives occupied the Ipperwash Provincial Park in Ontario, unleashing violent confrontations between some members of the Stoney Point Ojibway protestants and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). One unarmed protestor, Dudley George, was killed (Russel 37).

Lawrence also discusses the very important consequences of the Indian Act; its impact on Native people in Canada from 1876 and ongoing today, that has become apparent in the previous description of the Indian Act. She maintains, that “its overarching nature as a discourse of classification, regulation, and control . . . has indelibly ordered how people think of things ‘Indian’” (4). She asserts that a “classificatory system produces ways of thinking” that are deeply rooted in Canadian society (3). Here it is especially important to incorporate both Native as well as non-Native ways of thinking that circle around the concept of a Native Identity. The simple designation of Canada’s Indigenous population as ‘Indians’ supports this idea. The name ‘Indians’ was clearly a descriptive and purely false term used by the early Settlers to describe the Aboriginal people as an “Other.”¹³⁷ In her book *‘Real Indians’ and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, Lawrence critiques the understanding of Native identity in terms of “primordality, as a state of existence in contradistinction to modernity, whereby language, ways of living and cultural knowledge as manifested by distinct beliefs, traits and practices transmitted in relatively unbroken lines from a distant past” (1). She asserts and emphasizes that this point of view is still present in the general mindset of Canada’s contemporary Settler society.

Lawrence instanced the prominent Gitskan - Witsuwit’en land claim court case - more commonly known as *Delgamuukw vs. the Queen* - which indeed serves as a good example for primordality with regard to Native identity in Canada (Mills *Eagle Down* 3). Lawrence argues that the Supreme Court’s opinion that the “claims to Indigenous land title were invalid because they were not the same people as their ancestors were” (Lawrence, *‘Real Indians’* 4) has its very foundations in primordality. Therefore, Aboriginal people who are living a contemporary life that includes speaking English as their mother tongue, eating European (inspired) food¹³⁸ and dressing in favour of mainstream fashion styles are not seen as ‘truly’ Indigenous and with that relegate their Native identity to pre-contact practices and traditions (5).

This thesis aims to look at the reflections in contemporary Aboriginal literature of such political concepts and regulations defining and affecting Native Canadian identity.

¹³⁷ It is well known that Christopher Columbus called the Indigenous people “Indians” because he thought himself to be in India.

¹³⁸ Robin Ridington also called it the “Pizza Test” (224) - an Aboriginal person admitted in court to eat pizza. The result of the “test” could deny Indigenous individuals their Aboriginal rights in court because eating Pizza was not considered to be ‘Indigenous’ but instead would prove participation in mainstream society and culture (224 ff).

Societal mindsets and perceptions are mirrored in (fictional) literature and are often presented in a more emphasized and highlighted (often also exaggerated) manner, underlining the significance of humour and a rebellion against these restrictions. The dissertation rests on the conviction that the Indian Act and other governmental strategies to control Native identity have impacted and still impact Indigenous peoples creating a racist, discriminatory, chauvinistic mindset that to this day, helps to perpetuate existing stereotypes and anxieties that are rooted in imposed Identity politics. Here, dreaming and the literary analysis of its representations and functions conducted in this work are aimed to work against the established notion of primordiality and subvert preconceived notions of ‘Indianness.’ It is dreaming’s collective as well as individual character and its communicative function that destabilizes a ‘master narrative’ and instead establishes a ‘new’ perspective on literary dream discourses in Aboriginal literature while helping to deconstruct falsely adopted concepts of ‘Indianness.’

The following quotation from A. Barker sums up the ample misunderstandings and their pervasive effects that still occur so frequently between Canada’s Settler society and the Indigenous population:

What Settler Canadians fail to realize is that control through judgment and repression tends not to achieve safety for colonizers and others within the imperial order; it is repression that, just as it fueled violence in Algeria and Chiapas, now fuels the ongoing Caledonia standoff¹³⁹ and potentially violent reactions to the Vancouver Olympics in 2010. (344/345)

With this need to control and with these measures to control, it can - unfortunately - easily be anticipated that misunderstandings and incidents such as Oka, Caledonia or Ipperwash will continue to happen.

In this context, and in conclusion to this chapter, another look at the *Delgamuukw vs the Queen* court case may be illuminating. Prof. Dr. Antonia Mills, acting chair of First Nations Studies at the UNBC, conducted an expert opinion report and submitted it to the court in this case. Containing the original reports, it was published in 1994 with the title *Eagle Down is Our Law*, subtitled with the adapted report title for the court *Witsuwit’en Law, Feasts, and Land Claims*. In the prologue of the report, Mills explains that misinterpretations of Native identity were the reason why in the 1980’s before

¹³⁹ Due to an “unresolved land dispute,” in “February 2006, a contingent of Haudenosaunee physically occupied a half built housing development in Caledonia” which later ended in the protestors blocking “the main road through Caledonia as well as the highway bypass skirting the town” (DeVries 3).

Delgamuukw, no Native Elders and hereditary chiefs would speak in front of the judges during court cases and land claims. There is the crucial significance of land that is not separable from an Indigenous understanding of identity. Conversely, there is also the subtle conviction that non-Native judges would understand the Gitskan and Witsuwit'en land claims better if articulated "through the idiom of Western culture" (Mills *Eagle Down* 11, Ridington 225). Thus, it is rather shocking to realize how deep the misunderstandings are/were that have been caused by two completely different ways of interpreting one's own identity. In 1991, Judge McEachern dismissed the land claims made by the two neighbouring First Nations bands and expressed in his decision that there was no right to Indigenous land title. Mills writes in her epilogue:

Because the colonial (and some postcolonial) powers that be assumed that First Nations peoples would want to assimilate and would 'go away,' they have not felt the need to learn from, to accommodate and share with, to respect, or to understand First Nations people. The perception of First Nations as primitive, hardly civilized, barbaric, and pagan unconsciously works to make colonialists feel that First Nations people must be forbidden to exercise their form of stewardship over the land. They are perceived as a danger - as a threat to the civilized and established order. (184)

Here again, it is the fear of the 'civilized' to lose control of the 'uncivilized.' Apparently, the road to self-determination and a restored relationship between Canada and its Indigenous peoples is a rocky one that demands a constant dialogue, as well as the willingness to leave behind the futile path of eurocentric methods, colonial frameworks, and "historic narcissism" (as reflected in e.g. the construct of reverse racism). I want to conclude this subchapter with Mills powerful statement:

Accommodation of Witsuwit'en, Gitskan, and other First Nations rights is necessary for the welfare not only of First Nations peoples but of everyone. No one is claiming that it is easy to live in a pluralistic society - a society which recognized that people who may not agree on many issues can work towards mutually beneficial solutions. If non-First Nations people can truly accommodate that process, then perhaps they will deserve to be referred to as civilized. (185/186).

5.2 Homelessness and the City

Indigenous in the City

The short story's and the novel's plots are set in bigger cities throughout Canada, the most prominent cities being Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto (Crombie 61). While the cities in the novels remain unnamed, the identity of some of them can be guessed by their description without really naming them: In *Red Rooms*, the city is referred to as "this huge city" (10) with no names ever given. It could be any of the bigger cities in Canada. In *Ragged Company*, the "shining city by the sea" (225) is not the main location of the novel, but more information is provided about this location than about the city of the main setting. The city by the sea might be Vancouver, and as it is across the country from the city where the ragged company lives, it might be Toronto. A city is only identified once in the novels, when one of the characters goes into a corner store to hand in his lottery ticket. He misunderstands the Chinese store manager who repeatedly calls out "Winnipeg!" He is actually saying "winna BIG" and tries to tell Digger that his ticket is the winner of a big money prize.

Most of the time, the large city stands for a poor lifestyle, no housing, prostitution, physical abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, and no connection to the protagonists' First Nations heritage. In her article "Their Spirits Live within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility" Dara Culhane writes:

Anyone passing through inner-city Vancouver on foot, on a bus, or in a car cannot help but SEE, in a literal sense, the concentration of Aboriginal people here. . . . many representations of this and other inner-city neighborhoods in Western Canada are characterized by a marked *invisibility* of Aboriginal people, and women in particular. (593, orig. emphasis)

It is not astounding then, that the characters living on the streets of Toronto or Vancouver pursue a path to help them to step out of this invisibility: "It was about being seen, visible, real" (*Ragged Company* 321).

It is not astounding that the character of Dimaline's story, living on the streets of Toronto or Vancouver, pursues a way out of this invisibility, because her whereabouts in the novel, "Pain and Wastings," form a rhyming synonym with "Main and Hastings," one of the main crossings in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, notorious for high rates of drug addicts, homelessness, crime, violence, and prostitution. The HIV infection rates in this

area “exceeded those anywhere else in the ‘developed’ world” (Culhane 594). Farley, Lynne, and Cotton write that over fifty-two percent of one hundred prostitutes in Vancouver, whom the interviewers questioned for their study, were of First Nations background. They also write that PTSD among these women was rampant and that eighty-six percent were currently, or had been at some point in their lives, homeless (242). Culhane asserts that it is through medical prevention projects and politicizing issues of the (Aboriginal) residents living in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside that “a previously invisible population has entered into public discourse” (603). The high rates of Aboriginal homelessness in the cities are not really surprising if we refer again to Frank’s remark about a tendency common for society to separate homelessness and prostitution from its realms in order to make way for, what Tuck and Yang call, “settler moves to innocence” (1). That the legacy of colonization is still directly affecting Aboriginal people today serves as a painful reminder of unresolved traumas. As Piliavin, Entner Wright, Mare, and Westerfelt claim, “Institutional disaffiliation is perhaps the most systematically developed thesis on the conditions leading to homelessness” (36). The term “institutional disaffiliation” itself describes a group’s or an individual’s estrangement from governmental institutions and their structures, which results in further mistrust and growing isolation. Canada’s Indigenous population has been facing racist colonial structures and policies for centuries, explaining the prevailing feeling of estrangement and disaffiliation from the country’s government.¹⁴⁰ Reasons for institutional disaffiliation rest on disrupted family ties, human connection, and kinship. All of these were purposefully damaged by Residential Schools, the Indian Act and other legal regulations that continue to ignore Indigenous people’s rights to land, language and traditional sustenance. People who have grown up in adopted or foster care homes are hence more likely to become, remain, or return to homelessness (Piliavin et al 37). In her poem “Blind Justice,” Lee Maracle writes “[a]s an occupier of my homeland in my homeless state” (216), portraying the hypocrisy surrounding settler society and the fact that Canada “was built on stolen land” (Eigenbrod 13). In that sense, Indigenous peoples have been robbed by colonialism

¹⁴⁰ As Jeannette Armstrong writes, “Arising out of the siege of conditions of this nightmare time, what is commonly referred to as the ‘social problems’ of Native peoples emerged. Homes and communities, without children, had nothing to work for, or live for. Children returned to communities and families as adults, without the necessary skills for parenting, for Native life style, or self-sufficiency on their land base, deteriorated into despair. With the loss of cohesive cultural relevance with their own peoples and a distorted view of the non-Native culture from the clergy who ran the residential schools, an almost total disorientation and loss of identity occurred” (“The Disempowerment and Empowerment” 599-600).

of their homes: spatial and ideological ones, as well as physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual homes. This profound level of displacement, a theft of land and identity, leaves many Aboriginal people uprooted on the streets.

In his essay “Coming Home Though Stories” Neil McLeod claims that Canada’s Indigenous peoples are living in a sort of exile in their own home/country (19). He explains:

I define the removal of an Indigenous group, in this case the *Néhiyawak*, from their land as spatial diaspora. . . . I call the alienation from one’s stories ideological diaspora: this alienation, the removal from the voices and echoes of the ancestors, is the attempt to destroy collective consciousness. (19, orig. emphasis)

In that sense, Indigenous peoples have been robbed of both homes, spatial and ideological, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual homes by colonialism. This profound level of displacement and identity theft leaves many Aboriginal people uprooted on the streets.

As editors Evelyn Peters and Chris Andersen assert in their introduction to their work *Indigenous in the City: Contemporary Identities and Cultural Innovation*,¹⁴¹ most of the public discourses surrounding Aboriginal homelessness in the city however still “exert particular influences on struggles over the meaning of Indigenous identities” as “the historic development of discourses that define Indigenous peoples and their cultures as incongruous with modern urban life” (Peters and Andersen 1). While the Indian Act has provided the racialized framework for reserve versus city dichotomies, scholarship increases this still existing rift by focusing mainly on studies among rural Aboriginal communities and life on reserve. Little is “known about Indigenous urbanization patterns and experiences” (2). Not only does this substantiates conceptions of primordiality and essentializing, it also fuels the ‘status quo vacuum’ with which most social problems of Aboriginal peoples are observed and judged. Historical contextualization (through e.g. appropriate and less ethnocentric education) would help to prevent such ignorance and instead point to root causes of such issues.

Due to the racist and sexist legislations of the Indian Act, many Natives (not viable

¹⁴¹ The editors clarify that “the focus in this book is on how cities create challenges and opportunities for the creation of new forms of Indigenous identities that can provide a baseline for further research” (10). I would hence lay emphasis on a change of terminology, since I do not entirely concur with “new” Indigenous identities but would suggest writing about and discussing the “addition” to Indigeneity and its confinements. Both, Dimaline and Wagamese, write beyond these limitations and as Native authors reclaim the right to (re)define Indigeneity as fluent, dynamic, much broader and inclusive as was portrayed and assumed by mainly non-Indigenous concepts of Indigenous identity.

to be identified as “Indian”) were forced to leave remote communities, reserves, and villages and move to the city.¹⁴² The city offered better job opportunities than smaller cities in isolated locations, challenging people’s perceptions of “the Indian,” that was clearly separated from metropolitan life (3). Not only were people, who were not living on a reserve and who had no ‘bad’ affiliation, legally ‘white,’ they were still perceived as “Indian” in the cities. These contradictory views and imposed identities had to evoke discrepant and incongruent reactions of both Natives and non-Natives. The difficulty to be(have) and live Native in the city was often not accepted, because this would not be congruent with the prevalent “identification of Indigenous people with ‘wild’ nature, in opposition to significations of ‘the city’ as the hallmark of ‘civilization’” (5).

Luckily, these preconceptions are outdated. However, the prejudice has been only replaced by the nowadays perceived notion of ‘forced urbanization.’ In a CBC produced documentary series called the *8th Fire* (“Episode1: Indigenous in the City”), Cree artist Kent Monkman responds to the question of why Aboriginal people live in the city with the following question: “Why are people living on reserves?” He then goes on to argue that many of the reserves were/are actually rather arbitrary and artificial places constructed by the colonial governments in order to control Aboriginal life in Canada (min 15:50). He states: “There is the perception that all Aboriginal people come from a reserve.” Having never lived on a reserve himself and arguing that neither of his extended family ever has, he clarifies that living in the city was a conscious choice that would offer opportunities reserves did not have: to “participate in the world” (min 16:38).

According to the show’s host, Wab Kinew from the Onigaming (Anishinaabe) First Nation in Northern Ontario, half of the Aboriginal population living in the cities is under 25: “The fastest growing population in Canada. . . . too many Canadians think they are all gang members” (min 6:06). Métis litigation lawyer Renée Pelletier from Toronto also observes people’s overly affirmative responses when she tells them about her Native background: Being a lawyer, living a successful life in the city and identifying as an Aboriginal person in Canada still does not seem to fit into people’s imaginations of Indigeneity. While she recognizes that she is unable to “practice some traditions” due to

¹⁴² Mary Jane Norris, Stewart Clatworthy, and Evelyn Peters have written the first chapter of *Indigenous in the City* called “The Urbanization of Aboriginal Populations in Canada: A Half Century in Review” (29-45), providing a “demographic overview of Indigenous identities and urbanization” (11). For an elaboration on numbers, developments and trends regarding urban Indigenous presence and identity, I would recommend this chapter as well as Yale D. Belanger’s chapter “Breaching Reserve Boundaries: Canada vs. Misquadis and the Legal Creation of the Urban Aboriginal Community” (69-87).

the distance to the land, Pelletier holds on to her “close relationship with my creator” (31:40). The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), representing non-Status and off-reserve Indigenous peoples as well as Native people in the cities are “dedicated to servicing the needs of Aboriginal people residing in the urban area and improving the quality of life in the community as a whole” (pgnfc.om). Aboriginal traditional life can hence undeniably also be part of urban Native lifestyles, since friendship centers have become “the place to go for cultural activities” (Kinew *8th fire* 31:51).

The fictional writings discussed in this thesis do not fall into the category of reserve-focused approaches, since two texts are set in smaller communities and the other two deal with Aboriginal life in the city. Life in the city, however, is mainly portrayed but not limited to the experience of homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and alienation from traditionalist life. The city as the opposite of home is manifest in the life lived on the streets as a choice to turn one’s back towards one’s past: often that past also entailed a Native background. Many of the characters, however, find a home in the city that also allows a spiritual life in accordance with Native worldviews and Indigeneity. These fictional writings challenge the preconceived notion that “urbanization resulted in detribalization” (Peters and Andersen 7). Urban Native experiences are (have become) irrefutably part of Indigeneity. Simpson states: “Whether urban or rural, city or reserve, the shift that Indigenous systems of intelligence compel us to make is one from capitalistic consumer to cultural producer” (Simpson “Land as Pedagogy“ 23).

Both fictional texts, highlighting Native urban presence in both negative and positive ways broaden prevalent conceptions of Indigeneity and its relationship to place while establishing subversive notions of home that build on Indigenous (traditional) knowledges and transform passive characters into active “cultural producers.” Before taking a closer look on the depiction of home(lessness) and the city in both texts, it is again helpful to analyse both texts’ structure, rhetoric and language.

Language, Semantics and Structure

Wagamese

Like *Porcupines and China Dolls*, Wagamese’ novel is divided into four different parts, or books: The first is called “book one: shelter,” the second “book two: fortune,” the third “book three: dreams,” and the fourth “book four: home.” This structural division also

mirrors the plot's development in its separation from "shelter" and "home." The middle parts foreshadow their function as triggers: the money stemming from a coincidental lottery-win as well as the dreams. In a way similar to Alexie's novel, there are narrative insertions of a dialogue between two people set in italics (1f, 70 f, 82 f, 126, 180f, 209f, 268f, 280, 322f, 359f, 376). These dialogues often elaborate on some recent topic in the narrative. The identity of the two people talking is only revealed at the end of the novel, which transcends two of the five main characters' role within the plot. Only when their identity is revealed, do the narrative functions of the insertions as well as the contents of these conversations become obvious. On page 1 and on page 376, the dialogue opens and ends the novel:

Is it you?

Yes.

Where have you been?

Travelling.

Yes. Of Course. Where did you go?

Everywhere. Everywhere I always wanted to go, everywhere I ever heard about.

Did you like it?

I loved it. I never knew the world was so big or that it held so much. (1)

While the style of this conversation, with one person asking questions and the other one responding, remains the same, the dialogue is brought to a closure when the storytellers' identities are revealed on the last page of the novel:

What do I call you now? Do you have a different name there?

Well. I will always call you Amelia. And you can always call me Dick.

Yes. Dick. So long, Dick. Travel well.

I will. And I'll see you again.

I know. I know.

The Beginning (376)

Ending the novel with the words "The Beginning" leads us back to the beginning of the story that started more or less *in medias res* with a dialogue of yet unknown characters. The un-linear fashion and its circular pattern could be identified as an Indigenous storytelling device that emphasizes orality. That every end is also a beginning - a circle - of some sort is one of the main teachings/ideas that shines through every fictional text that is discussed in this thesis.

This impression is further supported by yet another frame: Death. Death or dying

plays a significant role in Wagamese's novel since it frames the narrative and provides the reason for most of the characters' homelessness. Amelia - or One For The Dead, her name as a "rounder" - has witnessed her four brothers, parents and boyfriend die before her 18th birthday. On page six, after the initial dialogic insertion, the following words prelude the first book: "shelter:" "It was Irwin that started all the dying" (5). On page 371, Amelia concludes the novel's last book: "home" with the following words: "It was Dick that stopped all the dying."

Amelia is the main character of the novel that brings together the "ragged company," weaving and triggering the plot and the male characters towards personal transformation and healing. Double Dick is one of the four male characters that One For The Dead has 'chosen' to become part of the ragged company. The other three are Timber, Digger and Granite. These names are all nicknames, "rounder names" or street names. I will dedicate a whole subchapter to the naming process that correlates to the common search for identity further on.

The four street people meet at a shelter and become closely attached to each other and, due to Amelia's insistent ways, also befriend a "Square John," a non-homeless person, Granite Harvey. Throughout the novel, there is a constant separation between people who are referred to as "rounders" versus "Square Johns" (18/19). A rounder is a homeless person and a Square John is somebody who is not homeless and who would be considered as a "regular" citizen.

When Digger finds a lottery ticket and learns that it is the winning ticket of a little more than 13 million dollars, the novel's second book: "shelter" starts and expounds the change that comes along with money. While the newly gained fortune, that Digger shares with his four homeless friends, turns them into millionaires, their pasts, i.e. their dreams in the form of nightmares, cannot disappear. The nightmares' haunting influence on waking life is tragically portrayed by Dick's death due to an accidental overdose. Amelia, too, does not come to terms with life in accordance to societal norms and conventions. She feels the urge to return to the street and help those in need. The dialogic insertions highlight the impression of a story being told within the story as if the storytellers are talking to the audience in-between the 'real' plot, reminiscing and pondering some of the aspects of the story. Examples for such aspects are topics of love, friendship, time, change and stories. The dialogic insertions not only interrupt the plot, but also frame it.

*Do you remember the next part of the journey?
Like it was yesterday.*

It was yesterday. (210)

Did you ever wonder how the story might have gone if we'd have known that then?

Sometimes. But the story is the story, isn't it?

Yes. Yes it is.

More than words can say. (281)

However, in congruity with the alternating perspectives from which the novel is told, the transition from dialogue to plot remains fluent. The reader gets to hear the story in each of the five characters' voices: One For The Dead, Dick, Timber, Digger, and Granite. Linguistic features, grammar, vocabulary, tone and point of view emphasize the difference of their 'voices.' While Digger swears a lot and appears to have the roughest shell, One For the Dead provides a gentle voice forgiving "her boys" every slip or relapse.

When the last conversation reveals that it is Amelia and deceased Dick who are talking and retelling the story of their ragged company, Amelia recapitulates:

Quite the story.

Quite the journey.

Quite the life.

Yes.

I wouldn't change a single part of it.

Me neither. Going back to it always fills me up again.

Me too. (376)

It is Dick who ends all the dying, initiating a new beginning and within the framework of his conversation with Amelia, he denies death its final power. Before further scrutinizing the presence of death, dead people, ghosts, spirits and "shadowed ones," I want to take a closer look at the language, structure and semantic word field of Dimaline's *Red Rooms*.

Dimaline

In her short story collection *Red Rooms*, Métis writer Cherie Dimaline weaves together several layered stories within one frame narrative. The collection consists of five separate short stories that are numbered according to the rooms their protagonists have inhabited in the frame narrative: "room 414," "room 502," "room 106," "room 207," and "room 304." A first person narrator, who is also the protagonist of the frame narrative, tells several different stories that all surround the narrator's workplace: a hotel in a big city.

The uncapitalized "r" of "room" in every short story's title somewhat lessens the importance of the room and its number but instead enhances both the anonymity of the

hotel's geographic location and the detachment of rooms and residents. A quote from the first short story underlines this alienation: "Her words hung between them, two strangers abandoned at the edge of the city in this unremarkable room; she could feel the tension in this storied space; she read it with her fingers like Braille" (6). The name of the city is insignificant because it could be "any big city" where you find homelessness, prostitution, drug abuse and the anonymity of a random middle-sized hotel. The significance does not lie in the name or location of a specific city, but rather in its exemplary character for the portrayal of urbanized lives of contemporary Native people.

The bleakness of the hotel rooms match the despairing situation of the rooms'/stories' protagonists. The frame narrative further increases the vivid imagery and comparisons of the rooms as each room contains and portrays an entirely separate and distinct lifeworld in the made-up stories. While the quote describes the rooms as "storied spaces," it is the hotel's cleaning lady who tells us how she finds left behind personal objects or other remnants, and even dead bodies, and who begins to build a fabricated account around the individual guest's (im)possible life story, and the reasons behind his or her stay in the hotel. The narrative gives each story a clear physical border by its spatial containment inside the room and yet, through the narrator, offers the possibility of transcending all spatial borders. Each time the housekeeper opens the door to one of the five rooms, she enters or leaves the "storied space," while her constructed tales eventually blend with each other in the collection's last story. The confusion evoked by the blending of the fabricated story and the perceived 'real' story discloses the complex levels of storytelling.

The cleaning lady - whose name is Naomi - serves as the work's narrating protagonist, guiding the reader through the stories. In the course of all five stories the reader gains intimate knowledge of the housekeeper's thoughts and feelings. The stories reveal her own perspectives and world views when, from a meta-level she comments on the story she is about to tell: "When people die in certain places, those places are irrevocably changed. It's as if the stories of their death become imprinted on the walls or are thrown up on the ceiling like a film projection" (36). Visually, the frame narrative of Naomi and her life as a cleaning lady is printed in bold italics. The typographic separation of the frame narrative by italics is again reminiscent of *Porcupines and China Dolls* off-voice, *Ragged Company*'s inserted conversation and Van Camp's short stories, where Bear's thoughts and his spiritual connection to Snowbird are revealed in passages printed

in italics.

In contrast to the other novels, Dimaline's frame narrative *Red Room*'s does not end with its frame narrative. The housekeeper introduces her work on page one as follows: "*I am caught up in the tribal movements of the staff, intrigued by the remains of so many foreign guests. I read lives through old magazines in bathrooms and piles of change left on bureaus*" (1). When the first person narrator introduces the last story on page 120, it is also the last time that this level of *storytelling* occurs. The short story collection ends with the merging of two people's lives from the last story when they happen to be at the same Powwow. In the following quote, the Italics mark the excerpts from a diary that was left in one room. It is followed by Naomi's story of a female hotel client who reads the diary and thereby finds out, that the diarist is going to a Powwow in the same city, the next morning:

Yippee! Nathaniel just called. He's coming by to get me and we're heading out to grab some breakfast before Grand Entry. I'm full of butterflies, like fancy dancers are twisting their way through my ribcage. Wish me luck!

And that was it. Natalie stared at that last sentence for a full minute before she lowered the book and exhaled her last plume of smoke. . . .

Pulling up to the stadium, she felt queasy. She handed ten dollars to the driver and opened the door. She was nervous and short of breath, like fancy dancers were twisting their way through her ribcage. (147-150)

Homelessness: The Shadowed Ones

Wagamese

Representing Homelessness in Wagamese's novel, there is an abundance of words such as "holes," "spirits" and "souls" when referring to the streets and the people living on it. The extensive talk about, and the presence of "the shadowed" ones delegates a character-like role to this almost invisible group of people (16, 60, 62, 63, 96, 105, 155, 164, 177, 192, 213, 215, 314, 323, 371, 374). Amelia explains: "the shadowed ones on the street that no one ever sees, the living dead. The homeless" (17). While this introduction to her ability to see the ones that mainstream society does not see, or rejects/refuses to see, establishes the shadowed ones as representing homeless peoples in the city.

In Arthur Frank's acclaimed work *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (1995) "although focused on the stories of illness, it is easy to read across from disease to homelessness" (Nixon 39). The sociologist's portrayal of narrative ethics includes several stories of homeless people, exemplifying his three story types: the

restitution narrative, the chaos narrative and the quest narrative. While homelessness is mainly the topic of the chaos narratives, the quest narratives offer a sort of healing by means of finding and reclaiming one's voice. Nixon asserts: "It is by stories that we can reclaim our sense of self, and make sense of the 'narrative wreckage' of our lives during or after illness, and by extension, in the disruption of homelessness" (39). Frank situates homelessness as an embodiment of chaotic social status that society cannot identify with and hence excludes from the "us" by perceiving homeless people as the "other" (113). He further postulates this dichotomy as being at the center of society's ignorance and as a sort of coping mechanism that allows society to focus on medical treatment and "so avoid[s] the massive social changes required to see the other as part of oneself" (Nixon 39). For Indigenous people in North America this form of "othering" comes with even more ramifications, which are explored in *Ragged Company*.

The following quote highlights another interpretation of the shadowed ones: "Shadowed ones. The ones whose spirits can never leave this earth, the ones tied here by a sorrow, a longing stronger than life and deeper than death. . . . death has a presence . . . and when you live so close to it for so long you get so you can see it" (16f). Portraying the shadowed ones as a figurative representation of homeless people, whose existence in the lives of non-homeless peoples is merely a vague shadow, goes hand in hand with the second portrayal of the shadowed ones as ghosts, spirits, or dead people because of their constant fight for survival. Being alive or dead is often arbitrary. After three homeless people have died in one night, Digger comments: "The Square Johns all tish-tosh over the stories in the news, say how sad and pitiful it is, how something should be done - but five minutes later they forget" (18f). His clear disassociation from the non-homeless people, the Square Johns, reinforces the notion that the lives of the former are emotionally and spatially separate from the latter.

The visibility of the shadowed ones is exclusively Amelia's perspective. She is the only one who can see them. Furthermore, the shadowed ones also come to visit her as presences from her past, like her dead brothers and boyfriend. Amelia describes her puzzlement when seeing them for the first time, resulting in her successful sobriety:

I stank. I slept in parks, doorways, abandoned buildings, and hobo jungles, stumbling into a world fortified by shaving lotions, mouthwash, rubbing alcohol, or whatever was handy. . . . Until the shadowed ones came. I started seeing them everywhere. At first I'd rub my eyes, shake my head, and gulp down a mouthful of whatever I had to chase away what I thought for sure were DT's. But they stayed. Not real people, not

even what you'd call ghosts, just hints, vague outlines I saw everywhere. . . . Shadowed ones. . . . When the drinking wouldn't drive them away and the haunting got too much to handle, I walked into detox one day and quit drinking. Just quit. Suddenly, I was forty-four. I looked eighty. I felt older than a thousand years. (16)

The shadowed ones as ghostly appearances, representing a haunting and traumatic past, are unable to leave this world because they have not found reconciliation. Ironically, she stopped drinking alcohol in order to make the shadowed ones disappear but instead their appearances did not stop and their presence turned into a mission for her to connect people.

Since Aboriginal peoples “are overrepresented amongst homeless populations in most communities in Canada” (Gaetz et al 7), their lives are too often overlooked by dominant society. While people might be aware of many Aboriginal peoples living on the streets, the invisibility of homeless Aboriginal people will remain rampant as long as the reasons and roots of Aboriginal peoples' homelessness remain unaddressed. As Frank has metaphorically argued, the body can heal only when society accepts the homeless as part of their own body. Looking at Aboriginal homelessness as one symptom of PTSD, also means taking responsibility and accountability for Canada's colonial past and present. Wagamese and Dimaline tell individual stories of homeless people, revealing internalized blame, traumatic stress responses, and troubled personalities in hopeless situations. In both texts, the protagonists cannot be characterized as being on a typical 'quest for identity' because they are in much more desperate situations, closer to death than to life. If on a quest at all, theirs is a quest for survival. Also, they seldom *want* to find resolve or reconciliation. This is also where the appearance of the shadowed ones and the protagonists' dreams play a major role, since they both trigger the protagonists' healing journeys (which does not necessarily end in finding a physical home). The urban lives of most of the characters dwelling in the shadows and margins of society are existentially transformed: healing seems possible through existential dreaming. Dreams and the shadowed ones are also inextricably connected, as the next chapter will portray.

Since the shadowed ones symbolize the oppression and marginalization produced by colonization, and hence the collective trauma of Canada's Indigenous peoples, their presence also emphasizes that this past is not going to simply fade away over time, and that every Native person living in Canada today still lives with these shadows as remnants of that history. According to Amelia, the shadowed ones cannot leave the 'earth' (and

probably will never be able to leave) because their existence, like the historical reality of genocide in Canada, has not been acknowledged to this day.¹⁴³ The idea of the general Canadian public's denial of an "American Holocaust" is strikingly presented in Pam Colorado's poem *What Every Indian Knows*, which Ward Churchill quoted in his book *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and the Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present*:

Auschwitz ovens
burn bright
in America
twenty-four million
perished in the flame
Nazi
not a people
but
a way of life
Trail of Tears Humans
Ends in Oklahoma
an Indian name of
Red Earth
Redder still
Soaked in blood
of two hundred
removed tribes
the ovens burn
bright
in America
Ancestral ashes
sweep the nation
carried in
Prevailing winds
Survivors know
The oven door stands wide
and some like mouse
cat crazed and frenzied
turn
and run into the jaws
at night
the cat calls softly
to the resting
us. (xi)

The precarious and definitely contested comparison between the German Holocaust and

¹⁴³ After the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was released in June 2015, as well as after the government elections the same year with Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau replacing Stephen Harper, the matter of genocide has been addressed publicly. Chief Justice of Canada Lachlan has even publicly called the Residential School System and its legacy genocide.

the ethnocide/genocide of the Indigenous population of North America¹⁴⁴ gives insight into a highly political debate in which definitions seem to be the major difficulty. Such a fierce statement elucidates the frequently mentioned impression by Aboriginal People of being invisible or displaced from a greater mainstream society. The invisibility and inaction keeps colonialism alive and thriving as does the ignorance about the reasons of homelessness. Gaetz et al comment:

It is also important to consider the extreme poverty, lack of opportunities and inadequate housing on many reserves as a driver of migration to cities. Even further, Canada's colonial history, including the federal Indian Act, which identified who "qualifies" as an Aboriginal person and therefore has access to various benefits, the history of residential schools . . . and ongoing discrimination, racism and systemic oppression continue to affect Aboriginal access to services, programs and support. Accordingly, only when the Settler society will recognize Native displacement and mistreatment, reconciliation on both sides can be achieved. (26)

Seeing the shadowed ones as a representation and a reminder of the many unjust actions and policies against Canada's Aboriginal peoples to this day also gives reason to further examine the responses to homelessness in *Ragged Company*. The city, which is a platform for both extremes, the very rich and the very poor, serves as a location of intense conflict.

When Digger finds out that he won 13.4 million dollars, the meaning of 'the city' changes. The four protagonists experience the city no longer as the place of homelessness, but as the place for the rich; entering the realm of the visible solely due to money. But this is not what Richard Wagamese's novel is portraying. It is quite the contrary. As Digger poignantly describes, the money has suddenly turned them into visible participants of an affluent society, which they have never known. He observes, however, that the money does not change anything about their pasts and that it cannot fix "the ones with woe" (215). The money that they win radically changes the outer world's reaction towards them:

It amazed me, One day earlier, sitting in the same park with the same mickey in my pocket would have earned me a phone call to the police in this neighbourhood. But today, showered, shaved, and dressed expensively, I had become a *sir*. What had the soap washed off, I wondered? . . . All the *sirs* and all the politeness, all the nods, small salutes, and other signs couldn't hide the fact that I was still a ragged

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Woolford in his article "Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples" claims that "the varied path of attempted Aboriginal destruction in Canada is misrepresented by attempts to reduce Canadian colonialism to a singular event and Aboriginal Canadians to a single 'group'" (81).

man inside, still a rounder, still more street than neighbourhood, still on a park bench alone while the world happened around. (156)

The quotation reflects the level of hypocrisy in response to the characters and it also highlights the loneliness of the character, Timber, who does not feel included in society no matter what clothes he wears, or what social status he has. His sudden visibility to society, which is depicted by “square” people greeting and interacting with him in a park, is only superficial and he actually remains as invisible as before. Only when he feels seen and acknowledged as the person who he is, including his life story and his many years as a homeless person, does Timber become able to take on agency within the world and become visible to others.

But there are two sides to “invisibility.” The characters had become used to being invisible, which provided protection and mechanisms to cope with their past. When Amelia leads the group to the movies for the first time in the city’s better neighbourhood, she explains her companions’ unease: “For the boys it was stepping out of shadow and being seen, and none of them liked it very much. . . . There were no shadowed ones here, or at least they had no need to tell me of their presence that night” (48). Of course, in the richer neighbourhoods there are no shadows, no homeless people (tolerated) and historically, Native people are ‘not supposed’ to live in the city but on reserves. The Indian Act has explicitly announced that Native life, culture, and identity are tied to the reserve and unattainable in urban areas. The appearance of Native people in cities has been conceived as unnatural, as there was no room for an Aboriginal presence in what was perceived and promoted to be the Canadian space, a space of enlightenment and imperialism (Lehan 3), of progress and model citizens. However, in Wagamese’s novel, it is not the return to the reserve and to a ‘true’ Native life, but the reconciliation with oneself that is central. ‘True’ Native life has transcended the confines of imposed identity constructions and freed itself from separationist ideas of geographic allocations. The characters all stay in the city, but instead of seeing it as a mere shelter for their broken existence, it develops into a home for strong individuals who also partly happen to have Aboriginal backgrounds. The constant juxtaposition of external perceptions of Indigeneity and internal self-identification turns out to be the character’s main struggle.

For Dick, however, living on the street also serves as a form of self-punishment, which ultimately leads to his death. The shadowed ones also embody individual pasts, conflicts, and traumas. Amelia observes Dick: “There were always shadowed ones there,

just behind his shoulder, and I worried that he might never find a way to rid himself of the weight of their presence” (192). Amelia knows about the healing and the fatal impact of the shadowed ones. She intuits Dick’s inability to come to terms with his troubling past and the guilt he feels about having accidentally killed his nephew.

While all four protagonists chose the city to be their shelter, the city remains ambivalent. On the one hand it provides a hiding place and survival due to heat and food sources that accompany city life. On the other hand, it cuts them off from their homelands - often remote communities - that are still centers of traditional Indigenous life in Canada because of their proximity to ecological ways of traditional sustenance. Reserves are places that inhabit strong senses of Indigeneity, not only because of the proximity to the respective ecosystems that used to guarantee the community’s survival, but also because of the presence of a community and a sense of relationality, a tribal concept of “Mitakuye Oyasin” (“All my Relations”). Relations are hence ‘easier’ to see and identify on reserves than in cities, where dominant society “is segmented not only into millions of individuals but it is also divided along economic, biological and cultural lines of class, sex and gender, race, age, health and belief” (Lutz *Approaches* 198). This fragmentation makes it harder for Aboriginal people to find and rely on these concepts essential to Indigeneity. This “cultural schizophrenia” (204) as the attempt to balance two cultures and worlds establishes the characters in the texts discussed as liminal characters that find themselves emotionally disjointed and isolated.

From the moment Amelia decides to quit drinking, she also decides to devote herself to the many homeless people that “no one ever sees” (17). She talks to them, helps them get food or run other errands, cares for them in cases of illness or Delirium Tremens’ (DT). As ghostly appearances, the shadowed ones seem to guide Amelia and her actions. Often, Amelia’s parts in the novel are introduced like follows: “The Shadowed ones brought us *Rain Man*” (60), “the shadowed ones who had brought me each of my boys” (213), or “‘Shadowed ones. That’s what got us into all this in the first place.’ ‘It’s what got us out,’ Amelia said. Whenever the shadowed ones are around, Amelia seems to know that something of significance will happen, or that what is already happening is of significance: My little brother Harley. . . . He came as a shadow person, hovering behind me when I looked in the mirror. Just a wave, a motion, a wrinkle in the light, but I knew it was him. I felt him. And I knew where the boys were. Just like that” (164). The guidance she receives from the shadowed ones, whether good or bad messages, imposes on Amelia

the role of the Native character with traditional roots and a connection to spirituality that will further conceptualize the Old Ways as (traditional) Indigenous knowledge.

Whether it is ghostly appearances or homeless people, the shadowed ones embody everything that is or has become invisible for mainstream Canadian society - “verdrängt” (repressed) in the Freudian sense. Amelia concludes:

It was Dick that stopped all the dying. I don't know why, but the shadowed ones let me be after that. . . . I wandered around the downtown core . . . but I never saw them anymore. . . . Instead, I saw the people. Saw the way they could become a part of you if you let them. . . . That's all they ever wanted, the shadowed ones, to have their stories heard, to be made real. (371)

Maybe that is also the voice of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, a voice that wants to be heard, acknowledged and made real. People that are real also cannot be overheard, or overlooked: Acknowledged history, acknowledged genocide, calls for action. Amelia offers a way to deal with trauma that is reminiscent of the other novels discussed in this thesis: disclosure, public testimony, reconciliation. It is portrayed as crucial to realize that it is not only financial compensation that means reconciliation but also accountability and resulting action. Maybe then, the haunting past's effects, the intergenerational trauma, and identity struggles will start to fade away, like the presence of the shadowed ones has become redundant.

In the end, when Timber carves a giant mural of a downtown street scene that he calls “Shadowed Ones,” even these are literally made visible.

Dimaline

Homelessness in room “414” is also at the center of the short story's plot. “The girl” as the protagonist is portrayed as being outside of the ordinary world, not belonging to anything, and not complying to any set of rules or codes. She is “wearing underwear marked ‘Wednesday’ on a Sunday evening . . . and a wifebeater shirt made grey from a thousand washes in someone else's machine” (5).

Being treated with no respect and sometimes as less than a human being, the men “deposit[ing]” (5) her back onto the cold streets where she waits for another “john” to provide. Since the girl's real name is not revealed throughout the story, her anonymity facilitates her role as the exemplary embodiment of the desolate state of affairs for many Aboriginal women who live in the shadow of society on the streets of Canada. The

protagonist's physical condition reflects her emotional and mental state, which is graphically visualized as 'broken,' 'tormented' or even 'near dead': "spindly legs," she "peeled off the scab from her kneecap," "bony, bruised hips," "raw and jagged," "nicotine-stained fingers" (5), "smudged eyeliner," "puffy eyes of a middle-aged woman who lived too hard and smoked too much," "her skin hid the sickness that crept through her blood" (8). The description of her physical appearance testifies not only her poor health but also of a desolate mental state. She herself morbidly connects both:

Her shoulders hunched in on themselves so much she was sure that if she really wanted to, she could pull them completely together. Perhaps she could flap them fast enough that they would carry her away; she's [sic!] be liberated by the bad posture of low self-esteem. She giggled at the image and caught herself laughing in the smudgy reflection of the brass plated elevator buttons. And for a moment, she didn't recognize the girl, the girls with the wings constructed of bones and fear, smiling an absurd sort of smile that was separate from the rest of her face. (13)

Her body is clearly in very rough shape, and so is her outlook on life: "But now that laughter was gone. She thought that maybe the ability to laugh and the ability to breathe were somehow dependent on each other because her breath was gone like a runner at the end of a lost race: a pointless and frustrating place to be" (14). The dirty, dusty and neglected hotel rooms where the stories take place also parallel the desolate portrayal of her physical condition. Dirty environments, zombie-like people and filthy business dominate the overall surroundings. Her existence in the city as a homeless "hooker" leaves not only exterior but also interior mental scars: "she felt unwell. There was pain from somewhere deep inside of her" (24). The city is established as the opposite of "back home" (6) and has served as a way to flee from hurtful events that keep on haunting her. Most traumatic were the absence of her unknown father and the death of her brother, Trevor. Both of these hidden truths are only revealed with the help of dreams or visions. They serve as catalysts for her journey that first leads into her past and then helps her to find a more hopeful future. Her deceased brother comes back in the form of a shadow person in one of her dreams:

Out the window she watched the full moon breathe as it sat in the sky - the wide, round, star-filled sky. A candle flickered from somewhere on the shelf beside her, throwing shadows on the wall. She watched them as they slid around each other, weaving in and out like masked dancers. And she saw there, dodging the other shadow men like a wild streak of wind, the shadow of her deceased brother. He moved with the erratic energy that had consumed him throughout his life. (11)

Her brother, whom she later also calls “that crazy, cynical shadow dancer who had killed himself,” has committed suicide. Seeing him as a shadowed person, in that in-between space of her dream - and between an unresolved life and a restless death - reminds her of the pain of her troubled past. Although the dream also prompts her to offer tobacco for her late brother, she proceeds to throw away the flickering candle that produced the shadows, and hence her brother as a shadow person. It is obvious that she does not want to deal with this facet of her past life, and that the pain is too much for her to bear.

When she perceives herself as a shadow person in one of her visions - her personal state in limbo, in-between life and death - her stasis becomes especially clear: “But she was a mere shadow in this woman’s kitchen, in her grandmother’s house, and shadows can’t die” (30). Her inability to affect the situation and the outcome of her dream keeps her stuck. In her dreams this in-between shadow identity was previously ascribed to already deceased or ‘unreal’ people, and the character’s own inactivity as a shadow person reflects a lack of self-determination and an inability to participate proactively in life. Just like the shadowed people, who are either homeless people or deceased returning as shadows unable to participate in waking life, she is suffering a life devoid of any meaning or purpose, denying her any chance of action or personal growth. That her stagnation is on the verge to change and transform into sovereignty is indicated by her pondering, contemplating her past and what she describes as a “constant internal yelling” (30).

The other shadowy appearances that she calls “near dead Indians sitting at corner tables” (18) are the two women that first appear in the girl’s dream. After that dream, the women start to appear whenever the girl is about to have a dream/vision. She experiences their appearances as something that scares her and evokes a sense of losing control: “She felt fear slip its scaly tentacles into her ears and around her thighs. It was a desperate, intrusive feeling” (18). Although she reacts with panic to seeing the women from her dream, she seems to be aware that this is something happening to her that she cannot change or avoid.

When a few pages later the girl states that, “Her father was a ghost to her, not real at all” (21) her complete ignorance towards her dreams and the two women is highlighted.

She does not believe in ghosts, visions, or other ‘spooky’ or ‘supernatural’¹⁴⁵ experiences and refuses to accept them as anything else: “Fuck these revelations about a past she cared nothing for” (24).

Naming and Identity

Dimaline

The characters’ homelessness is one of the most striking identification markers in both *Red Rooms* and *Ragged Company*. The protagonists’ identity as homeless people is often shaped by rough circumstances and poor physical conditions. Looking at the different means of identification and identity constructions within both texts may provide insight into the plot development and facilitate significant connections to the role of dreaming.

The first person narrator who is telling the short stories of *Red Rooms* identifies - as opposed to her stories’ protagonists - *herself* as a Native person on page four:

Every fall I inevitably run into relations from up North when the annual Native festival rolls into town. It’s an excuse for Indians from all over to pack up their regalia, call in sitters for the weekend and get to the Big City, . . . I, of course, being the token Indian on staff, am called upon to mediate disputes, explain strange behaviours and to generally defend cousins and strangers alike. (4)

Within the short story “room 414,” however, exterior elements dominate the identification process of the main character: The girl’s identity is neither expressed nor shaped by herself but instead it is ascribed to her by the often hostile clients and abusive people in her life.

Her somewhat cloudy, indefinable existence as a young prostitute gives the first clue of her Aboriginal descent, as she hatefully recounts “these cold, hard men. These were the ones who called her squaw. Who called her half-breed, the ones who would just as soon slap her than bother to put on the condom she always handed them” (6). The reader receives information on her identity as a Native woman via the disparaging and

¹⁴⁵ Apparently, there is another way to analyze and theoretically approach Dimaline’s short story. Elements reminiscent of the Gothic genre or of Magical Realism elements such as increased violence, death, ghosts, visions, dreams and time travels are rampant. In a 2010 article I have analyzed this text through the lens of an Aboriginal Gothic, or what Hauenberger called Spiritual Realism. However, this approach does not (in my opinion) do justice to the text as it still succumbs Western theories and epistemologies, no matter how much emphasis is laid on the “Aboriginal Twist.” I therefore decided not to elaborate on available theories of the Gothic, Magical or Spiritual Realism and focus on the role of dreams, the identity formation, Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies and current realities in Aboriginal lives.

belittling comment of her clients who pay her for sex. Her identification is hence defined by people from the exterior and not by herself. What these men ‘call’ her is what she ‘becomes’ until she reclaims her own identity and starts to believe that she, too, deserves a self-determined connected, meaningful life. Working as a prostitute seems to superficially increase her self-esteem and it provides a way for her to take control: “She pulled the role on like a well-tailored suit, and, sauntering about, swung bony, bruised hips. She was cocky. . . .” (5). Her cockiness is merely a pose, stemming from something as artificial (in playing a role) as sex work, hiding her real feelings of hatred towards her male clients: “To these men she had no name and no face. She was a hole” (6). She is playing her role with a morbid, almost masochist pleasure, that displays her cockiness as contempt and “the calculated respect accorded to dangerous dogs” (6). But behind her smugness is the desperate need to find a way out of the repeated “indifferent,” “unremarkable,” “insignificant” space and to “forge a connection” (6). The lack of connection in her life is extensive, and her loneliness is palpable in every sentence. She lacks any feeling of self-worth and her concomitant need for self-punishment finds symbolic expression in her repeated presence near the floor, on the ground, laying in the dirt and grime of the street, the bar or the hotel floor: “She was eye-level with the floor. . . . She could see lint” (10), “the girl woke up in the alleyway” (12), “lying fetal on the floor of a hotel room beside a sleeping stranger,” (12) “now she was under the table,” (20) “when she finally cleared away the clouds from her eyelids and felt the sandy ground beneath her bared thighs, it was like reaching the bottom of the knot” (30). The girl has literally hit rock bottom, and the years of drugs, alcohol, life on the streets, and selling her body to strangers have taken its toll on her body and mind.

But even “back home” - which refers to life on a reserve, to family ties and her Native background - she has spent a lot of time “at the feet of her aunties under the table. Beside her would be the smelly old dog” (7). That she has been a passive observer even back home ascribes a sort of agency to her choice to live in the city and earn her money as a prostitute. When the relationship between her and her “john” is compared to a hawk and his prey - where *she* is the hawk and *he* is her prey - it is obvious that this is the only moment where she can feel empowerment and a distorted kind of superiority.

Her physical description later in the story alludes to her Native background as it is stated how her skin “looked soft and tanned even though she hadn’t seen the sun in more than a few weeks” and how she “quickly undid and re-braided her long brown hair,

streaked with dye in lighter shades of red and coppery orange. Her dark eyes were smeared with turquoise eyeliner and sparkly powder shone across her sharp cheekbones” (8f). Alone at a bar she “recalled pictures of herself with feathered bangs,” (14) but the reader’s expectation of a harmonious, loving, and traditional life back home remains unfulfilled when the girl continues to recall images of herself and her relatives “posing with half-empty bottles” and “making ‘monkey juice’ in her grandma’s basement from the dozens of bottles that lines the rec room” (14f). Her upbringing was also shaped by alcohol abuse within a dysfunctional family. By rejecting to establish a clear-cut dichotomy between a good reserve/family life (as represented by “back home”) versus a bad urban life alone and homeless (as represented by “the city”), Dimaline draws attention to the relative insignificance of location to Indigeneity. For the most part, Indigeneity is portrayed as being something inside a person and not outside. No exterior factors (whether physical appearance or a status card) can establish a person as (especially) Indigenous. Life on a reserve does not secure or come along automatically with Indigeneity either.¹⁴⁶

Although no word from herself clearly reveals that the nameless protagonist of “room 414” identifies as Indigenous, her outer appearance and what her “johns” call her remain the only identification markers there are. But just as the girl remains unnamed and hence more or less unidentified, other peoples’ or places’ names are rarely mentioned in the story, either. Insults or nicknames are more often used than real names.

In Anishinaabe culture, as in many other Indigenous cultures, name and identity are intricately connected and can and give a lot of information about a person. Relations and kinship, achievements, land affiliation, talents, and other significant aspects of one’s life can be revealed in the name (L. Gross 1, 214f, M. McNally 244ff). The girl’s namelessness hence highlights her alienation from her cultural background as well as her lack of a meaningful identity. The girl’s and the two women’s namelessness make it easier to accredit greater symbolic meanings to them. In making the two women and the girl in “this huge city” (10) as anonymous as possible, they can easily be analyzed as epitomizing female struggles,¹⁴⁷ strength and connection in an otherwise often disconnected urbanized world. While in *Red Rooms* the girl remains nameless, the protagonists in *Ragged*

¹⁴⁶ As what Indigeneity is portrayed, will be further discussed in the coming chapter on Dreams.

¹⁴⁷ The significance of the role of women in the text will be further discussed in the course of the coming chapters.

Company embark on a spiritual journey or what could be called a naming ceremony¹⁴⁸ throughout the novel.

Wagamese

The characters' homelessness in *Ragged Company* is also manifest in their names, their "rounder names" (136). These names are not their real names but exemplify what Piliavin conceptualizes as "acculturation," referring to coping mechanisms and assimilationist practices that secure survival on the streets (38). These names are their street names; nicknames given to them by the street community of "rounders," reflecting one special, outstanding fact or feature of the person so named. But the name also separates their existence as homeless people from their previous lives. By having a "rounder name," their identity is restricted to street life, silencing a life off the streets with family ties and official names given to them by their parents. Not only does this form of naming attest their street community as their new family, it also empowers the ragged company to be - in this case they all chose to be - homeless. The novel starts out with the perspective of One for the Dead, the most important main character who is the only one who identifies as an Ojibwe woman and gives her real name from the very beginning: "I was named Amelia, after my grandmother. We were a known family - respected, honoured. . . ." (5). Her four brothers, her parents and her late boyfriend die, and after having survived Residential School, Amelia's alcohol addiction leaves her living homeless on the streets. She has been given her rounder name because she continues to 'perform' the old ritual to honour the dead by always spilling on the ground a few drops of a newly opened bottle of alcohol. On page 17 she adds her 'real' last name to her rounder name "One For The Dead One Sky" which connects her to her past and shows pride in her Native family ties. As the quote from page five has also shown, Amelia is the only one who grew up in a stable and

¹⁴⁸ In Sherman Alexie's 2007 novel *Flight*, the main character's quest to find his place in the world is also mirrored in his naming process. While the protagonist introduces himself on page one with the words "Call me Zits" (which obviously also is an intertextual reference to the famous opening of Melville's *Moby Dick*: "Call me Ishmael"). His most defining characteristic seems to be the many zits on his face - proving that he suffers from a lack of self-worth while not taking himself serious. The novel however ends with the words: "'Michael,' I say. 'My real name is Michael. Please, call me Michael'" (181). As a way of self-protection and with no parents for guidance, his 'half-breed' identity positions him in state of inner disunity and overwhelming anger and sadness. Having found a home where he is accepted the way he is, the main character feels worthy of his real name and also accepts the vulnerability to open up to people. His self-naming progress suggests personal self-growth and growing openness. His given name does not serve as a mask anymore, but as a reflection of who he really is.

traditional Ojibwa environment, giving her a more grounded sense of identity. She comments on her rounder name versus her real name: “One For The Dead One Sky. I’ve been here for twenty years and Amelia, little Amelia, resides in a place of memory, standing at all her places of mourning, shedding tears that salve her bruises, offering prayers that set her free” (17). Amelia wilfully reduces her identity to the last twenty years on the streets and cuts herself off from the little girl that had to endure more losses and pain than she could take. The emotional distance to her former life is further established in the need to bring together the ragged company and help them find reconciliation.

The other characters’ real names are only revealed towards the middle of the novel. “Digger” has been given his rounder name because he makes money by “digging” the trash for usable items. He tells the others his real name is Mark Haskett on page 114, and he continues to tell them about his life prior to his homelessness. The names in the novel play a significant role beyond forming a separation between past and present, because by revealing their real names and telling their life stories, they connect the future with their past. The characters’ healing journeys are mirrored by the way they handle their names. Whenever they recount personal (his)stories from their former lives, they open up to their comrades and their identity broadens to include the past.

With the exception of Amelia, their Native ancestry (three of the five main characters have a Native background) is revealed only later in the book. When Digger finally gives the others his real name, he also states that his mother was Métis. He comments:

So somewhere in me is a thinned-out fraction of rebel blood. Don’t make me Metis, don’t make me half-breed, don’t make me Indian. It don’t make me nothing but the only son of a lazy son of a bitch who’d sooner pocket the fucking nine ball than pocket a paycheque. That’s how I started out. (115)

His refusal to be identified (by others) as an Aboriginal person - or the given labels for Aboriginal peoples - shows his discerning level of self-reflection. He never grew up in a Native environment and understands that a bloodline alone does not define him as an Aboriginal person. His upbringing in a family that did not care about him resulted in his running away to live and work on a farm. Digger’s rejection of his Native background reveals how arbitrary Native identity was and continues to be, because it remains controlled by others. His grandmother lost her identity as a Native woman by marrying somebody non-Native and thus became “white” herself. The impact on the future

generation is manifested in often involuntary, tragical ignorance about people's heritage and Native background.

When Digger calls Amelia by her real name for the first time (113), they both start to acknowledge the other person for what has brought them to the street. The third character is called "Double Dick;" (21) the name deriving from his real name "Richard Richard Dumont" (21). His parents could not decide how to pronounce the name Richard, in the French or English pronunciation, and decided to give him the name twice. His real name is revealed quite early on in the novel, but his Native background is only disclosed very late in the book. After Amelia asks him why he knows Native stories, he comments: "On accounta I'm an Indian too," he said. 'I'm an Indian too'" (287). He elaborates and gives clues about his perception of what Nativeness meant and continues to mean for him and his upbringing: "We was poor. We was poor like all the rest around there. They called us sawmill savages. The sawmill was the only place anyone could get a job an' people hung around waitin' for the chance to get in" (288). By not commenting on the addition 'savage' to the abusive name that was given to them, Dick has either normalized the insult or simply does not see the need for explanation. Dick's only way to relate to any 'traditional' Native life is through the movies. He recapitulates:

But we didn't live like in the movie. I guess we wasn't that kind of Indian. We lived on moose milk. There was some who told stories an' stuff. Others went to hunt an' got meat. But it wasn't like them Indians in the movie. We was moose milk Indians. That's all. Moose milk Indians. (289)

Again, his identity was mainly shaped by exterior factors such, as poverty, work, alcohol abuse, and the offensive generalization "savages" people were calling him and his family. Already having inherited the preconceived idea of what it means to be Native, this notion ironically incorporates the "landlessness" of Indigenous people: "On accounta my dad was a half-breed we never had no land or nothin'. We just kinda lived on the land that no one else cared for" (299). For the literate reader, the irony of this remark is almost painful; the people who have been living on the continent for time immemorial have been forced by colonization to live on the 'leftover land.'¹⁴⁹ Ignorant about this fact, Dick does not include any history of his people in his self-identification. Accepting and not questioning what he has experienced, his approach to Native half-breed identity highlights the

¹⁴⁹ Maria Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (1995), for example, addresses this topic.

internalization of oppression, marginalization and imposed identity regulations. With nobody teaching him about the past and the reasons for his impoverished present he has no choice but to see only what is in front of him.

The fourth person is “Timber,” (22) whose real name, Jonas Hohnstein, (130) is only revealed to the others during the public money handover by the lottery agency. He is not of Native ancestry and received his street name because he would be able to drink all night and then suddenly fall down like timber. His portrayal suggests a deep sadness that is rooted in his past experiences of his wife’s tragic accident and resulted memory loss. After having cared for her for years he eventually cannot bear her not recognizing him anymore and decides to leave and live on the streets, as if he purposefully deprived himself of anything comfortable. His homelessness and drug addiction seems like self-punishment and a way to forget his wife, just like she did forget him. Only when he opens up to the ragged company about the reasons for his self-imposed homelessness, does he learn that his wife is still alive. Ironically, his rounder name Timber not only alludes to his rounder existence but also to his previous life in which he was a professional carver. Once Timber meets his former wife and her new husband - still not recognizing him or anything of their life together - Timber reclaims his name and starts to carve again.

Granite Harvey (28) was named after his grandfather’s (and later his father’s) granite quarry, and is the fifth of the ragged company and the only one who is introduced with his real name from the beginning. The naming process is in reverse to that of the rounders because his street name is given to him after his real name is already known. Digger decides to call Granite “Rock,” simply because he was named after a certain kind of ‘rock.’ Symbolically however, Granite also becomes the rock for the ragged company; supporting them and encouraging them, providing shelter, advice and attention when - due to the lottery win - their lives take a sudden turn.

Especially Digger feels resentment towards other Square Johns, except for Granite. By digging for things, which Square Johns throw away and then selling them, he discloses the hypocrisy of capitalist society. His resentment culminates publically when Digger is confronted with the public’s sudden interest in the ragged company after they have won the jackpot and have publically been proclaimed as millionaires. His speech in front of TV and radio on page 138 displays Digger as a smart and critical thinker who understands the mechanisms of society. He states: “You don’t give a fuck where we been or what we done to get by. You don’t give a fuck about that . . . except that you wish it was you and you

wanna tell this story to a whole bunch of other Square John fucks who will wish it was them too.” His pointed argument discloses the hypocrisy and the superficial ways of defining and categorizing people by unveiling jealousy and competition as capitalist society’s driving forces. His opinionated sense of “institutional disaffiliation” (Piliavin et al 37) is what provides him with pride of being an outsider, an outcast of a society he despises. But what is so striking about the Square Johns’ sudden change in perception of the ragged company now that they are millionaires is the instability of society’s identification markers. When money, property, and position are the only things that assign and define status, then society proves to be an incredibly unstable structure. The exclusive social marker, control of money, may suddenly change and hence does not provide a stable identification marker at all. Despite the constantly underlying moral that ‘money alone does not make you happy,’ the reader is again surprised when money does actually do both: bring life and death. While Timber and Digger are suddenly enabled to live financially secure lives, Dick on the other hand is lead even deeper into his spiral of shame and guilt, unable to accept the opportunity that was given to him. While it provides some with the means to build meaningful lives, it does not change anything at all for Dick, who despite all the money cannot come to terms with his past and kills himself.

It is also Digger, who sees the similarities between rounders and Square Johns in their unusual community. He is the one who recognizes that the separations he has previously lived by are just as artificial as the concept of money as a social marker. He states:

All of us. Rounders. In our own way, every one of us sitting there in that old scrub of a bar had lived a rounder’s life, had survived. . . . Here there were no Square Johns, no us and them, no have and have-nots, no ups and downs, no rich and poors because we had been all of that. All of that. Rounders. (265)

That the four of them buy a house together on “Indian Road” (185)¹⁵⁰ sounds ironic at first and yet fits the discourse of identity as shaped by exterior factors, here the blatant street name. Dick, alive then, liked the name of it and thought that it fit for them, because Amelia is Native and brought them all together. This almost naïve way of choosing a road that alludes to their Nativeness, shows his ignorance but also his desire for a strong and unmistakable bold sense of identity.

The naming process in *Ragged Company* is hence emblematic for personal growth,

¹⁵⁰ “Indian Road” actually exists and appears to be a quite, middle class neighbourhood in Toronto near High Park.

transformation, and revelation, which are here often typified as not only existing but also the longing to live. The following chapter will argue that similar to the novels discussed before, it is through the therapeutic power of dreams that the formation of an exterior identity is replaced by an interior self-identification. Dreams serve to provide spirituality to revitalize disturbed connections and to facilitate ultimate healing (or at least the prospect of healing).

5.3 “We are people of the dream:” Dreaming an(d) Identity

Dreams, Movies and Stories

Just as in Van Camp and Alexie’s novels, Dimaline and Wagamese intricately connect dreaming with their character’s fate. Providing this connection emphasizes the link between stories and dreams as integral parts of Indigenous knowledge and Identity. In the analysis of dreams in Wagamese’s and Dimaline’s texts, the existential dimension focuses on identity concepts and the very transformation of these. In order to take a closer look at identity constructions and self-perceptions, the chapter will introduce Wagamese’s comparisons (almost equations) of dream, story and movie, while the section on Dimaline discusses the character’s daydreams and the significance of stories within the narrative (frame).

Wagamese

Amelia, as the only identified and “full blood” First Nations person in the novel serves as a paradigm of what is considered Indigenous. Her calm manner and her connection to spirituality (brought forward by her use of language, her knowledge about traditional Native life, her belief in dreams and her ability to see the shadowed ones) are especially noticeable. Concerning the other Native characters in *Ragged Company*, their whole environment seems to be more Indigenous than they are themselves. This impression is highlighted by the notion of movies in the novel and their inability to connect and understand their dreams. Initiated by Amelia, the five main characters meet in theatres and start watching movies together: “Movies were our common ground and we all knew how to be when one was playing, we all knew how to feel when the build-up started inside just before the first flicker of light on the screen. It’s what made us friends. It’s what had

brought us all here” (109), “and the four of us were at home in the movies once again” (109), “we sat in the flickering light of a dream made in 1962 . . . and lost ourselves in story one more time” (112).

The many movies¹⁵¹ mentioned in *Ragged Company* are classics, one of them sticks out: *Dances With Wolves* (1990). The movie does not depict “Indians” as bloodthirsty savages and instead idealizes tribal Native life by “adopting” a disillusioned US army soldier into their idyllic community (Huhndorf *Going Native* 2f).¹⁵² *Ragged Company*’s characters experience the movie as follows:

Dances With Wolves. We walked to see that movie, all seven of us. . . . It was glorious. This was a movie that shone from start to finish. I saw the People as they had once lived: free, unencumbered, tribal. I saw the land as it had once been: open, free, pure. I saw a vision of myself that I had never seen before: a tribal me, a tribal woman, strong, resilient, proud, and in harmony with her world. It made me cry. (285/286)

The movie evokes emotions and sensation for a long gone past where there was no necessity to even pose the question of who is an “Indian” or how is an “Indian.” Amelia, realizing that loss and the need to find something Native in their daily lives is overwhelmed by her feelings. Envisioning herself as a “more Native” - hence tribal - woman than she feels she is, displays her need to identify with a past that is unknown to her but that she believes to be part of her ancestry. She also realizes that the movie does not portray current realities but focuses on a past that was dominated by ‘tribal’ and traditional cultures. What affects her the most about the movie is the emotional groundedness she experiences and the sadness about the thought that there are so many, “native people for whom the world was never the free and open place it was on the screen that night, whose identities were never so focused, so sharp, their history rolled out like

¹⁵¹ Here is a list of the movies that were explicitly mentioned in the novel (in chronological order of their appearance): *Wings of Desire* (1987), *Big* (1988), *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), *Rain Man* (1988), *Stealing Home* (1988), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *Three Fugitives* (1989), *An Affair to Remember* (1957), *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Reversal of Fortune* (1990), *Total Recall* (1990), *Cadillac Man* (1990), *Bird on a Wire* (1990), *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), *Hamlet* (1990), *Ironweed* (1987), *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), *Pacific Heights* (1990), *Mr. Destiny* (1990).

¹⁵² It is essential to mention Kerstin Knopf’s statement that the film “is supposed to be a politically correct movie, one that raises sensitivity toward Indian clichés and promotes a broader awareness of Indigenous issues in North America. Although the movie might have done this on the surface, it contains the same colonialist stereotypes packed neatly into benevolent images of Indians. There are, again, blood-thirsty, savage Pawnee set against peaceful, ‘domesticated’ Sioux. Emma LaRoque outlines the inherent dangers of such ‘pan-Indian’ movies and maintains that films like *Dances With Wolves* (1990) . . . which are regarded as fostering cross-cultural tolerance, use very seductive techniques to portray only fragments of Indigenous cultures” (*Decolonizing the Lens* 255).

the great carpet of the plains” (286). Her reminiscing about a past of a free and strong people who knew who they were and what their purpose in life was is also reflected in the presence of the shadowed ones who were “as unwilling to leave as I was. Moved beyond life itself” (286). The absence of this clear, purposeful and unquestioned identity as Indigenous has caused many deaths, pain and troubles in Amelia’s life, and her gratitude for a movie that reminds her of her groundedness as opposed to the many ‘lost souls’ incites an emotional discrepancy: Happy to feel a sense of pride towards her Native ancestry and sadness because not everybody is able to feel this connection due to colonization’s continued effect of alienation and isolation.

The extent of Hollywood movies’ influence on identity constructions in the novel appears as two-fold. On the one hand, it partly educates the characters and the readers about Aboriginal roots; on the other hand, movies as the sole educator prove to be full of stereotypes. Movies can be seen as catalysts or triggers for the characters’ questioning of their own pasts, backgrounds, and futures. When self-identification solely relies on external incentives such as movies, names and nicknames, insults, and public policies, it remains artificial and unnatural. But it can initiate dialogue, re(negotiations), and the questioning of one’s status quo as a Native or non-Native person.

Curiously, it is also the movie that leads Dick, one of the most introverted characters, to reveal his own Native identity as was discussed before. In one of their inserted dialogues, Dick talks to Amelia about a teaching of an elder he once received:

Creation gives us three ways to get to the truth of things.

Yes.

She said the first tool we’re given is thought. . . . Then we’re given feeling. Emotion. . . . And last, we’re given words in order to bring it to life, to express it, to give it to the air. . . .

You actually have to allow yourself to feel the experience, then explore it with thought, and then express it. (280f)

What Dick learned is the healing power of words, which give him the possibility to reflect upon experienced traumata and by verbalizing these emotions and thoughts, freeing himself from the isolation and guilt that these ‘trapped’ feelings evoked. Dick continues to ask “Did you ever wonder how the story might have gone if we’d have known that then? Sometimes. But the story is the story, isn’t it? Yes. Yes it is” (281). Similar to *Porcupines and China Dolls*, public testimony, the sharing, and the audible verbalization of the trauma is depicted as the path that may lead to personal healing.

Storytelling happens on many different levels. Amelia and Dick retelling the story

of the ragged company constitutes both the first level and the novel's frame. The second level would be Amelia's recounts of the stories and tales her grandmother used to tell that remind the reader of an ancient Ojibwe presence. The third level is represented by the many life stories that slowly unfold and reveal the characters' pasts while also shaping their futures. The fourth level is the story told by and about Granite. He is a retired journalist who rekindles his passion for words and stories as he tells the story of how the ragged company came together, lost Dick, and regained a sense of peace by finding a home, literally and metaphorically. Granite makes it his task to write newspaper columns depicting life stories of homeless people, thereby making them visible, giving them a voice, and pulling them out of the shadows of the city.

Dimaline

In *Dimaline's* texts, stories and dreams are connected on many different levels. As was discussed before, the narrative frame of a storyteller who invents the short stories of the hotel guests ties the different texts together. With each room the storyteller, Naomi, enters by opening its door, unveiling the turmoil of each short-term resident. The hotel rooms are referred to as "storied space[s]," (6) and not only allude to the several floors of the hotel but also to the literary translation/implementation of the different rooms' stories. Similar to the tone of *Ragged Company*, the importance of stories fuels the plot, the narrative and the structure: "I came to appreciate that each room was a veritable library of stories, and each guest a curator of sorts. It made me want to stumble upon more occupied rooms and to hear more tales" (42). Here, too, it is the story that 'tells itself' or that confers itself upon the storyteller, whose task it is to verbalize the story. The dreams as stories are significant because they serve as a means of portraying the storyteller's imagination, personal dreams, and daydreams.

Dreams shape and (in)form the stories. The girl from "room 141" imagines - or daydreams about - a different life in which one of her clients is actually her husband:

She pretended he was waiting for her, that he was part of her life. It was nice thinking that someone was expecting her to come home. That he was waiting for her. She imagined him welcoming her return with a smile and a glass of juice. There would be clean blankets and a regular night of watching TV ahead. (16)

The girl's innermost desires, needs and vulnerabilities are disclosed within these daydreams. They articulate her wish to have a home and to have people who expect her to

come home and live a healthy, loving life. Her usual roughness is displaced by the common desire of a young girl. That this wish is far from her current reality becomes obvious when she returns to her client in the hotel and whispers “Honey, I’m home,” and then states: “She felt like she hadn’t come home at all” (32). It is then that she discovers that the man is dead. With her daydream literally dying, she cannot ignore any longer “the possibilities of this wide, open sky” (32) and decides to translate her daydream into action and face her painful past in order to be able to find a home.

Nightmares, Dreams and Visions

Wagamese

Dreaming in *Ragged Company* relates to both the dreams which people have at night and the people’s dreams in the sense of concrete (or less concrete) goals, desires, and wishes they would like to attain for their lives. Timber describes them as follows: “Dreams. Of all the things we carry, they are the lightest and the heaviest all at the same time. I had dreamed for all those years. . . . But I always woke up. Always emerged again into the world where dreams are haunting things, because they have no power in the real world” (260). His statement points out the powerlessness of dreams in his lived reality. Dreams thus seem to be something better than reality because more seems possible in dreams than in Timber’s waking life. His disillusioned perspective on (his) dreams might be due to his homelessness and the limitations it poses when it comes to attaining and enacting his dreams. Claiming that he always woke up from his dreams reiterates his deprivation of any sort of deeper connection to his dreams, both his nighttime dreams and his life goal dreams. Reflecting the Western perspective on dreams as being the opposite of reality, Timber’s dreams remain nothing but painful reminders of a past and the impossibility of reconciliation. The disconnection of dream and reality keeps him stuck and hampers his personal transformation beyond hurt and pain.

Double Dick on the other hand, experiences his nightly dreams as something frightening. It is his past that troubles him at night; he has to relive the worst moment of his life over and over again. He is so afraid of that recurring dream and what happened in the past that he is barely able to sleep anymore. In *Porcupines and China Dolls* it is the sexual abuse that haunts the protagonist in his dreams. In *Ragged Company* it is the tragic death of Double Dick’s nephew. Double Dick was supposed to look after the young child

but due to his alcoholism he could not fulfill this responsibility and found the child drowned in a bucket full of Double Dick's own vomit. Amelia seems to sense his inner turmoil: "There were always shadowed ones there, just behind his shoulder, and I worried that he might never find a way to rid himself of the weight of their presence" (192). It later turns out that he indeed could not free himself from his past and the guilt he felt when he dies in a hotel room without having told anybody about the accident for which he feels responsible. As in *Porcupines and China Dolls* the dreams suggest to the protagonist the need to confront their own past. Ermine called the main purpose of dreams the reciprocity of the inner with the outer peace. He suggests that only with inner peace can people achieve an outer, physical restoration (109). The perspective is mirrored in the plot when Amelia urges her four "boys" to tell their stories and share their pain. Not all of them are able to do so, which ends in the death of one of them.

For Amelia, dreams can also have a guiding and even instructing function. As the only First Nations character with an "anchored" and clear identity, she is able to let her dreams enter, influence, and inform her lived reality and waking life. Ermine argues: "Dreams are the guiding principles for constructing the corporeal. Dreams, the voice of the inner space, give rise to the holy and prescribe all ceremonies on the physical level. Conversely, the physical ceremony - as an enactment of the holy - nourishes the spirit and the energy of the 'vast scale'" (108). In opposition to Timber's perception of dreams, Amelia seems to have found a more profound meaning in her dreams and the inseparable existence of the shadowed ones in both worlds, 'real world' and 'dream world.' She is capable to let the dreams influence her physical life, as she is able to really comprehend their 'messages.' By allowing the mental and spiritual walk hand in hand with the physical, Amelia follows a holistic episteme based on Indigenous knowledges.

As the gradual focus of the text on Amelia's spiritual insights and objectives grows stronger, her mission to bring together the four boys becomes increasingly apparent. Surmounting Western dream perceptions and instead valorizing Indigenous knowledges, she unremittently follows her dreams' instructions:

Dick was the first one. I saw him running. Crashing down the street on those big feet of his with fear all over his face, and the farther he got from me the more he shrank and shrank until he became a little boy surrounded by bush and trees and rock. When I saw him at the Mission weeks later, I knew who he was. . . . Timber was next. In my dream I saw him at a desk in a library in a kind of light that reminded me of a chapel. He was bent over, reading something that he held in trembling hands before laying it on the desk and walking out the door. In the

dream I walked over to the desk and found a photograph of him and a woman and then I was behind him on the street where he walked and walked and walked. . . . The toughest was Digger. He'd been around as long as me so we knew each other by reputation. . . . But in my dream I saw him building something upward into the sky. Something huge and metallic, something he handled with love, gently, with an assurance that spoke of a long familiarity. . . . The boys wanted to leave him alone but I knew the strength of dreams and was determined to pay attention to mine. . . . And it was the shadowed ones who brought us Granite. They surrounded him too that day in the movie house and it was like they waved to me. (38ff)

Amelia saw all three boys in her dreams before she even knew them. When she saw them in her 'real' street life, she recognized them from her dream and fulfilled the dream's message by approaching them and slowly encouraging them to become friends. The dreams also offer her clues about the boys' individual pasts, troubles, and possibilities that foreshadow the disclosure of each of them. Her childhood and the teachings she received from her grandmother, who urged her to listen to her dreams, provide Amelia with the knowledge, confidence, and trust to understand her visionary dreams. According to her grandmother, Anishinaabe are "people of the dream" (37).

On page 323ff Amelia dreams, and within that dream the presence of the shadowed ones reaches its climax: they appear in the form of all of Amelia's deceased brothers and her then boyfriend Ben, who bring her the news of Dick's death: "When I woke up, I knew." Besides foreshadowing Dick's fatal accident, their presence in her dreams also provides her with the comfort of a deep connection to a traditional past, reminding her to remain cognizant of her role as a protector and guide.

Dimaline

While Amelia finds meaning and purpose in her troubling dreams, the girl in Dimaline's story does not understand her dreams and instead reacts with horror, fear and the impulse to repress dreams as unreal and insignificant. After the first dream, the girl wakes up exhausted and filled with a deep sadness:

She cried until someone came and told her to fuck off and get away from the building. She left, crying still, arms wrapped around her stomach. She cried for two days. . . . She promised herself, deep into the night . . . that she would never dream again. Dreams were for pussies. Dreams didn't make you happy and they didn't make you money, so what was the point. (12)

Her vigorous rejection of dreams mirrors her fear of vulnerability. Her blatant disconnection of her mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical being explains her inner rupture. While the text hints at the girl's skin hiding "the sickness that crept through her blood despite the fact that leftover alcohol and free-based crack aggravated it" (8), it is not revealed which sickness it is.

The quote also reinforces her environment as an unforgiving, harsh place where no one cares about her or shows the least bit of empathy. Her choice of living in such a cruel place suggests her desire to shut off her own feelings and past experiences. Her dreams/visions (hence visionary dreams) force her to deal with her troubled past and suppressed memories. It is a past she does everything to forget, mainly because she cannot connect to it anymore, and because "thinking about seeing her family was more painful than anything she could do in this city, to or by herself" (32). Her brother's death and the lack of love from her parents were too much for her to endure, and the only way to feel safe and in control again was to move to the city and leave her past behind. Nothing in the city has so far reminded her of her life back home until her dreams start to occur. While at the beginning the girl rejects these dreams and responds with anger and horror about her visionary dreams, she slowly starts to personally transform. She starts to renegotiate her definition of herself, her life, and her idea of home.

The dreams, even if unwanted, turn out to be constant reminders of her identity as an Indigenous woman in the past and of the continued existence of Native spirituality in a modern world. They initiate a journey to her past and thus also to her future which makes her personal "homecoming" possible. The ambiguous open-ended homecoming here means giving the dreamer a chance to reconnect with her Native roots and a possibility to improve her situation towards a meaningful life. Most of the dreams are unasked for and spontaneous suggesting a vision or time travel rather than a dream. The dreams turn out to be instructive because they exhort the girl to undergo a healing journey in which she learns things about her identity that she did not know before. The dreams instruct her about facts from her past, the identity of her grandmother and the role of her mother, and the relationship between her mother and father. In the girl's first dream, she meets two women:

and then there were hands on her shoulders; two hands, belonging to two different women. (11)

These women are the epitome of traditional Native life and spirituality and hence

symbolize the girl's heritage, which she has discarded and turned away from. The first woman's hairdo resembles the "medicine wheel," (11) which according to Jenkins has become one of the most well known concepts and symbols of Native religion and spirituality, which he compares to the Christian crucifix. Formerly, the medicine wheel was a "geometric arrangement of stones found in many locations across the Northern Plains" (Jenkins 5). The medicine wheel is often portrayed and explained as a (symbolic) circle divided into four equal parts - often black, yellow, white and red (the races of humans) - by spokes representing the four sacred directions. The directions are also often correlated with the idea of holistic health that relies on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being (Lavallée 128f).

It is striking that in both books *Ragged Company* and *Red Rooms* it is the stereotyped medicine wheel that represents Native spirituality. This could be due to its degree of familiarity for both Natives and non-Natives but also in order to show how biased, deformed and constructed ideas about Nativeness are. The braided hairstyle reminiscent of a medicine wheel "took up every wave from her head and wove it into meaning," (11) ascribing immense meaning and significance to Native identity. Especially for the young girl, who has turned her back to her Native identity, all meaning in life has been lost or shifted to a mode of mere survival. The girl's extreme emotional reaction to the dream ("She cried for two days," 12) reveals her desperation and a strong alienation within herself, from both her origins and her current life.

After waking up from the dream "she did remember . . . to walk down to the patch of glass-strewn beach at the bottom of her new city to put tobacco into the water on the anniversary of her brother's suicide, that crazy, cynical shadow dancer who had killed himself" (12). The dream seems to have a direct impact on her daily life since it brings back old sorrows and reminds her of the death of people that were once close to her. She even acts upon it and visits her brother's grave. Later, after she has left a sleeping client, she walks into a bar - with the intention to get drunk and forget her sorrows and memories. Soon, the girl slowly recognizes one of the women who had appeared in her dream: ". . . something familiar about the way she folded her hands together," (16) "There was something so familiar about this woman in a city where she knew no other Native person beside from some of the skids who hung out in the park. These were the unrelated cousins who bummed cigarettes off her. . . ." (17). The girl's isolation from everything and everybody Native in the City and from whatever symbolizes "back home" becomes

obvious (8). This seems to be a means of self-punishment and an inner strategy to not face the guilt she feels about her lifestyle. 'Native in the city' means "skids" - who she excludes from her definition of Native - including herself, as she does not ascribe any Native identity to herself.

There were a few Native organizations in the neighbourhood where she could get a lunch or a shower or even some new clothes. . . . And what if they tried to make her talk to an Elder? How should she form the words and tales of her days and nights to such a respectable person who could never understand what she did or how she lived? What was there on the other side anyways? (17)

Native hence also means the workers and Elders in Native organizations, whom she seems to consider "respectable person[s]" and does not dare to face. At this point, there is no incentive for her to turn back to "the other side;" she would rather imagine a more or less peaceful life with her latest "trick" (13) as her partner, to whom she can come home. Her question, "what was there on the other side anyways?", alludes to her position on a different side from that of the "respectable" Natives, and it hence reinforces her exclusion from any tribal or First Nations community. It also underlines her existence as a "half-breed," who should 'naturally' be able to inhabit two worlds. That she is failing this endeavour is foregrounded in her dispirited and lonely life on the streets. Her longing for belonging - to that community she is so cut off from - is manifested in her secretly watching women from Native organizations singing or offering tobacco, literally from "the other side if the road" (17).

The "other side" metaphor can also be seen as foreshadowing her upcoming experience with "the other side," the other side of our perceived sole reality and of her current chosen exile. It is a side to which she will be catapulted by the women who appear in the bar and send her on a journey to her past, exceeding temporal and spatial borders of Western concepts of reality: "She knew this woman and had felt those hands. . . . She was the woman on the left...the woman from her dream. . . . And she was watching her now from the corner of this dimly lit bar" (18). At this moment of recognition, the 'dream world' seems to blend with the protagonist's 'real world.' The girl does not know whether the woman is really sitting there or not, but she goes to the table where the younger woman sits. Shortly afterwards, the protagonist finds herself under a (different) table: "The woman reached across the table and loosened her fingers, smiling with her tiny teeth, eyes darker now, sparkling like stars in the sky. And then the girl was gone. Now she was

under the table, but the table wasn't the same" (20). The table turns out to be not a table at the bar but the same table at her aunt's house "who lived back home" (8) where she used to hide and listen to her aunt and her aunt's friends' conversations when she was a little girl.

Rationalist thought would explain this change of setting with another dream that the girl is having. She mixes up memories with the reappearance of two women she might have come across in her lived reality. It might also be assumed that the girl, due to heavy drug and alcohol abuse, has hallucinations and cannot distinguish reality from fantasy. In the context of spotting gothic or fantastic elements, it might also seem possible that the girl is embarking on a time travel or prophetic vision bringing her back to her past. Indigenous perspectives, knowledges and cosmologies allow a broader approach. Her visionary dream experience enables her to get a glimpse into a different reality that is not separate but intricately linked to her other lived reality. In the dream, she learns about the reason why her mother abandoned her when she was a young child, and who her grandmother is. This telling dream already partakes in the girl's upcoming identity transformation.

The girl's metaphysical journey to her aunt's house in "room 414" is followed by another spiritual, time and space defying journey, where she witnesses a conversation between her mother and her father's mother. This time it is the other woman from her dream that triggers her journey:

This was the woman on the right from her prophetic dream, the same dream from which one ghost had already escaped. . . . The spirit [the old woman] at the bottom of the stairs turned and walked calmly across the street, the air charged with electricity all around her. And the girl was following her. Once again her legs were operating on a remote, seemingly controlled by the smooth steps of the old lady. (25)

Further on, her grandmother appears to be looking straight into the girl's eyes and demands from her to come home (30). The situation is peculiarly surreal since the girl does not know her grandmother in person. The girl's former vision has just revealed that "the ole witch from up the hill" (27) is her grandmother and it is she who is requesting the girl's return home. That her grandmother is referred to as a "witch" by her aunt reinforces the impression of the characters' estrangement from Indigenous knowledges. Colonization and the Residential School system has taught Indigenous peoples to adopt Christian belief systems and vilify traditional ways of knowing and behaving as 'witchery'. The pejorative

term “witch” connotes preternatural characteristics unveiling not only her geographic but also social exclusion. Identified by others as a witch, her seemingly supernatural abilities scare the people around her. When in her vision the girl faces her grandmother for the first time she reacts very emotionally, and with tears in her eyes she asks her in her Native Ojibwe language: “Nokomis?”¹⁵³ meaning “Grandmother?” (Ojibwe Language Word List, nativetech.org). This is the only evidence that the girl actually knows (parts of) the language of her people; it is also the first time that the reader experiences the girl’s genuine emotions and feelings. In her vulnerability she seems anxious to develop a connection to this woman who also seems to be “fully aware of her presence” although the girl is supposedly only experiencing a vision (27).

The old woman seems to be addressing the girl during her conversation with the girl’s mother: “Then, amazingly, the woman stared past her mother, almost through her and into the eyes of the shaking, time-displaced visitor” (30). This supernatural way of connecting past and present, time and space and crossing borders of what Western norms would consider as impassable and (im)possible, deeply changes the girl’s perspective on her life: “She saw her Nokomis wishing her return. Then she saw her life here, devoid of thought” (33). The acceptance of the unknown grandmother by calling her “grandmother/Nokomis” in traditional Ojibwe language causes the girl to reassess her life’s worth/sense, which was formerly coined by the following thought: “She fought to exist and not to live” (33). This perception might change considerably when she realizes that with the help of the two women in her dream, who enabled her grandmother to “talk” to her, “she was released. Hands that had been cupped around her as if she were a tiny bird had opened to the sky” (34).

Freud has universally claimed that dreams often appear to show what people have thought of, what they have done, or what they could not cope with during the daytime. Black Elk has explained the prophetic, visionary powers of dreams that are in need of enactment, communal sharing, and testimony in order to positively affect one’s own and community’s life. The girl’s journey comes to be a journey to her past, her hidden desires and fears. Without controlling it, the girl is confronted with her deepest emotions when she contemplates her brother’s death, her mother’s rejection, and her ignorance about her father’s identity. The presence of the two women, as well as her grandmother’s wish for

¹⁵³ All Ojibwe words are neither identified as being words from the Ojibwe language nor translated for the reader.

her to return home, call for change in the girl's life. By ignoring her dreams and rejecting them, the girl does the opposite of enacting them. Her journey from rejection to acceptance and then to a form of "enactment" is depicted in her dream progress and a (re)birth analogy that will be discussed in one of the following subchapters.

The transitions between "the Real and the Dream" in *Red Rooms* support the idea of dream experiences being just as real as reality: "Then the girl was pulled away like a giant had inhaled her from behind. She felt her shirt go first; then her hair slipped through an airy cervix, relief and tension at once in the transfer. Her feet went last, which is why her landing back into reality was not an easy one, being whipped through rips and epochs by the seat of her pants" (Dimaline 30). The girl seems physically harassed which could be explained by her constant alcohol and drug abuse but also by the challenging confrontation with her past. After these two spiritually revealing journeys, she states that "thinking about her family was more painful than anything she could do in this city, to or by herself" (32). This testament of her isolation is especially terrifying when considered from Indigenous concepts of tribal/communal identity. Kim Anderson writes in her book *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings and Story Medicine* that

childhood was a time to begin to learn the disciplines of the community in anticipation of becoming a full contributing member. Adolescence was a turning point in which children broke from 'the good life' [childhood] into what Midewiwin¹⁵⁴ teachers refer to as 'the fast life,' a time of rapid change, introspection, vision, sacrifice, and transition. (66)

Describing the protagonist as a "girl" and not yet a "woman" suggests her age in between adolescence and adulthood. Having no paternal or other relational guidance in her life, the girl's internalized mechanisms of self-protection become apparent by means of her statement that she would rather sell her body to strangers than face her repressed emotions and fears.¹⁵⁵ Lutz writes in accordance with Vine Deloria jr.: "in a tribal sense there is no difference between an individual's and the tribe's identity, - if they fall apart, that is a sign of great alarm and causes mental, spiritual and even physical suffering" (*Approaches* 197). For the most part, her choice to live a life separated from her family and community displays not only the effects of intergenerational PTSR but also her need for individual

¹⁵⁴ According to Anderson "a spiritual society of the Anishinaabek" who "define the roles and responsibilities of the life cycles as having seven stages" (9).

¹⁵⁵ Sherman Alexie's novel *Flight* (2007) also portrays a young character who undertakes a dream-like journey through space and time in order to come to terms with his "half-breed" identity and why his homeless father has abandoned him after his birth.

healing in order to reclaim and reconnect with her Indigeneity.

Not only is she separated from her family ties and Indigenous relations, but as a homeless person, she is also made an “other” by mainstream society and hence sick or diseased (Frank 113). Her double outsider position situates her on the periphery of both worlds - Indigenous and Western - and it is only by her dreams as tools of her - as Frank calls it - restitution story. In them she finds out about things she did not know before, and her vision seems to reveal important truths that may affect her life profoundly while also providing her with a significant connection to her personal history and therefore her individual identity. Dreams and visions are depicted as educating and truth revealing. They lead their ‘owners’ into a disturbing, yet often healing journey into their pasts. In his famous book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud states that dreams reveal things that the dreamer believed to have long forgotten and is thus often unable to recall when awake (12). He adds that although some of the processed material of dreams dates back to childhood experiences, most “dreams reveal elements drawn from our most recent experiences” (16).

The following quotation shows how the protagonist in “room 414” (physically) experiences one of her dreams/visions:

’What the fuck...’ she managed to shriek, looking down at herself as a small child . . . before the room collapsed in on itself and her eyes couldn’t hold a single image steady. . . . The girl threw herself over the smaller child, still sleeping, unaware of the chaos, and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, everything was dark and from somewhere the sound of music belched out of a broken speaker. (23)

This literal collision of past and present represented in the girl as a child and the girl as an adult, underlines the necessity of a confrontation between past and present in order to embark on a healing journey that will provide a better future. In opposite to Western perceptions of dreams, Indigenous knowledges and scholars have transcended dreams and exalted the realm of dreams as another reality that is equally capable of informing and even ameliorating wakeful, physical life. The following chapter will scrutinize this daring journey and its effects on the characters’ lives.

Beyond Existing: Finding Home and Self-Determination

*It was about reclaiming the past and getting a foothold on the present
and a step up into the future.*

(Wagamese *Ragged Company* 69)

Wagamese

Richard Wagamese's *Ragged Company* overtly plays with stereotypes and the contested question of an "Indian" identity by highlighting the extent of external identification and the internalization of these concepts. Although only one of the five protagonists clearly states that she is a First Nations person from the beginning, the exaggerations of "Indian" identity as perceived and portrayed by dominant culture are rampant. Here, naming functions as the major tool to display the identification struggles. That cultural identities are not revealed until later in the book is significant since it shows the author's withdrawal from making the novel a purely *Native* novel, that deals with exclusively Indigenous identities, showing how all racial categories are constructed. Also, for the ragged company, race and cultural identity are not decisive in their coming together. Amelia is not aware of her boys' ethnic identities when they are pointed out to her by dreams. It becomes evident that the novel deals with identity in general and not only Aboriginal identity, and that Wagamese's approach to ethnicity rests on its constructedness and not on any biological racist criteria.¹⁵⁶ It shows the life of five seemingly different personages and their growing friendship and community.

The following quotation shows Double Dick's perception of identity, equating it with "(his) story." After he left his friends in order to grieve his unsettling past, he is determined to leave the country and look for a place he and his best friend used to dream of going when they were kids. He records his 'last will' in a hotel room where they will find him dead the next morning. Here, he specifically addresses Granite and articulates the following wish for him:

¹⁵⁶ Wagamese's critical approach to (Native) literature was already mentioned in chapter 2.1. In his autobiographic novel *For Joshua*, he also states that he negates any sort of racial or ethnic exclusion. Lutz recapitulates: "Whether they like it or not, for several hundred years now, Indigenous peoples have had to accommodate the presence of immigrants, and in recent years, despite the experience of colonization, Indigenous authors invite the immigrants to cooperate, and to embrace the Canadian land ethic and identity, to become Indigenous, not in a sense of race, but in the sense of place" (*Contemporary Achievements* 140-141).

people like you need to be where everythin' ever happened for them. It's history. I like that word. *History*. Did you know that if you kinda split it into two it makes 'his story'? Well, when I got to thinkin' about you I thought that for Granite that big stone house was 'his story' an' I figured that he hadta be where his story was. . . . You gotta go home, Granite. You gotta go home on accounta you gotta finish your story. When you got one, you don't look for any other ones on accounta you got the only one you ever need to tell. So have my money on accounta I don't got no home an' I don't got no story to finish but maybe I could come there sometime an' be part of yours. Go home, Granite, go home. (347)

The notion of identity and home is tied to an actual geographic and physical place. Here it is the house where Granite grew up in and which he sold after he could not relate to the life he was living anymore. The quote hence connects three important components of the novel: the stories, the notion of home, and the concepts of (Native) identity. Only with the act of going home, in this case repurchasing his parental home, can Granite reconnect to his identity, his role, his purpose and finish *his story*. The deeper satisfaction of finally finding meaning by writing one's own and other's life stories down are here highlighted by the term "home" or "homecoming."

Granite's consideration for Double Dick's last words to him is demonstrated in a discussion he has with Digger after a fight:

Dick taught me that home is a truth you carry within yourself. It's belonging, regardless. . . . It's bred in the heart and germinated by sharing, spawned by community. . . . Dick never had a home. Not really. Not ever. But he gave me one. When he died tragically, he bequeathed a portion of his money to me so I might reacquire the home I sold. My family home. My heritage. My history. That one place that anchors me. I sold it because I had come to believe that I didn't need it anymore. But Dick knew differently. (358)

Granite poignantly explains the notion of 'home' that is represented by a literal, physical location as well as an emotional and spiritual one, which he found in his friendship with the ragged company. By doing so he comes up with a very important word, which describes the companionship, the ragged company: they have grown into a community. The word community in Canada is commonly used to refer to groups of First Nations people living on a reserve or a certain geographic area. The shift from identifying with a specific band to community affiliation might also be due to increasingly heterogeneous First Nations communities that find commonality not in their band membership but within

Indigeneity that transcends status cards by focusing on shared values and the belief that diversity is a source of strength and growth. In the novel, the five characters have found(ed) a community that is not based on policies or worldviews, heritage, ethnicity, class, gender, or cultural identity. They have found similarities in their personal quest for an identity and a place in society. Four of them used to live on the street and have a special attachment through shared experiences and life-style. The fifth, who is an educated journalist with a sophisticated apartment and enough money to afford a good living, seems to be falling out of alignment but Digger strikingly observes: “‘Wow.’ . . . ‘You’re as friggin’ homeless as I was’” (213). Every single one of the five is on a journey to find a purposeful, meaningful life and they eventually realize that they have found it in true human connection that transcends external categories of value, identification markers, and societal appropriateness. Digger therefore depicts or understands the concept of home as something that is not necessarily tied to outer, physical or material objects and circumstances but that moves beyond materialized concepts of home.

Out of this understanding result the explanation and the reason of the outwardly unsuitable companionship. Their coming together, catalyzed and enforced by Amelia, who knew about the necessity of their community, is described by Digger: “We came together in our brokenness and find out that our small acts of being human together mend the breaks, allow us to retool the design and become more” (305). Their healing took place because of their communal sharing of (their) stories, encouragement, acceptance, and honesty. Later in the novel, it is Double Dick who chooses to buy - with the money they won at the lottery - a house in which the five characters decide to live together: “I chose Indian Road. It sounded right to me on accounta One For The Dead is an Indian an’ she was the one who got us all together” (188). Ironically, the house, located on “Indian Road,” again highlights that what is imposed is artificially and outwardly more “Indian” than the Native protagonists. Dick’s attempt to provide himself and his friends with a physical home that comes along with a clear and appropriate identity shows his dependency on exterior identification markers. He is desperately clutching onto identity constructions and conceptions that he is familiar with and that were suggested to him throughout his life. Conversely, his decision and his reasoning suggest a higher level of confidence and self-determination. McLeod explains that

An ideological home provides people with an Indigenous location to begin discourse, to tell stories and to live life on their own terms. An ideological home is a layering of generations of stories, and the

culmination of storyteller after storyteller, in a long chain of transmission. To be home, in an ideological sense, means to dwell in the landscape of the familiar, collective memories, as opposed to being in exile. 'Being home' means to be part of a larger group, a collective consciousness; it involves having a personal sense of dignity. (19)

Especially with ongoing colonialism manifest in systemic oppression of Indigenous peoples, legal confines and dominant patterns of marginalizing Indigenous ways of knowing, self-determination is central to the decolonization process. Here, the main concern of self-determination is regaining control over one's own identification. Centuries of imposed identity politics, mistrust and arbitrary status policies have not only engrained confusion but also often the extensive belief that everybody but Native people themselves are to define what it means to be Native. Indigenous homelessness, metaphorical and literal, unmasks the uprooting effects of colonialism. The essential human right to an anchored, clear identity has been taken away from Indigenous peoples by a system based on racism, and to retrieve that sense of self and community takes great effort from both sides: Settler society and Indigenous peoples.

Tragically, Dick's death shows that his way of taking control over his life is too late - or that his way of gaining control is to end his life. The responsibility he is taking on by deciding to leave the ragged company and life could be interpreted as flight as well as self-determination. The realistic outcome indicates that for many there is no reconciliation, there is no happy end in the lived waking reality.

The dialogic insertions between Amelia and Dick suggest that they talk after Dick has passed away. Hence, Dick might have occurred to Amelia in the shape of a shadowed person, whom only Amelia can see and interact with. He was the only one not able to liberate himself from his disturbing past, emotions of guilt, and inner torment. Hence, after his death, he experiences the fate of wandering as a shadowed one amongst the living, unable to redeem himself. While he did not find a home in his lived reality, Dick still seems to have found reconciliation with his destiny and explains on the last page: "It's all home. Everywhere. It's all home" (376). His retrospective insight suggests that he finally found the resolution he needed in order to come to terms with his past. Yet, his existence as a shadow person insinuates that he is forced to remain a restless spirit, revisiting key places of his tragic life.

However, the novel also approaches the concept of self-determination within the emerging lottery/money discourse. With more than 13 million dollars, the life of the four

homeless people changes drastically. Granite observes - because he understands and knows - mainstream perspective: “They had become elite. They had become the envied minority. They’d become visible” (139/140). Sadly, it is only through their financial status that they gain visibility for mainstream society. Shifting from being a rejected minority to becoming an “envied minority,” ironically only places them yet again on one of society’s peripheries.

However, the book ends with another act of liberation and empowerment for all five main characters. Granite has retrieved his reason and motivation of being a writer, Timber starts to carve again and thus continues his passion from a former life and Digger, having opened his own retail store, also finds peace without giving up his somewhat resentful ‘street attitude.’ While according to dominant society, money can be enough to reclaim, or at least help reclaim, one’s self-determination, one’s visibility and one’s voice, all four characters prove that monetary compensation never gets to the root of the problem and instead focuses on appeasing the symptoms. What comes to mind is the governmental idea to compensate former Residential School attendants with money - implemented in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA)¹⁵⁷ - hoping that with the money the victims would be forever silenced and resolution attained, the issue could hence be considered “settled.” Of course, the result was not as wished by the government and the collective trauma of mental and physical abuse, of cultural genocide and ongoing marginalization could not be cured by money.

In the novel, the elusiveness of a true reconciliation and personal transformation (by means of money) is manifested in Dick’s death. Money facilitates superficial self-determination and reconciliation while encouraging fake and rather hurtful actions of compensation that perpetuate the marginalization and silencing of Indigenous voices. To what extent, true self-determination can have an effect on a person’s life and self-identification will be emphasized in the discussion of “existential dreaming” and self-determination in Dimaline’s short story.

Dimaline

The girl’s healing journey becomes more and more discernible to the reader when the chaos narrative slowly transforms into a quest narrative as the protagonist reclaims her

¹⁵⁷ The IRSSA was approved in May 2006 and its implementation started in September 2007. For more information see the website of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (a Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, adnc-aandc.gc.ca).

identity and finds meaning by moving towards reconciliation. The language and terminology that appear towards the end of the story evoke images of a pregnancy and birth, symbolizing the girl's metaphorical rebirth. On page ten, when her "monstrously oversized gut" is mentioned for the first time, it is unclear whether the girl's intestines are bloated due to lack of food, resulting in malnutrition, or due to an illness. Later, on page 24, mention is made of "her hard, cold stomach" that "felt like a kettle full of icy well water." When she is in one of her visions she describes herself, or her mother's reaction to her, as "some dream daughter as real and unreal as a fetus buried deep inside a Fallopian tube" (28). Her condition that is described in medical terms climaxes on the following page: "She felt certain now that she was dying. Her pulse was quick and fluttering, her tummy was extended and sore, her head screamed at her, and she felt as if she would pass out from nausea and the constant internal yelling." When the dream/vision comes to an end, the girl undergoes liberation: "She felt her shirt go first; then her hair slipped through an airy cervix, relief and tension at once in the transfer. . . . her landing back into reality was not an easy one, being whipped through rips and epochs by the seat of her pants" (30). The climactic alleviation that the girl experiences here is reminiscent of the final stages of birth, and so the reader finally comes to the realization that the girl is about to (re)enter the world as newly-born or reborn. The focus on the girl's body, as both being reborn and giving birth to her new self, reinforces the aspect of her newly found self-determination and self-help, the process of which is unfolded as the narrative develops. After experiencing her rebirth in her dream/vision, the girl continues to carry out her "duties" as a prostitute and returns to her "trick." When she arrives at the hotel the metaphor of rebirth appears again as the girl describes the elevator as "deposit[ing] her like a baby in a basket on the doorsteps" (32). Her "whimpering" (34) before entering the room revives again the image of the girl as a 'newborn.' Yet when she enters the room, she is confronted with death again as she finds the dead, bleeding body of a client, whose suffering reminds her in fact of her own experiences of pain from the hours before. The death of the man is pervasive, which is visualised by means of the image of the girl who is covered with the man's blood. Yet the experience of it is subversively liberating to the girl; in an act of, what seems to be, a confirmation of her existence, "she constantly checked her own pulse, making sure she wasn't an animated corpse running down rain-slicked streets towards an impossible future back home" (36) and feels in fact as if "[s]he was released. Hands that had been cupped around her as if she were a tiny bird had opened to the sky" (34). This

foreshadowing of her metaphorical return to life is further extended into a possibility of positive change and transformation when we learn that the girl uses the dead man's money to leave the place of her destruction. In disbelief about her life and his death, her rebirth has been completed, enabling her to envision a future away from prostitution, homelessness, and a shadow existence. She has learned to walk again. And so, what was formerly impossible even to imagine has now become a reality: a better life away from the streets is no longer beyond the girl's reach.

The metaphorical rebirth constitutes a connection to her Indigenous identity, and is only triggered by the spiritual guidance of dreams and visions. Her estrangement from her culture is reflected in her inability to read her dreams and to understand the messages. Instead, her dreams and visions scare her. It is only in the end of the story that she is able to embrace her dreams and visions as spiritual guidance and accept the comfort and hope that accompany them. The cloak that the women from her dream give her in one of the visions epitomizes the reclamation of her (Native) identity:

They pulled it around the girl's shoulders. The cloak itself became a wide, round star-filled sky. Its weight was the weight of all eternity, from time immemorial passed down through slow migrations across eons and down the strands of DNA that brought everything to this moment. It was comforting, like the weight of a welcomed lover who has come after many nights alone. (12)

After this first mentioning of the cloak, the girl wakes up and is incapable of transferring the comforting presence of the cloak and its ramifications into her "real" life on the streets. Her desperation seems to even increase, but change is foreshadowed by the birth analogy that starts right after this dream. Throughout the story, more appearances of the two women, as well as of her mother and grandmother occur, revealing a journey to her past and hence her identity. Through these interactions, the girl finally comes to terms with her past, present and future. On the last page, the cloak metaphorized her ability to enact her dream's messages and take on agency: "Now the cape she shrugged up over her shoulders and tossed over her head was the wide, round star-filled sky itself, and she was running toward it as fast as she could" (35).

The cloak that she is now actively pulling over her shoulders as shelter from the cold shows that she can finally permit herself to do what is good for her and not what hurts her. Rediscovering her entitlement to shelter and protection, she is enabled to leave her life as a homeless prostitute behind. In this way, we see how the girl's self-punishment

has turned into agency and self-care; the girl's rapid change from being at the bottom to finally reaching for the sky as a metaphor for her re-empowerment at the end of the story highlights her existential transformation. Alongside the hope for a better future, the girl finds the power to determine for herself the meaning of her past, present, and future.

5.3.1 The Old Ones and the(ir) Old Ways

Wagamese

The significance of the *Old Ways* or of the *Old Ones* in both novels foregrounds Anishinaabe/Ojibwe respect for the elderly - the elders. Both authors are of Ojibwe/Anishinaabe origins, and so are *Ragged Company's* and the short story's Native characters. Amelia One Sky introduces and identifies herself as Anishinaabe in the first few sentences of *Ragged Company*: "We lived on an Ojibway reserve called Big River and our family, the One Sky family went back as far in tribal history as anyone could recall. I was called Amelia, after my grandmother. We were a known family - respected, honoured . . ." (5). Her undoubted affiliation with an ancestral background as an Anishinaabe woman helps her to feel and be more grounded. Especially her ability to see the shadowed ones can be ascribed to the teachings she received from her grandmother:

It made perfect sense to me. Grandma One Sky used to tell me a lot about the invisible. We're surrounded by invisible friends all of the time, she would say, and even though the idea of ghosts frightened me a bot, Grandma One Sky's casual acceptance of it made me more comfortable with the notion. (62)

What makes perfect sense to her the others cannot comprehend. For the ragged company Amelia now assumes the role of the teacher and slowly introduces the community to Indigenous ways of knowing and healing.

Here, however, her role as an Ojibwe *woman* and the role of the female characters in *Red Rooms* shall be highlighted as a crucial connection to an ancestral past, the Old Ways, postulating culture as healing. In his article "Redressing First Nations historical

Trauma: Theorizing Mechanisms for Indigenous Culture as Mental Health Treatment”¹⁵⁸
Joseph P. Gone argues that cultural ceremonies - here especially the Sweat lodge ceremony - serve as a means to ameliorate the mental health of Indigenous peoples suffering from PTSD related drug and alcohol addiction (696). These therapeutic practices serve “as a form of anti- or counter-colonial repudiation of long histories of Euro-centric domination that instead reaffirms the value and vitality of Native life” (696). The following section will scrutinize how the two fictional texts use traditional female Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous culture as a healing instrument.

Establishing a strong Native presence by incorporating Ojibwe characters serves not only autobiographical purposes but also underscores an ancient as well as contemporary Indigeneity. Ojibwe populations and history stretches over the borders of the United States and Canada and Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe language) has twelve dialects and is to this day one of the most prevalent Aboriginal languages in North America.

On page 267 ff of *Ragged Company*, the Anishinaabe concept of *weedje-wahgun* is introduced and translated as “companion, fellow traveller. Being a good companion means being willing to always learn more about loyalty and kindness. . . . In those purely tribal times it stood for the relationship between a man and a woman. . . . I understood it to mean any coming together. Any joining of spirit.” This old teaching, explained to Timber by Amelia, is ground breaking for Timber as he finally seems able to forgive himself for having abandoned his wife. His restlessness ceases after he realizes that forgiveness is also an act of love and liberation. Once again, this teaching and the concept of *weedjee-wahgun*, as part of traditional Indigenous philosophy and epistemology, were only accessible to Amelia who learned about it from her grandmother. Because the transmission of these teachings, codes, principles, and knowings rests on her, she becomes elevated as one of the Old Ones, providing the ragged company with the Old Ways herself. She assists the distressed by bringing cultural teachings - in the novel especially by story - back into the alienated lives of the Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) characters.

In her work *Holding Our World Together: Ojibwe Women and the Survival of Community*, Brenda J. Child historically recounts the significant roles of women in the Great Lakes region from the nineteenth century onward. She explains: “The elders were

¹⁵⁸ Gone refers to Maggie Brady’s article “Culture in Treatment, Culture as Treatment. A Critical Appraisal of Developments in Addictions Programs for Indigenous North Americans and Australians.”

always a source of strength. We respected women who assumed demanding economic and cultural roles, and we deferred to a power and authority that seemed to grow even more concentrated with age and maturity” (8). Child continues to describe that Ojibwe women did not only play a major role when “a gendered economy of wild rice flourished” at the beginning of the nineteenth century but especially as healers and their “significant involvement . . . as society builders, which allowed their communities to preserve in an era dominated by the expansion of American colonialism” (8).

According to this role allocation, it is not surprising that in both texts, the female characters initiate change and transformation, continuity and reconciliation. Amelia’s grandmother serves as her guide, having provided her with essential Ojibwe teachings and the spiritual belief in the sustainability of Native ways of life. Amelia recalls: “Grandma One Sky used to tell me about the Trickster when we picked berries. They were funny stories. . . . The Trickster was a teacher. . . . it was only around to help you learn what you really needed to learn” (88). Amelia received these traditional teachings in the form of Trickster stories, teaching children about who they are, where they come from, and what their role in life is. As a “society builder,” Amelia brings together a small community, the ragged company and with that helps to kindle a sense of belonging and connection within the members of the community.

She continues to explain her grandmother’s role and recounts her grandmother’s teachings on the significance of stories, and here especially Trickster stories: “Grandma was a storyteller and she would take me with her as she gathered roots and herbs. . . . She knew all the stories of our people, every legend, tale, and anecdote that made up our history” (37). She especially remembers that the tales of the Windigo and the Trickster, often silly and full of hyperbole, are designed to educate children: “Grandma One Sky said that the stories were very serious and that one day when I was older and had seen more of the world myself, I would recall those tales and go back into them and learn from them” (88). Later on, Amelia realizes with the help and the recalling of her grandmother’s Trickster stories that “in it’s way, booze was a Trickster. . . . This money was a Trickster. . . . Digger blasting past us . . . reminded me of a Nanabush story . . . and I knew the Trickster was among us” (88). While Amelia is able to make sense of the happenings, the others from the ragged company do not come to terms with the new changes and have a much harder time accepting their new life. Since Digger and Dick as identified Indigenous people have barely received traditional teachings, they are not rooted in a firm identity.

Dick, who only once shares with the others that he too knows traditional Native stories, makes clear that his father's "Indian" identity was not "even half Indian," (288) reducing his family life to the self-brewed alcohol business and his non-"Indian" appearance. Only when Amelia enters the lives of the two, are they reminded of their Native background and its relevance. Amelia's subtle and yet resilient questions about what they think, feel, mean or want, relentlessly urges them to reflect, open up to the group, and face their pasts in open dialogue. Child maintains: "In every journey and story of survivance, women were at the heart of the Ojibwe sense of their world" (Child 9).

In Wagamese's novel, it is Amelia One Sky who is at the heart of the group's search for meaning, identity, reconciliation, and home. One could even argue, that it is only through meeting Amelia, that the other four *want* to find reconciliation and personal transformation. For most of them it was a conscious choice to become and remain unseen. They were hiding from their past as if that would make it disappear, only surfacing when each of them slowly uncovers their life stories. The naming process that was discussed in the previous chapter has already outlined the significance of this process. Through Amelia's presence the four homeless people slowly develop enough courage to find a groundedness in their identities that needs no hiding. The reconciliation with one's past by telling one's story can also be interpreted as a homecoming in the Old Ways. Without Amelia's short excursions into the Old Ways, it would remain less clear why she felt the need to bring the ragged company together. Her recounting of Ojibwe teachings and her role as a mediator establish her as a teacher and community builder. She comments:

Those are spirit colours. Orange the colour of old teachings and purple the colour of spirituality, the spirit way, the ancient path, the path of the soul. . . . they were a sign of a great teaching, a great coming together of the energy of Creation, and it didn't scare me so much as it comforted me; a simple knowing that this journey had been the right one. (225)

In this chapter, the power of the Old Ones as a guidance for Amelia further establishes herself as a representation of the ancestral Old Ways and providing guidance for "her boys."

When Digger, Dick, and Timber are on the verge of deciding between life or death, community or isolation, shelter or home, it is only with Amelia's help and trust that they find their way towards recovery. Her spiritual guidance is mostly represented in her relentless presence and her friendship regardless of the circumstances. Only Dick does not make it to the 'other side' and remains unable to escape his haunting past. Instead, he

enters a different realm that is only accessible by Amelia.

The Old Ways' most complex and holistic teaching is represented in Amelia's explanation of the "Great Wheel of Life" that is also known as the "Medicine Wheel." The medicine wheel - according to Amelia - encompasses the four directions, the east representing the physical dimensions of life and of a person, the south represents the emotional aspects of one's being, the west stands for the ability to think and reflect, and the north symbolizes spirituality. Amelia assigns each character to one of the directions: east is Digger ("he's always been the tough one"), south is Dick (because "he's always the one who feels things the most"), the west is Timber (because "he was always the one who needed to know, to understand") and the north is Amelia herself ("since the shadowed ones let me see them") (295). The medicine wheel takes up and further develops Black Elk's envisioned concept of the sacred hoop. The interconnectedness of all beings is concretized and transferred to spiritual wellbeing and concepts of holistic health. Amelia declares: "the journey around the Great Wheel of Life brings you to that [the north, spirituality] if you look back at where you've been. . . . So we came together for a reason. To be strong together. To be whole. To be a circle" (294). The circle is resuscitated with Amelia's help when Digger and Timber have settled into their new lives and even for Dick, who found his tragic life circle unfolding when he dies the same way his nephew died: in his own vomit.

Amelia's role as mediator - or maybe even Trickster - culminates and yet surprises the reader when she decides to withdraw from their life off the streets and return to homelessness. She acknowledges the house on Indian Road as her home to which she returns to "sit on the veranda with Timber, Digger, Granite, Margo, and James and [we] talk about the old days, about Dick and cold snaps, Square Johns and rounders, shelter and fortune, and dreams an home" (375). She becomes the founder of "Deer Spirit Lodge. In my people's way, the deer is a gentle spirit, healing and nurturing. The lodge is a place for women to go to learn to nurture themselves after a life on the street, in prison, or just life in its toughness and difficulty" (375). Although her mission to provide guidance and healing for "her boys" has come to an end, her greater mission is not over yet and her presence among the homeless provides hope for spiritual continuity and the possibility of reconciliation and resurgence.

Dimaline

While in Wagamese's novel, *Amelia One Sky* displays a rooted Indigeneity that offers protection and a spiritual home, in *Dimaline's* short story, the female protagonist is portrayed as uprooted and estranged from (her) 'Nativity.' Due to ongoing and still active colonialist identity regulations of 'Indianness' that are based on "racist and sexist criteria" (Lawrence "Identity Regulations" 24), Native women were at a higher risk of legally losing their 'Nativity' (which is devoid of any First Nations thinking or definition, because Nativity was never and can never be defined, owned, by pure external factors). Lawrence writes:

Taking into account that for every woman who lost status and had to leave her community, all of her descendants also lost status and for the most part were permanently alienated from Native culture, the scale of cultural genocide caused by gender discrimination becomes massive. ("Identity Regulations" 9)

The girl's struggle to break free from these imposed identity politics has left her with a sense of "institutional disaffiliation" and estrangement from both settler society and her own Indigenous community, reflected in her homelessness. However, the 'cure' to her chronic alienation and self-punishment comes also in the form of strong female characters.

In her work *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, Simpson includes a subchapter titled "Grandmother Teachings" in which Anishinaabe elder Edna Manitowabi recounts a story:

Dreamtime has always been a great teacher for me. I see my dreams as guides or mentors, as the Grandfathers and Grandmothers giving me direction in my life. Dreams are how my own spirit guides me through life. In the mid 1970's, a dream led me to ceremonies and to the Little Boy water drum. (36)

Manitowabi continues to explain the significance of the elder females as mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters to teach the younger generations about life and traditions. When the girl in *Dimaline's* short story recounts her first dream and how the young woman's hand was on her left shoulder and the older woman's hand on her right, this comforting gesture alludes to the role of women and especially elder women in providing younger women with reassurance, advice, and confidence when it comes to spiritual directions. M. McNally writes, youth did not only "receive instructions from their elders in ethical standards, moral code, and vocational guidance and practice" (134) but that especially during dream ceremonies or fasts "the mentorship and . . . guidance in light of a

significant dream, it was the wisdom of elders that one sought” (239). The girl in the novel receives both in one dream. The symbolic appearance of the two women foretells her significant dreams/visions, comforts her and establishes the purpose of the dream. Their presence gives the girl courage, confidence, and the hope that a better life is attainable.

The reappearing women in the short story as well as the girl’s grandmother stand for the spiritual teachings of female guides, similar to Amelia in *Ragged Company*. When the girl meets the two women in her dream for the first time she describes them as follows:

She looked to her left and there stood a young woman with a serious face. She was wrapped in deep layers of material the same colour as the veins that snaked up and down her pale arms. She had sad smudges under her eyes as though a coal miner had tried to wipe away her tears in a moment of tenderness. Her dark hair was pulled back tightly into an intricate medicine-wheel braid that took up every wave from her head and wove it into meaning. Her lips were thick and cut by deep creases symptomatic of a life spent outdoors in unforgiving sunlight and inside in dimly lit corners. She did not look unkind; she looked beautiful and fierce. (11)

The other woman, standing at the girl’s left side is also described:

The hand that gripped her shoulder on this side belonged to an old woman; a woman whose severity and kindness ran down her face like the patterns of a butterfly’s wings. In fact, almost everything about that woman reminded her of a butterfly. She looked so fragile in her age; yet she looked ready to travel many miles before settling to rest. (11)

Both these women seem to represent different values and stages of life. The meeting of all three women in the dream appears to be the meeting of three generations, an ancestry that has its roots in matriarchal lineage. From that dream onwards the two women are harbingers for future dreams or visions, or ones that happen the moment they appear. The semantic field of the dream strongly alludes to ceremonial traditions and Indigeneity: “cedar and heat,” (10) evocative of the traditional ceremonial sweatlodge. The long dark hair of the women: “hair . . . long and smooth, like the sleek ferns that grew down at the shore behind her auntie’s house” reminding of the traditional way to wear hair “pulled back tightly into an intricate medicine-wheel braid that took up every wave from her head and wove it into meaning.” “Smudges,” on the women’s faces allude to the pre-sweatlodge ceremony of cleansing, or “smudging” your body and mind with traditional sacred herbs such as tobacco, sage, cedar, and/or sweetgrass. The “full moon” and “the wide, round, star-filled sky” (repeated twice), the “masked dancers,” the wind and the

shadows, the appearance of the first, younger woman as if she had spent “a life spent outdoors in unforgiving sunlight and inside in dimly lit corners” (11 f) evoke imagery of pre-contact Indigenous life. The appearance of the second woman reminds the protagonist of a butterfly which might refer to the presence of a deceased person. Providing a sensation of their presence “from time immemorial passed down. . . .” and “held together by a frayed red thread of Aboriginal blood” (Lord 4), the two women have a comforting effect on the girl who experiences their presence as a homecoming.

As Frank has declared, in the quest narrative, “illness is the occasion of a journey that becomes a quest” (115). When the girl turns her suffering into meaning and the opportunity to reclaim her voice and her strength, she learns to walk again and provide for a more purposeful future. She is on her way to become an Indigenous woman who stands up for her rights and reclaims what has been taken away from her: (Intellectual) Self-determination¹⁵⁹ and knowledges embedded in Indigenous frameworks. The following section will focus on strong Indigenous female voices that have found a platform in contemporary activist movements.

As was insinuated in Van Camp’s stories, the butterfly symbolizes transformation and change but also the human’s soul or spirit. Being in the girl’s dream, the woman inhabits the girl’s innermost private spheres, and her butterfly appearance represents the inner change that is about to happen within the girl. The butterfly’s symbol as spirit (of deceased people) also makes the old woman a symbol of an old Native *female* presence. The women stand for the resilience and spiritual significance of the female in Ojibwe communities, which is apparent in their physical as well as almost spiritual descriptions. Their presence recalls traditional Indigenous ways of life preceding colonization’s disruption. Lawrence explains:

For Native people, individual identity is always being negotiated *in relation to* collective identity, and *in the face of* an external, colonizing society. Bodies of law defining and controlling Indianness have for years distorted and disrupted older Indigenous ways of identifying the self in relation not only to collective identity but also to the land. (“Identity Regulations” 4)

The girl’s interaction with the two women in her dreams allows her to also (re)connect with her communal identity as a Native woman that is predicated on relationality, different

¹⁵⁹ Battiste explains “intellectual self-determination”: “The recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people” (4).

ways of knowing, seeing, and interacting.

The reoccurring image of a star filled sky helps the girl to regain control over her life and to finally make decisions on her own; the decision to return home and confront herself with her past. At the beginning of the story the two women in her dream pull a cloak out of the darkness and put it around her shoulders. There it

became a wide, round star-filled sky. It's weight was the weight of all eternity, from time immemorial passed down through slow migrations across eons and down the strands of DNA that brought everything to this moment. It was comforting, like the weight of a welcomed lover who has come home after many night alone. (12)

At the end of the story the girl seems to not need the help of the spiritual "Dream Women" anymore. She does not fade out her past and now seems ready to face up to an unknown future that can only be better than the life she is living at the present. Here it becomes especially clear that the connection to one's own past can help to restore the body's and soul's balance.

Supporting the leading role of the female in this story is also the fact that the girl's grandmother is the only one who can sense her presence in the girl's visionary dream. Her grandmother is also the only one who urges for her return home and believing that the girl "is meant for great things, much more than you and I" (29) establishes her grandmother as the only person who cares about the girl's identity as a Native woman and her role within a Native community and life. Hence, she stands for a greater moral projection, representing everything her life is not and thus representing her 'Nativeness' that the girl has to rediscover. This 'Nativeness,' being repressed but nevertheless present in her, represents a better path, which she is about to take, regardless of her grandmother's "real" existence. That the girl struggles with her life might also be due to her mother's parental neglect, evident in the dismissal of the grandmother's concern for her granddaughter as "voodoo bullshit" and declaring that she "only came here to dry out a bit, to get my shit together before I head out West to meet up with my ole man" (29). Her own spiritual disconnection to her Indigenous beliefs and knowledges has also affected her daughter who cannot deal with the seemingly preternatural things happening to her. The girl states: "And she didn't want to drink anymore. At least not tonight with the fucking Indian Morticia Addams inviting herself out as a drinking buddy, giving her visions and shit" (24). Comparing the women from her dream with the mother of the 1964 TV Show *The Addams Family* highlights the girls inability to come to terms with her dreams and visions.

She cannot relate to what is happening and reacts with *horror* and fear (18/19). She is much more familiar with spooky images of popular culture than with Indigenous culture and philosophy.

Dreams/dreaming constitutes a commonality that connects the protagonists of all three fictional texts to their past. This past is depressing and harmful, inducing the protagonists' shared need to forget and suppress those negative memories and feelings for as long as possible. But dreaming also connects them to their truth; the truth of their origins and their history. It is also the reconnection to their tribal traditions and culture that helps the characters as Aboriginal people to mediate between the two conflicting worlds they are trapped in, to deal with the Western world view that seems to collide with traditional ways and spiritual beliefs. The young girl in the first story of Dimaline's books experiences a guiding assistance by the power of dreams which incorporate all elements of the girl's relation/association with her tribal/Indigenous heritage: The geographic place of her community (the shore), its flora and fauna (the ferns and the cedar), tribal practices (sweat lodges, heat) and the outer appearance of Indigenous people are all identification markers (the long hair) - an identity that includes the whole habitat/ecosystem, not just human relatives and cultures.

Hence, dreaming provides spiritual guidance and continuity. The circle can be restored and a home can be found with the help of the Old Ways of the Old Ones, that can directly be linked and often even equated to Indigenous knowledges and the transmission of such. The following chapter will elaborate on dreams as facilitating healing, home, and identity within an Indigenous epistemology.

Finding Home the Old Way

Within a Nishnaabeg epistemology, spiritual knowledge is a tremendous, ubiquitous source of wisdom that is the core of every system in the physical world. The implicate order provides the stories that answer all of our questions. The way we are taught to access that knowledge is by being open to that kind of knowledge and by being engaged in a way of living that generates a close, personal relationship with our ancestors and relations in the spirit world through ceremony, dreams, visions and stories. (Simpson "Land as Pedagogy" 12)

In Simpson's article "Land As Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," she explains core Anishinaabe values, knowledge, and epistemologies

with the help of the Anishinaabe story of how the young girl Kwezens found out about maple sap and learned how to make maple syrup. But Simpson also goes further by explaining one fundamental difference between Kwezens and herself as a little girl: “She [Kewzenz] has already spent seven years immersed in a nest of Nishnaabeg intelligence. She already understands the importance of observation and learning from our animal teachers . . .” (6). And because “Kwezens already lives in a reality where the spiritual world has tremendous presence in each moment” (12), it only comes natural to her to adopt these values and apply them. As the previously discussed novels have shown, not every Aboriginal - here Anishinaabe - has the possibility to grow up within an environment that knows, nurtures, and transmits these core values. Richard Wagamese’s novel demonstrates that this is not necessarily due to geographic location or urbanization, but more so to the lack of “traditional teachers,” uprooted and disconnected identities, and the internalization of colonizer mindsets, values, and identity politics.

In both fictional texts, nightmares represent homelessness, trauma, stagnation, and a disconnection to one’s (Native) background, whereas dreams represent continuity through the restoration of identity, finding home, and a sense of belonging and spiritual guidance. Ermine states: “The spirit is the haven of dreams, those peculiar images that flash symbolic messages to the knower. Dreams are the link to the spiritual world from whence our spirit comes . . .” (108). The broken, alienated, and literally homeless spirit receives spiritual guidance through dreaming processes (both nightmares and dreams) that foster personal transformation and reconciliation, which ultimately lead to a restoration of the whole spirit.

“We are people of the dream, Grandma One Sky said” (37). Here, Amelia draws the connection between dreams and Native/Anishinaabe culture. According to her grandmother, dreams have always played an important role in Indigenous religion and belief. Simpson writes: “in Anishinaabeg philosophy, if you have a dream, if you have a vision, you share that with your community, and then you have a responsibility for bringing that dream forth, or that vision forth into a reality” (Simpson qtd in Klein). Her quote emphasizes that dreams and their power were (are) part of Indigenous knowledge that has either been forgotten or disregarded with colonization. Simpson continues to explain that this philosophy includes and thrives upon the concept of “regeneration. That’s the process of bringing forth more life” (Simpson qtd in Klein). Amelia recounts her grandmother saying that “dream life was just as important as earth life and if I paid

attention to what I lived in dreams I could learn more about my earth walk - real life. Visions were dream life” (37). The notion of a dream reality and a waking reality influencing and informing each other while relying on sharing dreams with the community, eventually leading to an enactment of the dream or vision, is reminiscent of Black Elk’s dream discourse. Amelia too takes guidance from her dreams as reference points and uses them in her mission to bring together Timber, Digger, Dick and Granite. She shares these dreams with the reader and its enactment process is observable in the plot progression as the characters’ fates are unfolding on the pages.

Native literature and the storytelling process as part of a holistic Indigenous epistemology can advance mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional healing and thus help to find alleviation and resolve in a newly (re)discovered Native spirituality (Adelson 277).

5.4 Idle No More and the ‘Highway of Tears’

As both fictional texts in chapter five have highlighted, crime, violence, drug abuse and addiction, homelessness, prostitution, and poverty are still problems many Indigenous people in Canada face today. To further address the issue of the continuing colonial discourse and public policy neglecting and marginalizing Indigenous peoples (and women especially), I would like to turn now to a brief discussion of the Idle No More movement. But first, some information needs to be provided regarding the so-called Highway of Tears. Since the late 1980s, “582 Aboriginal women have been reported missing and murdered across Canada,” of which forty women went missing alongside the 724 kilometres of Highway 16 in Northern British Columbia,¹⁶⁰ also known as “Highway of Tears” (Smiley, *Highway of Tears* 00:00:48).

Matt Smiley’s 2014 documentary *Highway of Tears* exposes the fact that despite common knowledge that Aboriginal women are “3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Aboriginal women” (00:00:57), “in 2013, Human Rights Watch released a report stating that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Northern British Columbia failed to protect Aboriginal women” (0:00:44). Amnesty International has been fighting for greater acknowledgement of these disappearances of women along the Highway for over ten years. Its 2004 report, “Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to

¹⁶⁰ It stretches from Prince Rupert, BC, to Edmonton, Alberta, and further into Manitoba.

Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada,” states that it:

This report examines the role of discrimination in acts of violence carried out against Indigenous women in Canadian towns and cities. This discrimination takes the form both of overt cultural prejudice and of implicit or systemic biases in the policies and actions of government officials and agencies, or of society as a whole. This discrimination has played out in policies and practices that have helped put Indigenous women in harm’s way and in the failure to provide Indigenous women the protection from violence that is every woman’s human right. (3)

It of course goes without saying that the step towards acknowledging the disappearance of and general violence against Indigenous women as a Human Rights concern is crucial and most urgent.

That the RCMP has not done so in the past is manifested in the case of Robert Pickton, a serial killer. The owner of a pig farm close to Vancouver was convicted with 6 second-degree murders of Aboriginal women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. The Pickton case - according to Culhane, “the largest serial killer investigation in Canadian history“ (598) - received enormous media coverage. Due to the morbid setting of the murders - his pig farm - and the multi-million dollar search for evidence on his property, it stirred a national and international public discourse on missing and murdered Aboriginal women. In his law suit, “Willi” Pickton denied the murder of the women, but has been caught on camera bragging about the murder of 49 women while stating disappointment that he did not make it to an “even 50” (Matas and Armstrong 1). Pickton allegedly fed his victims’ flesh to his pigs in order to avoid DNA tracking, which made the case an especially gruesome and cruel sensation.

The RCMP was accused of not having made the cases of missing Aboriginal women from Canada’s Downtown Eastside a priority. As many family members reported their sisters and daughters missing, the police did nothing to investigate these incidents and instead discounted the concerns. Many of the missing and murdered women were poor, homeless, drug addicts or sex workers, prompting the police to treat these women as “second class” citizens. It was only when a young “white” woman disappeared, that the inquiries started and led the police to Pickton’s farm. Even though he denied the murder and insufficient evidence was found to convict him for the numerous other murders he is believed to have committed, he was finally sentenced to life imprisonment without parole in May 2008. Since then, the huge problem of the disappearing and the murdering of Aboriginal women has become undeniable.

Since the decolonization ideology goes hand in hand with the ideals of healing and liberation (in its many different meanings), Tuck and Yang refer to Lorde who acknowledges literature (especially poetry) as a step within the process that can eventually translate into action and social transformation (20). What Cherie Dimaline presents in her writing reflects in fact the reality of urban Indigenous female life experiences and the long-lasting effects of (neo)colonialism and marginalization. While her fictional protagonist finds a way to reclaim her identity and take charge of the course of her life, it remains questionable what Lorde's wording of "tangible action" (qtd in Tuck and Yang 20) towards the improvement of the desolate situation of many homeless Aboriginal women is actually taking place on an extra-textual level. And yet the resistance is active and it comes from Indigenous people, women in particular, who despite living in a world dominated by white supremacy, speak in a clear and strong voice of resilience; in Lee Maracle's words: "Even as men abduct as I hitchhike along the new highways / To disappear along this lonely colonial road / I refuse to be tragic" (216).

Just as many Indigenous adolescents have used political movements of the 1960s to increase their representation and visibility (Atleo 69), so do Aboriginal youth today find a voice in contemporary activist movements such as Idle No More. The group, which started with "a series of teach-ins throughout Saskatchewan to protest impending parliamentary bills that will erode Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections, has now changed the social and political landscape of Canada" ("The Story," idlenomore.ca). This grassroots movement was initially founded in 2012 by three First Nations and one non-First Nations women: Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean. Their aim was to oppose the 2012 Jobs and Growth Act, also called Bill C-45, which is "the government's omnibus budget implementation bill that includes changes to land management on the reservations. It attacks the land base reserved for Indigenous people, removes protection for hundreds of waterways, and weakens Canada's environmental laws" (Caven). The Idle No More activists created a Facebook page, which until the present day¹⁶¹ has more than 149,000 likes and a Facebook group that counts over 54,00 members, the number of whom is growing every day. The movement has reached Native peoples worldwide and finds many non-Native allies with the same environmental values, human rights principles, and objectives: "to assert Indigenous inherent rights to sovereignty and reinstitute traditional laws and Nation to

¹⁶¹ December 21st, 2016.

Nation Treaties by protecting the lands and waters from corporate destruction” (“The Story,” idlenomore.ca). What is, however, most pertinent to this study, however, is the fact that the Idle No More movement can be seen as an example of a resistance movement created and led by female voices. Just like Dimaline’s story, the expanding movement proves the strength of Indigenous women who, as the Kino-nda-niimi Collective puts it:

. . . have always been leaders in our communities and many took a similar role in the movement. As they had done for centuries when nurturing and protecting families, communities, and nations, women were on the front lines organizing events, standing up and speaking out. Grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters, and daughters sustained us, carried us, and taught through word, song, and story. When Indigenous women were targeted with sexual violence during the movement, many of us organized to support those women and to make our spaces safer. Many also strived to make the movement an inclusive space for all genders and sexual orientations and to recognize the leadership roles and responsibilities of our fellow queer and two spirited citizens. (23-24)

One of the most valuable assets of this movement is thus its openness and ability to recruit into its ranks more and more people: female empowerment from which the movement arose has clearly swept the masses, encouraging further emancipation and engagement in “Indigenous activism [which] has taken many forms” (Murphy). The Idle No More Movement is therefore an undeniable example of “Healing Activism.” Just like Dimaline’s story, it clearly shows the possibility of “learning to walk again,” both on an individual and a group level. As Native educator and artist Khelsilem sums up, “I think that’s where a lot of it comes from—this very strong history of our people starting to feel proud of ourselves again and becoming more visible and becoming stronger and becoming more active” (Murphy).

Consequently, the empowerment that comes with current streams of Indigenous activism, like Idle No More, enables Aboriginal families, communities, and larger organizations to speak up and not let most pressing issues be glossed over by the authorities. For example, The “Stolen Sisters” report has been further developed into the “No More Stolen Sisters” campaign that aims at:

A national action plan to end violence against women which addresses the root causes of violence and identifies holistic, culturally-appropriate ways in which to prevent violence and to support those impacted by violence. . . . [As well as] [a] national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women focused on exposing the nature of this violence and on ensuring government and police accountability for an

effective and coordinated response. (“No More Stolen Sisters,” *Amnesty International*)

Indigenous activism exposing the truth that the authorities try to conceal is a necessary form of resistance that receives more and more public attention worldwide. Hence, projects like film documentaries on the subject matter (for example, Smiley’s *Highway of Tears*) have become of key importance as they reach a broad international audience that pressures the police and the government to act on these demands. That such attempts can be powerfully effective was proved in 2012 when the RCMP released a national report surveying the missing and murdered Aboriginal women, which is a first step in the long-awaited recognition of the national problem at hand—the mistreatment and lack of protection of Canada’s Aboriginal women.

But it is also the cause of such mistreatment that needs consideration. While Dimaline’s short story successfully portrays the ramifications of homelessness, prostitution, drug and alcohol addiction, the general public largely ignores these causes. Looking at the extensive problem that Aboriginal women are facing counteracts the colonial Eurocentric mindset that fuels violence against Aboriginal women: “Racist and sexist stereotypes deny the dignity and worth of Indigenous women” (“Stolen Sisters,” *Amnesty International*). Also, the governmental neglect and lack of investigation, protection, and prevention have served to confirm the assumption of some men that they would get away with the murder of Aboriginal women (“Stolen Sisters,” *Amnesty International*). Indigenous (non-governmental and international) organizations, movements, activists and writers have successfully urged the government to move towards justice for the affected families and communities and to finally take action: the new Canadian government of Justin Trudeau has announced that a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls has recently been launched (“National Inquiry,” *Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada*).

Indigenous political activism and its human rights campaigns as well as Indigenous literature increase the visibility of Indigenous Women in Canada and raise Canada’s public awareness, which altogether works against ongoing marginalization. Problems such as the ones encountered by Dimaline’s protagonist in fiction are directly tied to colonialism and are fuelled by the underlying colonialist and paternalistic structures that are based on the disparagement and objectification of Indigenous people, Indigenous women in particular. Dimaline’s short story and the Idle No More movement not only

point to the *status quo* of Indigenous people, but they also focus on its many causes. Relegating colonialism to something of the past is a danger that euphemizes and downplays Indigenous struggles in the city and on reserves. Feeling safe in your own country is a privilege of non-Indigenous people in Canada. It is a cruel reality that such is not the case for Indigenous women. Differences in lived realities of safety and privilege are a human rights violation and perpetuate internal colonial structures. Indigenous literature as well as a newly emerging form of activism protest against the existence and persistence of these differences and work towards effectuating actual changes in public policies and consciousness. Counteracting the “fourth wave of colonization,” Indigenous people reclaim their Indigeneity and redefine healing by blending traditional knowledges with contemporary ways of resisting.

6 Conclusion

Healing

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (“Constitution of WHO: Principles,” who.int). The adverse impacts colonization had and colonialism continues to have on Aboriginal peoples are most visible in often desolate health and well-being of entire First Nations communities. Many reasons are attributable to, but not limited to: economic isolation, poor health insurance, no transportation, deeply entrenched racist and colonial structures and unabated loss of land and language. While the previous chapters have shown effects of the “ontological violences of colonialism” (Hokowhitu qtd in Byrd 82f) as portrayed in literature, this chapter will further scrutinize Indigenous ways of knowing and a reconnection to these ways as a significant trajectory of resurgence and reclamation.

To draw a connection to Indigenous knowledges, the concept of the “Red Road” that was introduced in chapter 2.3.2 needs further elaboration. While the origins of the “Red Road” concept derive from Black Elk’s great vision, in which he saw the tree of life and two different coloured roads, one red and one black, Forbes defines “the good Red Road” as follows:

On the whole, the history of the Americas (prior to European conquest) reveals a land where most human groups followed, or tried to follow, the “pollen path” (as the Navajo people call it) or the “good, red road” (as the Lakota call it). The pollen path and the red road lead to living life in a sacred manner with continual awareness of the inter-relationships of all forms of life. (Forbes 21)

With that in mind, the “Red Road” seems to have been a life-style, a lived concept of Indigenous peoples before contact and has since been hampered by the wétiko disease and its symptoms of corruption, exploitation, colonization, and ongoing (neo)colonialism. The symptoms are numerous and have changed over the course of time. In the previous chapters on Van Camp’s, Alexie’s, Wagamese’s and Dimaline’s texts, we have taken a closer look at many different symptoms, as well as the “symptoms of symptoms,” so to speak: PTSD, Homelessness, identity crises, alcoholism, FAS, spiritual disconnection and institutional disaffiliation. Colonialism continues to perpetuate a trauma within individual

First Nations and whole communities. The Red Road has come to symbolize the return to Indigenous values and life. Today, many (Aboriginally run) networks, programs, organizations, and political movements encourage the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges into their healing and reconciliation agendas. Often, this return to relational thought systems yields healing for the participants. I want to give two concepts that exemplify a “Red Road discourse:” Re-indigenization and *Biskaabiiyang*.

In a TedTalk that was organized by the UBC Okanagan College in June 2011, Jeannette Armstrong in her talk “Indigeneity: A Necessary Social Ethic to Take us Beyond Sustainability,” states: “I think the idea of Indigeneity might have something to do with questioning our ethics as human beings” (mins 2:15-2:22, videotexts.net). Her talk continues to pointedly maintain that “everyone is the problem, and the way we do things is the problem” (8:21). What many of the characters from the novels discussed in this thesis also partly experience or demonstrate is “re-indigenization,” a concept that is explained by John Mohawk as follows: “I think that when we talk about re-indigenization, we need a much larger, bigger umbrella to understand. It’s not necessarily about the Indigenous Peoples of a specific place; it’s about re-indigenizing the peoples of the planet” (in Armstrong “Indigeneity” 115). Jeannette Armstrong argues that the Western world with all its problems could benefit greatly from Indigenous (traditional) knowledges, cosmologies and theories, since they aim at restoration, sustainability, and relational co-existence. In her TedTalk, she explains that only by “moving beyond the idea of human-centric sustainability“ (8:31), can we understand that re-indigenization is about nothing but place and that specific knowledge of specific places which forms Indigeneity can help to achieve the goal of “the human as a perfectly integrated part of nature“ (10:47). The restoration of Indigenous values implies that by listening and incorporating Indigenous knowledges and by (re)applying their teachings to our own specific situation, we can begin to expedite a safer, more sustainable, and environmentally friendlier approach in a local and global extent.

The Anishinaabemowin verb *Biskaabiiyang* “means to look back“ (Simpson *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* 49). Simpson explains the concept by giving examples of how scholars and Elders apply the concept by evaluating “how they personally have been affected by colonization, rid themselves of the emotional and psychological baggage they carry from this process, and then return to their ancestral traditions” (Wendy Makoons Geniusz qtd in Simpson 50). *Biskaabiiyang methodology*, as it was adopted by Wendy

Makoons Geniusz in her PhD dissertation, helps to free individuals from colonialist thought and instead return to Indigenous thought systems and knowledges; in this case to Anishinaabe knowledge and health principles: *anishnaabe-gikendaasowin* (Makoons in Simpson 50). Simpson explains that the metaphorical meaning of *Biskaabiiyang* transcends its literal translation and

does not literally mean returning from the past, but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support well-being of our contemporary citizens. It means reclaiming the fluidity around our traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism; it means encouraging the self-determination of individuals within our national and community-based contexts. (51)

As the term and its symbolism is often used similarly to that in which “decolonizing” is used (Simpson 49 ff), the process also includes the colonizer. Taking on the responsibility of colonialism and its attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples, Canada’s settler society needs to be just as involved in the processes of decolonization and reconciliation as Indigenous peoples. The health, well-being, and revitalization of Indigenous communities depends on these mutual efforts. It rests on the belief that self-determination is achievable and desirable by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.

Research plays a big role in affecting positive change for Indigenous peoples. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has stated ever so famously (see Chapter 2.2.1), the word, concept, and process of ‘research’ has predominantly negative connotations for Aboriginal communities in Canada and globally. The main problem seems to be the approach and the methodologies that have been oriented on solely Western codes and principles, ignoring Indigenous methodologies and research frameworks. As the late Jo-Ann Episkenew, then serving as the director of the Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre (IPHRC, University of Regina) explained, their organization does not do research *on* Aboriginal peoples but work closely *together* with Aboriginal communities and networks (*Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre*). The network that is described as a partnership network between the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina, and The First Nations University of Canada envisions “thriving, healthy, self-determining Indigenous peoples, families and communities“ for which “**self-determination** [orig. emphasis] is the foundation“ (*Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre*). Research Associate Cassandra Opikokew, who works for what IPHRC, calls “Knowledge Translation,” meaning “the community should also have ownership of research. So knowledge

translation is the process of how do we take the research that's done and actually translate it into meaningful outcomes. Not just for researchers and academia, but also for the communities involved" (*Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre*, iphrc.ca).

In my perception the concept of Indigenous knowledge translation strongly echoes the struggle of the characters in the novels discussed to understand their dreams as Indigenous knowledge. Having adopted imposed identity concepts by the government or dominant non-Aboriginal society has led to alienation and disconnection from their First Nations identity. Often, the environment they grew up in failed abysmally to teach the children what Indigeneity meant. At the turning points of their lives, when dreams and visions start to reappear, they are lost in translation. Their own illiteracy towards Native spirituality and traditional Indigenous knowledges has them trapped in the inability to read their dream messages. In accepting the significance of their dreams as whatever part of themselves - past, present, future - a re-indigenization is facilitated, because the dreams serve in the roles of messenger, translator, and mediator. By transgressing Western norms and limitations of reality perceptions and other dream conceptualizations, their dreams manifest themselves in many different forms - anxiety dreams, ecological nightmares, and existential dreams.

IPHRC defines Knowledge Translation as the process of transforming research into meaningful action and hence promoting the collaboration of researchers and First Nations communities. In emphasizing that this translation process is a mutual one that both 'parties' can benefit from, it is reminiscent of the re-indigenization concept. Especially after realizing that many of the current problems are based and rooted in misunderstandings and the collision of definitions, ontologies and epistemologies, these concepts are illuminating. The implementation of research and the aim of affecting positive change within Aboriginal communities and Canadian society in general must be based on reciprocity. Only then, can decolonization, in the sense of Simpson's concept of *Biskaabiiyang*, be successful.

Wagamese explains the role of intergenerational trauma as an effect of the Residential Schools: "The pain they bore was invisible and unspoken. It seeped into their spirit, oozing its poison and blinding them from the incredible healing properties within their Indian ways" (Wagamese "Returning to Harmony" 154). By bringing to light what was once invisible, dreams help to 'cure' this inflicted/imposed blindness towards traditional culture. The initiated return to traditional values, ceremonies, and knowledges

ultimately leads to personal transformation, liberation and healing.

The Sacred Circle Revisited: Continuity through Spirituality

The above mentioned concepts of re-indigenization and *Biskaabiiyang* exemplify that there are enough Indigenous methodologies, theories, concepts, and scholarly research processes, that when writing about a First Nations topic, there is no need to rely only on Western theories. Especially when it comes to literature, there has been extensive research by Indigenous scholars. The reliance on Indigenous sources, with local, community-based approaches, respects and fosters Aboriginal knowledges as science.

Introducing the circle as a transdisciplinary Indigenous concept may seem essentializing at points, and should not be considered as the ‘one truth’ for all disciplines within Native Studies. However, the symbolism of the circle has come to represent Indigenous philosophy and epistemologies, especially when contrasted with Western, non-Aboriginal education and worldviews. In his essay “The Circle as a Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction,” Lutz discusses foundational Native American novels such as Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) in relation to the symbolism of the circle as an Indigenous (literary) concept. He concludes that “the novels seem to maintain that the circle exists and show exemplary ways to regain harmony. . . . they also show that there are ways for continuity through Native spirituality” (206).

But now that I can it all as from a lonely hilltop, I know it was the story of a mighty vision given to a man too weak to use it; of a holy tree that should have flourished in a people’s heart with flowers and singing birds, and now is withered; and of a people’s dream that died in bloody snow. (Neihardt *Black Elk Speaks* 1)

In 1932, when Black Elk shared his life story with John G. Neihardt, he started his recount with his supposed failure in not enacting his vision. Black Elk - according to Neihardt’s account - had not managed to restore the sacred hoop, but had instead helplessly witnessed the death of his people’s dream. The embodied death of a people in “bloody snow” can historically be dated back to the Massacre of Wounded Knee in December 1890. His self-recrimination is evidence of the significance of dreams and visions and the huge responsibility that he felt as a young person.

But his dream might not have been entirely drowned in bloody snow. The development of his persona into one of the most influential Indigenous thinkers and most cited medicine men stretches over decades of ethnocide, and established dreams and

visions as a significant part of Indigenous knowledge. Even if his vision was not 'performed' or 'enacted,' Indigenous peoples today return to their dreams and incorporate them into lived reality. The sacred hoop he envisioned is - after years of oppression and marginalization - slowly being resurrected and Indigenous knowledge systems are gaining attention and significance.

Episkenew's book title *Taking Back Our Spirits* gives insight into contemporary Native resistance, healing, and public policy. Literature and Indigenous traditions of storytelling have especially created a tool to reclaim traditional values that provide spiritual continuity. She asserts: "I began to understand the healing power of stories in general and of Indigenous literature in particular" (Episkenew 2). Cheryl Suzack, in her review of Episkenew's work affirms:

Episkenew asserts that healing is at the centre of the individual and collective stories that Indigenous artists tell about their experiences of colonialism and that these stories have the power to heal communities from the trauma of settler occupation. Their writing not only illustrates how colonial policies caused a breach in family and community relationships but also envisions counter-discursive reading strategies that call attention to writing as an 'implement of social justice' and as a 'tool of anti-racist education.' (718)

Dreaming Home and Beyond

I want to come back to the role of dreams and the literature that was discussed in this thesis. The notion of 'dreaming home' is a reference to the 'writing back' paradigm that was introduced by postcolonial scholars Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (96/97) and which labels a literature that aims at writing back to the dominant colonial forces in order to "undermine its conceptual foundation" (Döring 18). Categorizing Indigenous literature as conforming to "writing back" literature asserts Episkenew's concern that Indigenous literature has often been categorized as being merely "'protest' literature - literature about 'issues' rather than aesthetics" (Episkenew 146). With the new 'writing home' concept, scholars distance themselves from this interpretation and instead observe that Indigenous authors have altered their focus on what is home and not what is back/the 'center:'

In the process of defining their own theories and writing in culturally relevant aesthetics, they are no longer primarily concerned about 'writing back' (Ashcroft et al.) to the colonial center, or about being understood by the mainstream. Texts contain fewer and fewer ethnographic (omniscient) comments or 'translations' to smooth

mainstream access or to (re) educate the majority and decolonize the dominant discourse. Instead, Native women poets are 'writing home' to their own people, using philosophical concepts and linguistic materials. . . (Lutz *Approaches* 191)

The 'writing beyond' concept goes even further, expressing that literature by Aboriginal authors is not only written for their own Native communities and peoples but to a much broader audience. An audience that surely needs to be "culturally literate" but also a diverse readership that does not exclude but instead includes peoples from different backgrounds, cultures and worldviews. The texts thus transgress and go beyond not only national but also international borders and limitations by accommodating cultural diversity and heterogeneity. Dreaming is something innately human, and thus contributes to the inclusive character of the selected novels.

'Dreaming home' leads to the possibility of finding a more stable sense of place, home, and identity. In the process of restoring and revitalizing meaningful connections in life, the 'dreaming beyond' paradigm refers to the re-indigenization of the characters through dreams and nightmares. This dissertation has started out with explaining and discussing reasons for the existing rift and remaining juxtapositions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in a Canadian context. These juxtapositions are (neo)colonialism and decolonization, Western and Indigenous epistemology, trauma (HT, IGT, PTSR, FASD) and healing, nightmare and dream. While nightmares represent the first categories, dreams symbolize the latter. The dreaming process, its slow acknowledgment and the resulting existential transformations of the characters, triggered processes of liberation, reconciliation, continuity, community, rebirth, and ~~with that~~ thereby fostered balance and epistemological hybridity. Through dreaming in the novels, the spiral of colonialism became disrupted and was replaced by the circle of reconciliation and relationality. Being caught in the spiral of their nightmares, they prove to be the product of internal and external (neo)colonial structures. Just when the characters' slowly start to pay attention to their dreams and revitalize them as an integral part of Indigenous knowledges they are able to liberate themselves from the prison of trauma. Reclaiming agency over their lives helps the characters find a holistic, balanced identity that is based on integrity and self-determination. Thomas King reiterates: "The magic of Native literature . . . is not in the themes of the stories - identity, isolation, loss, ceremony, community, maturation, home - it is in the way meaning is refracted by cosmology, the way understanding is shaped by cultural paradigms" (*Truth About Stories* 112).

Still in Service of Decolonization

I had already called the conclusion of my Master's thesis “In Service of Decolonization” and decided that for my PhD thesis I would simply put a “still” in front of “in service of decolonization” because for me, that shows that decolonization is a process, which means that just like in 2012 when I wrote and received my Master's, I am still hoping to be writing in service of a long reciprocal process of decolonization.

At one point during the metaphorical battle with the demons, dreams and nightmares in Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*, James' best friend Jake addresses him and says something really important. Every dream and every nightmare was and will continue to be part of a necessary healing journey for the protagonists and therefore a central component to liberation: “Healin’ is a journey - there is no end!” (201). And so is decolonization a process with no end, because the effort of this endeavour needs to be continuous. Battiste recapitulates on the term decolonization:

The term is an aspirational practice, goal, or idea that the delegates used to imagine a new form of society that they desired to create. Yet we recognized that postcolonial societies do not exist. Rather, we acknowledge the colonial mentality and structure that still exist in all audiences and nations and the neocolonial tendencies can only be resisted and healed by reliance on Indigenous knowledge and its imaginative processes. (Battiste xix)

Humbled by the inclusive and accepting mindset of the Lheidli T’enneh First Nations community in Prince George and the many Indigenous people I had the chance to meet and talk to on my PhD journey, I want to give a short personal anecdote. The first few weeks as a visiting Masters and later PhD student, I was at first estranged and then intimidated by the openness in which First Nations scholars, students, and writers open (public) talks. The introduction always contained prior information about themselves. It was through family ties and place that the audience learned about the speaker's background and “all her relations.” My first response to such a rather personal self-reflection and positioning in an academic setting was out of my comfort zone and proved to be the most important lesson for me so far. For me, as a German and hence purely Western thinker, this was unprofessional and un-academic. I was ashamed of putting myself, and my personal background into an academic discourse. We learn in school and especially in university, that as researchers and scholars we have to strictly distance ourselves as a human and subjective person from everything that we want to be considered academic. This is an approach that is entirely incompatible with Indigenous thought,

education, and knowledge.

After a poetry reading, author Garry Gottfriedson went to have coffee with me along with other students and professors. He eventually turned towards me and asked, “what’s your story?” I felt somewhat exposed and was for a moment speechless. Not once have I thought about “my story” that positions me towards other people and myself. It was there that I recounted my story for the first time.

Other First Nations writers and scholars have since shared their stories with me and have asked for mine. The incredible openness and willingness of a people who have endured unimaginable amounts of marginalization, oppression, and trauma to listen to the story of a privileged German student continues to humble and inspire my existence as a scholar in Germany. Jeannette Armstrong has written the poignant words in which she expresses her hope “that those whose thoughts I have provoked may become our greatest allies in speaking to their own” (“The Disempowerment and Empowerment” 601). She does inspire my thoughts and provokes my desire to speak to my own (German) compatriots about the change needed globally and on a transdisciplinary scale in academia and in general.

I would like to close my thesis with a quote from Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson, who recognizes and promotes the significant role of academia in the decolonization process in Canada and abroad:

If the academy is concerned about not only protecting and maintaining Indigenous intelligence, but revitalizing it on Indigenous terms as a form of restitution for its historic and contemporary role as a colonizing force (of which I see no evidence), then the academy must make a conscious decision to become a decolonizing force in the intellectual lives of Indigenous peoples by joining us in dismantling settler colonialism and actively protecting the source of our knowledge - Indigenous land. (“Land as Pedagogy” 22)

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