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Contemporary Indigenous Women Writers in Quebec:

Re/connecting with the Self, Community, and Land through Resurgent Storytelling

Les écrivaines autochtones contemporaines au Québec:

Re/connexion avec le soi, la communauté et la Terre par la narration résurgente

par

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores contemporary Indigenous women writers who crafted their cultural productions in the geo-political territory we now call Quebec between 1976 and the present. My main argument is that contemporary Indigenous women's writing in Quebec constitutes an expression of Indigenous resurgence. I understand Indigenous resurgence as a movement of transformation that is grounded in Indigenous worldviews and seeks to revitalize Indigenous ways of knowing and being. My corpus is comprised of the artistic and literary texts of seven Indigenous women in Quebec. More specifically, I investigate Kanien'kehá:ka artist Skawennati's machinima project *TimeTraveller*TM (2008-2013), selected poems from Maya Cousineau Mollen's debut collection *Bréviaire du matricule 082* (2019), Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's poetry collections *Manifeste Assi* (2014) and *Bleuets et abricots* (2016), Rita Mestokosho's multilingual collections *How I See Life, Grandmother / Eshi uapataman nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère* (2011) and *Née de la pluie et de la terre* (2014), and Manon Nolin's debut collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* (2016), as well as the autobiographically-based narratives *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976) by An Antane Kapeshe and *Kuessipan: à toi* (2011) by Naomi Fontaine.

My methodological approach juxtaposes contemporary Indigenous women's writing with Indigenous feminist and decolonizing theories. In Chapter 1, I argue that Skawennati's main objective is to empower Indigenous women by sharing and celebrating decolonial alternatives of the past, present, and future. In Chapter 2, I contend that Innu women poets use what I refer to as "Indigenous herstory" to lyrically transcribe their transformation into "Innushkueu," meaning Innu or Indigenous woman. Chapter 3 discusses Indigenous women's autobiographically-based

narratives as “tipatshimuns:” Innu traditionally oral stories testifying to the storyteller’s lives experiences. In Chapter 4, I propose that Innu women’s poetry and environmental activism merge into what I call “land-based poetic activism:” activist poetry that voices opposition to environmental exploitation, destruction, and injustice and is thus instrumentalized in a political manner to protect Indigenous land and Rights.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse explore l'élaboration de productions culturelles d'écrivaines autochtones contemporaines dans le territoire géopolitique que nous appelons présentement le Québec entre 1976 jusqu'à présent. Mon argument principal est que l'écriture contemporaine des femmes autochtones au Québec constitue une expression de la résurgence autochtone. Je comprends la résurgence autochtone comme un mouvement de transformation qui est fondé sur les visions du monde autochtones et qui cherche à revitaliser les modes de connaissance et d'existence autochtones. Mon corpus est constitué des textes artistiques et littéraires de sept femmes autochtones du Québec. Plus précisément, j'étudie le projet machinima *TimeTraveller*TM (2008-2013) de l'artiste Kanien'kehá:ka Skawennati, le premier recueil de Maya Cousineau Mollen *Bréviaire du matricule 082* (2019), les recueils de poésie de Natasha Kanapé Fontaine *Manifeste Assi* (2014) et *Bleuets et abricots* (2016), les recueils multilingues de Rita Mestokosho *How I See Life, Grandmother / Eshi uapataman nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère* (2011) et *Née de la pluie et de la terre* (2014), le premier recueil de Manon Nolin *Ma peau aime le Nord* (2016), ainsi que les récits à caractère autobiographique *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976) d'An Antane Kapeshe, et *Kuessipan: à toi* (2011) de Naomi Fontaine.

Mon approche méthodologique juxtapose les écrits de femmes autochtones contemporaines avec les théories féministes autochtones et décolonisatrices. Dans le chapitre 1, j'avance que l'objectif principal de Skawennati est de rendre le pouvoir aux femmes autochtones en partageant et en célébrant les alternatives décolonisatrices du passé, du présent et du futur. Dans le chapitre 2, je soutiens que les poètes innues utilisent ce que j'appelle « l'histoire

autochtone au féminin ou *Indigenous herstory* » pour transcrire de façon lyrique leur transformation en « Innushkueu », qui signifie femme innue ou autochtone. Le chapitre 3 traite des récits autobiographiques en tant que « tipatshimuns » : des histoires innues traditionnellement orales qui témoignent des expériences de vie de la narratrice. Dans le chapitre 4, je propose que la poésie des femmes innues et l'activisme environnemental fusionnent dans ce que j'appelle « l'activisme poétique territorial ou *land-based poetic activism* » : une poésie activiste qui exprime une opposition à l'exploitation, à la destruction et à l'injustice environnementales et qui ainsi est instrumentalisée de manière politique pour protéger la Terre et les droits autochtones.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Skawennati. *TimeTraveller*TM: *TT*

Antane Kapeshe, An. *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*: *JSMS*

Kanapé Fontaine, Natasha. *N'entre pas dans mon âme avec tes chaussures*: *NEPAC*

Kanapé Fontaine, Natasha. *Manifeste Assi*: *MA*

Kanapé Fontaine, Natasha. *Bleuets et abricots*: *BA*

Cousineau Mollen, Maya. *Bréviaire du matricule 082*: *BM082*

Nolin, Manon. *Ma peau aime le Nord*: *MPAN*

Bacon, Joséphine. *Batôns à message*: *BM*

Mestokosho, Rita. *Née de la pluie et de la terre*: *NPT*

Mestokosho, Rita. *How I See Life, Grandmother / Eshi uapataman nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère*: *CJPVG*

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Tshika Uapar. Il y aura demain.

(Naomi Fontaine, 2016)

Innu writer Naomi Fontaine wrote these words as part of a spontaneously created message gifted to me when I attended the Salon du livre des Premières Nations at Wendake (Quebec) in 2016, and her words supported me during the long process of researching, writing, and completing this dissertation. My academic work would not have been possible without the generous and beautiful gifts of Indigenous women on Turtle Island, and I am indebted to you for sharing your stories, your knowledge, and your wisdom. Special thanks to Sandra Mestokosho for verifying the parts in Innu-aimun. I am grateful for the precious knowledge that members of Indigenous communities shared with me, and I hope that this work contributes to the powerful movement of Indigenous resurgence. Any mistakes or misunderstandings in this dissertation are mine.

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INTRODUCTION

On nous croyait plus mortes que vives / Plus effacées que jamais // [...]
C'était compter sans nos guerriers / Artistes, pourfendeurs, clairvoyants //
Qui de leurs pinceaux, de leur talent / Nous ramenaient une à une à la vie // [...]
Redonnaient à chacune sa beauté / Et soulignaient sa dignité //
De la noirceur invisible et gourmande / Nous étions ressuscitées.
(Cousineau Mollen, *Enfants du lichen*, 20-21)

In the lines cited above from Innu poet Maya Cousineau Mollen's most recent collection *Enfants du lichen* (2022), Cousineau Mollen writes back to Indigenous women's invisibility and celebrates Indigenous artists, writers, and activists for igniting an Indigenous women's renaissance. Cousineau Mollen's statement invokes how powerful stories are, and how stories connect the past to the present and to future generations. This dissertation takes a similar approach to the poetic invocation of Indigenous resurgence, in that it involves a detailed comparative study of contemporary Indigenous women writers who crafted their cultural productions in the geo-political territory we now call Quebec between 1976 and the present. My work explores the artistic and literary texts of seven Indigenous women, namely Kanien'kehá:ka artist Skawennati and the Innu writers An Antane Kapeshe, Maya Cousineau Mollen, Naomi Fontaine, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, Rita Mestokosho, and Manon Nolin. Using Indigenous feminist and decolonizing theories, I compare the voices of my corpus of Indigenous writers, who all live and work in Quebec, but who "also write from different locations, nations, backgrounds, and social positionings" (Carrière 69). Moreover, these women represent different

generations, are either emergent or established writers, and they work in different colonial (French and English) and Indigenous languages (Kanienkeha and Innu-aimun).

Other settler scholars, such as Diane Boudreau, Maurizio Gatti, Isabelle St-Amand, Sarah Henzi, Jonathan Lamy Beaupré, and Marie-Hélène Jeannotte have researched and critiqued Indigenous literatures in Quebec, and, more recently, settler scholars Joëlle Papillon, Jean-François Létourneau, Marie-Eve Bradette, Élise Couture-Grondin, Isabella Huberman, Myriam St-Gelais, and Malou Brouwer, to name only a few, have continued to expand on the field of Indigenous studies in Quebec. However, few researchers have looked specifically and exclusively at Indigenous women writers in Quebec, and I consider my own work to be part of the rapid growth of this important, yet still marginalized, literary field in light of ongoing discussions about Indigenous-settler relations in post-TRC Canada.¹

My overall argument is that contemporary Indigenous women's writing in Quebec constitutes an expression of Indigenous resurgence, which is a particular form of expression that I define below, and I look at the writers under discussion in this dissertation through the lens of both Indigenous feminist and decolonizing theories. Contemporary Indigenous women's writers' expressions of resurgence are marked by three key elements, in conversation with Indigenous feminist theories: relationality, self-representation, and recognition of the transformative power of language and writing. I understand Indigenous resurgence as a movement of transformation that is grounded in Indigenous worldviews and seeks to revitalize Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Cree feminist scholar Gina Starblanket defines Indigenous resurgence as follows:

Practices of resurgence emerge from a worldview that acknowledges a living relationship between past, present and future, and makes possible the imagination of strategies of

¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)

cultural renewal based on the interplay of pre-colonial pasts and decolonial futures. This continuity evidences the extant nature of Indigenous ways of being, affirming our cultural resiliency in the face of the ongoing and ever-evolving colonial forces. (25)

Starblanket's definition stresses the temporal dimension of relationality in Indigenous women's expressions of resurgence, which are marked by cultural continuity. Skawennati, for example, seizes on this temporal dimension of Indigenous resurgence in *TimeTraveller*TM, as her science-fiction (sf) project is literally made for a play with time. Other Indigenous women writers in Quebec, like Kanapé Fontaine, also constantly evoke the past to craft a decolonial present and future.

Relationality as a key element of contemporary Indigenous women's writing is also expressed in the preface to *Life Lived Like a Story* (1990), where Canadian anthropologist Julie Cruikshank underlines the significance of autobiographical narratives shared by Indigenous women: "Their life stories tell us as much about the present as about the past, as much about ideas of community as about individual experience; they call our attention to the diverse ways humans formulate such linkages" (ix). Cruikshank's statement evokes the temporal dimension of Indigenous women's resurgent writing and stresses that relationality is a vital element of Indigenous women's writing, whether autobiographical or not. Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice confirms that "*relationship* is the driving impetus behind the vast majority of texts by Indigenous writers – relationship to the land, to human community, to self, to the other-than-human world, to the ancestors and our descendants, to our histories and our futures, as well as to colonizers and their literal and ideological heirs" (*Why* xix; original emphasis). All Indigenous women writers discussed in this dissertation explore the theme of relationship in multiple ways. Some of them, like Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine, focus on the exploration of

the self and deal with questions of identity. According to Indigenous feminist Joyce Green (of English, Ktunaxa, and Cree-Scots descent), “[i]dentity, recognition of identity and access to rights attached to Indigenous identity are central matters for Indigenous feminists” (“Taking More Account” 7), just as they are for Indigenous women writers in Quebec. Other Indigenous women writers in Quebec, such as Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine, focus on the relationship to their community, while again others, such as Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine, stress their relationship to the land. Skawennati’s *TimeTraveller*TM, on the other hand, is a poignant example of Indigenous women artists exploring their connection with their histories and futures.

Starblanket defines the Indigenous “resurgence movement as fundamentally relational in nature,” meaning that it “is ultimately grounded in our interconnectedness with creation” (28). Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine revitalize their connections to creation, as I argue, by emphasizing their own creative and transformative power as Innushkueu (meaning Innu/Indigenous woman).² For many Indigenous women, their creation story tells them a lot about their place in society, their roles, and their responsibilities. Female-centred creation stories, like the story of Sky Woman or “la femme qui tombe du ciel” (Kanapé Fontaine, *Manifeste Assi* 79), remind Indigenous women of their transformative power as creators of the world, and they encourage Indigenous women to reclaim their powerful places in Indigenous and settler societies. In the second edition of *Iskwewak: Kah’ Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak, Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws* (2016), Nêhiyaw-Métis-Nahkawè scholar-activist Janice Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe introduces the Anishinaabe word “*Manitoukwe*,” which acknowledges “the enduring signifying relational power of women” and acts “as a signifier of Indigenous women’s

² Like the Innu poets Maya Cousineau Mollen and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, I decided to capitalize “Innushkueu” because I also capitalize “Innu,” which appears in Innushkueu. Moreover, this dissertation is realized in a bilingual program and includes both the English and French language. I therefore decided to italicize neither expressions in the French language nor in Indigenous languages to be coherent and to normalize their use.

creative powers” (49; original emphasis). Acoose contends that “some Indigenous languages and ceremonies refer to women as Creators [whereas] scholarly attention to such ways of thinking is sorely lacking” (*Iskwewak* 2016, 49). In my work, I trace Innu women’s poetic transformation into Innushkueu in the works of Cousineau Mollen, Kanapé Fontaine, and Nolin, and I explore Indigenous women’s resurgent power in terms of social, political and environmental activism. This dissertation is therefore meant to be a much-needed corrective to the “serious lack of scholarship about Indigenous women’s creative power and relationality” (Carrière 63), especially in Indigenous literary studies in Quebec.

I also argue that literary self-representation is another key element of contemporary Indigenous women’s writing in Quebec. Drawing on Indigenous feminist theories and practices to analyze Indigenous female-centred narratives, Indigenous herstory “gives authority to Aboriginal women’s voices – voices that benefit all Aboriginal people, women and men, by contributing to positive social changes in Canada” (Olsen Harper 187). In light of Indigenous women’s past and ongoing marginalization, misrepresentation, and erasure in colonial discourses, storytelling allows them to craft counter-narratives that place them at the centre of stories. Settler scholar Elaine Coburn and Métis scholar Emma LaRocque contend that Indigenous women have “resisted their silencing and marginalization through advocacy, activism and in their scholarship” (114), and, as I argue, through literature and art. Indigenous women writers are therefore united through their “belief in the role that art can and must play – whether the role is one of healing, distortion, or contributing to an ideological shift” (L’Hirondelle Hill and McCall 6). Self-representation is an essential element of contemporary Indigenous women’s writing, and it allows Indigenous women to share how they see themselves, how they want to be seen, and how they see others. Rogers contends that “our words are literary territory on which we

stand to represent ourselves (individually and collectively),” and she foregrounds the need for Indigenous self-representation by saying that “we must tell our stories to offer an honest definition of who we are” (253).

Anishinaabe writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm expresses a similar idea of the significance of Indigenous women’s self-representation when she states that “[f]or many of us, writing, storytelling, performance, and multi-media art are forms of activism, are creative (and therefore positive and giving) ways both to maintain who we are and to protest against colonization,” and she adds that “we protest by dispelling lies and telling our own stories, our own histories, in our own ways, according to our own concepts of truth and beauty” (“We Belong” 89). In addition to the importance of Indigenous self-expression, Akiwenzie-Damm’s statement emphasizes how many Indigenous women writers adhere to Indigenous storytelling traditions and aesthetics. Anishinaabe futurist Grace Dillon reminds us that “we should not emphasize literary storytelling at the expense of film and new media” (“Indigenous Futurisms” 5), and I therefore consciously include an extended analysis of Skawennati’s new media projet *TimeTraveller*TM as well as a short analysis of Innu poet and film maker Réal Junior Leblanc’s short documentary “*Blocus 138 – la resistance innue / Blocus 138 – Innu Resistance*” (2012).

Indigenous women writers stress both their special connection with the land and their disconnection from the land. Green states that “[f]or Indigenous decolonization and for Indigenous feminism, the connection with and alienation from land remain major political factors” because “[c]olonialism and its successor settler states are predicated on the theft of and exploitation of Indigenous lands and the oppression of Indigenous peoples, justified by the racist myths that are still encoded in settler cultures” (“Taking More Account” 4). Starblanket points to the gendered dimension of Indigenous resurgence by emphasizing Indigenous women’s special

connection with the land, and she contends that “[o]ne of the primary ways that gender plays out in on-the-ground practices of resurgence is through the physical nature of the roles and responsibilities associated with living on, sustaining and caring for the land” (29). This land-based approach in Indigenous women’s writing is best articulated through an ethics of care in the work of Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine but can also be found in the work of other Indigenous women writers, such as Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine. Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine specifically deal with their roles and responsibilities towards the land in their works, and I follow the directive to “explore the power of language and writing” that Indigenous women use “to reclaim, refract, and decolonize” (L’Hirondelle Hill and McCall 6). Kanapé Fontaine and Mestokosho, for example, use their powerful voices to poetically reclaim the land as Innu/Indigenous land, and support their poetic claims with their engagement in real-world movements of environmental activism because contemporary Indigenous women’s writing “convey[s] political and aesthetic purpose simultaneously” (Dillon, “Indigenous Futurisms” 4).

Contemporary Indigenous women writers in Quebec “[add] to a collective memory, [and they all continue] a living story” (Deerchild 242) by sharing their stories. My work engages with writers, artists, scholars, activists, and Elders from different backgrounds and generations, to emphasize the richness of their stories, experiences, perspectives, and realities in order to demonstrate that there is no single Indigenous voice, but a myriad of different Indigenous voices and, as Coburn and LaRocque state, “[t]here is no one Indigenous feminist voice” (102).

Along with Coburn and LaRocque, I understand Indigenous women as “actors demonstrating resilience, that is, a capacity for survival against a genocidal context, and resistance, in other words, a determination to challenge colonial racism, patriarchy and heterosexism, as these are expressed institutionally, socially and through stereotypes” (102).

Throughout this dissertation, I seek to demonstrate that contemporary Indigenous women writers, whether they identify as Indigenous feminists or not, “are committed to resurgence, or the renewal of diverse Indigenous ways of knowing and being” (Coburn and LaRocque 102). In her essay “Practising Indigenous Feminism: Resistance to Imperialism” (2007), Māori-Scots scholar Makere Stewart-Harawira states: “As Indigenous women warriors, we are called to re-weave the fabric of being in the world into a new spiritually grounded and feminine-oriented political framework and process of ‘being together in the world’” (136). Stewart-Harawira’s statement asks us to question how contemporary Indigenous women writers in what we now call Quebec create this renewed pattern in and through their cultural productions. All Indigenous women artists and writers studied in this dissertation underline the forcefully imposed character of heteropatriarchal colonial systems - including colonial languages, syllabic writing, Christianity, patriarchal organization of society, Western forms of education, and capitalistic lifestyles - and they all turn to their own ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies to create powerful narratives that move beyond a critique of the status quo by envisioning decolonial alternatives and futures.

Indigenous feminist theories recognize that “[c]olonialism affects both Indigenous men and women, but not identically” (Green, “Taking More Account” 4) because “settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process” (Arvin et al. 9). Cree/Métis scholar Verna St. Denis argues that intersectionality in Indigenous contexts needs to be understood with the present-day political and social processes of colonialism: “Aboriginal people live for the most part in a western capitalistic and patriarchal context; it is that social, economic and political context that irrevocably shapes our lives, and denying this or minimizing these conditions will not change it” (47). Indigenous feminists therefore stress the importance of recognizing the

intersectional nature of settler colonialism. Listening to Indigenous women's voices and the revaluation of their lived experiences and their stories as forms of Indigenous knowledge is crucial to the ongoing project of decolonizing Turtle Island.

Coburn and LaRocque argue that "Indigenous women's activism has had a growing impact across lands claimed by Canada" and "this has been translated into Indigenous women's English-language scholarship, [which constitutes] now an impressive body of work" (114). The scholarly work produced by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Emma LaRocque, Lee Maracle, Janice Acoose, Kim Anderson, Margaret Kovach, Dian Million, and Audra Simpson, among others, is an example of Indigenous women who contribute to the growing corpus of Indigenous women's scholarship. Indigenous women are, and always have been, "innovators in the arts" (Gray 281), and they contribute to "a new paradigm beyond colonialism, including an Indigenous understanding of the power of words, both spoken and written" (Hubbard 142). Anishinaabe literary critic Kimberly Blaeser, for example, openly critiques how "[t]he insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization" (233). Moreover, it needs to be asked how patriarchal structures imposed by Western settler colonialism and upheld by Indigenous male leadership have contributed to marginalizing, silencing, or erasing explicitly Indigenous female voices. In "The Good Red Road" (1997), Mohawk feminist writer Beth Brant asks: "Why are [critics and reviewers] so ignorant of what is being written by my sisters? Why is a white-European standard still being held up as the criterion for all writing? Why is racism still so rampant in the arts?" (179). Blaeser and Brant are both part of a collective of "Indigenous critical theorists [who] agree that it is time to examine literature on its own terms" (Hubbard 142). Blaeser argues that forcefully imposed Western critical language and literary tradition "are used to explain, replace,

or block an Indigenous critical language and literary tradition” (233). Hubbard emphasizes that this “language of containment needs to be recognized by academics and readers who wish to assist in the process of decolonization, which means honouring Indigenous thought and processes” (141). A decolonizing approach places Indigenous methodologies, knowledges, and voices at the centre of the research framework to combat the persistent colonial influence on Indigenous representation and voice in academia. Honouring Indigenous intellectual sovereignty implies that it is now settler scholars’ responsibility “to listen to Indigenous critics, scholars, activists, and writers” (62), as settler scholar Marie Carrière states in *Cautiously Hopeful*. The main body of critical work used in this dissertation therefore encompasses Indigenous scholars, theorists, writers, activists, and Elders, prioritizing Indigenous women’s voices.

In this work I use the lens of Indigenous feminist theories to look at Indigenous women’s cultural productions in Quebec. In their seminal essay “Decolonizing Feminism” (2013), Indigenous feminists Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill define Indigenous feminist theories as “those theories that make substantial advances in understanding the connections between settler colonialism and both heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism” (11). Indigenous feminist theories acknowledge the importance of intersectional approaches and therefore “focus on compound issues of gender, sexuality, race, indigeneity, and nation” (Arvin et al. 11). I believe that it is imperative to avoid approaching these concepts in isolation and to recognize and analyze their convergence and often-complex relationships, as Lenape scholar Joanne Barker states: “there is the difficulty of the way *gender* is co-produced by *race*, *ethnicity*, *nationality*, *class*, and *sexuality* - not always in that order and in multiple kinds of relationships with each other” (506; original emphasis).

I agree with Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill that the phrasing “Indigenous feminist theories” is advantageous to the term “Indigenous feminism(s)” because it does not reduce significant contributions to those who identify as Indigenous, woman, and feminist, and it allows for a wider range of contributions to topics that concern Indigenous women in particular, and Indigenous Peoples at large. As such, the co-authors write in “Decolonizing Feminism”:

we prefer this phrasing over ‘Native feminist(s)’ or ‘Native feminism(s)’ because these are identity-derived labels, referring to those scholars and activists who identify as Native and Indigenous feminist women; indeed, these are the scholars who are theories as limited to the participation of those who are Indigenous, feminist, and/or women identified. (Arvin et al. 11)

Indigenous feminisms provide a theoretical and action-oriented space through which Indigenous women can work to reclaim and decolonize their selves, their bodies, their languages, cultures, relationships, and (hi-)stories. They are also the methodological focus of my work, which looks at a variety of perspectives and voices from the field.

One of these perspectives in particular is what Indigenous feminist Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) calls a “desire-based framework” (“Suspending Damage” 416) that focuses on Indigenous women’s self-representation and self-determination. Desire-oriented readings of Indigenous women’s writings recognize the resistance, resilience, and resurgence of Indigenous women, symbolized by the powerful image of the “femme debout” in Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine’s *Bleuets et abricots* (7) and in Innu poet Marie-Andrée Gill’s *Frayeur* (75). In contrast to “damage-centered narratives” (Tuck 415) or what Justice calls “stories of Indigenous deficiency” (*Why* 2), this approach avoids further victimization and positions Indigenous women as powerful “agent[s] of social change” (Gabriel qtd. in Anderson, “Interview” 52). In her essay

“Métis and Feminist” (2007), LaRocque points to the importance of offering a balanced image of Indigenous women:

Yet one feels compelled to offer a more positive portrait of the ways in which Aboriginal women live: as victims of colonization and patriarchy, yet as activists and agents in their lives; as oppressed, yet as fighters and survivors; and as among the most stereotyped, dehumanized and objectified of women, yet as the strong, gracious and determined women that they are. (53)

LaRocque’s statement evokes what Justice calls “good stories” in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*: “There are many stories about Indigenous peoples alive in the world today,” Justice contends, that “give shape, substance, and purpose to our existence and help us understand how to uphold our responsibilities to one another and the rest of creation, especially in places and times so deeply affected by colonial fragmentation” (2). Justice calls them “our good stories – not always happy, not always gentle, but good ones nonetheless, because they tell the truths of our presence in the world today, in past days, and in days to come” (*Why* 2). The “good stories” crafted by contemporary Indigenous women writers in Quebec are marked by self-representation and relationality.

I have intentionally centered and prioritized Indigenous women’s voices, experiences, and perspectives, and I understand Indigenous women’s diverse expressions and contributions, whether theoretical, political, cultural or artistic, as significant forms of Indigenous knowledge and, therefore, expressions of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. I engage primarily with Indigenous texts and theorists because historical and ongoing systemic oppression still affects Indigenous Peoples’ everyday lives, and I have attempted to ensure, as much as possible, that my

academic work is decolonial in nature by giving priority to Indigenous voices, and particularly those of Indigenous women.

Socio-Political Background: Indigenous Women in Canada and Quebec

In *Travelling Knowledges* (2005), German literary scholar Renate Eigenbrod argues that settler scholars working in the field of Indigenous literary studies must know about the (settler-) colonial context in which Indigenous literatures are produced:

Anyone attempting to understand Indigenous literatures must know about the history of colonization from a Native perspective; i.e., must know, for example, about treaties and assimilation policies like forcefully removing children to be put into foster homes and residential schools; about the Indian Act and its dehumanizing categories and legislations; and about events that became symbols of oppression *and* resistance like Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Oka. (61-62; original emphasis)

In response to Eigenbrod's insistence on learning about important historical, political, and social events as experienced and narrated by Indigenous people, I position myself as an individual who is cognizant of the fact that settler geo-political terms such as Quebec and Canada are "a violent imposition, a way of naming and claiming Indigenous lands by and for the colonizer" (Starblanket and Coburn 86). This recognition implies that settler colonialism was not a single event in the past, but actually constitutes a multi-layered process and a succession of different events and strategies that continue today, as Cree political science scholar Gina Starblanket and settler scholar Elaine Coburn stress in their essay "'This country has another story': Colonial Crisis, Treaty Relationships, and Indigenous Women's Futurities" (2020): "Colonialism, with its contradictory movements, is not reducible to any singular act or set of challenges" but has been

imposed in “contradictory colonial impulses of erasure, containment and appropriation” (89). An introduction to the socio-political background to Indigenous women in Canada is needed in order to recognize their ongoing experience of misogynistic, patriarchal settler colonialism, which constitutes the framework that influences and shapes contemporary Indigenous women writing in Canada and Quebec. It is also needed in order to understand how the settler-colonial nation-state sought and continues to disrupt lived concepts of community, kinship, and interdependence in Indigenous epistemologies through forced dislocation, dispossession, assimilation, and genocide. More importantly, however, it is needed in order to understand how contemporary Indigenous women seek to re-establish their connections with the self, community, and land through the transformative power of storytelling. Moreover, a profound knowledge of the settler-colonial framework in Canada, Indigenous resilience and continuous resistance against politics of erasure and assimilation, and movements of Indigenous resurgence is essential to understand the themes and references that Indigenous women writers embed in their creative works.

In “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” (2012), Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that land was and is the most important concern in Canada’s settler colonial project (5). The presence of Indigenous Peoples, however, conflicted with the *terra nullius* of the European imagination. In order to appropriate Indigenous land for settlement and capitalist resource extraction, the settler colonial nation-state needed to remove Indigenous Peoples from the land and introduced a politics of forced assimilation and erasure. The assimilation policies that were introduced in order to accomplish the goal of erasure continue to affect and concern all Indigenous people in Canada, but Indigenous women are especially affected by assimilative strategies because they represent one of the most marginalized groups in Canadian society. In fact, the ongoing misogynistic colonial system in Canada, which discriminates against particular groups of people

on a basis of race and gender, double marginalizes Indigenous women because they are Indigenous *and* female. If “through contact with missionaries and other colonizers, First Nations people were introduced not only to new beliefs, but also to a dramatically different canon of acceptable social and religious behaviour, particularly as it related to women” (Wesley-Esquimaux, “Trauma” 18), a patriarchal European system of governance has been imposed on Indigenous societies since the mid 19th century in order to destroy and disrupt existing socio-political and economic entities that have been based on matrilineal and/or matrilineal structures and that have practiced forms of gender equity. The imposed 1851 paternal succession of the Indian Status and the 1876 adopted *Indian Act* resulted in the compulsory “emancipation” of Indigenous women who were forcefully expelled from their communities after having lost their Indian Status due to marriage with a non-Indian man (whether non-Indigenous or non-status) (Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), “Aboriginal Women 14). The so-called marrying out rule only changed in 1985, when Bill C-31 passed into law in order to address gender equality promoted by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (NWAC, “Aboriginal Women” 14; “Bill C-31”). Indigenous women who had lost their Indian Status, their right to live on the reserve, their entitlement to inheritance on reserve land, and access to social and cultural services (Jamieson 1) forced the Canadian government to adopt this amendment by bringing their cases to the Supreme Court of Canada and the United Nations Human Rights Committee in the 1970s and 1980s. Kanien’kehá:ka Elder and human/women’s rights activist Mary Two-Axe Earley, from Kahnawà:ke in Quebec, played a crucial role in building up an Indigenous women’s movement that challenged Canadian laws discriminating against Indigenous women (Robinson), and she is known as the first Indigenous woman who regained her Indian Status.

Although Bill C-31 allowed Indigenous women and their children to regain their Indian Status, gender-based discrimination in the legal system continues to affect younger generations of Indigenous women who cannot pass on their Indian Status in the same way as Indigenous men (Ottawa 121). The intergenerational impact of this gender-discriminatory and oppressive set of laws continues to have serious material, cultural, and psychological consequences for the children of these forcefully disenfranchised women (Jamieson 1). With the *Indian Act* as the legislative foundation of defining legal status and identity in Canada, systemic discrimination toward Indigenous women is still an ongoing practice.

Settler politics of erasure resulted in the creation of Indian Residential Schools (1876-1996), territorial dispossession (the eleven Numbered Treaties, 1871-1921), and the accumulation of prohibitions on several levels, including the practice of certain traditional rituals and ceremonies such as the Sun Dance and potlatch, the prohibition of assembly, and the enfranchisement of Indian Status if the individual was judged sufficiently westernized, meaning civilized and educated (Ottawa 32). Assimilative acts that were often promoted under the guise of a civilizing mission heavily affected Indigenous cultures, bodies, and lands. By forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families and by placing them in residential schools, the federal government sought to geographically and culturally isolate them from their communities and to disconnect them from their historical, social, legal, and cultural practices on their traditional territory. The church-run schools imposed a new European language (English or French), religion, belief and value system and thus a completely different culture that has influenced, contradicted, and finally disrupted the children's Indigenous identity. According to Atikamekw historian Gilles Ottawa, "the impacts on First Nations have been immense on all levels, psychic, physical, linguistic, and cultural" (12; my translation). Moreover, institutional

and interpersonal power is used to regulate human bodies that are marked as inferior. It is well documented, in written and visual documents as well as by oral testimony of survivors, that Indigenous children in residential schools were given numbers and renamed, that their appearance was altered, forcibly shaving their hair and dressing them in European-style clothes, and that they were often psychologically, physically, and sexually abused.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded in its final report that the Indian Residential School system, as an essential element of Canada's Aboriginal policy, was "cultural genocide," defined as "the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group" (1). Despite the gradual disappearance of Indian Residential Schools since the 1960s and the closure of the last school in Saskatchewan in 1996, assimilative and genocidal practices continue to exist in other forms. The Aboriginal child welfare system, for example, furthers the separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities as well as their disconnection from their native languages, cultures, and territories. The "Sixties Scoop" describes the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families and their placement into either institutionalized care or foster care (in the latter case essentially middle-class Euro-Canadian families) (Hanson). The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in state care shows that the removal of children is an ongoing practice that has deep impacts on Indigenous societies, the intergenerational relationships in families, and the well-being of whole communities. By the same token, the disproportionately high number of Indigenous individuals in both the Canadian prison system and the sex industry illustrates that the Indigenous body is a powerful symbol of subordination and oppression.

With the violent colonial history of Canada and the background of ongoing identity and body politics in mind, it is not surprising that Indigenous women in Canada are almost three

times more likely to experience violence than non-Aboriginal women (Brennan 19). While multiple Indigenous women's organizations in Canada and Quebec, international human rights bodies, socio-political movements and online campaigns have openly addressed violence towards Indigenous women for decades, it was the Val-d'Or crisis of 2015 that finally led to a national commission on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2016-2018).³ The national inquiry elevates violence against Indigenous women from a uniquely personal to a political level. According to a report by Statistics Canada, Indigenous women represent about 4% of the population in Canada, but at least 8% of the women murdered between 2001 and 2011 identified as Indigenous (Sinha 10). Given the disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women across the country, it is appropriate to call these cases acts of femicide, highlighting the double marginality of Indigenous women. Widia Larivière, Anishinaabe feminist and activist for Indigenous women rights, writes in her foreword to French journalist Emmanuelle Walter's *Sœurs volées: Enquête sur un féminicide au Canada* (2014):

Ce qui se passe au Canada est une tragédie nationale qui s'inscrit dans les impacts encore actuels de l'héritage colonial, et s'apparente à un féminicide. [...] Le racisme, l'indifférence des médias et l'apathie politique font en sorte que la disparition d'une femme autochtone émeut moins la majorité que celle d'une femme blanche. (10-11; original emphasis)

Systemic exclusion, institutionalized violence, racial and gendered discrimination, objectification, (hyper-)sexualization, and commodification as well as the legacy of abuse in

³ To name only a few reports and calls to action: Native Women's Association of Canada: project *Sisters in Spirit* (2005-2010) and their "Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls" (2010); Quebec Native Women: "*Debout et solidaires: Femmes autochtones disparues ou assassinées au Québec*" (2015); Amnesty International: "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada" (2004); the United Nations: "*Les femmes autochtones et la violence*" (2008); Idle No More (2012), #Am I Next (2014), and #Do I Matter Now? (2015).

residential schools and the resulting intergenerational trauma (responses) in communities are all factors that contribute to the systemic violence towards Indigenous women. It is urgent to deal with these issues because the vicious circle of discrimination, oppression, violence, and disappearance has strong intergenerational impacts on future generations, as, for example, the poetry of Innu poet Maya Cousineau Mollen illustrates.

Policies of assimilation have heavily influenced the socio-political organizations of Indigenous nations in Canada. In particular, such policies discriminate against Indigenous women and exclude them from the political sphere and official decision-making. While 2016 marked the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in political elections in Canada, Indigenous women across Canada were excluded from voting in federal elections until 1960, and Indigenous women in Quebec from voting in provincial elections until 1969. Nevertheless, Indigenous women have maintained their power and agency despite these attempts at controlling their voices. As Chippewa scholar Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux states: "For generations, First Nations women's voices were silenced in historical narratives that sidestepped their influence and power. Today, First Nations women are increasingly using their voice to reclaim lost stories and narratives" ("Trauma" 20).

Indigenous female leadership and political power have always been a reality in Indigenous societies on Turtle Island. Yaqui scholar Rebecca Tsosie defines Indigenous women's leadership as "an ethics of survival, of connection to the past generations, of responsiveness to the needs of this and future generations" (29). The ongoing and important work of female leaders and activists is illustrated by their engagement in communities and in associations run by and for Indigenous women such as Quebec Native Women (QNW; 1974) and the Native Women's Association of Canada (1971). These provincial and national organisations have been essential for Indigenous

women as they have represented “their only chance to be heard” (NWAC, “Aboriginal Women” 15) on a political level. However, Indigenous feminist struggles, such as struggles for gender equity, were contested by “malestream Indigenous organizations,” such as the Indian Brotherhood, because they feared that Indigenous feminist reclamations would weaken collective issues of self-government and Indigenous sovereignty, as noted by Starblanket: “Malestream Indigenous organizations blocked Indigenous women from having their own representation during constitutional talks, concerned that it would erode their political power and complicate their political agenda” (22).

Strong female leadership can also be seen in socio-political and environmental activism, such as the numerous protests against pipelines, mines, and treaty violations, but most clearly in the Idle No More movement that began in 2012. Idle No More is a pan-Canadian grassroots movement initiated by one non-Indigenous and three Indigenous women in Saskatchewan in protest against the Conservative omnibus Bill C-45 (officially the *Jobs and Growth Act, 2012*), which proposed, amongst other things, amendments to the *Indian Act* in terms of modifications to voting and approval procedures in the communities, and the removal of environmental protections from resource development as laid down in the *Navigable Waters Protection Act* (1882). The Idle No More movement, which “calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water” (“Idle No More”), attracted international attention when Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence undertook a hunger strike in front of Parliament Hill in Ottawa to create awareness for the precarious situation in Indigenous communities, which are often poverty-stricken and marked by high rates of suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, (domestic) violence, sexual abuse, unemployment, housing problems, lack of health facilities and clean drinking water.

The Quebec section of Idle No More is co-initiated by two Indigenous women activists, Widia Larivière (Anishinaabe) and Melissa Mollen Dupuis (Innu), and strongly promoted by Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine. The roots of the Idle No More movement in Quebec can be seen in Mohawk activism during the Oka resistance in 1990, in Mi'kmaq resistance against the Quebec Provincial Police, imposing measures for fishing restrictions on the Restigouche Reserve (1981; now called Listuguj), or even much earlier in the Cree resistance against the James Bay Project (1972-73). It is, however, mainly through media coverage in times of crises as well as (self-)representation in social media that Indigenous women's issues become visible to the larger Canadian public. Social media have significantly facilitated the spreading of Idle No More across Canada and activated particularly young people to engage in its actions. According to Larivière, Idle No More has stimulated the emergence of an Indigenous militant feminism in Quebec that foregrounds Indigenous female identity affirmation and thus speaks particularly to young women.⁴ Moreover, research projects like *Kaianishkat* (an Innu term meaning “from generation to generation”), funded by Quebec Native Women in order to valorize research done by and for Indigenous women, who are today often more educated than their male counterparts, are essential for disseminating Indigenous female perspectives and their knowledge. Besides academic research and socio-political activism, artistic productions offer a platform to address Canada's colonial history, to unveil the ongoing racism and discrimination towards Indigenous people and especially Indigenous women, to engage in contemporary Indigenous realities, to

⁴ Presentation given by Widia Larivière on 25 August 2016 during the 12th edition of Université nomade “Aboriginal Women: From Systemic Exclusion to Social Innovation,” organized by the *Réseau de recherche et de connaissances relatives aux peuples autochtones (DIALOG)*. My translation and transcription of Larivière's words based on personal notes.

produce new knowledge based on female perspectives, and to envision decolonization and sovereignty through cultural empowerment.

Positionality and Ethics

This dissertation involves a comparative study of contemporary Indigenous women's literatures in Quebec in conjunction with Indigenous feminist and decolonizing theories. As a privileged, white, and female emergent settler scholar who grew up in Northern Germany, I must accept the fact that I will read and analyze Indigenous literary works from an outsider perspective and, consequently, that I will understand these texts in a different way than most Indigenous people understand them. In accordance with concepts of positionality, such as developed by Margaret Kovach in *Indigenous Methodologies* (2009) and by Renate Eigenbrod in *Travelling Knowledges* (2005), my project will not attempt a normative reading of Indigenous women's writing in Quebec. However, I understand my role as a non-Indigenous settler scholar "as a facilitator for the discussion of [Indigenous] literatures" who comes from "a positionality of non-authority" (Eigenbrod 8, 143).

I propose readings and interpretations that will be influenced by my own cultural upbringing, background, and contemporary reality. This does not mean, though, that I want to centre my own voice, speaking from a position of privilege. I know that my work can successfully contribute to the dissemination and recognition of Indigenous literatures from Quebec, and can expand on the critical debate around alliance, decolonization, and literary criticism that incorporates Indigenous methodologies and ethical practice. Besides Kovach's and Eigenbrod's theorizations of positionality, settler literary scholar Sam McKegney's work on ethical engagement and Anishinaabe literary scholar Niigaanwewidam Sinclair's proposed ten

points of a responsible and ethical engagement with Indigenous literatures have provided me with a useful framework of how to ethically approach and engage with these literatures in order to produce new ways of thinking about Indigenous women's writing in Quebec and to fill the gap that exists in this particular field.⁵

Centering Indigenous feminist theories in this dissertation involves critical reflection on ongoing settler colonialism in Quebec, Canada, and North America. As a temporary settler on the traditional territory of the W8banaki Confederacy, I am complicit in upholding settler colonialism and the dispossession and oppression of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Despite the unnegotiable fact that I am profiting from the settler colonial context (as well as from being white), my work includes a critique of settler colonialism and attempts to offer, through the analysis of Indigenous women's writing in Quebec, avenues of radical transformation. Moreover, as a visitor to the territory where I currently live and work, I see it as my responsibility to learn about this place, its histories, its peoples, and the continuing effects of settler colonialism - and the process will be part of this work because I understand Indigenous women's writing as a valuable teaching tool, and Indigenous writers' and scholars' intellectual, political, and cultural contributions are thus rich and diverse sources of knowledge. Moreover, my focus on Indigenous women's voices as methodology allows me to "denaturalize power within settler societies and ground knowledge production in decolonization" (Morgensen 805). Self-identifying as a white scholar teaching critical race, Indigenous, and settler-colonial studies, Scott Lauria Morgensen underlines that non-Indigenous academics play a vital role in decolonizing the academy by turning to Indigenous methodologies: "an act that also implicates non-Indigenous people in

⁵ See McKegney's "Strategies for Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures" (2008) and Sinclair's "Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures" in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, co-edited by Deanna Reder and Linda Morra (2016).

challenging the settler academy” (805). More precisely, Morgensen states: “Indigenous methodologies in fact disturb the metaphysics of colonial rule, not only in the academy, and model a way of life that draws Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in interrelationship to work for decolonization” (806).

Ethically and respectfully engaging with Indigenous women’s writing means, to me, to carefully listen to their voices and stories. Moreover, this process of listening involves “unlearning those stories that have affirmed our belonging and normalized colonial relations of power” and “enter[ing] into a relation” with Indigenous writers, thinkers, and scholars by prioritizing their creative and critical work (Hargreaves and Jefferess 17). Hargreaves and Jefferess contend that an ethical engagement with Indigenous literatures “entails taking our analytical cues from the work of Indigenous scholars, artists, and activists, while not appropriating this knowledge as our own” (17). Their approach evokes Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s concept of “thinking in formation” or “thinking with” Indigenous scholars and writers (*As* 32, 37), a concept that recognizes the work of others. I use this concept as an analytical strategy to engage with contemporary Indigenous women’s writing in Quebec in conversation with Indigenous feminist and decolonizing theories. Green contends that “[t]here is an urgent need for the consistent application of the analyses and tools provided by Indigenous feminism” because “sexism, misogyny and racism continue to afflict Indigenous women” (“Taking More Account” 3). Indigenous women’s writing in Quebec challenges

the unthinking racism that has enabled some to fail to see Indigenous women in their full historical and contemporary contexts: as simultaneously Indigenous and female, and as contemporary persons living in the context of colonial oppression by the occupying state and populations of, for example, Canada, the U.S., Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia,

with their racist mythologies, institutions and practices” (Green, “Taking More Account”
2)

I hope that my own work challenges the ongoing colonial oppression of Indigenous voices and elevates, through decolonizing critical interpretations, our understanding of the work of Quebecois Indigenous creators and their vital importance to the future of Turtle Island.

In Chapter 1 “Unwriting History and Future Imaginaries,” I look at Kanien’kehá:ka artist Skawennati’s digital art project *TimeTraveller*TM, a science-fiction project that uses machinima⁶ to re-image historical key events and to imag(in)e future events. In “Imagining Indigenous Futurisms,” the introduction to the first anthology of Indigenous sf, *Walking the Clouds* (2012), Anishinaabe editor Grace Dillon asks: “Does sf have the capacity to envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes, and dreams recovered by rethinking the past in a new framework?” (2). This chapter seeks to answer this significant question by exploring two episodes of Skawennati’s machinima project *TimeTraveller*TM. Episode 3 re-images a historical key event in Quebec, the so-called Oka Crisis in 1990, and episode 4 imag(in)es a future event, the Intergalactic Pow Wow in 2112. This chapter deals with questions of representation and focuses on Skawennati’s representation of Indigenous women in her science-fiction project. Indigenous self-representation constitutes an important counter-narrative to misrepresentation in colonial discourses and a corrective to the erasure of Indigenous Peoples from historical and cultural narratives. Skawennati’s artistic approach to Indigenous self-representation involves the past, present, and future, and her remaking of history thus involves both Indigenous autohistory and autofuturity. In this chapter, I argue that Skawennati’s main objective is to empower Indigenous women, and, more generally, Indigenous Peoples by sharing and celebrating decolonial alternatives of the

⁶ A machinima is a movie created in the virtual environment of a video game.

past, present, and future. *TimeTraveller*TM serves as a means of Indigenous survivance and sovereignty, rather than as a simple means of resistance. Through artistic expressions of Indigenous empowerment and resurgence, Skawennati's work is a contemporary representation of Indigenous Peoples, but it is also a performance of Indigenous sovereignty.

In Chapter 2 "Indigenous Herstory: Becoming Innushkueu through Writing," I explore contemporary Innu women's poetry as expressions of Indigenous herstory. More specifically, I analyze selected poems from Maya Cousineau Mollen's debut collection *Bréviaire du matricule 082* (2019; *BM082*), from Manon Nolin's collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* (2016; *MPAN*), and from Kanapé Fontaine's third poetry collection *Bleuets et abricots* (2018; *BA*). This chapter argues that Innu women writers use what I refer to as "Indigenous herstory" to lyrically transcribe their transformation into "Innushkueu," meaning Innu or Indigenous woman. Indigenous herstory are female-centred narratives that follow empowering desire-based approaches while, simultaneously, critiquing patriarchal settler colonialism and giving room to felt and lived experiences of vulnerability, rupture, or loss. More specifically, Indigenous herstory provides writers with a conceptual space where they can explore what it means to be and live as an Innu/Indigenous woman in Quebec's contemporary dominant settler society. This implies critiquing patriarchal settler colonialism as a central force of rupture and restorying patriarchal settler narratives from their particular standpoint as Innu/Indigenous women. This chapter underlines the transformative power of Indigenous women and the narrative power of stories when it traces Innu women's poetic transformation into Innushkueu.

Chapter 3 "Autobiographical Narratives: Expressions of Indigenous Resurgence" deals with Innu women's autobiographical narratives, notably An Antane Kapeshe's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976; *JSMS*) and Naomi Fontaine's

Kuessipan: à toi (2011). This chapter emphasizes again the transformative power of Indigenous women and stories and explores autobiographically-based narratives as expressions of Indigenous resurgence. Indigenous autobiography is understood as the continued practice of Indigenous intellectual traditions, which is exemplified by the reading of Antane Kapeshe's and Fontaine's narratives as *tipatshimuns*: Innu traditionally oral stories testifying to the storyteller's lived experiences. This chapter argues that Innu women's autobiographical narratives constitute expressions of resurgence, which I understand as a movement of transformation that is deeply anchored in Innu worldview and seeks to revitalize Innu traditional ways to ensure an Indigenous future on Turtle Island. Innu/Indigenous resurgence acknowledges living relationships, especially with and among Indigenous people, with the past and future, and with the land. As a relational practice, Indigenous resurgence is essentially informed by an ethics of care for the collective, as expressed in the work of Innu writers An Antane Kapeshe and Naomi Fontaine.

Chapter 4 "Land-Based Poetic Activism" examines again Innu women's poetry, namely Rita Mestokosho's collections *How I See Life, Grandmother / Eshi uapataman nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère* (2011; *CJPVG*) and *Née de la pluie et de la terre* (2014; *NPT*) and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's collections *Manifeste Assi* (2014; *MA*) and *Bleuets et abricots* (2016; *BA*). This chapter argues that Innu women's environmental activism and their production of poetry merge into what can be called "land-based poetic activism," that is, activist poetry that voices opposition to environmental exploitation and is thus instrumentalized in a political manner to protect Indigenous land and Rights. Moreover, land-based poetic activism is understood as a strategy to sensitize a wide audience to environmental exploitation, destruction, and injustice; issues that are inseparably interwoven with Indigenous Rights and questions of

social justice. For this reason, the larger goal of land-based poetic activism is to support real-world activist movements of ecological protection, social justice, and Indigenous sovereignty.

A Note on Terminology⁷

Language is not neutral, and this implies that the words we use to talk about Indigenous Peoples are not neutral either. In contrast, the naming of Indigenous Peoples has been a key tactic used in the historical and ongoing process of colonization. In *Indigenous Relations: Insights, Tips & Suggestions to Make Reconciliation a Reality* (2019), Bob Joseph contends that “[l]anguage has the power to respect and honour or hurt and offend. And that is particularly true when you are working across cultures” (161). As an emergent settler scholar working in the field of Indigenous literary studies, I am working across cultures, and I therefore have needed to pay particular attention to the terminology that I use throughout this dissertation. It is not always easy to choose the correct term because “the process of decolonizing language surrounding Indigenous Peoples is not finished: terms, names, and styles continue to evolve” (Younging, 50). Similarly, Métis writer Chelsea Vowel stresses in *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada* (2016) that among Indigenous Peoples “there is no across-the-board agreement on a term” because “[n]ames are linked to identity, and notions of identity are fluid” (8). Throughout this dissertation, I use the umbrella term “Indigenous Peoples” to collectively refer to “the distinct societies of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples” living in what is now called Canada (Younging, 65).⁸ In his seminal book *Elements of Indigenous Style: A*

⁷ See Chelsea Vowel’s *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada* (2016; especially Part 1: The Terminology of Relationships, pp. 5-22), and Gregory Younging’s *Elements of Indigenous Style* (2018; especially Chapter 6: Terminology, pp. 50-73, and Chapter 7: Capitalization, pp. 71-81) for a comprehensive discussion on terminology for both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people.

⁸ Kanien’kehá:ka anthropologist Audra Simpson understands “Indigenous” as “the broad language that captures the category of precontact peoples residing and claiming their ancestral territories postsettlement” (202n11). Note that I use the discriminative and pejorative term “Indian” only in reference to Indigenous legislation, that is, the *Indian*

Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples (2018), Cree editor Gregory Younging emphasizes that the plural and capitalized form of the term “recognizes the cultural integrity and diversity of Indigenous Peoples” whereas “*Indigenous people* refers to people who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis in a context where their specific identity is not at issue” (65; original emphasis). Although my dissertation focuses on First Nations women writers, and more specifically on Kanien’kehá:ka and Innu artists and writers, I often prefer the term “Indigenous” as a way to include all those women and genderful people who self-identify as Indigenous (regardless of their status) and whose experiences might be similar to those of the women discussed in this dissertation.⁹ As Younging proposes, I, too, attempt “to make informed, mindful choices about terminology” and I therefore take direction from the Indigenous (women) writers and scholars who are at the centre of this dissertation (50). As a conscious editorial choice, there are instances where I combine a specific and a general term, for example “Innu/Indigenous women,” to illustrate that some experiences apply to a specific group while also being a more common experience that many Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island share.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Quebec are extremely diverse. In Quebec alone, there are eleven distinct nations and fifty-five communities. “Colonialism destroyed the diversity of Indigenous peoples by regulating and producing state-approved Indigenous identity for the purpose of usurping their territories and resources” (195), Métis writer Diedre Desmarais contends in her contribution to the second edition of the anthology *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2017), and it is through identifying and naming individual Indigenous women writers, scholars, and activists as Kanien’kehá:ka, Innu/Innu, Abenaki, Métis, Mi’kmaq, and so on, that I

Act, or in direct quotations. As contested collective terms, I use “Native” and “Aboriginal” only in direct quotations to ensure the reference’s integrity.

⁹ Cree scholar Tracy Bear uses the term “genderful” to refer to the spectrum of gender as opposed to the ideology of the male-female gender binary (viii).

“seek to recall the ongoing cultural diversity among Indigenous peoples on lands Canada now claims” (Coburn and LaRocque 104). Sometimes the names of Indigenous groups commonly used are not the same as the names that people use to refer to themselves, and I respect these names by using Indigenous names as much as possible. For example, Mohawk people refer to themselves as Kanien’kehá:ka, and I usually prioritize the Indigenous self-identification as Kanien’kehá:ka instead of using Mohawk. Using Indigenous names is a decolonizing act and reminds us of the imposed nature of many of the terms that are still in use. According to Younging, Indigenous Peoples started the ongoing process of reclaiming, revalorizing, and reestablishing Indigenous names already four decades ago:

In the later colonial period in Canada, as generations of Indigenous children were introduced to English and systematically denied access to their languages through the residential school system, most Indigenous Peoples acquiesced to the terminology that had become established in English. This general trend, however, began to reverse in the early 1980s, when many Indigenous Peoples began to reestablish their original names.

(70)

As language and culture are constantly evolving and changing, the terms that I use in this dissertation, and especially the umbrella term “Indigenous Peoples,” might be contested in the future, as Vowel observes: “What was a good term 20 years ago might be inappropriate now, or it has been worn out through constant repetition” (8). At this point, however, “Indigenous Peoples” seems to be the most appropriate term.

I agree with the many Indigenous writers and scholars who argue that it is paramount to capitalize the various terms used to identify Indigenous Peoples (Vowel 9). Justice, for example, contends in his seminal book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018) that the capitalization of

“Indigenous” is important because “it affirms a distinctive political status of peoplehood” and “affirms the status of a subject with agency” (6). Innu poet Maya Cousineau Mollen understands the capitalized form of Indigenous names as a “marque d’affirmation culturelle” (*BM082* 8), and she therefore uses the capitalized form of “Innu” in French. I understand the capitalization of Indigenous names, whether in English or in French, as a sign of respect and an act of decolonizing language.

My use of “non-Indigenous” refers to those who are “not-Indigenous-to-this-place-called-Canada” (Vowel 10). I also use the term “settler,” which “acknowledges the historical and structural position of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands and the system of privilege and power they/we benefit from based on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples” (Couture-Grondin 1n2).

CHAPTER 1: UNWRITING HISTORY & FUTURE IMAGINARIES¹⁰

Talking about her own work as an internationally celebrated and yet unconventional documentary filmmaker, distinguished Abenaki artist Alanis Obomsawin explains the significance of history to her films: “history is crucial to me and to all of my work. In whatever I have done, in whatever I have made, I have always included history. History tells the story and educates. Otherwise how would we ever know how we have gotten to where we are now?” (qtd. in Loft, “Sovereignty” 64-65). Obomsawin’s statement leads to an important question that Canadian literary scholar Linda Hutcheon asks in her monograph *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989): “How do we know the past today?” (55). While Obomsawin’s words focus on the central role of history and its relation to the present and future, Hutcheon’s question reveals the problem of representing history: “we only have representations of the past from which to construct our narratives or explanations” (55). More specifically, she alludes to the danger of misrepresentation in recounted historical events, which we only know “[t]hrough its discourses, through its texts - that is, through the traces of its historical events; the archived materials, the documents, the narratives of witnesses... and historians” (Hutcheon 34). These representations of the past, as Hutcheon explains, are most often in the form of written documents (or material objects), overruling orality, which, from a Western perspective, seems more difficult to preserve and archive as opposed to written material. In “Who Is the Text in This Class?” (2016), Métis literary scholar Warren Cariou considers Indigenous traditions of oral storytelling (including the functions of memory and forgetting) and the role of the archive: “In an archive, a story becomes

¹⁰ This chapter is based on an earlier and much shorter version entitled “Skawennati’s *TimeTraveller*TM: Resistance and Resurgence in ‘Indigenous Autofuturity’” which has been accepted for publication in a collection co-edited by David Stirrup and Padraig Kirwan (Routledge series in *Transnational Indigenous Perspectives*; under peer-review). I thank Skawennati for her insights and her permission to publish some of her machinimagraphs that allow transferring her visual digital project on paper. Transcriptions are mine.

a specific, measurable thing in a way it may not have been in its oral incarnation,” and, he continues, “Stories become archivable only after they are written down or recorded, turned into material objects” (472). Cariou recognizes the danger of archives for oral stories “if it is the final resting place of a story” (475), and he urges the embodied continuance of Indigenous oral storytelling traditions, which may, however, require audio or video recording of the storytelling process to preserve, and thus archive, important stories for future generations.¹¹ Like Cariou, settler scholar Marc André Fortin reveals the potential danger of the archive in relation to Indigenous (mis-)representation when he concludes that anthropologist Marius Barbeau “could not write scientifically about an imaginary subject, [so] he created one instead – an archived Indigenous other, who once existed in time and space, and who could be found in the interpretation and ‘correcting’ of the stories he had recorded” (461) and then written down in his novel *The Downfall of Temlaham* (1928).

Syllabic writing is not a traditional feature of Indigenous cultures and was imposed upon them during the process of heteropatriarchal colonialization and Christianization. This implies that historical and cultural archives - and by extension the preserved narratives - are informed by the ideologies of their time and are thus biased.¹² It is therefore no accident that the

¹¹ Modern recording technologies paved the way for preserving and archiving oral (hi-)stories and knowledges. However, as Cariou warns, Indigenous oral stories in the archive are often devalued “solely as source material for archival documentation” once they are recorded, filmed, or transcribed (472). Today, many Indigenous people, like Nisga’a artist Jordan Abel, turn to archived documents and material objects to explore the preserved stories, to gain access to Indigenous Knowledge, to revitalize endangered languages, and to revive their ruptured cultures. In doing so, they refuse a “one-way process, from testimony to document to archive” and “find ways of animating those stories *as repertoire*, even if (and perhaps especially if) they have been stored in archives” (Cariou 475; original emphasis). See also Dallas Hunt’s article “Nikikiwân” (2016) for an example of how Indigenous scholars challenge “settler colonial archives through Indigenous oral history” (25). William T. Hagan’s article “Archival Captive - The American Indian” (1978) seems to be outdated, but it pinpoints the power of white (ethno-)historians and the resulting problem of Indigenous misrepresentation in colonial archives. Another problem with archived stories is, as has been discovered, that Indigenous Knowledge keepers sometimes purposely spread “false” information in their recordings in order to protect their sacred stories.

¹² Hutcheon confirms this view by stating that “[h]istoriography [...] is no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past” (61). However, Western cultures continue to prioritize written material because it traditionally connotes with “objectivity” (and therefore “truth”) whereas oral material connotes with “subjectivity”

representation of Indigenous Peoples in North America is biased, too. Most importantly, however, biased representations of Indigenous Peoples are not simply side-effects of settler colonialism, they are fundamental to its process and its moral and legal justification.

Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) artist Skawennati deals with one-sided historical narratives in her digital project *TimeTraveller*TM (*TT*) and beginning in the very first episode, she immediately critiques biased representations of Indigenous Peoples. At the same time, she encourages Indigenous self-representation and creates what Kanien'kehá:ka anthropologist Audra Simpson calls “resurgent histories” (107). Cree literary scholar Dallas Hunt argues that Indigenous histories “contest our erasure, assert our presence, and call upon an Indigenous archive of memories, including those held by elders and by the land itself, beyond what settler histories allow” (26). The main avatar of *TimeTraveller*TM, Hunter, argues from a similar position when he says: “If there is one thing every Indian knows, it is this: When it comes to history, always get a second opinion” (Skawennati, *TT*, E01, 04mm54ss).

As a result of biased historical narratives, the long history of the representation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, especially in literature and art, is characterized by various forms of colonial misrepresentation, including the partial or complete erasure of Indigenous Peoples from dominant narratives and cultural life. Both misrepresentation and erasure are tools that allow colonial society to consciously make invisible physically present Indigenous Peoples and

(and therefore “imagination”). In her seminal monograph *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith deconstructs the idea of history as an innocent discipline and of the historian as an objective organizer of facts: “This idea says that ‘facts’ speak for themselves and that the historian simply researches the facts and puts them together. Once all the known facts are assembled they tell their own story, without any need of a theoretical explanation or interpretation by the historian. This idea also conveys the sense that history is pure as a discipline, that is, it is not implicated with other disciplines” (32). Moreover, Smith criticizes how postmodern critiques of history erase Indigenous Peoples’ continued efforts to decolonize historical narratives: “For indigenous peoples, the critique of history is not unfamiliar, although it has now been claimed by postmodern theories. The idea of contested stories and multiple discourses about the past, by different communities, is closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary indigenous life” (34).

to silence their voices in order to maintain power over the historical and cultural narratives as they have been imagined, constructed, and then disseminated by colonizers and settlers for centuries now.¹³

As we cannot sidestep representation when we deal with the past, the present reality, and also the imagined future, it is, according to Hutcheon, crucial to “study how representation legitimizes and privileges certain kinds of knowledge - including certain kinds of historical knowledge” (51). From the 1950s onwards, the determined efforts of Indigenous individuals and collectives to counter their erasure and stereotypical misrepresentation and to highlight acts of self-representation and cultural re-appropriation have become visible all-over Turtle Island (North America). These efforts have evolved into Indigenous artistic practices, literary expressions, and criticism that have not only carved out a niche in academia, but that have also questioned, critiqued, and transformed hegemonic research, writing, and teaching practices. More specifically, Indigenous scholars and artists on Turtle Island have appropriated and continue to (re)claim former spaces of erasure and misrepresentation in historical, political, and cultural studies as well as in novels, poetry, films, and the arts, and in doing so, they “proclaim that Indigenous peoples exist, that the colonial project has been ultimately unsuccessful in erasing Indigenous existence” (Sium and Ritskes IV). On the other hand, Indigenous voices - and

¹³ Palestinian American academic, literary critic, and political activist Edward Said’s study on Orientalism, for example, illustrates how power over historical and cultural narratives is closely linked to power relations on different levels, such as politics and economics, with the goal to maintain the unequal relationships between peoples and cultures. The process of Othering, which Said describes in his influential scholarly work as the West’s construction of stereotypes that regard Eastern people and cultures homogeneously as inferior, backward, strange, exotic and passive, resembles, at least partially, the forcefully imposed unequal hierarchical power structures (based on dichotomies) between Indigenous Peoples and settler-colonial authorities in North America. A major difference between the Western construction of “the Orientals” and “North American Indians” lies in the categorization of Indigenous Peoples as a vanishing or disappearing race. For a detailed discussion of Othering in Postcolonial Studies, see Said, *Orientalism* (1978).

especially Indigenous women's voices - also "serve to highlight both [their] presence and absence" (hooks 127) from conventional historiography and literature.

In the context of Indigenous literatures, the concept of "remaking history" involves the act of un- and re-writing colonial history from an Indigenous perspective and offering alternative visions of historical events.¹⁴ It is possible to link this concept to Indigenous rewritings of history that have been published in Quebec since the 1970s. History books, political and historical essays, and life writing by Indigenous writers have since become a common space of historical, political, territorial, and cultural reclamation. Moreover, Indigenous autohistorians¹⁵ such as Georges Sioui (Wendat) and An Antane Kapeshe (Innu), to name only two major representatives, have also, in important ways, contributed to the representation of Indigenous Peoples in Quebec and how their histories and collective experiences in the context of settler colonialism are documented and officially presented. However, remaking history from Indigenous perspectives, as it is understood in this chapter, goes beyond the act of un- and re-writing historical events. A major difference between remaking history and Western historiography lies in the understanding of time, which is chronologically ordered and clearly separates the past from the present and the future. Most Indigenous societies, however, adhere to the idea of circular time, which proposes a

¹⁴ Unlike "alternate history" - the fictional genre in literature or film that imagines alternative outcomes of historical events - the Indigenous remaking of history that I discuss in this chapter depicts past events from a different perspective than that offered in master narratives, without, however, changing the outcomes and consequences of those events. The aim of this creative practice is not to imagine "colonialism-free history" or to re-imagine historical conflicts with Indigenous vanquishers. The main focus is placed on the change of perspective that, as I argue, serves as a tool for (settler) education. It is also important to add that Indigenous rewritings of history underline pre-colonial history, which generally constitutes only about a few pages in conventional historiography, where the emphasis is put on events starting with the arrival of the first European explorers in the 15th century and thus ignores thousands of years of Indigenous presence on Turtle Island.

Skawennati transfers this aim of not changing the outcomes of history into her *TimeTraveller*TM project, where, at the end of his virtual trip into the past in episode 3, Hunter explains the impossibility to alter important actions that happened in the past: "Somebody must have done the same thing when it really happened, or *TT* [the *TimeTraveller*TM edutainment system] wouldn't have let me" (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 07mm35ss).

¹⁵ "Autohistorian" is a neologism deriving from Sioui's concept of "autohistory," which he developed in his well-known book *Pour une autohistoire amérindienne* (1989). Translated in English as *For an Amerindian Autohistory* (1992) by Sheila Fishman.

holistic understanding of past, present, and future events. This understanding is clearly articulated by internationally acclaimed Métis/Cree director, writer, and lecturer Loretta Todd: “When native people say that the past is in the future, that the future is knowable, it is not some mystical rant, but is rather the result of planning and consideration. As well, it draws on an understanding of the interconnected nature of all life. Prophetic belief and skill aside, there is a relationship to time and space that is not restricted to the moment at hand” (186). A fundamental component of remaking history in and through Indigenous literatures and arts consists therefore in linking the past, present, and future and presenting them as an inseparable and interrelated whole. As such, the creative imagination of an Indigenous present and future is an integral part of remaking history and reflects Indigenous philosophies and cosmologies.

This chapter will examine two episodes of Kanien’kehá:ka artist Skawennati’s new media project *TimeTraveller*TM, which deals with re-imaging key moments in the history of pre- and post-conquest Turtle Island and imag(in)ing future events from a Mohawk perspective. At first sight, there is not necessarily a feminist or female-centred approach in this particular artwork; Skawennati even declares that “*TimeTraveller*TM is like imagining Indians on testosterone” (“Imagining” 04mm46ss).¹⁶ However, Indigenous women, their lives, experiences, perspectives, thoughts, and contributions occupy an important space in the work, and my analysis will look particularly at the representation of Indigenous women in this science-fiction project. That said, I chose the episodes 3 (Oka Crisis, 1990) and 4 (Intergalactic Pow Wow, 2112) to compare the remaking of a key event in Quebec history, experienced through the eyes of the main male avatar

¹⁶ In contrast, Skawennati’s first new media project, *Imagining Indians in the 25th Century* (2000), a web-based paper doll / time travel journal, narrates time travels from the perspective of Katsitsahawi Capozzo, a First Nations woman. Furthermore, it deals with famous historical Indigenous female figures, such as Kaia’tano:ron Kateri Tekahkwitha, Sacagawea, and Pocahontas, and also refers to successful contemporary women, such as Waneek Horn-Miller, a former water polo player and the first Mohawk woman from Canada to ever participate in the Olympic Games.

Hunter, and the imagination of a future event, experienced through the eyes of the second main avatar, Karahkwenhawi. Moreover, the analysis of episode 3 will help unmask the “centrality of Mohawk women” in protecting their nation and defending their territory (A. Simpson 148), a reality that mainstream media representations have mostly ignored with their biased depictions of male warriors. On the other hand, the analysis of episode 4, where references to the so-called Oka Crisis occur at the beginning of the work, but which is ultimately focused on celebrating an Indigenous future, will allow me to present a more complete image of Indigenous autofuturity. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate how Indigenous literatures move beyond what Hutcheon coined “postmodern historiographic metafiction” (14). Though similar to “the postmodern’s initial concern [which] is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact ‘cultural’; made by us, not given to us” (Hutcheon 2), Indigenous women writers underline the forcefully imposed character of heteropatriarchal colonial systems - including colonial languages, syllabic writing, Christianity, patriarchal organization of society, Western forms of education, and capitalistic lifestyles - and they return to their own ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies to create narratives that move beyond simply critiquing the status quo in order to envision decolonial alternatives.

Remaking History and Imagining Indigenous Autofuturity in Digital Media: Skawennati’s *TimeTraveller*TM

Erasure and misrepresentation have not only been “successful” colonial strategies in producing master narratives dealing with Canada’s past and present, but also in settler future imaginaries, especially in science fiction (sf), where, according to Jason Edward Lewis

(Cherokee, Hawaiian, Samoan), “Indigenous people rarely appear” (58). In her 2015 TEDx Montreal Women talk “Imagining the Next Seven Generations,” Skawennati testifies that “except for a couple of examples from *Star Trek*, I never saw any images of us in spaceships, or Onkwehonwe¹⁷ [Kanien’kehá:ka word for Indigenous people] robots, or even of us using computers” (01mm20ss). The absence of Indigenous people from futuristic visions of our world demonstrates the prevailing influence of the settler myth of the “Vanishing Indian,” referring to the settler belief that Indigenous people “were quickly disappearing in the face of disease, alcohol abuse and economic hardship” (Francis 15). “[I]mage-makers,” as Canadian historian and writer Daniel Francis calls European and North American artists, writers, and photographers who participated in constructing and maintaining this myth, “to a large extent created the Imaginary Indian which Whites have believed in since” (15). As Francis explains in his 1992 monograph of the same title, his concept of the “Imaginary Indian” refers to “the images of Native people that White Canadians manufactured, believed in, feared, despised, admired, taught their children” (5). Over time, this myth has transformed into imaginations of what Cherokee literary scholar Thomas King calls the “Dead Indian” (*Inconvenient Indian* 66) or, at least, into the settler ignorance of an Indigenous presence because Indigenous people are believed to “live on a reservation someplace far from here, wherever here is” (Warrior, *World* xxiii).¹⁸ As such, “expressions of [Indigenous] futurity, operating in resistance to those assumptions that consign

¹⁷ Mohawk political science scholar Taiaiake Alfred translates “Onkwehonwe” as “‘the original people,’ referring to the First Peoples of North America” (*Wasáse* 288).

¹⁸ King’s famous tripartite distinction between “Dead, Live, and Legal Indians” that he draws in his book *The Inconvenient Indian* (2012) plays with North America’s collective imaginary of Indigenous Peoples and underlines that “Dead Indians are dignified, noble, silent, suitably garbed. And dead. Live Indians are invisible, unruly, disappointing. And breathing. One is the reminder of a heroic but fictional past. The other is simply an unpleasant, contemporary surprise” (66). And he adds: “Legal Indians are those who are recognized as being Indians by the Canadian and U.S. governments. Government Indians, if you like. In Canada, Legal Indians are officially known as ‘Status Indians,’ Indians who are recognized with the federal government as Indians under the terms of the Indian Act” (68).

Native American peoples and lifeways to the past” are, according to Cherokee scholar Sean Kikummah Teuton, important counter-narratives to settler imaginaries (101).

Besides the problem of Indigenous absence from future imaginaries, the danger of misrepresentation, this time in online virtual worlds, becomes real when new media technologies “reproduce forms of social stigma encountered in everyday real life, as well as introducing new forms of stigma” (D. Fox Harrel qtd. in Lewis 62). Paraphrasing game designer Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe, Métis, Irish), Lewis specifies that “[r]epresentations of Indigenous characters in video games are rare, and, in the few instances where such characters appear, they are based on stereotypical caricatures flowing from deep ignorance about the past and present reality of Indigenous people” (64).¹⁹ As a result, “sf becomes complicit in the colonial gaze” (John Rieder qtd. in Dillon, “Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” 244n4) because it prioritizes these “stereotypical caricatures” that can be traced back to earlier visual representations of Indigenous Peoples, especially but not exclusively the famous pictures taken by American photographer and ethnologist Edward S. Curtis. Staging his subjects as “stoic Indians,” or what Chippewa cultural studies scholar Gail Guthrie Valaskakis condemns as “postcard Indians” (“Postcards”), Curtis’ nostalgic representation casts Indigenous Peoples in the past and perpetuates biased images that situate them exclusively as relics of the past.²⁰ As such, Curtis

¹⁹ *Native Representation in Video Games* (2011), directed by LaPensée, offers a short, but extensive overview of Indigenous representation in video games. Video games tend to produce hypersexualized representations of both masculine and feminine characters; a problem that Skawennati is very aware of and has been combatting with her visual and digital artwork. As Marianette Jaimes-Guerrero explains in her chapter “Savage Erotica Exotica: Media Imagery of Native Women in North America” (1999): “There is a strong connection between early literature that manifests a Native erotica exotica and later media and video imagery” (187).

²⁰ As non-Indigenous scholar Pamela McCallum states in her chapter “Painting the Archive” (2010), Curtis collected an “extraordinary archive of photographs” portraying Indigenous Peoples: “In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he travelled throughout the continent accumulating some forty thousand images of Amerindian peoples for his twenty-volume work, *The North American Indian*. Although Curtis conceived of his project as a strategy to preserve what he saw as a disappearing way of life, a common assumption of his time, it is amply evident to a viewer in the next century that his photographs pose their subjects in idealized stances that foreground a nostalgic construction of Native cultures. [...] Stoicism is the predominant emotional tone of the images” (245). Like the historical colonial archive in general, these visual representations place and keep Indigenous Peoples (often

contributes to what Québécois literary scholar Joëlle Papillon terms the “*archéologisation* des Autochtones” (“Imaginaires” §4; original emphasis); a colonial act that consciously places Indigenous Peoples in the past. As Wendat historian Georges Sioui explains: “First Nations philosophical views and spiritual culture are seen and represented by the dominant culture as vestiges of the past, with very little or no practical value for the ‘rapidly evolving modern world’” (*Histoires de Kanatha* 101). This one-sided representation is hurtful, Skawennati states in her 2015 talk, because it acts as a driving force in establishing and maintaining stereotypes and leaves no room for Indigenous people in the present and future. And if Indigenous people are depicted in the present or future, these representations continue to be biased. Nêhiyaw-Métis-Nahkawè scholar-activist Janice Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe warns, more specifically, about the severe consequences of stereotypic misrepresentation for Indigenous women: “Stereotypic images of Indian princesses, squaw drudges, suffering helpless victims, tawny temptresses, or loose squaws falsify our realities and suggest in a subliminal way that those stereotypic images are us. As a consequence, those images foster cultural attitudes that encourage sexual, physical, verbal, or psychological violence against Indian women” (49).²¹ Acoose makes an important connection between Indigenous women’s misrepresentation in historical and cultural narratives and the impact of those depictions on past, present, and future generations of Indigenous women who are at a significantly higher risk to experience different forms of violence than any other

misrepresented as one monolithic group) in the past and thus propagate the idea that their cultures are now dead or, at least, culturally assimilated. On the other hand, Valaskakis’s image of “postcard Indians” is a powerful visualization of the act of silencing Indigenous voices and erasing settler violence. It needs to be added that many Indigenous artists and writers, such as Jane Ash Poitras (Cree Chippewyan) and Jordan Abel, use and transform colonial archives to re-appropriate their histories and cultures, or in other words, to reclaim memory. More specifically, McCallum, in her analysis of Poitras’ visual art, argues that “[b]y appropriating photographs from the anthropological archive and resituating them within her own aesthetic practices, Poitras re-empowers Indigenous women” (247).

²¹ See also Gail Guthrie Valaskakis’s essay “Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians” (1999) and Jaimes-Guerrero’s “Savage Erotica Exotica” (1999) for analyses of Indigenous women’s misrepresentation.

group of women across Turtle Island. The fact sheet *Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, published by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), warns that "Aboriginal women 15 years and older are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Aboriginal women." And the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls emphasizes how stories shared by survivors and family members "demonstrate that racism, prejudice and oppressive systems are still affecting Indigenous peoples and are creating situations that increase the vulnerability of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people" (*Reclaiming*, vol. 2, 91).²² As such, there is "[a] direct relationship between racist/sexist stereotypes and violence," as Métis feminist scholar Emma LaRocque confirms, that "can be seen, for example, in the dehumanizing portrayal of Aboriginal women as 'squaws', which renders all Aboriginal female persons vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual violence" (*Violence* 73-74).

Like Skawennati, Lewis creates an important link between the absence of Indigenous people from settler future imaginaries and the impact of this narrative of Indigenous non-existence and invisibility on our contemporary real world:

Our absence from the future imaginaries of the settler culture should worry us. Absence implies non-existence, or, at the very least, non-importance. A people that are absent in the future need not be consulted in the present about how that future comes about. A culture that is assumed not to be important one hundred years from now can be discounted now, for what are the consequences? (58)

²² The report also specifies that "no First Nations community was spared from the years of assimilation policies, and the result is that Indigenous women and girls are almost guaranteed to be exposed to one form of violence or another in their lifetime" (*Reclaiming*, vol. 2, 96). And it continues: "From these [witnesses'] stories, we can see that Indigenous women and girls in Quebec are confronted with multiple forms of violence and trauma throughout their entire lives, episodically or on an ongoing basis. This violence often starts very early in life, sometimes in childhood. The violent episodes accumulate, overlap and intersect in the lives of Indigenous women and girls, to the point where violence is rarely experienced as an isolated incident" (*Reclaiming*, vol. 2, 97).

This political statement critiques the settler nation's continued ignorance of Indigenous presence in Turtle Island's past, present, and future, and urges Indigenous communities to use artistic expressions, and especially new media technologies, to imagine their presence in a self-determined future in order to change contemporary real-world conditions. Mohawk curator, writer, and media artist Steven Loft explains that "technology exists as shape shifter (not unlike the Trickster himself), neither inherently benign nor malevolent, but always acting and active, changing, transformative, giving effect to and affecting the world" ("Aboriginal Media Art" 94). Digital media technologies can thus be used for both misrepresentation of Indigenous people and Indigenous self-representation. In the same vein, Todd reflects on the impact of cyberspace on Indigenous Peoples in her 1996 article "Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace," written at a time when cyberspace was still a new, unexplored medium, and asks: "Will cyberspace enable people to communicate in ways that rupture the power relations of the colonizer and the colonized? Or is cyberspace a clever guise for neo-colonialism, where tyranny will find further domain?" (180). Despite the threat that the digital age can possibly pose for Indigenous people when new media resources are misused, they offer valuable tools for cultural preservation, transmission, and production, as well as an "unprecedented opportunity" (Lewis and Fragnito, "Aboriginal Territories" 29) for self-representation after centuries of perpetual misrepresentation and absence in Canada's colonial narratives. In other words, digital technology allows for the ability "to transform and overturn the colonial discourses often attached to indigenous imagery in ways that had not been possible in the past" (Sandoval and Latorre 94-95). As a result, Indigenous artists have embraced new media technologies to create "Aboriginally determined territories in cyberspace," an expression coined by digital media artists Jason Edward Lewis and Skawennati (Lewis and Fragnito, "Aboriginal Territories" 29). Indigenous artists appropriate cyberspace to

create safe and loving spaces of Indigenous presence, in which they use the virtual space to perform their imaginative representations of Indigenous resistance, resurgence, and sovereignty and to share their decolonial alternatives to the past, present, and future. By reimagining, transforming, and subverting the dominant narratives, by replacing the hegemonic historiography with a counter-narrative built on Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, and storytelling traditions, and by sharing of what LaPensée identifies as “Indigenously-determined” (“Indigenously-Determined Games” 20) visions of the future, Indigenous artists contribute to the empowerment of Indigenous nations on multiple levels.

In Quebec, Kanien’kehá:ka artist, occasional writer, and former independent curator Skawennati is one of the first Indigenous artists to have recognized the potential of new media technologies and cyberspace as tools for Indigenous empowerment. Skawennati employs “a variety of mediums, but mostly images and words” (Skawennati, “Imagining” 00mm57ss). These are two important elements in her digital art project *TimeTraveller*TM, which is only one of several projects where she explores the beneficial effects of new media technologies for Indigenous communities.²³ Many Western analyses of Indigenous artwork have overlooked the diverse manifestations of survivance and are stuck in a realm of limited thinking that positions Indigenous art uniquely as a simple response to colonial erasure and misrepresentation and, therefore, as solely works of resistance against past and ongoing colonial forces. However,

²³ In Ontario, Rebecca Belmore’s art is another great example of how Indigenous women artists explore new media and mediums while simultaneously adhering to Indigenous storytelling traditions. Like Skawennati, Belmore “has been at the forefront of artistic multimedia projects that combine the visual arts, film, video, and performance” (Gray 273) for a few decades now. Viviane Gray writes about this exceptional artist: “Rebecca Belmore’s unique artistic style and her portrayal of Native women have earned her an international reputation as a socially engaged artist with a focus on the realities of Native women. Rebecca pushes the boundaries of women’s art in various forms by representing social and economic injustice, environmental issues, as well as personal issues of identity, loss, and love” (273). Again very similar to Skawennati’s artistic approach, “Belmore displays a unique ability to combine the Aboriginal traditions of natural aesthetics, storytelling, song, and dance into contemporary forms of performance art, installations, multimedia, and visual arts” (Gray 273).

Indigenous digital projects exemplify the continued act of storytelling, by using oral stories that are adapted to contemporary realities and embedded into new media forms, but whose message remains the same: valorizing Indigenous knowledges and practising Indigenous cultures, as well as supporting the resurgence and sovereignty of Indigenous nations. Skawennati's main objective is to empower Indigenous Peoples by sharing and celebrating decolonial alternatives of the past, present, and future, as *TimeTraveller*TM essentially serves as a means of "creative expression and production" of Indigenous survivance (Lewis and Fragnito, "Aboriginal Territories" 31), rather than as a simple means of resistance or "creative rebellion" (Sium and Ritskes V). Through artistic expressions of Indigenous empowerment and resurgence, Skawennati's work is a contemporary representation of Indigenous Peoples, but it is also a performance of Indigenous sovereignty. This idea is supported by different concepts of Indigenous sovereignty, such as Seneca scholar Michelle Raheja's theorization of visual sovereignty, under which "artists can deploy individual and community assertions of what sovereignty and self-representation mean" (29). In the same vein, Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard argues that visual sovereignty - and I suggest that the same is true for intellectual and artistic sovereignty - and the legal-political assertion of Indigenous sovereignty are complementary movements: "the work of Indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization and identity politics [...]. Sovereignty is the border that shifts Indigenous experience from victimized stance to a strategic one" (51). As such, Skawennati carefully avoids further victimization in her representation of Indigenous individuals and collectives and presents them as powerful agents of social change.

Machinima as a Medium of Digital Indigenization and Decolonization²⁴

Hunter: Have you heard of machinima? It was invented right around your lifetime.

Karahkwenhawī: *Is that where you can save the action in your video game to make movies?*

Hunter: *Yeah, that's the basic idea.*

Skawennati, *TT*, E07, 07mm27ss

*TimeTraveller*TM (2008-2013), a multi-platform project created, written, and directed by Skawennati, is a major artistic project undertaken by Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC). AbTeC is an international “research network of artists, academics and technologists centrally concerned with Indigenous representation in digital media” that is based at Concordia University in Montreal (LaPensée and Lewis 105). Skawennati, a visionary who has revolutionized the field of new media since the mid-1990s, pushed for the “creation of more and better representations of Native characters in digital media” (Lewis 63) and, more globally, the indigenization of new media technologies. In partnership with Jason Edward Lewis, she established AbTeC “as a vehicle for staking out Aboriginally determined territories within cyberspace” where First Nations people can “assert control over how we represent ourselves to each other and to non-Aboriginals” (Lewis and Fragnito, “Aboriginal Territories” 29). AbTeC is mainly concerned with the exploration of Indigenous storytelling in relation to game design and what LaPensée and Lewis state is the investigation of “innovative methods for Indigenous

²⁴ For a more detailed background on Skawennati and her digital art projects (including *TimeTraveller*TM) as well as comprehensive information on *Second Life* and machinima, see LaPensée and Lewis (2013) and Lewis (2014). Harwood (2013) and Ng (2013) also offer valuable resources for understanding the medium of machinima.

peoples to participate in networked culture to tell our stories, and in doing so, strengthen our communities and participate actively in shaping cyberspace” (105). As a result, projects realized in collaboration with AbTeC valorize and promote Indigenous cultures by using traditional stories as their starting point and by placing them at the heart of their newly developed digital stories. The concept that Lewis coined as the Indigenous “future imaginary” acts as the main driving power in AbTeC productions, which seek to “[encourage] young Aboriginal people to be fully empowered digital Natives with the confidence to craft a future of their choosing” (AbTeC).

The *TimeTraveller*TM machinima episodes were filmed on location in *Second Life* at AbTeC Island (59, 115, 35). According to LaPensée and Lewis, online “[v]irtual worlds like Linden Lab’s *Second Life*, which allow users to constantly generate new environments and perform within them, offer an ideal space for Indigenous representation in a digital context” (105). Moreover, *Second Life* proved to be a prosperous space for machinima production. The compound word “machinima,” composed of machine and cinema, describes “a form of animated film created using [real-time] game engines or virtual worlds” (LaPensée and Lewis 108).²⁵ As a form of experimental digital media that is highly multidisciplinary, machinima has been used for educational, artistic, activist, and entertainment purposes, which also applies to the *TimeTraveller*TM machinima project (LaPensée and Lewis 108).²⁶ Although the production process of machinima often remains invisible to the online viewer, digital media scholar Tracy Harwood explains that the term machinima essentially “encompasses both its production and

²⁵ Harwood explains: “The term was coined in 1996 by Anthony Bailey and Hugh Hancock as a mashup of ‘machine’ and ‘cinema’, with ‘animation’ being later added to justify the misspelled concentration which is now legendary in its emergence” (169).

²⁶ The multidisciplinary character of machinima, requiring a high level of collaboration and teamwork with different specialists, becomes evident in the credits that end each of the nine *TimeTraveller*TM episodes.

consumption as a form of animated content” (168). Machinima is therefore as much a tool for digital creative practice as an artwork. Moreover, machinima’s different purposes remind me of what Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre call “digital activism,” a term that underlines the connection “between ‘activism’ and digital ‘artistic’ production” (81). “Artivism” is, according to Sandoval and Latorre, “a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism” (82). Digital activism, more specifically, recognizes “the convergences between creative expression, social activism, and self-empowerment” (Sandoval and Latorre 82); elements that are all vital to Skawennati’s digital art and particularly her *TimeTraveller*TM machinima project.²⁷

Machinima’s “reliance on subversion and creative misuse” (Friedrich Kirschner qtd. in Harwood 175) makes it the ideal medium for repurposing modern technology to tell stories in Indigenous ways that reflect AbTeC’s mission of what settler scholar David Gaertner calls “‘indigenizing’ cyberspace” (63). *TimeTraveller*TM is a nine-episode “sci-fi story of an angry young Mohawk man who uses his edutainment system to learn about his past and future” (AbTeC).²⁸ Hunter’s endeavour to learn about Mohawk history creates a space to represent the cultural ruptures that have emerged as consequences of centuries of misrepresentation, colonial indoctrination, and forced acculturation, without implying the complete or irreparable loss of Mohawk culture or traditions. Skawennati uses the futuristic edutainment system to spread a message of hope by portraying one possible way of restoring and revitalizing Indigenous practices. Aligned with, but simultaneously repurposing the traditional first-person shooter, the

²⁷ In their chapter on “Chicana/o Activism” (2008), Sandoval and Latorre also state that “digital activism is a form of political activism that seeks egalitarian alliances and connections across difference” (83) and that “digital technology is understood here as the means by which activists like [Judy] Baca deploy feminist understandings in the practice of public art” (84). As my analysis will show, both elements - political and Indigenous feminist activism - can be found in Skawennati’s digital art projects.

²⁸ According to Skawennati, her *TimeTraveller*TM project explores both cultural/historical learning and a coming-of-age story.

machinima series allows viewers a “fully-immersive experience” (LaPensée and Lewis 109) when they accompany Hunter and (from episode 4 onwards the female avatar) Karahkwenhawi on their virtual immersions into (re-)imagined historical “events of importance to the First Nations people of Turtle Island” (Lewis 69). As Skawennati explains, she “trace[s] a narrative arc mimicking the one that Aboriginal people have been following: from [Hunter’s] unhappiness and unwellness to a point where he self-actualizes, learning to love himself and another [Karahkwenhawi] while also gaining fame and fortune” (Skawennati, “Imagining” 05mm08ss). Focusing mostly on the stage of reception, the following sections discuss episodes 3 (“Oka Crisis, 1990”) and 4 (“Intergalactic Pow Wow, 2112”) of Skawennati’s *TimeTraveller*TM series within the conceptual framework of Indigenous resistance and resurgence.

Unwriting and Remaking the Past: Episode 3 - Oka Crisis, 1990

Episode 3 begins with Hunter in his Montreal apartment in the year 2121. Hunter’s existence in the long-term imagined future, one hundred years from now, as well as healthy depictions of Indigenous people in episodes mostly set in the viewer’s future are basically the most powerful indicators of Indigenous resistance, resurgence, and sovereignty in Skawennati’s digital art project. As literary scholar Jace Weaver²⁹ writes, drawing on Wendat historian Georges Sioui’s theorization of Indigenous historiography: “By (re)representing the Indian, [Indigenous writers] are asserting Native representational sovereignty. It is a declaration that the Native is self-defining, producing an ‘autovision’ and ‘autohistory’ in the face of Amer-

²⁹ I avoid a reference to Weaver’s self-proclaimed Cherokee identity because he has been accused of cultural appropriation. Despite this controversy, I think that his scholarly contributions to the field of Indigenous Studies are still worth being mentioned. Other well-known cases of cultural appropriation in terms of Indigenous identity in Canada include the famous case of Grey Owl, and more recently, novelist Joseph Boyden and, in Quebec, filmmaker Michelle Latimer. For a more detailed discussion of Boyden’s case, in particular, see Swiss literary scholar Patrizia Zanella’s essay “The Controversy Around Joseph Boyden’s Identity: A Missed Opportunity at Reconciliation” (2019).

European heterohistory” (163-164). While Sioui’s autohistorical concept focuses on an Indigenous re-interpretation of the past that generates “a new history to match the image of themselves that people have always had, or should have” (Sioui, *Amerindian Autohistory* 37) and mirrors a common trend in the field of Indigenous Studies of that time, Indigenous future imaginaries herald a new era centred around narratives of healthy, thriving, and sovereign Indigenous communities.³⁰ Borrowing from and combining the concepts of the “Amerindian autohistory” (Georges Sioui), the “future imaginary” (Jason Lewis), “Indigenous futurisms” (Grace Dillon), and “Indigenous futurity” (Sean Teuton), I propose the term “Indigenous autofuturity” to describe Indigenous artists’ creative imagination of continued Indigenous presence and agency in future times that also takes into account the past and present.

In *TimeTraveller*TM, Skawennati successfully plays with the concept of time and space from an Indigenous perspective, or what Anishinaabe cultural critic and scholar Grace L. Dillon refers to as “space-time” in her introduction to *Walking the Clouds* (“Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” 3). In episode 3, the story’s starting point is set in the viewer’s future, the year 2121, which represents Hunter’s present time. All events that thus happen before 2121 are, from Hunter’s perspective, events of the past. From the viewer’s angle, however, many of the events still represent future imaginaries. In that sense, it can be argued that Skawennati continues the tradition of rewriting history (or autohistory), but from a new perspective that is embedded in a larger future narrative. The play with space-time is literally represented by Hunter’s use of the *TimeTraveller*TM edutainment system, an “emerging technology” (69) of Hunter’s time, as Lewis explains, that is materialized in futuristic sunglasses that enable him to virtually travel through

³⁰ For more information on Indigenous autohistory in Quebec, see Janssen, “Autohistoire amérindienne.”

time and space.³¹ By neutralizing temporal and spatial boundaries in her machinima episodes that cannot yet be overcome in the real world due to physical restrictions, Skawennati uses new media technologies to deconstruct the dominant (Western) understanding of linear time and embraces “Native slipstream,” a term that, as Dillon explains, “views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream” and “thus replicates nonlinear thinking about space-time” (“Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” 3). In a similar vein, Sto:lo writer Lee Maracle speaks of a “dreamspace” where she “can stretch time [...] [and] erase the artifice of separation that divides today from yesterday and yesterday from tomorrow. In this place all time is the same time. In this place images speak reality - paint truth in believable pictures” (“Post-Colonial” 207).³² Maracle’s concept of “dreamspace” and the sf version of “Native slipstream” reflect the temporal interrelatedness that characterizes many Indigenous epistemologies and is often represented through the geometric form of the circle. Skawennati expresses and materializes this interrelatedness using new media technologies, which are seemingly less bound by temporal and spatial restrictions in their ability to “create” new forms of time and space using digital representations of reality. The “time slippages” (Dillon, “Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” 4), triggered by the avatar’s journey through time and space with the *TimeTraveller*TM app, allow Skawennati to counter linear forms of storytelling and to present an alternative, circular understanding of time in which the past, present, and future intertwine and that is traditionally ascribed to Indigenous societies.

³¹ While the time-travelling avatars can virtually move through time and space, they are still restricted to physical boundaries, which explains why, for example, Hunter’s body physically stays in his Montreal apartment when he virtually explores the past in the third episode. Karahkwenhawi’s discovery of this physical restriction is depicted in episode 5. Moreover, the two main avatars discuss this physical boundary in episode 6 (Skawennati, *TT*, E06, 05mm57ss).

³² In their 2015 article “Sight Unseen: Imag(in)ing Indigeneity in English,” Joanne DiNova (Ojibwe) and Lila Pine call this phenomenon “‘now time’, where past, present, and future occur at once” (369), and describe it as a common experience of fused time in digital media spaces. I prefer, however, the concepts of “Native slipstream” and “dreamspace” in this context.

In episode 3, this cyclical sense of time is represented in the story's narrative structure and inseparably linked to the *TimeTraveller*TM edutainment system, which combines entertainment and cultural learning.³³ This combination of teaching and entertainment is a vital component of Indigenous stories, according to Cree scholar Margaret Kovach: "Stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices that can assist members of the collective. They promote social cohesion by entertaining and fostering good feeling" (95). As mentioned earlier, the story begins with Hunter in the first half of the 22nd century, aspiring to learn more about Haudenosaunee warriorhood. Despite his self-identification as "Warrior Mohawk" (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 00mm25ss), it becomes obvious that Hunter, living in a highly technological future, has been alienated from his culture. He thus uses the edutainment system to learn more about his past, resulting in virtually travelling to the Kanehsatake of September 1, 1990. Arriving in the past, Hunter evokes, however, the future when four-year old Karahkwenhawi asks: "Where did you come from?" and Hunter simply replies: "The future" (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 01mm28ss), earning much laughter from the group of Indigenous protectors/protestors behind the barricades. Looking for "some background info" on the events surrounding the so-called "Oka Crisis," Hunter uses the "Factoid" function of his edutainment system, visualized as a smaller screen in the foreground (a strategy called superimposition in film studies), and revisits the events of July 11, 1990 (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 01mm38ss).³⁴ This virtual flashback shows perspectives from both conflicting sides - settler and Kanien'kehá:ka

³³ The "Find-A-Date" function of the *TimeTraveller*TM edutainment system allows Hunter to enter the "Intelligent Agent" mode, which offers a variety of different functions, such as facial recognition and identification, translation, and factoid, which I explain in detail at different moments in this chapter.

³⁴ Skawennati's choice of the term "factoid" is interesting because it generally refers to an apocryphal claim (with the intended meaning of pseudo-information), and, more specifically in Canada, a trivial item of information. Skawennati combines both definitions: the first one applying to the assumingly Québécois newscaster who stands for the biased reporting on the events (most evident in the language he uses); the second one applying to the Kanien'kehá:ka women who, despite their influential roles in the conflict, did not receive the same media coverage as their stereotyped male counterparts.

points of view - and, with a shift back to an observer's perspective, transports the viewer briefly back to Hunter's Montreal apartment in 2121, where he continues his digital research, still using the edutainment system. Returning to the past events of the summer of 1990, Hunter narrates - as I assume both to himself and the viewer - the circumstances leading to what is commonly referred to as the "Oka Crisis," which I describe in detail below. Hunter's narration is accompanied by re-imag(in)ed scenes of that time, combining the powerful tools of words and images. Without the avatar's "Intelligent Agent" modus, the viewer cannot see the exact location and date, but as the scenes depict the tense atmosphere around and behind the barricades, it must be during the period of crisis. Correspondingly, the end of Hunter's virtual trip parallels the end of the siege on September 26, 1990. The finale of the third episode completes the past-present-future circle and ends again with Hunter in his apartment in 2121.

In terms of content, episode 3 is fully dedicated to what is commonly called the "Oka Crisis," also known as the Kanehsatà:ke Resistance,³⁵ which has significantly marked Quebec's recent past and undoubtedly continues to affect the present. What is now the province of Quebec is home to three Kanien'kehá:ka reserve communities which are "located southwest of Montreal in urban or partially urbanized areas" (Lepage 103).³⁶ The Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) are part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (also known as Iroquois or Five/Six Nations Confederacy) and

³⁵ The documentaries *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000) by distinguished Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, who stayed "behind the barricades" during the summer-long blockade, protest, and armed uprising, as well as Gord Hill's comic "The 'Oka Crisis'" (2010) also visually approach the months-long standoff between the Mohawk community and their allies, police and armed forces as well as the local settler population. Obomsawin's 1993 documentary also provides insight into the forces behind the conflict, namely the unsolved question of territorial claims and (dis)possession that is inseparably connected to past and ongoing settler colonialism.

Wanda Nanibush (Anishinaabe) states more precisely that "[t]he event has been labelled crisis, claim, standoff, protest, blockade, standing up, revolt, and resistance depending on one's perspective, and who is doing the naming" (166).

³⁶ In 2017, the three Kanien'kehá:ka communities in Quebec had a total recorded population of 13,495 (Lepage 101).

“occupied territories in parts of what is now upstate New York and later, the St. Lawrence region in Canada” (Abler).³⁷

Starting in March 1990 with actions of peaceful protest, the events of Kanehsatà:ke/Oka were first a peaceful protest of the Kanien’kehá:ka community of Kanehsatà:ke against territorial expropriation, and more specifically, a planned golf course expansion and condominium development on land that was considered sacred and belonging to the Kanien’kehá:ka community. It was the beginning of a territorial conflict that ultimately turned into a violent land dispute symptomatic of the territorial claims, struggles, and dispossessions that have been taking place on Turtle Island since the arrival of European explorers and later Euro-Canadian settlers. What is commonly referred to as the “Oka Crisis” describes this shift towards an extremely tense 78-day period in 1990. The violent dispute began on July 11 with a raid undertaken by provincial police forces, *Sûreté du Québec*, which resulted in the unsolved death of one officer, and led to the involvement of federal army forces. The standoff - but not the dispute itself - ended on September 26 with the activists’ collective decision to lay down their arms and leave the blockade peacefully. Most of them were, however, arrested and temporarily incarcerated for protesting. Hunter describes the end of the siege with the following words in *TimeTraveller*TM: “The army was harsh, but we expected that” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 07mm11ss). He also hints at prior experiences of settler violence towards the community. Skawennati emphasizes Hunter’s words with a long take composed of a sequence of different scenes depicting the arrests that are displayed for an unusually lengthy time, and she highlights this even more by adding dramatic

³⁷ *Haudenosaunee* means “people of the long house or ‘those who make the long house’” (Horn-Miller, “Emergence” 229). The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is also known as the precontact Iroquois Confederacy, originally founded by the five member nations of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, and later joined by the sixth member, the Tuscarora.

The word *Ganienkeh* means “Land of the Flint [and] refers to the traditional territory of the Kanienkehaka” (Horn-Miller, “Emergence” 229). There is also a more specific definition of *Ganienkeh*, according to A. Simpson, when it refers to “land reclaimed by Mohawks near Altona, New York in 1974” (208n2).

sounds to the scenes. These scenes expressively exemplify the affective power of the audio-visual to revision events and support Skawennati's critique of the colonial governments' strategy of criminalizing Indigenous protestors who were enacting their rights to the land. As many scholars have argued, the criminalization and incarceration of Indigenous people (and other targeted minority groups) acts as a form of containment that, at least temporarily, erases Indigenous presence and resistance, displaces them from the contested land, and allows the dominant powers to eliminate this "obstacle" to societal and economic development - as Indigenous Peoples are still too often seen in North America and other colonized countries. Settler studies scholar Patrick Wolfe, for example, investigates, in his essay "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" (2006), "the relationship between genocide and the settler-colonial tendency that [he] term[s] the logic of elimination," and he makes an important statement on the land's value for the settler-colonial nation-state and its genocidal strategies to gain and maintain power over stolen Indigenous lands and bodies: "The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life – or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be – indeed, often are – contests for life" (387).³⁸

³⁸ The reserve, residential school and child welfare systems as well as the prison/justice system in Canada, all examples of Indigenous containment, represent historical and contemporary forms of (neo-)colonial oppression, assimilation, and erasure. More specifically, Andrew Woolford and James Gacek study "the ways space is implicated in the physical, biological, and cultural destruction of group life," a settler colonial process of destruction they call "genocidal carcerality" (401). The co-authors define their concept as follows: "In practice, genocidal carceral spaces are assemblages of multiple destructive strategies. [...] we use genocidal carcerality to refer to spaces enlisted toward the elimination of a targeted group, either for purposes of exterminating or transforming the group so that it no longer persists" (Woolford and Gacek 404). For more scholarly investigations of Indigenous incarceration, see, for example, Vicki Chartrand, "Unsettled Times: Indigenous Incarceration and the Links between Colonialism and the Penitentiary in Canada" (2019) and, with a particular focus on the incarceration of Indigenous women, McGuire and Murdoch, "(In)-Justice: An Exploration of the Dehumanization, Victimization, Criminalization, and Over-Incarceration of Indigenous Women in Canada" (2021). In *TimeTraveller*TM, Skawennati alludes to the problem of state care in episode 3, where the avatar "Pinky" mentions "state custody" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 06mm47ss) in relation to incarceration as a colonial strategy of containment, which involves Indigenous people, and specifically Indigenous women, at a disproportionately high rate.

Focusing the question of land and settler violence more closely on the events of Oka, in *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014), A. Simpson outlines the long history of territorial dispossession and Mohawk resistance culminating in the “Oka Crisis:”

Prior to the summer of 1990, they had endured two centuries of sustained land expropriation. The Mohawks of Kanehsatà:ke did not sit passively as their land was taken from them; they petitioned Ottawa, they petitioned Quebec, they suffered from incarceration for those petitions, and finally in 1990 their women resorted to a peaceful protest that became decidedly militarized. When their months of peaceful protest did not effect a response from Ottawa regarding the most recent land situation, which involved extending the neighboring town of Oka’s country club golf course directly into Mohawk land, the Warrior society convened at Kanehsatà:ke with AK-47 assault rifles. (150-151)³⁹

As A. Simpson aims to outline in her anthropological and political study of Kahnawà:ke, the siege at Kanehsatà:ke in the summer of 1990 is simply the visual climax of a long history of Kanien’kehá:ka resistance to the destructive forces of colonization.⁴⁰ This opinion is also expressed in the *TimeTraveller*TM episode, where the female avatar Mabel McComber emphasizes during a teach-in on the contested land that “this is not the first time we had to protect these Pines” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 04mm11ss). For this reason, it is paramount to historicize the events in the larger context of past, present, and future actions of Kanien’kehá:ka

³⁹ At the beginning of *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), Obomsawin provides a comprehensible resume of the long history of territorial dispossession, forced displacement, and broken promises to contextualize the “Oka Crisis” and situate it in the larger context of colonization, genocide, religious conversion, and forced assimilation. These forces are the roots of the 1990 escalation of the land dispute, and they are still in charge today. In *Aboriginal Peoples* (2019), Lepage also gives a short overview of the history of broken promises and resistance that led to this particular land dispute (72-75).

⁴⁰ Isabelle St-Amand confirms this view: “le siège témoigne d’une longue histoire de résistance des Premières Nations aux empiètements territoriaux, aux entreprises de conversion et aux politiques d’assimilation qui visaient et prévoyaient leur disparition” (“Retour” 83).

resistance as well as, more broadly, Indigenous actions of protest and reclamation across Turtle Island, such as Alcatraz, Restigouche, Standing Rock, and Uni'stoten/Wet'suwet'en, to evoke only a few among a myriads of events. Not surprisingly for a settler-colonial context, the land is the deep - but often ignored - root of these conflicts. It is important to remember that, as many Indigenous environmental and cultural activists such as Ellen Gabriel (Kanien'kehá:ka) or Kanahus Manuel (Secwepemca, Ktunaxa) have emphasized, territorial conflicts between Indigenous nations and the settler governments (both provincial and federal) have not yet been resolved and land theft is an ongoing practice in Quebec and Canada.⁴¹ However, the siege at Kanehsatà:ke, which, according to Cree/Métis educator Kim Anderson was "a defining moment for a lot of people across the country" ("Interview" 55), has been an inspiration for other Indigenous communities and has become a vibrant symbol for Indigenous protest and resistance against territorial and cultural dispossession.⁴²

As recreated at the beginning of episode 3 in *TimeTraveller*TM, the standoff was a highly mediated event that was followed closely by both Québécois and Canadian media outlets. Mainstream media focused primarily on spotlighting the heavily armed Mohawk warriors and thus nurtured the settler imagination of the "bloodthirsty warrior" (McKegney, *Masculindians* 78) and turned the protectors/protestors into "criminals and terrorists," as then Prime Minister

⁴¹ I will take up the conflictual issue of ongoing territorial dispossession in Chapter 4 ("Land-Based Poetic Activism"), where I expand on it in relation to Innu women's poetic responses to this past, present and - most probably - future reality.

⁴² In *A Recognition of Being*, Anderson emphasizes the influence of the Kanien'kehá:ka resistance on Indigenous Peoples: "In Canada, Native peoples refer to the Oka crisis as a turning point in their lives. [...] It soon turned into a national event, drawing Native peoples from across the country in support. It was a rallying point and an overt example that colonial warfare was still happening in 1990. It was a call to consciousness for many Native peoples about identity as it renewed our awareness and resistance to the way in which Indigenous peoples are treated in Canada" (104).

Brian Mulroney called the Indigenous activists in 1990 (qtd. in A. Simpson 148).⁴³ In doing so, mainstream media, in its function as a settler-colonial state apparatus, contributed to creating and maintaining what Cameroonian political philosopher Achille Mbembe calls “a fictionalized notion of the enemy” (16). According to Québécois scholar Julie Burelle, “[t]his reductive [settler] narrative not only undermined the complex identities and motivations of those who chose to oppose settler-colonial forces in Oka, it also served to criminalize and delegitimize Indigenous resistance” (4). Alternative and international media, on the other hand, mainly drew on the extensive presence of armed police and army forces compared to a relatively small number of Indigenous activists, linked this to the systemic injustices experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and thereby challenged Canada’s international image as “a peace-keeping middle power and effective advocate of soft power” (Findlay 81).⁴⁴ All of these depictions initiated, at the very least, discussions about Canada’s then mostly neglected violent settler-

⁴³ In *When the Other Is Me* (2010), LaRocque contends that “Native resistance to White encroachment was always framed in terms of innate ‘bloodthirsty’-ness” (50). In *The Imaginary Indian*, Francis points to the long history of Indigenous misrepresentation in the arts: “For the vast majority of Whites, Indians existed only as images like that of the Mohawk warrior in Benjamin West’s painting [“The Death of General Wolfe,” 1770]” (15). As he further explains, West’s painting is a piece of fiction, and not a true representation of the historical moment of General Wolfe’s death during the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759; a major event in Quebec history because it reversed English-French power relations in then Lower-Canada and led to English domination. As Francis states, “West was an admirer of the Noble Savage and so included the contemplative Native, mourning the death of his commander,” although Mohawk warriors “fought on the side of the French” and “Wolfe despised them” (14). West’s depiction of the Mohawk warrior thus aligns more with the settler image of the “Noble Savage” than with the violent warrior, but it demonstrates nonetheless the long history of colonial conceptions of Indigenous people.

⁴⁴ In his article “Soft Sovereignties and Strokes of Genius” (2013), non-Indigenous scholar Len Findlay briefly outlines Canada’s contradictory international and national stance on human rights. Praised as a leader in drafting and pushing on with the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) as a response to the atrocities of the Second World War (1939-1945), Canada opposed the adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in 2007, and - just as the three other Anglophone settler countries of Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and the United States - then refused to sign the declaration because of the “problems for Canada’s legal sovereignty” (Findlay 81). In 2010, the Harper government endorsed UNDRIP, but its principles were never applied in Canada. In international law, declarations, such as UNDRIP, are non-binding, however, Canada has been repeatedly criticized by the United Nations and Amnesty International, for instance, for not fully embracing the UNDRIP principles. Opposing interpretations of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination are the key issues that have blocked the full implementation of UNDRIP in Canada.

Similar to Findlay’s critique, Wendat artist Guy Sioui Durand critically compares Canada’s internationally projected image to Canada’s disturbing internal handling of issues, such as “son refus de signer la Déclaration universelle des droits des peuples autochtones décrétée par l’ONU, la présentation des Jeux olympiques d’hiver sous un logo inuit et le traitement des communautés autochtones quant à la pandémie de grippe A (H1N1)” (4).

colonial history, territorial dispossession and forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples, their (marginalized) place in (or even outside) mainstream Canadian/Québécois society, and human rights violations.⁴⁵ Thirty years later, however, history seems to repeat itself: several Mohawk communities, such as Tyendinaga near Belleville, Ontario, and Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawake in Quebec - among many other Indigenous communities across the country - have recently been in the spotlight because of their railroad blockades in support of the Wet'suwet'en anti-pipeline protest in British Columbia and, more generally, Indigenous resistance to land expropriation. Mohawk individuals have, once again been criminalized, arrested, and incarcerated for defending their rights. And again, they are demonized as criminals and terrorists, with Quebec's Premier François Legault adding fuel to the fire by publicly insisting on the presence of AK-47 assault rifles in the Kahnawake protest camp, an accusation that camp insiders and Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller denied.⁴⁶

In *TimeTraveller*TM, Skawennati deals with the controversial and contested image of the Mohawk warrior and instrumentalizes digital media as what Sandoval calls “an oppositional technology of power” (paraphrased in Everett 1280). The viewer experiences Hunter's vision quest into the past through a simple, but surprising change of scene that opens with an extreme close-up, framing the face of a young Canadian soldier. The change of perspective to a

⁴⁵ For a detailed analysis of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic responses to the “Oka Crisis,” see Québécois literary scholar Isabelle St-Amand's monograph *Stories of Oka: Land, Film, and Literature* (2018), which is the translated and updated edition of her original French version *La crise d'Oka en récits: territoire, cinéma et littérature* (2015). See also Leanne Simpson's and Kiera Ladner's edited anthology *This Is an Honour Song* (2010) that commemorates this important event 20 years later.

⁴⁶ It is reasonable to argue that most Indigenous protest and resistance activities are highly mediated as soon as they negatively impact the settler population and their so-called liberty (that is, access to routes, waters, and resources; questions of private ownership; or occurrences of sentiments of settler guilt), but most importantly as soon as they touch and interfere with the settler state's economy and its well-being, which means profit-making in a capitalist society. The Wet'suwet'en's protection of their territory in British Columbia and the railroad blockades across the country as manifestations of support are only the most recent example. Linking public representation of conflicts and the rule of colonial law, Kanien'kehá:ka activist Ellen Gabriel is convinced that Indigenous rights are always overruled when the so-called economic well-being of the settler-colonial nation-state demands it (39).

(temporarily limited) point-of-view shot (POV shot) allows the viewer to virtually slip into the avatar's body, who now personates an Indigenous warrior. From this counter-perspective, the viewer is able to relive an iconic moment of the Kanien'kehá:ka Resistance. Moreover, the shot is a counter-narrative to one of Canada's most-widely circulated images, which captured the moment of a face-to-face confrontation between Pte. Patrick Cloutier (Royal 22nd Regiment) and Brad Larocque (Anishinaabe) from a journalist's outsider perspective (see Figure 1).⁴⁷



Figure 1 - Face Off. Image courtesy of Skawennati.

As Burelle recalls in her recently published book *Encounters on Contested Lands* (2019): “The image immortalizes a tense confrontation between a ‘Vandoo’ and an Ojibwa Warrior who joined forces with the Mohawks to protect their land [...] against further encroachment by the nearby predominantly white and francophone town of Oka” (3). Lewis remarks how significant Skawennati’s shift of perspective is for Indigenous self-representation: “We get to experience

⁴⁷ The famous photograph *Face to Face* was taken by Shaney Komulainen, a freelance photographer for *The Canadian Press*.

this past first-hand, through the eyes of the Native people involved rather than through the eyes of the colonists. This provides an alternative reading of historical events that compensates somewhat for the biases of conqueror history” (69). Lewis here critiques the dominance of biased settler perspectives on historical events, such as the “Oka Crisis” or Kanien’kehá:ka Resistance. Whitewashed historical narratives are still the ones that are generally told, taught, and known, not the parallelly existing Indigenous counter-narratives. As such, Dillon describes *TimeTraveller*TM as “a machinima about a Mohawk time traveler who uncovers the Indigenous perspectives that mainstream history books don’t care to recount” (“Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” 5), and this highly needed change of perspective therefore allows Skawennati to “restory the settler version of history” (Corntassel et al. 138).

In the above-described opening scene between Hunter and the soldier, the ego-shooter perspective is a powerful tool to foster the viewer’s identification with the Indigenous warrior in particular and, more broadly, with Indigenous people enacting their rights, asserting and defending their territories and cultures.⁴⁸ This technique thus creates and strengthens the relationship between the medium of machinima and the viewer who embarks on this journey of watching the episode with the feeling of being an active part of the narrative. This feeling originates, of course, from machinima’s creation in video games, in which the player takes an active role, and it is intensified through the first-person perspective. This feeling, however, is paradoxical because at the stage of consumption, the viewer is deemed to passively watch the episode instead of being able to actively participate in the game as opposed to the stage of

⁴⁸ In Cultural Studies, this is what Edward Hall and Mildred Reed Hall identify as “territoriality,” which they define as follows: “an innate characteristic whose roots lie hundreds of millions of years in the past, [territoriality] is the act of laying claim to and defending a territory and is a vital link in the chain of events necessary for survival” (10).

production.⁴⁹ Moreover, the viewer's identification with the avatar is fostered when the Canadian soldier insults the warrior - and thus Hunter and in extension even the viewer, who is us because we share the warrior's perspective - and calls him/us "motherfucker" (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 00mm34ss).

Already at this early stage of the episode, Skawennati gives viewers a glimpse of the central role of Kanien'kehá:ka women in their society. A female avatar - "Pinky" as we learn a few moments later - takes steps and de-escalates the situation before violence can break out. This moment recreates the decisional power that Kanien'kehá:ka women had during the conflict. As A. Simpson describes in her earlier cited passage on the history of Kanien'kehá:ka resistance to territorial dispossession, it was the women who decided to protest, first peacefully and then armed (150). Furthermore, this scene exemplifies the often-ignored political power that these women have traditionally held. According to Mohawk political science scholar Taiaiake Alfred: "In the Rotinohshonni tradition, the women of each family raise a man to leadership and hold him accountable to these principles. If he does not uphold and defend the *Kaienerekowa*, or if the women determine that his character or behaviour does not conform to the leadership principles, he is removed from the position" (*Peace* 114; original emphasis).⁵⁰ What Alfred points to here is the visibility of Iroquois male leaders and the - for cultural outsiders - invisibility of Iroquois female leaders even though they are their community's traditional decision-makers. Former president of NWAC, Gail Stacey-Moore (Mohawk), explains that the "Indian Act abolished the traditional matriarchal society for a patriarchal one. Our men turned to the Indian Act to get back

⁴⁹ The graphics of this digital project intensify the viewer's impression of being involved in playing a video game because the resolution is intentionally poor, and therefore too bad for a film produced at that time.

⁵⁰ As Alfred explains in the glossary to his 2005 book *Wasáse*, "Rotinohshonni" means "the people of the longhouse [...], referring to the people of what is commonly known as the Six Nations, or Iroquois Confederacy" (288), and "*Kaienerekowa*" translates as "the great good way" referring to the Rotinohshonni Great Law of Peace (287).

into a position of strength, and they still use it today” (qtd. in Rebick 112). Likewise, NWAC makes an important statement about Indigenous women’s status in their communities prior to and after the settler state’s forced imposition of heteropatriarchal structures on Indigenous societies: “By 1971, this patriarchal system was so ingrained within our communities, that ‘patriarchy’ was seen as a ‘traditional trait.’ Even the memory of our matrilineal forms of descent were forgotten or unacknowledged” (“Aboriginal Women” 14).⁵¹ This statement underscores the need to question and examine traditions and the often hidden motifs that lie behind traditional practices. “At issue is who decides what tradition is – and for whom,” Joyce Green emphasizes in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, and she adds that “traditions are not all axiomatically benevolent and must be considered as relations of power” (“Taking More Account” 13).

Moreover, NWAC’s above statement implies that cultures are not static, but constantly evolving and adapting to new realities. The Kanien’kehá:ka are traditionally a matrilineal society, as documented in the *Great Law of Peace*: “The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil [the clearing]. Men and women shall follow the status of the Mother” (qtd. in A. Simpson 147; original amendment). A. Simpson perfectly summarizes this paradox of traditional matriarchy and imposed patriarchy in contemporary Kanien’kehá:ka communities, which she calls “deeply ‘matriarchal,’ but juridically disenfranchising of women” (31).

Considering Indigenous women’s discrimination and dispossession, Green argues that “[c]ontesting traditions [such as patriarchy] is an essential part of societal hygiene, permitting

⁵¹ Gabriel critiques imposed patriarchal band councils which have replaced traditional ways of self-governance in which Indigenous women played a crucial role: “Demeurant majoritairement masculin, [le système imposé des conseils de bands] fait peu de cas du droit coutumier et des lois traditionnelles où les femmes étaient au centre de toutes les prises de décision, en particulier celles concernant le territoire” (Gabriel 38)

Caroline Ennis (Mohawk) critically recalls patriarchy as a so-called traditional trait of Mohawk society by illuminating the violent nature of patriarchal structures: “The men felt it was their tradition to discriminate against women” (qtd. in Rebick 113).

conversations about power relations and community norms in the context of how they affect particular people,” and she warns that “[i]nsulating traditions from critique silences critical voices” (“Taking More Account” 13). As an Indigenous feminist herself, Green stresses that “Indigenous feminist voices have much to contribute to these important conversations and to shaping an inclusive future” (“Taking More Account” 13).

Most of the action in the third episode of *TimeTraveller*TM is set behind the barricades, a strategy that helps uplift the Indigenous point of view because this sacred place in the Pines is mostly absent from settler narratives due to their forced exclusion from this space. For this reason, Skawennati’s approach resembles the one used by Obomsawin who “tell[s] the stories of Native people from a distinctly Indigenous vantage point” (Loft, “Sovereignty” 64). Loft comments more specifically on Obomsawin’s innovative strategy:

She establishes a non-linear, Indigenous aesthetic, one that references a shared and previously misrepresented history. [...] She has constantly included herself within the structure of her documentaries, as interviewer, narrator, and in the case of *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), eyewitness. This places her not only as observer but also as participant in the stories she tells.” (“Sovereignty” 64-65)

Skawennati’s virtual re-imagining of the events at Kanehsatà:ke parallels Obomsawin’s approach of creating Indigenous documentaries because both women artists move beyond the role of a passive observer and include themselves as participants in their respective work. In the case of *TimeTraveller*TM, Skawennati plays a crucial role in developing the project at the stage of production. More importantly, Skawennati enhances the participative strategy of the viewer who also becomes a participant or, as I would argue, even an eyewitness of a key moment in Quebec history.

The barricades have an equally political and symbolic significance as “une limite nécessaire posée au processus de dépossession territorial qui se poursuit” (St-Amand, “Retour” 89). Settler scholars Allison Hargreaves and David Jefferess offer an insightful reflection on the meaning of the barricade in their chapter “Always Beginning: Imagining Reconciliation Beyond Inclusion or Loss” (2015):

the barricade as apparent threat, the barricade as unfathomable assertion, the barricade as the unwanted obstacle that stretches to its limits the tenuous fantasy of settler belonging. What if we instead understood the barricade - both as a physical barrier and as a practice of symbolic signification - less as an obstacle and threat, and more as something erected to protect ‘all of us’? [...] the barricade could provide an opening onto a different relationship to land and to one another - one that both acknowledges the violence of settlement and resource extraction, and that affirms shared obligations to care-take the land for the well-being of future generations. (209-210)

Hargreaves and Jefferess recognize the meaning of threat and violence that the barricades represent as a result of their implication in (Indigenous) resistance movements, but the authors also open up a space for rethinking the barricades and why they are erected. The barricades in *TimeTraveller*TM serve, undoubtedly, as a physical barrier to protect the sacred Pines from destruction. Additionally, they create an inner space that offers the community a protected - though constantly threatened by police and army forces - place to gather and learn. It is thus not accidental that the viewer becomes more acquainted with the *TimeTraveller*TM app’s “Intelligent Agent” mode, including its different functions, when the action moves behind the barricades.

The first function of the “Intelligent Agent” mode that the viewer experiences is facial recognition. Whereas conventional facial recognition technology, as used by hegemonic state

apparatuses, has often posed a threat to specifically targeted groups (such as Indigenous, Black or Muslim populations) and has commonly served to further criminalize these groups, Skawennati repurposes facial recognition software and uses it as a way to re-humanize the people behind the barricades.⁵² While Skawennati's approach to using new media is innovative, she still continues a tradition of creative resistance among Indigenous writers, as Métis literary scholar Emma LaRocque emphasizes: "Most, if not all, Native writers have in some way protested their dehumanization, refuting in particular the charge of savagery, which is at the heart of the colonial discourse. This discourse is a power struggle. [...] As soon as Native individuals learned the tools of Western literacy, they challenged, even retaliated against, the stereotypes and the name calling" (*When* 96). Skawennati expands LaRocque's theory of appropriating Western literacy to resist the stereotypic misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples and uses digital literacy as a tool for re-humanizing Indigenous Peoples and decolonizing their histories.

In the third episode of *TimeTraveller*TM, the facial recognition function allows Hunter to identify the numerous protectors/protestors involved in the resistance movement. The process of naming is important here because it individualizes, diversifies, and re-humanizes the group of environmental, cultural, and political activists who now consist of a variety of men, women, elders, and children who together protect their sacred territory against capitalist exploitation and destruction (see Figure 2).⁵³ The act of individualizing the activists helps Skawennati deconstruct

⁵² Silman points to the fact that Indigenous people constitute a specifically targeted group of state surveillance when she recalls how Tobique women, who organized the Native Women's Walk to Ottawa in 1979, a peaceful protest march covering "one hundred miles from Oka Reserve, Quebec (near Montreal) to Ottawa" (152), were kept under surveillance: "We attracted attention from the RCMP, too. As soon as we started planning the walk, our telephones were tapped. You could actually here a strange sound in the background, it was that obvious. They even answered my phone once. They told one of our supporters that our number was no longer in service. I know the RCMP kept an eye on us during the walk, too, to make sure they had nothing to worry about. But really. What threat could we be to the country anyway? (laughter)" (154).

⁵³ These are the names of characters that are revealed to the viewer: "Pinky," her daughter Karahkwenhawi (in episode 3 depicted as a four-year old child; from episode 4 onwards, she is presented as the 24-year-old second main character and plays an important role in Hunter's coming-of-age story), Frank Natawe, "Bam Bam," Lance Thomas,

the monolithic representation of Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, it contradicts the stereotype of the anonymous, armed, male Mohawk warrior, as imagined, constructed, and circulated by the mainstream media and public.⁵⁴ Likewise, it helps deconstruct the simplified images of Iroquois women as “care-takers of the land” and “mothers of the nation” (A. Simpson 148), which do not allow for more nuanced and complex representations. Such images would include their resilient, determined, and sometimes even violent actions of caretaking: “women who called for a peaceful protest and then an armed refusal against further dispossession” (A. Simpson 148). These images, which Skawennati evokes in her artwork, position Kanien’kehá:ka women - and more generally Indigenous women - as powerful agents within their communities.



Figure 2 - Watching the News. Image courtesy of Skawennati.

Skenna, and Mabel McComber. There is, among other unnamed avatars, one woman portraying very probably Ellen Gabriel, who was the spokesperson for her community at that time. It seems important to mention here that Skawennati portrays an approximately equal number of female and male avatars.

⁵⁴ Ellen Gabriel mentions the dehumanizing power of media representation in her interview with Kim Anderson: “it [diverse forms of Indigenous support across Canada] brought back our faith in people and humanized us again. Because the media certainly took that away from us, and the government certainly took that away from us” (qtd. in Anderson, “Interview” 55).

The act of naming the people behind the barricades also has a deeper meaning related to Indigenous identity and sovereignty. Cree author Joy Harjo, following the tradition of Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance as a practice of Indigenous physical and cultural continuity, outlines the significance of naming and self-identification to sovereignty: "protocol is a key to assuming sovereignty. It's simple. When we name ourselves [...] we are acknowledging the existence of our nations, their intimate purpose, insure their continuation" (118-119). Applying Indigenous protocol and ethics of naming that are essentially related to the territory, Skawennati not only "indigenizes" cyberspace but she also contradicts the assumption that virtual spaces further the development of a "'landless' identity" (Gaertner 56). To foster a land-based identity in *TimeTraveller*TM, language revitalization and education in Kanien'kehá:ka geography, politics, and history also take place at the protest camp and follow Indigenous protocols, traditions, ceremonies, and teaching methodologies, such as oral knowledge transmission and land-based education. Wanda Nanibush (Anishinaabe) emphasizes the overriding importance of the territory for the survival/survivance of Indigenous cultures: "Without land where things like language and culture are nourished it becomes hard to imagine cultural continuity" (168). This connects with Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's theorization of resurgence, as outlined in "Land as Pedagogy" (2014). Pointing to the necessity of land-based education in Indigenous languages in relation to First Nations' struggles for sovereignty, she argues that both elements, land and language, are key to Indigenous resurgence, or "the rebuilding of Indigenous nations according to our own political, intellectual, and cultural traditions" (L. Simpson, "Land" 13). Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano, more specifically, seizes on the vital contribution that the preservation and revitalization of Kanienkeha has on their understanding and interpretation of traditional philosophies and politics:

“conservation of the language is essential to maintaining our capacity to probe the philosophical depths of Iroquoian ethics of peace” (“Heart” 233).

The fact that an Indigenous, and more specifically a Kanien’kehá:ka, perspective of the events of Kanehsatà:ke is presented prior to the dominant settler perspective and dominates the story, that both Kanienkeha and English are spoken, and that a non-linear understanding of time is presented, illustrates how the AbTeC co-founders “Skawennati and Lewis place Indigenous culture at the centre of interactive stories, video games, and online science fiction” (DiNova and Pine 369). Despite her deliberate and much-needed focus on Indigenous perspectives in digital art, Skawennati avoids romanticizing and idealizing the Indigenous cultures she represents in her creative work. The *TimeTraveller*TM app’s translation mode, for example, offers translations from Kanienkeha into English which implies that future Mohawk communities still suffer from a certain degree of language loss, and therefore makes language revitalization a key issue that needs to be addressed now.⁵⁵ Kanienkeha is indeed considered a “language in danger” (Abler) because of the small number of fluent speakers. However, Skawennati showcases her people’s “reputation of militancy in maintaining their language and culture, and for defending their rights” (Abler), and positions new media as a promising medium for linguistic and cultural preservation, revitalization, and transmission. Digital technologies can, in many different ways, successfully contribute to the revitalization of an endangered language, and Indigenous communities across

⁵⁵ The Kanien’kehá:ka communities address linguistic and cultural revitalization, for example, through Mohawk education in Kahnawà:ke. With 2,350 speakers, Mohawk was the most commonly reported Iroquoian language spoken in Quebec and Ontario (“Aboriginal Languages” 2-3). According to published data on the 2016 status of Indigenous languages in Canada (collected by Statistics Canada for the 2016 Census of Population), “the number of people in the Aboriginal population who could speak an Aboriginal language [has] increased by 3.1% [since 2006]” but “as in previous censuses, the number of Aboriginal people able to speak an Aboriginal language (260,550) exceeded the number who reported having an Aboriginal mother tongue (208,720)” (“Aboriginal Languages” 3, 4). These numbers can be linked to Indigenous initiatives of language revitalization, as for example in Kahnawà:ke where Mohawk immersion programs take place. As I will explain in chapter 3, the Indigenous residential school system was a major factor contributing to language loss and the rupturing of well-established systems of (intergenerational) knowledge transmission.

Canada use digital resources more frequently to protect their endangered languages and cultures.⁵⁶

Traditional teachings in Kanien'kehá:ka geography, history, and politics accompany language revitalization and in combination they are all fundamental to Indigenous sovereignty. In terms of Kanien'kehá:ka politics, the teachings of the female Elder avatar Mabel McComber are vital to a critical interpretation of Canadian history. In conversation with Hunter, she explains: "We don't want to be citizens of Canada. We are already citizens of the Iroquois Confederacy. Don't forget: Canada didn't even allow us to become citizens until 1960. And don't even get me started on the Indian Act!" (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 05mm22ss). McComber underlines the Mohawk's long political affiliation with the Iroquois Confederacy and alludes to complex Indigenous-settler relations marked by the racist and sexist provisions of the paternalistic *Indian Act*. Ellen Gabriel, in her translated essay "Enterrons le colonialisme" (2017), positions these colonial laws at the heart of Indigenous-settler conflicts over land and sovereignty: "Au Canada, la *Loi sur les Indiens* est la force juridique qui légitime à la fois la dépossession territoriale et la discrimination de genre, dépouillant les femmes autochtones de leurs rôles et de leur autorité" (36). Moreover, in taking an intersectional approach that looks at both racism and sexism, she underlines how territorial dispossession is indissociable from

⁵⁶ In her article "La technologie au service de la langue innue" (2015), Yvette Mollen, director of the language and culture sector at the Institut Tshakapesh, explains how the Innu Nation uses digital technologies for language preservation, transmission, and revitalization: "À l'Institut Tshakapesh, nous travaillons aussi sur la revitalisation et la sauvegarde de la langue en utilisant plusieurs moyens, notamment les technologies, car tout passe par là maintenant. Bien sûr, nous publions des livres, nous faisons de la formation pour transmettre la langue. Nous utilisons tous les moyens mis à notre disposition pour maintenir en vie la langue innue. Pour faire un travail d'intégration de l'Internet, nous travaillons en partenariat avec les milieux universitaires pour développer des outils en ligne, des outils de référence. Notre collaboration avec la professeure Marie-Odile Junker de l'Université Carleton a donné naissance à plusieurs outils dont des jeux interactifs sur la langue innue, un catalogue de livres, un atlas linguistique, un manuel de conversation de l'innu, un blogue incluant des fiches de grammaire ainsi qu'un catalogue d'histoires orales et la mise en ligne d'un guide de conjugaisons" (77-78).

Indigenous women's disempowerment. According to Indigenous feminists Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill,

inclusion ([...] of Indigenous peoples within settler colonial nation-states), cannot be the primary goal because inclusion confers a preeminent hierarchy, and inclusion is central to hierarchical power. The project of inclusion can serve to control and absorb dissent rather than allow institutions like [...] the nation-state to be radically transformed by differing perspectives and goals. (17)

In a similar vein, Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture Angus expresses her objection to Indigenous Peoples' forced political and cultural inclusion into mainstream society by describing that "[i]nclusion feels too much like being boxed in, forced to conform to ways that we do not share," and she adds: "It feels like cutting the heart out of an ancient way of being" ("Native America" 39).

Rejecting the sovereignty of the settler state, the avatars in *TimeTraveller*TM practise what A. Simpson calls the "politics of refusal," which she establishes as "a political alternative to [settler] 'recognition,' the much sought-after and presumed 'good' of multicultural politics" (11).⁵⁷ Acknowledging and upholding the political sovereignty of the Iroquois Confederacy and thus refusing settler recognition through Canadian citizenship, McComber embodies what A. Simpson defines as a "traditional woman" in *Mohawk Interruptus*:

⁵⁷ Influenced by Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson, among others, Glen Coulthard (Dene) is known for his theory of rejecting the colonial politics of recognition as an adequate means to transform the colonial relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian nation-state. Instead, he demands, in *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014), to modulate hegemonic right-based legal and political frameworks into "a resurgent politics of recognition that seeks to practice decolonial, gender-emancipatory, and economically nonexploitative alternative structures of law and sovereign authority grounded on a critical refashioning of the best of the Indigenous legal and political traditions" (*Red Skin* 179). In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, L. Simpson links Indigenous political movements and politics of refusal: "At their core, Indigenous political movements contest the very foundation of the Canadian state in its current expression" (16).

A ‘traditional woman’ would be defined as someone who self-consciously practices ‘tradition,’ and rejects the authority of the settler nation-state to define her or accord her rights. She does not vote in federal or provincial elections, she does not pay taxes, she uses her ‘red card’ (with her clan, not her band number) to cross the U.S.-Canadian border, she may refuse to use a provincially issued Medicare card to obtain health care. ‘Traditional’ would entail a very adamant stance in terms of sovereignty [...]. (226-227, n13)

Similar to McComber, the avatar Lance Thomas refers, in episode 3, to Iroquois traditions and explains what it means to be a warrior: “A warrior’s job is to protect the people and the territory” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 01mm46ss). He cites Karoniaktajeh Louis Hall⁵⁸ (Kanien’kehá:ka), who defines one of the several warrior credos in his *Warrior’s Handbook* (1979) as follows: “Think right so that you shall do right and be right, for only the purely justice minded can achieve peace and happiness for all” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 02mm00ss; transcription based on Hall qtd. in A. Simpson 27).⁵⁹ Hall’s words, as well as the slogan “Peace, Power, Righteousness” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 02mm30ss), underline the basically peace-oriented and protective mission of the Warrior Society. This is similar to A. Simpson’s description of Kanien’kehá:ka communities as “peace loving, but definitely ready to use force (consistently in defense of rights and of territory)” (31). Thomas thus reminds the group of the purpose of their actions: “It is crucial to remember why we are here. We are protecting our territory. This is not the time to show off how big your balls are” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 02mm19ss). I read Thomas’s

⁵⁸ Karoniaktajeh Louis Hall designed the famous “Mohawk Warrior Flag” that the avatar Lance Thomas points at in the third episode. For more information, see Horn-Miller, “Emergence.”

⁵⁹ This is an example of intertextuality and demonstrates the significance of Hall’s work for the Kanien’kehá:ka nation. In his *Warrior’s Handbook* (1979), Hall interprets the meaning of the *Kaienerekowa* or the *Great Law of Peace*, which is the Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy.

statement, and especially his last sentence, as a feminist critique of Indigenous hypermasculinity, which often involves toxic behaviours.⁶⁰ In conjunction with the Warrior Society's principles, Thomas's statement thus heavily contradicts the public assumption that Mohawks are "troublemakers" and aims at deconstructing the stereotyped image of the aggressive, violent, and bloodthirsty male Mohawk warrior generally depicted in settler narratives.⁶¹ As St-Amand argues, stereotypic media representations of Indigenous activists have overshadowed reports on the complex history of settler colonialism preceding (and succeeding) the events at Kanehsatà:ke: "les images saisissantes de *warriors* masqués, perchés sur des véhicules de la police renversés en travers de la route et brandissant un fusil en signe de victoire, ont exercé un attrait médiatique plus puissant que la complexité politique d'une coexistence issue d'un processus de colonisation" ("Retour" 82).

If the biased media representation had an impact on the settler population in Quebec, as I will briefly demonstrate below, it certainly affected Kanien'kehá:ka youth. In conversation with Anderson, Gabriel describes her observations of how the omnipresent misrepresentation of the

⁶⁰ Scholarly and creative work on Indigenous masculinities allows us to rethink heteropatriarchal stereotypes and toxic relationships between Indigenous women, men, queer, trans, and two-spirit people. In his introduction to *Carrying the Burden of Peace: Reimagining Indigenous Masculinities Through Story* (2021), settler scholar Sam McKegney, for instance, asks and seeks answers to the following pertinent and complex questions: "Can a critical examination of Indigenous masculinities be an honour song – one that celebrates rather than pathologizes; one that holds people and institutions to account but seeks diversity and strength rather than evidence of victimry; one that struggles to overturn heteropatriarchy without centring settler colonialism; one that validates and affirms without fixing the terms of engagement? Can a critical examination of Indigenous masculinities be an embodied enterprise? Be creative? Be inclusive? Be erotic? Be funny?" (IX). For further information on Indigenous masculinities, see, for example, McKegney's interviews with Indigenous artists, activists, scholars, and Elders published in *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood* (2014); the seminal collection *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration* (2015), co-edited by Cree scholar Robert Alexander Innes and Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson; or Lisa Tatonetti's *Written by the Body: Gender Expansiveness and Indigenous Non-Cis Masculinities* (2021).

⁶¹ In my understanding, A. Simpson's expression "Mohawk Interruptus" subversively plays with this image of the Mohawk "troublemaker" who intentionally interrupts mainstream Canadian life, for example by blocking important arterial roads, to signal protest and resistance. Interestingly, Indigenous women who fought for their rights as Indigenous women were also seen as troublemakers in their communities, as Sandra Lovelace (Mi'kmaq) reminds us when she recalls what Indigenous men's organizations said at that time about Indigenous women publicly resisting sexist discrimination: "Those women are just trouble-makers, just radical women wanting attention" (qtd. in Silman 165).

“Mohawk Warrior” has influenced the youth’s sense of identity: “Their impression was that being a Mohawk meant being a warrior and being a warrior meant being a badass” (qtd. in Anderson, “Interview” 55). What Gabriel outlines is the shift from an Iroquois understanding of being a warrior, as described by the avatar Lance Thomas, towards a European misinterpretation of the concept. In a similar approach of stereotypic deconstruction and Indigenous resurgence, Taiaiake Alfred explains in *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005) that the “most common English-Kanienkeha translation for the word ‘warrior’ is *rotiskenhrakete*, which literally means, ‘carrying the burden of peace’” (78). He then continues to differentiate between the commonly known white conception of a warrior and the lesser known Indigenous understanding of the term based on Iroquois principles:

We need to become warriors again. When we think of those people who take on the responsibility to act against threats to the people, we think of the word, “warrior.” But, obviously, the way that word is understood is just one of the meanings of the term. It is European in origin and quite a male-gendered and soldierly image in most people’s minds; it doesn’t reflect real Onkwehonwe [Original People] notions from any of our cultures, especially that of the ideal we are seeking to understand and apply here, of men and women involved in a spiritually rooted resurgence of Onkwehonwe strength. (Alfred, *Wasáse* 78)

Skawennati continues this tradition of deconstructing the European/settler imagination of the “Mohawk warrior” - and in extension the violent Indigenous protestor - and aims at rectifying this image based on their own ontologies and philosophies. The avatar whom I believe portrays Ellen Gabriel as the spokesperson for her community in 1990 serves to reverse the image of violence that coats the “Oka Crisis.” In the “Factoid” flashback appearing in the first half of the

third episode, the female avatar decries settler violence, which is mostly absent from mainstream media representation: “What kind of people are you? There’s children here, and you are shooting teargas at us. We’re not armed, and you are aiming your weapons at us. What kind of people are you?” (Skawennati, *TT*, E03, 03mm13ss). St-Amand comments on this biased mediatization in her article “Retour sur la crise d’Oka” (2010), which resumes the event in light of its 20th anniversary: “Si la posture des Mohawks défendant leur territoire par la force des armes a été fort décriée, les tenants et les aboutissants de l’opération policière dans la pinède se sont peu à peu fait oublier dans le spectacle médiatique qui a suivi” (82). As an important strategy of decolonization, Skawennati denounces settler violence and situates settler propaganda and hate, as depicted in the flashback, as a direct reaction to one-sided reporting based on misrepresentation. More importantly, she visualizes settler actions of propaganda and hate and, consequently, makes them tangible for the viewer without foregrounding these violent and harmful images. She thus successfully balances her substantive critique of violent settler colonialism on the one hand and an empowering visual self-representation on the other. To put it differently, Skawennati takes the events of Kanehsatà:ke - predominantly known as a story of violent Indigenous warriors - and turns them into a story of Indigenous resistance and resurgence which aims at empowering Indigenous communities.

Depicting a key moment of First Nations history and integrating fundamental elements of Iroquois politics and culture that emphasize Indigenous sovereignty, such as the references to the Iroquois Confederacy, the Warrior Society, and the Two Row Wampum, a treaty between the Kanien’kehá:ka and Dutch traders from the 17th century, this episode, as well as the whole *TimeTraveller*TM project, serves as a teaching tool for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers who are tired of biased settler historiography and wish to deepen their knowledge of

Indigenous history, politics, and culture, with a focus on Indigenous perspectives.⁶² For this reason, her digital reimag(in)ing of major historical events is characterized by a practice of subversion.⁶³ On the level of content, this subversive practice is evident in the unwriting of dominant history and its rewriting from an Indigenous point-of-view, but Skawennati's artwork goes beyond simple resistance and subversion of power relations. She resists the absence and misrepresentation of First Nations people in hegemonic settler narratives that have deeply impacted Indigenous-settler relations and resulted in the systemic oppression of Indigenous Peoples. Most importantly, she actively re-imagines a new narrative based on Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and perspectives that envisions Indigenous people as visible, self-determined agents. These combined elements of resistance and resurgence mirror Anishinaabe writer and academic Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which he defines as follows:

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 reaction, however pertinent. [...] Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry. (*Survivance* 1)

In the context of *TimeTraveller*TM, Vizenor's elements of continuous Indigenous presence and agency are key to unwriting and remaking history, changing present conditions, and imagining a

⁶² As Skawennati mentions on the AbTeC website, this interpretation can also be applied to the level of production because extensive research was needed to authentically recreate the historical events depicted in the nine episodes of her project.

⁶³ The practice of subversion is often linked to French philosopher Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which he introduced in his work *De la grammatologie* (1967), defining it as a practice of textual analysis that unveils conceptual and ideological oppositions. In Postcolonial Studies, deconstruction has become a common method to question and critique colonial systems and ideologies by subverting established colonial hierarchies and revalorizing marginalized people and their cultures. The deconstructive method not only shows what has been privileged, but more importantly, highlights what has been ignored, neglected, and oppressed. For the purpose of this article, however, I prefer Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which also includes acts of subversion.

self-determined future. Dillon, a leading authority in the world of Indigenous sf, even classifies the concept of Indigenous survivance as an essential condition or, in her words, a “*sine qua non* of Indigenous Futurisms” (“Indigenous Futurisms” 2; original emphasis). In addition, acts of subversion and remaking are supported on the level of the chosen medium, machinima, which relies “on subversion and creative misuse” (Kirschner qtd. in Harwood 175). Skawennati’s intention to repurpose new media technologies translates into her subversion of the ego-shooter genre that traditionally represents a hypermasculine “warrior” executing acts of violence. The face-off scene between the Canadian soldier and the Indigenous warrior that was mentioned above picks up the important first-person perspective of the ego-shooter, but Skawennati re-imagines a non-violent strategy to solve this conflict, one that is initiated by a Kanien’kehá:ka woman and based on the Iroquois understanding of the warrior as a (mostly) peaceful protector of the community. By foregrounding the importance of the community and its protection and by restoring agency and decisional power to Kanien’kehá:ka women, Skawennati succeeds in repurposing a Western video game genre according to Indigenous values and understandings.

Imagining Indigenous Autofuturity: Episode 4 - Intergalactic Pow Wow, 2112

The two episodes of Skawennati’s *TimeTraveller*TM series discussed in this chapter differ in two main points, and therefore offer a fruitful starting point for a comparative analysis. Whereas the third episode, discussed in the previous section, is centred around the male main character, Hunter, and his virtual trip to a major event in Quebec’s recent past, the 1990 “Oka Crisis,” the fourth episode, which I discuss in this section, focuses on Karahkwenhawī, the female main character, and her virtual trip to an important event in her future, the “Manitouahbee Intergalactic Pow Wow of 2112” (Lewis 69). The avatars’ virtual movement to events taking

place in different centuries of our past and future and across the North American continent mirrors Skawennati's creative play with time and space in all of the nine *TimeTraveller*TM machinima episodes. In an unchronological order, the two main avatars (Hunter and Karahkwenhawi), first individually and finally together, travel to "events such as an Aztec festival in pre-contact Tenochtitlan in 1490, the Minnesota Massacre in 1862, the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, the Oka Crisis in 1990, and the Manitouahbee Intergalactic Pow Wow of 2112" (Lewis 69). Lewis points to the significance of history to Skawennati's artistic work on Indigenous autofuturity, explaining that she "uses the history as a launch point both for reimagining the historical accounts from a Native viewpoint and for tracing lines forward from the actual present into a fantastical future" (69).

In the fourth episode of *TimeTraveller*TM, the female avatar Karahkwenhawi, at the time of production set in the present time, the year 2011, is presented as the testimonial to a complex Indigenous present that is still closely linked to the past. The episode's setting at "Saint Francis-Xavier Mission in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory" (AbTeC), the Catholic Church in the community, reveals the legacy of colonialism and missionary work on Turtle Island. Despite her professional interest in the church and one of its Mohawk icons, Karahkwenhawi's skepticism, or even refusal of this religious institution, becomes obvious when she refuses to cross herself with holy water after entering the building. Skawennati's production clearly shows that Karahkwenhawi is aware of this spiritual ritual but that she consciously renounces it, as her gestures illustrate. Likewise, her behaviour, especially her acceptance of incoming phone calls in both the entrance hall and the nave support this observation of indifference towards Christianity. And yet, Karahkwenhawi is impressed by the traces that the Mohawk physically left in the

church, such as inscriptions in Kanienkeha under the Stations of the Cross, and, most importantly, by the shrine of Kateri Tekakwitha (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 - Kateri & Karahkwenhawi. Image courtesy of Skawennati.

Karahkwenhawi has a professional reason for visiting the church. She needs to conduct research on “the representations of Aboriginal people in public spaces” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 00mm59ss) for her art history class, and her paper deals with Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), also informally known as the “Lily of the Mohawks” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 02mm40ss).⁶⁴ Due to the story’s development in the fourth episode, which then switches to a future event, the

⁶⁴ Interestingly, Skawennati’s most recent art installation at the 2020 *Art Souterrain Festival* in Montreal hyper-visibly positions her Indigenous avatars in the urban city’s public space and challenges settler ignorance of Indigenous presence and resistance: “Skawennati’s installation consists of activist avatars assembling throughout the space of the Centre de commerce Mondial, with oversized textile patterns wrapping various architectural features. Called to action by the passé portrayals of Indigenous peoples as well as their almost total absence from futurist narratives, Skawennati imagines cyberpunk avatars that burst onto the scene and demand a thriving future for their communities here and now” (“Skawennati”). In her public exhibition, Skawennati addresses a diversity of topics, such as Indigenous land claims, environmental protection, access to clean drinking water in Indigenous communities, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. In episode 6 of *TimeTraveller™*, Hunter also lists some of the problems that Indigenous Peoples face on reserves, which demonstrates Skawennati’s long-lasting artistic engagement with these issues.

viewer does not learn more about Tekakwitha, but Skawennati uses this figure as a transitional element and fully dedicates the next episode to her. Hence, Skawennati digitally retells, in episode 5, the hagiography of Tekakwitha, depicting the events surrounding her death caused by smallpox in 1680, while, at the same time, pointing to the “civilizing mission” in the so-called “New World.”⁶⁵ In both episodes, Skawennati alludes to the renown, yet contested status of Tekakwitha among the community, and Karahkwenhawi explains at the beginning of the fifth episode: “When you are from Kahnawake, you pretty much automatically know who Kateri Tekakwitha is. But in case you don’t know: She is the first Aboriginal person to ever even get close to becoming a saint” (Skawennati, *TT*, E05, 00mm36ss). For a decade now, Tekakwitha has been officially recognized as a saint, as A. Simpson points out in *Mohawk Interruptus*: “The Catholic Church at Kahnawà:ke houses the partial, bodily remains of the ‘first’ Mohawk saint, and second Indigenous saint in church history, Kateri Tekakwitha, who was canonized in 2012” (5).⁶⁶ The inclusion of Kateri Tekakwitha, “this ancient woman who is the same age as me [Karahkwenhawi; both are 24 years old in 1680 and 2011, respectively], a Mohawk woman we all claim as ours, yet is no one’s ancestor” (Skawennati, *TT*, E05, 06mm25ss), demonstrates that Skawennati is not afraid of depicting the multifaceted history of her community and the diverse, and sometimes opposing roles women played in it. The comparison of the “traditional women” in episode 3 and Kateri Tekakwitha in episodes 4 and 5, depending on the perspective considered

⁶⁵ I will expand on Indigenous critiques of the European myth of “discovering” the American continent and colonialism’s “civilizing mission” in chapter 2 (“Creating Indigenous Herstory”). In episode 5, the “civilizing mission” is alluded to when Father Pierre Cholenec calls Kateri (baptized Catherine) and her friend Marie-Thérèse (whom Karahkwenhawi embodies during her virtual trip) “children in the faith,” and, responding to Kateri’s objection that she is not a child anymore at the age of 24, he insists: “We consider all of our savages to be children in the faith. It means that you have much to learn.” Hinting at the civilizing mission, he finally concludes: “It is my whole reason for being here in Kahnawake. My whole reason for coming to the New World. We will teach you all to know and to love the one true God” (Skawennati, *TT*, E05, 01mm19ss).

⁶⁶ More specifically, Tekakwitha is the “Patron saint of the environment and of Aboriginal people” (Rasmussen 2012).

being either a “Mohawk saint” or a “traitor” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 00mm56ss), demonstrates Skawennati’s ability to represent complex images of Kanien’kehá:ka women, and these images are complemented by Karahkwenhawi as a nuanced character in the present as well as the Indigenous women represented in the future-part of the fourth episode, as I will discuss later.

The chosen setting of Kahnawà:ke is also important because the community played a crucial role in the “Oka Crisis,” which is again evoked at the beginning of episode 4. As a result of police violence targeted at the protectors/protestors at Kanehsatà:ke on July 11, Kahnawà:ke joined the movement of resistance with solidarity blockades and barred the Mercier Bridge to support their sister community: “Des Mohawks de Kahnawake manifestent aussitôt leur appui en bloquant le pont Mercier, artère importante reliant Montréal à sa banlieu” (St-Amand “Retour” 82).⁶⁷ The Mercier Bridge “connects this reserve [Kahnawà:ke] to Montreal, across the St. Lawrence River” (A. Simpson 5), and more importantly, the fact that it connects the Island of Montreal with its highly-populated southern suburbs makes it a strategically well-placed point for Indigenous activists who used the blockade to increase their pressure on the settler governments.

Different references to the Kanien’kehá:ka Resistance, and particularly Karahkwenhawi’s own memories as a four-year old child witnessing the conflict first-hand, work as a transitional element between episodes 3 and 4. More specifically, Karahkwenhawi remembers that someone brought her to her grandmother’s because her mother got arrested, as depicted in the impressive final scenes of the conflict in episode 3.⁶⁸ As the viewer already knows, it was the character

⁶⁷ The blockade of this important bridge created increasing tension between the Indigenous communities and the settler population depending on this transportation route and resulted in “frustrated and hostile civilians” (Marshall) who did not mask their anger and hate. Obomsawin specifically deals with those worsened Indigenous-settler relations in her documentary *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000).

⁶⁸ In episode 4, Karahkwenhawi uses the Kanienkeha word “Istá,” meaning mother, to address her mother when she talks to her on the phone.

embodied by Hunter who took care of Karahkwenhawi when the standoff came to an end, and, for some unexplainable reasons, Karahkwenhawi recognizes him when he suddenly appears in the church.⁶⁹ Although Hunter plays only a minor role in episode 4 (based on both characters' comparison of screen time), his avatar is still of importance for the story's development. When Karahkwenhawi contemplates the shrine of Kateri Tekakwitha, the sudden appearance and disappearance of his avatar surprises her. First mistaking Hunter for Tekakwitha, Karahkwenhawi then questions her lived experience and asks herself "if that was a religious experience, a flashback, or a rift in the space-time continuum" (Skawennati, *TT*, 03mm06ss). Initially overwhelmed by the event - clearly expressed by her exclamation "What the hell?!" (Skawennati, *TT*, 03mm17ss) - Karahkwenhawi then inspects the *TimeTraveller*TM glasses (depicted as a close-up) that Hunter accidentally lost, as he explains in episode 6 (Skawennati, *TT*, 05mm19ss). Though Karahkwenhawi is not supposed to have technology from the future, it will eventually transport her into the virtual future and allows the main avatars to meet again.

Hunter's background story is set in the long-term future, the year 2121, and the first three episodes of the *TimeTraveller*TM series deal more with Indigenous autohistory, or Hunter's exploration of past events. The fourth episode, first set in Karahkwenhawi's present time, 2011, and then mostly in the year 2112, is therefore special because it is the first episode of the series that is set simultaneously in the past, from Hunter's point of view, and the future, from Karahkwenhawi's perspective. Her creative deconstruction of linear time and its replacement by circular time allows Skawennati, through her integration of autohistory into the larger narrative framework of Indigenous autofuturity, to develop "a new mythology and an original set of stories to illustrate the values of an imagined future Native culture" (Lewis 69) or, to again use

⁶⁹ As Hunter states in episode 6, Karahkwenhawi should not be able to remember him from their encounter in 1990 (Skawennati, *TT*, E06, 05mm30).

Maracle's expression, a "dreamspace" ("Post-Colonial" 207). Skawennati's refusal of the "temporal narrative structure of Western culture" as well as her emphasis on the places that her avatars virtually explore, echoes Indigenous methodologies of storytelling where "stories are not meant to be oriented within the linearity of time, but rather they transcend time and fasten themselves to places" (Kovach 96).

While many Indigenous communities have long started to reclaim their past, to retell their stories, and to rewrite their histories from their own point of view, a long-term imagination of the future is often lacking from these narratives, as Lewis laments: "What we do not do is talk about our future. We make plans to keep everybody alive for the next few years, and we strive to stay mindful to the seventh generation, but we do not tend to spend much time imagining what our communities will be like in one hundred, five hundred, or a thousand years" (56). Hence, this is exactly what Skawennati does in episode 4 of her *TimeTraveller*TM series. She moves beyond the status quo and imagines what Indigenous individuals and communities will look like in one hundred years. Indigenous autofuturity opens a creative space for imagining what the future could be like. Restricted to imagining only one of several possible future realities, as are all future-oriented narratives, Skawennati sidesteps both completely utopian and dystopian versions and maintains a balanced vision of the future. As emphasized throughout this chapter, representation (whether historical or future-oriented) matters and strongly influences how individuals and collectives see themselves. Offering self-representation through nuanced future imaginaries, Skawennati expresses the positive impact of Indigenous autofuturity on contemporary Indigenous communities. Future imaginaries of healthy, successful, and thriving individuals and cultures translate into our present-day realities and, by shaping the image that

Indigenous people have of themselves, reinstate agency in Indigenous self-definition and self-determination.

The second half of episode 4 revolves around Karahkwenhawi's exploration of a cultural event that takes place in the long-term future, about one hundred years ahead of her present time. Skawennati again succeeds in demonstrating the interrelatedness of the past, present, and future when she takes her avatar on the virtual trip. This time, the linking element is the expression "Famous Mohawks" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 03mm37ss), with the name of Kateri Tekakwitha listed on top of a list in the "Intelligent Agent" mode, which Karahkwenhawi sees when she puts on the "not [...] ordinary sunglasses" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 03mm33ss), and, about a minute later in the episode, the naming of the punk band "Famous Dead Mohawks" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 04mm34ss), playing at the future live event.

Changing from a medium-range shot depicting Karahkwenhawi in the church, the perspective then briefly turns into a POV shot, showing what Karahkwenhawi sees through the glasses and, again, giving the viewer the feeling of walking in the avatar's shoes. A change of scene indicates that Karahkwenhawi then experiences her first virtual time travel, now finding herself in the arena of the "Winnipeg Olympic Stadium" where the "Manitouahbee Pow Wow 2112" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 03mm54ss) is being held. Again, the setting is vital because the future Winnipeg has a complex role in the episode, acting both as an inspiration for a dreamspace and a counter-place to the Winnipeg of the past and present time.⁷⁰ Compared to a total Indigenous population accounting for 4.9% in Canada, Winnipeg has, with 12.2% of its total population according to the 2016 Census of Population, the largest Indigenous population of

⁷⁰ Winnipeg has long been a major cultural centre of the Prairie provinces and holds a reputation as a thriving community of literature, sport, religion, music, education, and art (Artibise). It is therefore not accidental that Skawennati has chosen Winnipeg as the place of action for her future episode.

any major city in Canada (“Aboriginal Peoples” 1, 9).⁷¹ At the same time, Manitoba, with its capital Winnipeg, suffers from the highest crime index in Canada as well as the highest provincial homicide rate (Roy and Marcellus 6). With an approximately five times higher rate of homicide for Indigenous people in Canada (Roy and Marcellus 3), this means that the Indigenous population in Winnipeg and especially Indigenous women living there are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing different forms of violence than elsewhere in the country. Under those circumstances, Skawennati’s imagination of Winnipeg as a safe place to gather for Indigenous people is made even more relevant. The host of the event, Luke Mithoowaastee, hints at the dark history (and its continuance in the present) of genocide and violence against Indigenous Peoples but transforms it into a memory of resilience and survivance expressed through positive welcoming words: “Oh, it’s good to see you all here, all together, you beautiful people” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 06mm29). This introductory example, among many others in the episode, shows that Skawennati refuses trauma narratives that further victimize individuals and collectives and prefers, instead, creating alternative narratives of survivance, hope, and love.

By constructing a whole machinima episode around an imagined intertribal pow wow, Skawennati valorizes its cultural significance for many Indigenous nations and underlines the collective and empowering nature of this social event. In other words, the pow wow is a highly symbolic setting that allows Karahkwenhawi, the participants, and the public at the pow wow, as well as the viewer, to feel either a togetherness or allyship with the larger Indigenous community. Her future pow wow, “embrac[ing] many Nations, including those that historically did not participate in powwows” (LaPensée and Lewis 112), is thus a powerful call for pan-Indigenous community-building, collaboration, and collective action against misrepresentation,

⁷¹ Despite its ranking among the major cities with the slowest Indigenous population growth, “the Aboriginal population [in Winnipeg still] grew at a faster pace than the non-Aboriginal population” (“Aboriginal Peoples” 10).

absence, and oppression, and therefore echoes the general theme of collective resistance in episode 3. Discussing Skawennati's first digital art project, *CyberPowWow* (1997), Gaertner recognizes the importance of the community for Indigenous survival/survivance: "[b]ringing indigenous peoples together from across communities is a way to gather strength, collectivize, and proliferate cultural resurgence" (58). Likewise, Richard Hill (Tuscarora) identifies the pow wow "as a vital catalyst for cultural renewal" (qtd. in Gaertner 58) and, although the theme of resurgence is visually best represented in this particular episode, the whole *TimeTraveller*TM series resonates with this important motif. Including diverse cultural expressions, such as music, dance, and clothing, the pow wow publicly celebrates Indigenous cultural continuity and survival. More specifically, Skawennati imagines drumming and dancing competitions, live music, and the Manitouahbee fashion show featuring next season's regalia collection and demonstrates how Indigenous cultures brave (neo-)colonial attempts of cultural erasure and destruction by adapting to changing realities.

Building on oral stories that have been passed on from generation to generation, the avatar Luke Mithoowaastee recalls a period of cultural prohibitions in Canada, when gatherings and practising Indigenous rituals, ceremonies, and traditions were sanctioned by colonial legislation and the "pow wow was outlawed" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 06mm42ss).

Mithoowaastee's reference to federal bans on cultural and social activities implies a condemnation of the settler state's various genocidal and assimilative attempts, which sought - and according to many Indigenous writers and scholars still continue - to erase Indigenous Peoples, at least culturally, from the colonized landscape by forcefully absorbing them into Canadian mainstream culture and identity. The name of the punk band the "Famous Dead Mohawks" (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 04mm34ss), in concert at the pow wow, ironically pays tribute

to the settler imagination of the “Vanished Indian,” and honors all those who “were supposed to vanish, to die” (Akiwenzie-Damm, “Without Reservation” 99) but have survived and thrived.⁷² Their band name is therefore an oxymoron because the Mohawk communities, like most other Indigenous nations across Canada, have survived cultural and physical genocide and stand for the continued presence of Indigenous Peoples on their territory.⁷³ Skawennati’s joke is emphasized by Karahkwenhawi’s exaggerated repetition of the band name and her comment that it “is pretty funny actually” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 04mm39ss).

Skawennati’s machinima future pow wow is a manifestation of Indigenous survival and survivance that recognizes and celebrates the diverse, rich, and vibrant cultures of Indigenous nations who have been living on Turtle Island for millennia. As Lewis remarks, Skawennati draws “the development of a future where the Native community, aided by the highest birth rate on the continent, has reasserted itself as the majority culture” (69). As Anishinaabe writer and editor Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm sarcastically explains about the sexuality of Indigenous Peoples: “Certainly they [the colonizing governments with their missions of genocide and assimilation and the missionaries] didn’t want us procreating. That wasn’t the solution to ‘The Indian Problem.’ We were supposed to vanish, to die, not procreate, for God’s sake!” (“Without Reservation” 99). Wolfe links Indigenous reproduction to the settler logic and strategy of

⁷² In his essay “Ought We to Teach These?: Ethical, Responsible, and Aboriginal Cultural Protocols in the Classroom” (2016), Fortin emphasizes the longevity of this contradiction between settler imagination and Indigenous lived reality in Marius Barbeau’s novel *The Downfall of Temlaham* (1928): Barbeau “was always faced with a cultural divide: the first that was premised on both his Oxford-educated view of the ‘disappearing Native,’ and the second on the social and cultural perspective of the Gitksan, who attempted to maintain their own independence during a period of violent physical, psychological, and political attempts by both government agents and missionaries to re-socialize the Northwest Pacific Coast communities” (460).

⁷³ The Beothuk are probably the best-known case of an Indigenous people that did not survive the contact with European explorers and settlers on the North American continent. For more information, see the first chapter “La tragique histoire des Béothuks” in the second volume of Bernard Assiniwi’s *Histoire des Indiens du Haut et du Bas Canada* (1974, pp. 9-25). Recent research, however, suggests that Beothuk DNA is still present in the Newfoundland/Labrador area.

elimination used to facilitate access to the land and its valuable resources: “As opposed to enslaved people, whose reproduction augmented their owners’ wealth, Indigenous people obstructed settlers’ access to land, so their increase was counterproductive” (388). The avatar Luke Mithoowaastee, however, mentions the “record numbers of Indian babies [...] born in the 21st century” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 07mm03ss) and draws a close relation between the high birth rates, a growing Indigenous population, and thriving communities and cultures. According to data collected by Statistics Canada, fertility rates of Indigenous people are significantly higher than those of non-Indigenous people in Canada (Arriagada) and represent an important factor contributing to the overall growth of the Indigenous population across Canada that Skawennati envisions for the long-term future.⁷⁴

Despite the great potential that video games, and especially ego-shooters, offer for depictions of Indigenous revenge, Skawennati avoids a “Native-only utopia,” which Lewis describes as the genocidal imagination of a time and place “where the Thunder has cleansed the

⁷⁴ It is vital to acknowledge high fertility rates of Indigenous women despite genocidal acts of forced sterilization. For more detailed information, see settler scholar Darlene Juschka’s chapter on “Indigenous Women, Reproductive Justice, and Indigenous Feminisms” (2017) where she offers an extensive overview of the situation of Indigenous women in North America and contextualizes the forced sterilization of Indigenous women and girls as an attempted form of “erasure of Indigeneity” (14). As lawyer Yvonne Boyer emphasizes in “First Nations Women’s Contributions to Culture and Community through Canadian Law” (2009), the “involuntary surgical sterilization [of Indigenous women] carried out in Canada” constituted “a blatant breach of the Genocide Convention” (75). Moreover, Cleo Big Eagle (Nakoda) and Eric Guimond (of Mi’kmaq and French descent) explain in their essay “Contributions That Count: First Nations Women and Demography” (2009) how legislative changes, most importantly recent amendments to the *Indian Act* that specifically addressed gender discrimination and inheritance rules of legal status, contribute in significant ways to the overall growth of the Indigenous population in Canada (43-44). Kanien’kehá:ka human rights activist Mary Two-Axe Earley’s (1911-1996) struggle for the recognition of Indigenous women’s rights, particularly her contributions to initiate substantial changes to the discriminatory “marrying-out” clause enshrined in the *Indian Act* that resulted in First Nations women’s (and their children’s) forced disenfranchisement and expulsion from their community in case of marrying a non-status Indian, must be honored here. While Two-Axe Earley is rightfully recognized for her strong political activism for Indigenous women’s rights and has been dubbed “architect of the Canadian women’s movement” (Robinson), it was indeed the collective effort of many Indigenous women and their supporters that eventually led to the amendment of the *Indian Act* in 1985 (also known as Bill C-31). More recent amendments in 2011 (Bill C-3) and 2017/2019 (Bill S-3) tackled First Nations women’s rights to pass down their status to their descendants because gender discrimination continued after the 1985 amendment.

white people from Turtle Island” (57).⁷⁵ Lewis explains that in the *TimeTraveller*TM series, “the return to Native majority happens through procreation rather than through destruction” (69).

Although Skawennati focuses on Indigenous self-representation and marginalizes perspectives of non-Indigenous people in her stories, she explicitly keeps away from a genocidal or violently indigenized future vision of Turtle Island. Instead, she advocates for Indigenous empowerment and resurgence with the ultimate goal to again become self-determined and sovereign nations that are responsible for creating and maintaining a relationship of mutual respect between the different peoples who live side-by-side on Turtle Island, as it was once proposed and visually recorded in the Haudenosaunee Two Row Wampum Treaty of 1613.⁷⁶

Skawennati’s focus on women in the fourth *TimeTraveller*TM episode underlines her matrifocal vision of the past, present, and future. As I have already discussed the historical figure of Kateri Tekakwitha at the beginning of this section, I will limit my further analysis to Karahkwenhawi and the representation of Indigenous women in the long-term future, which Skawennati constructs as the time of Indigenous women. The first evidence to support this argument is the artist’s depiction of Karahkwenhawi among the women jingle dancers at the beginning of the future section of the episode. The female avatar directly travels into a jingle

⁷⁵ However, Skawennati alludes to genocide and ethnic cleansing by historicizing Kateri Tekakwitha’s death as a consequence of the smallpox pandemic caused by European immigrants. In their essay on genocidal carcerality, Woolford and Gacek explain that forced removal, a genocidal and assimilative strategy that Indigenous Peoples in Canada were and continue to be subjected to in a settler-colonial world, is “sometimes discussed under the terminology of ‘ethnic cleansing’” (405).

⁷⁶ *Guswhenta*, or the Two Row Wampum Treaty, a treaty between the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee and representatives of the Dutch government dating from the year 1613, is a great visual representation of this independent, and simultaneously connected relationship that ensures each nation’s self-determination: “The belt consists of two rows of purple wampum beads set on a background of white wampum beads. The purple beads signify the course of two vessels – a Haudenosaunee canoe and a non-Native ship that are traveling down the river of life together, side-by-side but never touching with each people in their own boat with their own laws, religion, customs, and sovereignty. Though the customs followed are different, each people are equal. The three white stripes symbolize friendship, peace, and respect between the two nations” (“Wampum”). It is important to note that the *Guswhenta* is a living treaty that still serves as a symbolic and binding agreement between Indigenous and settler peoples. See also Alfred (*Peace* 76).

dance competition and embodies one individual in the dancing collective. Traditionally a healing dance performed by women, the jingle dress dance has also become an expression of cultural pride performed at pow wows.⁷⁷ This resonates with the story's development because the female jingle dancers are the ones who are first depicted when the scene switches from the church setting in Kahnawà:ke to the future pow wow in Winnipeg.⁷⁸ Manitoba's capital and its surrounding area are within the geographical radius where the common existence of the jingle dance was documented in the early 20th century (Thiel 17). However, the jingle dress dance experienced a period of oblivion and only re-emerged in the 1970s, markedly an era of cultural revitalization and resurgence across Turtle Island (Thiel 17). The jingle dress, as depicted by Skawennati in this episode, acts specifically as a symbol of contemporary and future Indigenous women who continue to keep cultural traditions at their heart, but who adapt them to their realities.⁷⁹ In detail, the jingle dress combines traditional elements, such as the length of the dress and moccasins, and new elements, such as the use of vibrant colours and modern fabrics. The visibility that Skawennati accords to the jingle dancers counters Indigenous women's absence, marginalization, and misrepresentation in the past and positions them at the center of their thriving communities and living cultures. Moreover, the embodied performance of the jingle

⁷⁷ In his short article "Origins of the Jingle Dress Dance" (2007), Mark Thiel argues that oral histories locate the origins of the modern jingle dress dance "among the Ojibwa of the Minnesota-Ontario boundary waters area from 1900 to 1920" (14). In the aftermath of World War I and the deathly pandemic of the Spanish Influenza brought to North America by returning soldiers, "Hope of salvation from illness [...] provided the impetus for jingle dance popularity," according to Thiel (16). In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous jingle dancers use their social media accounts, such as Facebook, to perform and share their healing dances (R. Johnson).

⁷⁸ As I read it, the change of scene from the Catholic Church in Kahnawà:ke to the pow wow in Winnipeg is an indicator of Skawennati's critique of religious institutions' role in prohibiting Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices, which is shown more precisely in episode 5.

⁷⁹ This parallels what Alfred describes in *Peace, Power, Righteousness*: "The message here [...] is that whatever you are doing, you need to keep the traditional teachings in your heart and mind. Adapt, change, go forward, but always make sure you're listening to the traditional knowledge at the same time. Commit yourself to uphold the first principles and values" (20; original emphasis).

dance at the pow wow contests the idea of Indigenous cultures as dead cultures contained in the Western archive.



Figure 4 - Luke Mithoowaastee. Image courtesy of Skawennati.

The visibility and significance of Indigenous women is highlighted by the “stunning head female dancer” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 06mm03ss) who is presented as an internationally successful young woman. As Mithoowaastee proudly states, Starblanket is the Indigenous Miss Universe of 2111 and features on the cover of the Italian *Vogue*’s July issue (see Figure 4).⁸⁰ This future imaginary has already come true since Ashley Callingbull (Cree) was the first elected Indigenous (and Canadian) Miss Universe in 2015. Skawennati’s vision of successful women is further emphasized by naming Indigenous fashion designers showcasing their collections at the pow wow, and Indigenous female models presenting them. As the following statement by Skawennati shows, the integration and foregrounding of successful Indigenous women in the

⁸⁰ For a more detailed analysis of how Indigenous women appropriate beauty contests to counter their stereotypical images, see Bousquet et al. (2017).

*TimeTraveller*TM series is embedded into her larger project of healthy Indigenous self-representation: “I like to think that by adding these images of successful Native people to our collective mind’s eye, we can begin to reverse the tragic statistics and start to see our people thriving and becoming an integral part of North American society” (“Imagining” 05m32ss). What Skawennati here calls “tragic statistics” explains Cherokee literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice’s articulation of lived Indigenous experience: “Indigenous peoples are vastly overrepresented in all negative social indicators in Canada, the US, and other settler states, and grossly underrepresented in the positive ones” (*Why* 3).

To combat those statistics and eventually reverse them, Skawennati combines her future narrative of Indigenous resurgence with a narrative of love, a concept that Indigenous women have particularly seized on in their respective theoretical and creative works.⁸¹ Episode 4 of her *TimeTraveller*TM series thus frequently draws on “expressions of a loving gaze” (111), as Cayuga/Mohawk-Hungarian scholar Emerance Baker calls them in her essay on “Loving Indianess.” This “loving perception” (Baker 112) is, for instance, reflected in the welcoming words that Mithoowaastee addresses to “you beautiful Aboriginal people” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04,

⁸¹ Akiwenzie-Damm’s work on Indigenous erotica, for example in her article “Without Reservation: Erotica, Indigenous Style” (2000), links the concept of love to a much-needed reclamation of Indigenous eroticism that contradicts heteropatriarchal and stereotypical images of Indigenous women and men as well as their relationships. Dene/Métis author and photographer Tennille Campbell’s erotic poetry, Cree/Métis author and artist Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau’s erotic novel *L’amant du lac* (2013) - the first erotic novel published by an Indigenous woman in Quebec - as well as the work by Tracy Bear, Kim TallBear and other Indigenous women writers, scholars, and activists take a similar stance. Deborah McGregor’s 2013 article “Indigenous Women, Water Justice and *Zaagidowin* (Love)” shows that Indigenous concepts of love move beyond love between humans, and include non-humans, the land, and the water. As for examples of non-Indigenous literary research, Sarah Henzi’s essay “Bodies, Sovereignities, and Desire: Aboriginal Women’s Writing in Quebec” (2015) and Malou Brouwer’s essay “Le corps comme zone de contact: l’erotique et la souveraineté dans l’œuvre de Natasha Kanapé Fontaine” (2017) investigate Indigenous erotics in Quebec. It is vital to mention that conceptualizations of love and erotica are by no means uniquely bound to Indigenous women and therefore absent from Indigenous men’s or queer writing, whether theoretical or creative. The stories included in the queer science-fiction anthology *Love Beyond Body, Space, and Time* (2016; edited by Hope Nicholson), Qwo-Li Driskill’s essay “Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic” (2004), Mark Rifkin’s *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing In the Era of Self-Determination* (2012) as well as Niigaan Sinclair’s theoretical essay “K’zaugin: Storying Ourselves into Life” (2013) are just some examples among many others.

03mm49ss). The use of the second person plural pronoun “you” constitutes a direct form of address that comprehends, of course, the participants and the public of the pow wow, but also involves an extended form of address that goes straight to the heart of the viewer. To be sure that his words will affect his addressees, Mithoowaastee frequently repeats diverse expressions of love. Repetition is not only a common teaching tool in oral storytelling with a mnemonic function, traditionally used to facilitate the process of memorizing a story’s content, but, in this context, also a strategy of empowerment, revalorization, and resistance against the mainstream collective imaginary. This settler discourse has invented “image[s] of the Indian” or the “Imaginary Indian” (5), to again use Francis’s concept, a settler-colonial conception where Indigenous people exist, amongst other things, as savage, uncivilized, dirty, and thus ugly beings.⁸² In his seminal monograph *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018), Justice criticizes that the “story of *Indigenous deficiency*” connotes Indigenous people with a “constant lack: in morals, laws, culture, restraint, language, ambition, hygiene, desire, [and] love” (2; original emphasis).⁸³ Accordingly, Ktunaxa poet and scholar Smokii Sumac, in their review essay “Two Spirit and Queer Indigenous Resurgence through Sci-Fi Futurisms, Doubleweaving, and Historical Re-Imaginations,” pinpoints the significance of narratives of love embedded in Indigenous science-fiction: “this story tells us we are beautiful and deserving of love” (168). Although specifically related to Tłchq Dene writer Richard Van Camp’s queer short story

⁸² In her essay “Unbecoming a ‘Dirty Savage’” (1998), which analyzes Cree author Jane Pachano’s autobiography *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (1973), Linda Warley states: “Much of the language of the text is focused on the Native body, which is stereotypically represented as an alien, dirty, and corrupt body” (85).

⁸³ Justice states that there are many different toxic stories imposed from the outside but presents the story of Indigenous deficiency as being the most corrosive one (*Why* 2). Correspondingly, Dian Million in “Felt Theory” (2009) and Eve Tuck in “Suspending Damage” (2009) deal with hurtful, damaging narratives about Indigenous Peoples and urge for an ethical turn when it comes to research “about” Indigenous people. I will expand on this idea in Chapter 2 (“Indigenous Herstory”) and Chapter 3 (“Community and Care”) and discuss how Indigenous women writers in Quebec create healthy narratives of themselves and their communities.

“Aliens,” the above statement perfectly encapsulates the desired effect of Mithoowaastee’s loving gaze.



Figure 5 - Jingle Dancers Assembled. Image courtesy of Skawennati.

The beauty of Indigenous Peoples and cultures is best represented by the colourful images, and especially by the representation of “all those beautiful jingle dancers” (Skawennati, *TT*, E04, 05mm29ss; see Figure 5 and Figure 6).⁸⁴ In the prologue to her 1996 published autobiography, Mi’kmaq poet Rita Joe already urges that “our beauty must be discovered now” (*Song* 14). Moving beyond a uniquely corporal interpretation of beauty, Skawennati expresses a holistic interpretation of beauty that includes Indigenous cultures and their embodiment through cultural practices, such as dancing, drumming, and singing.⁸⁵ The visual representation of holistically beautiful and thriving First Nations people in new media spaces creates decolonial

⁸⁴ In their co-authored chapter “TimeTraveller™: First Nations Nonverbal Communication in Second Life” (2013), LaPensée and Lewis examine in detail the importance of clothing for Indigenous self-representation in virtual worlds.

⁸⁵ L. Simpson expresses a similar idea that links (yet not restricts) healthy images of oneself to embodied cultural practices: “In order to have a positive identity we have to be living in ways that illuminate that identity, and that propel us towards mino bimaadiziwin, the good life” (*Dancing* 13).

narratives of love and resurgence that Indigenous youth especially need for a healthy upbringing. As numerous survivors of Indigenous residential schools have described, and as recent research, for example by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, has confirmed, the traumatic experiences of forced displacement and acculturation in residential schools, of territorial and cultural dispossession, and of ongoing forms of colonization have an intergenerational impact on Indigenous communities that manifests in diverse forms of social dysfunctionality (Younging et al. 73, 126, 143). Skawennati produces images of healthy, successful, and thriving Indigenous people and uses them as a strategy for empowerment. Moreover, her representation acts as a counter-narrative to the toxic stories of Indigenous deficiency and other damaging and hurtful oral, written, and visual stories that have been circulating for centuries.

In order to produce resilient, strong, and empowered Indigenous youth, historical and current misrepresentations need to be counterbalanced and replaced by decolonial narratives and healthy images that focus on Indigenous self-representation and self-determination, as urged for by Akiwenzie-Damm, an Anishinaabe writer and editor who fights for the normalization of Indigenous love: “We need to see images of ourselves as healthy, whole people. People who love each other and who love ourselves. People who fall in love and out of love, who have lovers, who make love, who have sex. We need to create a healthy legacy for our peoples” (“Without Reservation” 101). Her statement is a call for a reclamation of the erotic, which she identifies as being mostly absent from Indigenous stories and literatures, although there has been a strong reclamation movement of Indigenous erotica in the arts since the publication of her seminal essay “Without Reservation: Erotica, Indigenous Style” in 2000. Akiwenzie-Damm defines the repression of Indigenous love, sexuality, and erotica as an oppressive weapon that complements the political and religious oppression of Indigenous Peoples and threatens their survival: “To

deny the erotic, to create an absence of erotica, is another weapon in the oppressor's arsenal.

When this part of us is dead, our future survival is in jeopardy ("Without Reservation" 99).

Indigenous feminist Kim TallBear (Sisseton, Wahpeton Oyate), for her part, links technoscience, environmental and sexual repression to this issue: "It became very clear that along with science and technology and control of the land and resources, there was control of Indigenous people's sexuality" (qtd. in Stirling).

On the other hand, Indigenous erotica, according to Akiwenzie-Damm, "speaks about the healing nature of love, about love that celebrates us as whole people, about love that is openly sexual, sensual, emotional, and spiritual. Love, and the expression of it, is a medicine to heal the pain of oppression, hatred, lovelessness and colonization" ("Without Reservation" 103).

Skawennati does include depictions of healthy love and sexual relations in her *TimeTraveller*TM project. The healthy depictions of love foregrounded by the developing partnership between the two main characters, Hunter and Karahkwenhawi, perform what Akiwenzie-Damm argues is the need to "positively portray Indigenous sexuality and healthy sexual, romantic, loving relationships between Indigenous partners" ("Without Reservation" 103) and regain what Nehiyawe (Cree) scholar Tracy Bear calls "corporeal sovereignty," defined as an "individual's freedom, full right, and choice to govern, represent, define, own, and make decisions for that individual's own body without colonial interference or oppression" (vii).⁸⁶ In a surprise meeting with Karahkwenhawi during his immersion into the Occupation of Alcatraz (1969-1971) in episode 6, Hunter gets an alert from his edutainment system, registering high figures on his

⁸⁶ Considering many Indigenous women's and girls' lived experiences of physical violence, sexual abuse, and forced sterilization, but also teen motherhood, Bear's "corporeal sovereignty" constitutes a much-needed concept to empower specifically Indigenous women to regain control over their own bodies after centuries of physical, sexual and psychological repression and settler colonial domination. Bear's inclusive approach of what she calls "eroticanalysis" explores how "Indigenous erotics may function as a potential source for decolonization through its ability to reimagine and transform how we view Indigenous gender and sexuality" (104) because, as she underlines throughout her work, Indigenous body and land sovereignty are inseparable.

physical, emotional, and intellectual scale (Skawennati, *TT*, E06, 04mm25ss), and indicating his strong feelings for her. This is the start of their romantic relationship, including sexual relations, which is clearly alluded to in this episode by depicting the naked avatars. Additionally, Mithoowaastee's seductive way of being, speaking, and acting in episode 4 also alludes to a healthy reclamation of the erotic in Skawennati's digital art.



Figure 6 - Jingle Dancers. Image courtesy of Skawennati.

Similar to Akiwenzie-Damm, Gabriel links healthy self-representation and cultural pride to the battle against social problems raging in many Indigenous communities: “The youth need guidance, and they need role models. They need reassurances that it’s okay to be ‘Indian,’ ‘Native,’ or ‘First Nations’ and that they don’t need drugs, alcohol, or the latest fashions to be proud of who they are” (qtd. in Anderson, “Interview” 58). Karahkwenhawi, being the main character of this episode, becomes an example that the youth can look up to. However, Skawennati avoids a “too-perfect” image of her female avatar and presents Karahkwenhawi as a complex character: adapted to her contemporary reality yet interested in her culture and her

community's past and future; rebellious but not disrespectful; loving and erotic but not eroticized. In the historical and political context of Indigenous women's misrepresentation and the severe, measurable consequences of violence against Indigenous women, culminating in the national crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, Skawennati's refusal to portray a romanticized, victimized, or hypersexualized version of her female avatar - as is usually common in video games - is fundamental and helps deconstruct exoticized and erotized images of Indigenous women. As another example of such work being done by Indigenous women, Hunkpapa Lakota artist Dana Claxton's photo series titled "Onto the Red Road" visually explores the artist's transformation from a sexualized object to a spiritually and culturally rooted Lakota wyan (woman). Her upright posture and bare feet in the final picture of the series characterize her deep connection to the land, the sky, and her culture.⁸⁷ Her long skirt, which has grown longer throughout the photos, is adorned with traditional designs, and her refusal to wear high heels marks her completed transformation and illustrates her pride. As Claxton writes in the artist's statement, red is "a sacred color within the tradition of the Sundance" (42), and her appropriation of the colour therefore represents a visual trace of the process of decolonization and Indigenous resurgence. However, I see her appropriation of the red "dress" (although she literally wears a shirt and a skirt) also as a visual reminder of her "Stolen Sisters" (Amnesty International). This expression - as well as "Sisters in Spirit" (NWAC) - refers to the disproportionately high and severe violence against Indigenous women, and feminicide in particular, which have culminated in the so-called "national crisis" of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. Again, violence against Indigenous women is closely linked to

⁸⁷ Innu poet Joséphine Bacon describes a similar transformation related to shoes as markers of the city and bare feet as sources of connection to the land in her second poetry collection *Un thé dans la toundra / Nipishapui nete mushuat* (2013): "J'ai enlevé mes souliers de ville / Pieds nus / Je sais que je suis chez moi" (24); Innu original: "Nimanen nimishtikushiussina / Nishashashtin / Nitshinat nitakushin" (25).

Indigenous women's eroticized, hypersexualized, and derogatory misrepresentation and objectification, as settler scholar Allison Hargreaves explains in *Violence Against Indigenous Women* (2017): "Critics point to a host of demeaning images and concepts that normalize women's invisibility as legitimate victims of violence and that code Indigenous bodies as inherently disposable and 'rapable' (15). Across Turtle Island, the red dress has become a symbol – or, as I would call it, a "fabric memorial" - of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. Claxton's refusal to be objectified and her artistic self-representation express her ability to honour those women and Indigenous women in general. As such, both visual artists - Claxton and Skawennati - create powerful counter-images to the violent narrative of easily available and disposable Indigenous women and celebrate Indigenous women's strength and resilience.⁸⁸

In a larger sense, Gabriel's call for guidance also involves the need to practise an ethics of care that will benefit the whole community. One element of this practised ethics of care in *TimeTraveller*TM is Skawennati's healthy vision of female-male relations, of course best illustrated by the main characters' romantic relationship. Though glaringly matrifocal, Skawennati balances her female-centred fourth episode by including depictions of Indigenous men. As such, Hunter's short appearances in the opening scenes and at the end of the episode, the avatar Luke Mithoowaastee, the circle of male drummers, and the male members of the punk band, as well as a mixed (fe/male) public articulate the need for both Indigenous women's and men's shared interest in reviving and practising their cultures. According to Dillon, it is "the notion of inclusivity that makes Indigenous Futurisms a praxis for healing and balance"

⁸⁸ In her debut collection *Bréviaire du matricule 082* (2019), Innu poet Maya Cousineau Mollen gives another poignant example of this narrative of disposable Indigenous women and girls in relation to colonial paternalism: "Mon père fiduciaire veille si mal sur nous / Filles si belles, uniques et jetables" (23). Moreover, her lines can be read as a critique of the long settler ignorance of normalized violence against Indigenous women and femicide.

(“Indigenous Futurisms” 4). Skawennati anchors her artistic work in an Indigenous feminist understanding that decidedly involves Indigenous men and their shared responsibility to transform heteropatriarchal systems into renewed, decolonized relationships. Likewise, Kim Anderson, in her feminist writings, underlines Indigenous women’s responsibility to support their men in their healing process for the larger objective of the community’s well-being: “In our work to reclaim ourselves as Indigenous women, we must strive to remember balance and seek ways to honour men as well as women” (*Recognition* 216).⁸⁹

A second important element of Skawennati’s ethics of care is her positioning of Indigenous people as “technology-capable” (LaPensée and Lewis 113), illustrated, for example, by the *TimeTraveller*TM edutainment system and the highly technological vision of the pow wow. In crafting this vision of digital-literate Indigenous people, Skawennati does not restrict herself to only speaking back to colonial representations of Indigenous Peoples as primitive and uncivilized, and thus “technologically inferior,” but she also presents innovative technology as a tool for practising an ethics of care that fosters community-building, that draws on Indigenous epistemologies, and that helps in establishing a healthy legacy for present and future generations. Her *TimeTraveller*TM project, and the fourth episode in particular, therefore resonate with Maracle’s dreamspace where “all are distinct, powerful and beautiful” (“Post-Colonial” 205).

The digital and social media boom of the early 21st century has been branded as being “de-socializing,” by which I mean the process of social isolation in the real world while huge

⁸⁹ According to Anderson, “Native women acknowledge the suffering of Native men, interpreting those who engage in dysfunctional behaviour as products of colonization” (*Recognition* 215). However, she rigorously states that “‘helping the men’ does not mean making excuses for abuse. Nor does it mean that we sacrifice our own well-being, ignore or excuse injustice, or fail to address violence and male-female imbalance, which is a reality in our communities” (Anderson, *Recognition* 217).

social networks are created and maintained in the virtual world.⁹⁰ In contrast to the observable shift towards individualization in Western societies, Indigenous new media artists, such as Skawennati, Jason Lewis, and Elizabeth LaPensée, among others, have initiated a counter-movement that valorizes community-building and collaboration. The machinima genre supports the artists' vision of community-driven digital projects because "[t]he process of making machinima film is clearly embedded within networked communities and creativity is bound to the creativity of others" (Harwood 172). Due to its highly interdisciplinary nature, machinima production involves the collaboration of many different specialists, Indigenous or otherwise. The significance of a strong and connected community for the survivance of Indigenous nations is also reflected on the content level: in episode 3 by the collective resistance aspiring to protect the sacred Pines and land-based community teachings, and in episode 4 by the depiction of a future pan-Indigenous social gathering. Moreover, by reimagining historical events that took place all over Turtle Island, the Indigenous term for the North American continent that includes the contemporary geo-political territories of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, Skawennati envisions, in all her *TimeTraveller*TM episodes, an Indigenous collective that ignores artificially constructed borders, does not recognize the legitimacy of settler colonial nation-states on stolen Indigenous land, and consequently, practises a politics of refusal and Indigenous self-determination.

Conclusion

"Well, we want to change the world."

⁹⁰ Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong expresses a similar idea in a 1997 article: "I see the thrust of technology into our daily lives, and I see the ways we subvert emotional ties to people by the use of communications that serve to depersonalize. I see how television, radio, telephone and now computer networks create ways to promote depersonalized communication" ("Sharing One Skin").

As all human cultures evolve over time, their modes of cultural expression, production, and transmission change and adapt to new realities. Contesting the widespread assumption of "static Indigenous cultures," Creek literary scholar Craig Womack identifies change - or adaptation - as a vital element of living cultures: "Indian cultures are the only cultures where it is assumed that if they change they are no longer a culture. In most other cultures, change is viewed as a sign that the culture is vibrant and alive, capable of surviving" (31). Adapting storytelling traditions to contemporary realities and technologies is therefore a useful tool for preserving knowledges, and Dillon confirms that "Native peoples have always been and are always ready to adopt new technologies" ("Indigenous Futurisms" 3). Indigenous stories have essentially been handed down orally from generation to generation according to specific protocols and rules, but Indigenous Peoples have used other mediums, such as pictographs, ceremony poles, birch bark, and wampum belts, to name only a few, to preserve and transmit their stories and knowledges. Anderson outlines Indigenous storytelling's resistant and resurgent character, and I assume that her words apply to both old and new forms of storytelling, that is, traditional oral storytelling and adapted forms: "Indigenous stories are significant because they are anchors of resistance. They are also ways of preserving the language and the power and meaningfulness of the spoken word. Our stories are unadulterated versions of our history and creation. They are critical for Native peoples who seek a sense of identity founded within Native culture" (*Recognition* 110).

For some decades now, Indigenous artists have explored the potential of new media technologies as tools for knowledge transmission and preservation or, in other words, as adapted and updated forms of oral (hi)stories, and it is suggested that "video games – more than books or

film – might be the best way to evolve and continue the tradition of oral storytelling” (Roetman 47). In the same vein, explaining her work with Indigenous youth in one of AbTeC’s major projects, *Skins*, Skawennati describes the different steps in this digital media workshop. First, they learn the tales, legends, and histories from their elders and communities; second, they learn how to take that story and translate it from the oral tradition to a new one, the video game; third, they learn the technological basics of how to create video games (“Imagining” 06mm11ss). Likewise, her partner and AbTeC co-founder Lewis conveys how Indigenous storytelling techniques “lie on a continuum with those of digital media, and that they do not lie on either side of some insurmountable cultural or epistemological divide” (66). More importantly, the *Skins* project, and especially the first phase of intergenerational knowledge transmission, demonstrates how all project participants give credit to “the continuing value of oral stories *as* oral stories in the contemporary world” (Cariou 472; original emphasis). The second phase of the story’s translation into a new medium highlights what Cariou calls the “adaptability” (473) of oral stories in opposition to the presumed immutability of written texts: “I worry that, once a story becomes a document, a location in the archive, it no longer has the capacity to change, to become relevant to a new situation, a new audience” (473). Moreover, the participants experience oral storytelling as an embodied and transformative practice that assumes presence. As American performance studies theorist Diana Taylor’s states: “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being a part of the transmission” (qtd. in Cariou 474). Cariou draws, in his essay, on Taylor’s important distinction “between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice, knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (qtd. in Cariou 474). In addition to synthesizing the adaptive nature of Indigenous stories

at the end of *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), Potawatomi scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer identifies stories as essentially animate bodies: “We are told that stories are living beings, they grow, they develop, they remember, they change not in their essence, but sometimes in their dress. They are shared and shaped by the land and the culture and the teller, so that one story may be told widely and differently. Sometimes only a fragment is shared, showing just one face of a many faceted story, depending on its purpose” (386).

The appropriation, indigenization, and decolonization of new media technologies is closely linked to issues of representation and the involved power dynamics, as Skawennati warns: “Adapting to these new mediums and technologies is essential, especially when it comes to Indigenous people controlling narratives and self-representation” (qtd. in Roetman 48). Indigenous digital media artists thus “seek to occupy, transform, appropriate and reimagine cyberspace” (LaPensée and Lewis 105) in order to “discuss, encourage, imagine and empower communities” (AbTeC). Indigenous-determined digital artwork continues to resist and “defeat colonial stereotypes and simulations of ‘the Indian’” (Madsen 105) by reclaiming power over representation. By creating healthy images of Indigenous individuals, communities, and cultures, Skawennati exercises her right to self-representation and self-determination that First Nations have been stripped of for so long. In other words, Skawennati puts into practice Raheja’s concept of visual sovereignty and shares her decolonial visions of the past, present, and future. Despite the danger of idealization after centuries of oppression, most Indigenous “writers are not gazing ethnostalgically on pre-Contact society. Their work attests to the lability of Native cultures while affirming Native values. They are looking back and looking forward for new myths, creating in the process new, praxis-oriented views of identity and community,” as Weaver states (164).

The *TimeTraveller*TM edutainment system allows Skawennati to playfully engage the process of remaking history and creating Indigenous autofuturity. If a “covert narrative of violent colonization and historical trauma” is present, the overt narrative speaks in the language of Indigenous resistance and resurgence and represents “a powerful gesture of Indigenous decolonization” (Madsen 102). Skawennati’s creative play with space and time acts as a response to Todd’s question of “Who considers the seventh generation when creating spaces and narratives in the cyberspace?” (185). In *TimeTraveller*TM - as in her complete artistic oeuvre - Skawennati clearly considers the Seven Generation Principle, which Lewis also alludes to in his theoretical work.⁹¹ Her imagination and visual depiction of healthy, loving and loved, successful, and thriving Indigenous characters reflect her lived responsibility towards this essential element of Haudenosaunee philosophy which is also part of many other Indigenous epistemologies across Turtle Island. As such, Skawennati’s work on Indigenous autofuturity, which could be described as a realization of what L. Simpson describes as “[d]reams and visions [that] provide glimpses of decolonized spaces and transformed realities that we have collectively yet to imagine” (“Theorizing” 282), is a major factor contributing to Indigenous resurgence and self-determination on political, historical, social, and cultural levels.

To conclude this chapter, I argue that Skawennati’s *TimeTraveller*TM machinima project is centred around one essential component: Indigenous knowledge transmission. As I explained

⁹¹ Loretta Todd outlines how the Seven Generation Principle links present-day actions to the future by considering their short- and long-term impact on future generations: “One of the tenets of our philosophies is a concern for future generations. Each generation considers the consequences of its actions, of its presence not just on the next generation, but often the generation of five or even seven times hence” (185). The principle says that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future. Bringing in the past generations, Alfred writes on this topic: “*We have to refer to both the past and the future in our decision-making. This is where we get the concept of the ‘seven generations’: We’re supposed to be listening to our grandfathers, our ancestors, but we also need to listen to the grandfathers yet to come*” (Peace 20; original emphasis). Although Alfred points to the significance of this principle, he critiques the superficial use of it when not applied to our individual actions: “Yeah, that sounds like a nice buzzword, ‘seven generations’ from now!” (Peace 33-34).

earlier, the act of passing on old and new forms of knowledge is a substantial element of Indigenous storytelling and, for this reason, is also an important part in the creation of Indigenous video games and machinima films that Skawennati foregrounds by integrating youth in this process of teaching and learning. Cariou identifies the transmission of oral stories as embodied practice as “a crucial function of pedagogy in Indigenous contexts,” and specifies that “teaching can, at its best, bring life to the archive and show us that the stories live in new ways for each new community of listeners” (475), including the youth participating in the project and then the public listening to, watching or playing the adapted stories in their digital projects.

On the other hand, the teaching component of Skawennati’s political artwork involves educating the settler population by challenging the master narrative and providing an “alterNative” perspective. This ethical responsibility seems to characterize Indigenous-settler relations and hints at settler ignorance, as Gabriel remarks: “Because that’s the nature of our relationship with Canadians and their government - we as Indigenous peoples have to continuously teach them about us, our perspectives, our history, our identity, and why they are important to us; why we want to perpetuate our languages, and why we want to continue being stewards of the land” (qtd. in Anderson, “Interview” 58).

Through her *TimeTraveller*TM project as well as her new media artwork in general, Skawennati positions herself as an “insurgent educator,” a concept developed by Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel, whose definition I quote here in length because of its significance for Skawennati’s work as an artist and academic:

Being a warrior of the truth is not [...] about mediating between worldviews as much as challenging the dominant discourse. It is about raising awareness of Indigenous histories and place-based existences as part of a continuing struggle against shape-shifting colonial

powers. Insurgent education entails creating decolonizing and discomforting moments of Indigenous truth-telling that challenge the colonial status quo. It does this by questioning settler occupation of Indigenous places through direct, honest, and experimental forms of engagement and demands for accountability. Insurgent educators exemplify Indigenous forms of leadership by relating their daily struggles for Indigenous resurgence to broader audiences using innovative ways that inspire activism and reclamation of Indigenous histories and homelands. (48)

Imaginations of Indigenous autofuturity allow contemporary artists and writers to move beyond colonial and trauma narratives and to flesh out alterNative – that is, indigenized and decolonial - ways of being, thinking, and acting. Commenting on her latest machinima project *She Falls for Ages* (2017), Skawennati emphasizes the importance of long-term future imaginaries for Indigenous survivance: “I fear that if Indigenous people cannot envision ourselves in The Future, we will not be there. We need to visualize ourselves as full participants in the multi-mediatised world of today and tomorrow to help ourselves become active agents in the shaping of new mediums and new societies” (“Machinimagraphique!”). As such, the education of Indigenous individuals and communities, especially when it comes to Indigenous female-male relations, is another important component of her work. *TimeTraveller*TM thus serves as a teaching tool of how to live healthy relationships in a shared present and future. Echoing Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong’s vision of the “shape-change” action through language (“Land Speaking” 152), Skawennati believes in the transformative power of (hi)stories and the potential of Indigenous autohistory and particularly autofuturity to change the world. New media technologies are indeed powerful tools for Indigenous resistance and resurgence, and Skawennati’s performance politics

have, in my opinion, the power to nurture decolonizing action and to catalyze the rebuilding of our present-day societies.

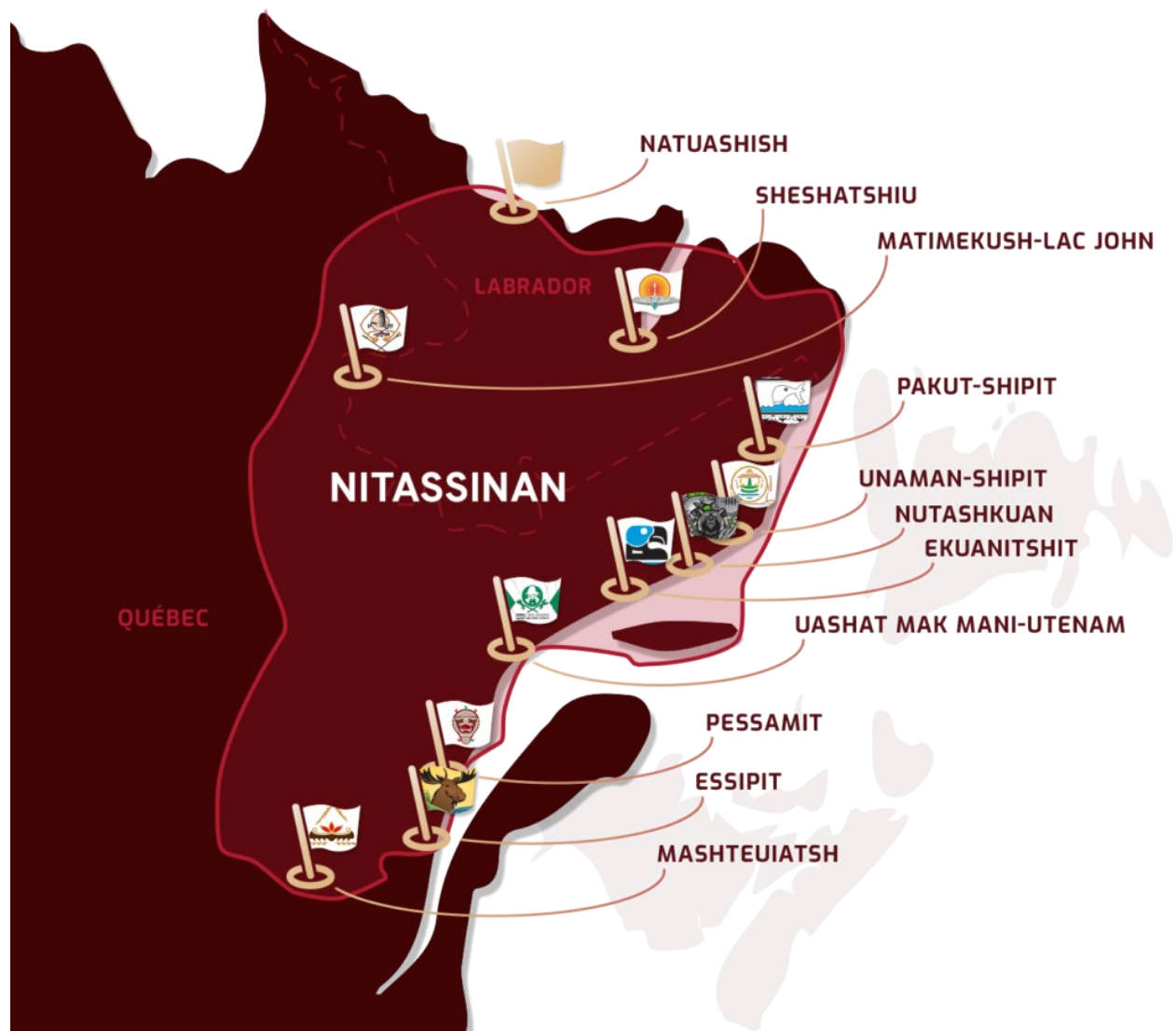


Figure 7 - Nitassinan. Image courtesy of the Institut Tshakapesh.

CHAPTER 2: INDIGENOUS HERSTORY: BECOMING INNUSHKUEU THROUGH WRITING

It seemed like I fell a long time before anything happened. I opened my eyes, and I could see the water birds from the world below coming up to meet me. The Heron and the Loon were the leaders, with their wide wings expanded in full flight. All of their wings combined to create a large, soft cushion for me to land on. [...] I went to the edge of the platform created by the birds' wings and peered over the edge. Far below, my eyes were met with brilliant blue. The blue was from a great expanse of water reflecting the sunlight, and it was both beautiful and almost too much to bear. There appeared to be no land. I wondered to myself, where I would stand in this world? In the depths beneath us, I could see water animals grouped together, looking up and talking to one another. I know that they were talking about me and wondering what to do. [...] I saw Muskrat gasp for air and dive below. [...] Suddenly from far below I heard a cheer erupt from the assembled animals. Muskrat had succeeded! In his lifeless paws were specks of dirt from the ocean floor. One of the animals pried the dirt from Muskrat's clenched paws and gently placed the dirt on Turtle being's back. Immediately, Turtle's shell began to grow bigger. Soon the shell became big enough for me to stand on. I was gently lowered and my feet touched the first earth. [...] I began to dance the women's shuffle dance and sing the planting songs I had learned from the women of the Sky World. I was heavy with child, but I still shuffled counter-clockwise, making the earth spread out on the Turtle being's back. I placed the tobacco and strawberry plants in the soil. 'Hey ya, hey ya,' I sang in a loud clear voice. I wanted all the animals to know how grateful I was for what they had done for me, and for the earth to be patted down, firm and smooth. [...] The Turtle being's

shell continued to grow, and the earth spread out in all directions with my songs and dances. [...]
New life was beginning on earth!

The Story of Sky Woman as told by Kahente Horn-Miller⁹²

“What if I began with an Indigenous woman’s writings, or with a female creation figure - Sky Woman, Corn Mother, or Spider Woman?” (506), Lenape feminist scholar Joanne Barker asks in her contribution to *The World of Indigenous North America* (2015). I understand Barker’s question as a call to reflect upon and critically engage with the place that Indigenous women occupy in both Indigenous and settler societies. Moreover, Barker invites her readership to imagine, create, and enact alternative visions to heteropatriarchal settler discourses and realities where women were and are kept in the margins. This chapter argues that Innu women writers use what I refer to as “Indigenous herstory” to lyrically transcribe their transformation into “Innushkueu,” or Innu/Indigenous woman.⁹³ I draw on Innu poet Maya Cousineau Mollen’s poetic description of Innushkueu in *Enfants du lichen* (2022), which emphasizes her status and connection with the land: “Je t’imagine Ishkueu en ces terres / Reine, souveraine, impératrice / Régnante dans le Nutshimit” (22). I understand Indigenous herstory as female-centred narratives that follow empowering desire-based approaches while, simultaneously, critiquing patriarchal settler colonialism and giving room to felt and lived experiences of vulnerability, rupture, or loss. More specifically, Indigenous herstory provides writers with a conceptual space where they can

⁹² For the full story, see Horn-Miller, “Distortion and Healing: Finding Balance and a ‘Good Mind’ Through the Rearticulation of Sky Woman’s Journey” (especially pp. 19-23). For a great example of Indigenous visual storytelling, see Skawennati’s futuristic machinima *She Falls for Ages* (2017) that also tells the story of Sky Woman and how Turtle Island was created according to Iroquois collective memory.

⁹³ The online Innu Dictionary translates the word “innushkueu” as “Innu, First Nations woman.” The word “ishkueu” translates as “woman.”

explore what it means to be and live as an Innu/Indigenous woman in Quebec's contemporary dominant settler society.

Inspired by Barker's inquiry, I decided to begin this chapter with the words of Kanien'kehá:ka scholar Kahente Horn-Miller who retells the story of Sky Woman as she interprets it. Horn-Miller's telling of this fundamental story and her understanding that "[I]ike all women, I am Sky Woman's great-granddaughter" ("Distortion and Healing" 19) reflect the importance and purpose of stories (whether in oral, written, or visual forms) in Indigenous cultures because they "remind us of who we are and of our belonging" (Kovach 94). In her seminal monograph *Indigenous Methodologies* (2009), Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach identifies story(telling) as Indigenous methodology: "Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships" and they "tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations" (94). Cree/Métis feminist scholar Kim Anderson argues that "[t]he respect accorded to Native women in many traditional stories provides the foundation for strong female identity and helps us retain an understanding of our power" (*Recognition* 110). Horn-Miller's description of the educative role of stories in Indigenous cultures exemplifies how stories contain and are knowledge that is then embodied and enacted: "In our oral history, we tell the story of Sky Woman; it is through the telling of her story that we learn about our roles and responsibilities as women. As we embody her life, and learn from our mothers, we are also passing on her knowledge" ("Distortion and Healing" 19).

Starting this chapter with a female-centred creation story, and particularly the story of Sky Woman who "exemplifies the power of women" in Haudenosaunee matrilineal societies (Riel-Johns 36), allows me to position Indigenous women as creators and transformers right from the start. Although it is a traditionally Iroquois creation story that exists in a variety of versions,

the female creation figure of Sky Woman is also well-known in Innu culture. Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, for example, evokes Sky Woman in her poetry collection *Manifeste Assi* (2014), where her female speaker repetitively claims: “Je suis la femme qui tombe du ciel” (79), and she uses this particular figure and her powerful story to position herself as a creator who, like Sky Woman, can transform the world she lives in, though this time through storytelling itself, or the process of what Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls “narrative imagination” (*Dancing* 40). By retelling or evoking the fundamental story of Sky Woman, Indigenous women adhere to principles of Indigenous poetics that aim at “bringing the narrative power of our old stories into the present” (McLeod 3). Moreover, grounding this chapter into Sky Woman’s story and acknowledging the knowledge it contains is an attempt to ethically engage with Indigenous theoretical and methodological frameworks that shape Indigenous stories, as L. Simpson contends in *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* (2011):

The starting point within Indigenous theoretical frameworks then is different than from within western theories: the spiritual world is alive and influencing; colonialism is contested; and storytelling, or ‘narrative imagination,’ is a tool to vision other existences outside of the current ones by critiquing and analyzing the current state of affairs, but also by dreaming and visioning other realities. (40)

The (re-)telling of this creation story also “enables a reader’s or listener’s understanding of Indigenous spirituality as a knowledge practice attuned to creating and strengthening affiliative and filiative kinships between and among humans, animals, nature, and ancestors or spirits” (Emberley, “In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 213). The female-centred creation story of Sky Women acknowledges interdependence and celebrates practices of kinship, recognizes Mother Earth as a living and sentient being and locates Indigenous women’s special relationship with the

land, animals, and other-than-human beings. Stories like this one exemplify, according to Indigenous feminist Lindsay Nixon, how “everything is connected and how creation is dependent on reciprocal relationships within these connections.” Connection and relationality are central elements of Indigenous worldviews, and Indigenous women writers engage with the theme of connection in their stories while, simultaneously, enacting relationships through the process of storytelling.

Indigenous herstory marks a crucial shift in Indigenous women’s narrative agency, and elements of this concept can be found in the work of Mohawk poet Emily Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), whether in her poetic writings and performances or in her critical essays. “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction” (1892), for example, constitutes one of the earliest texts published by an Indigenous woman that critically engages with questions of Indigenous women’s (mis-)representation in Canadian literature and can thus be seen as an early form of Indigenous feminist critique. In her critical essay, Johnson denounces the monolithic and stereotypic representation of Indigenous women in settler narratives as “one Indian girl” whose fiction life is characterized by “an unvarying experience [that] tells [the reader] that this convenient personage will repeat herself with monotonous accuracy” (“Strong Race Opinion” 122). In her performance poetry, such as the collection *Flint and Feather* (1912), Johnson carefully crafts counter-images that heavily contradict the predictable character of “[t]he Indian Girl” (“Strong Race Opinion” 122) as depicted in settler narratives, and she introduces diverse images of Indigenous women to her readership and public. Mohawk writer and feminist Beth Brant acknowledges, in *Writing as Witness* (1994), how Johnson created a space for other Indigenous women to speak their truths: “Pauline Johnson began a movement that has proved unstoppable in its momentum – the movement of First Nations women to write down our stories

of history, of revolution, of sorrow, of love” (5). In Quebec, the publications of Cree writer Jane (Willis) Pachano’s *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (1973) and Innu writer An Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976) are unprecedented references for Indigenous herstory, as both autobiographies are written from a distinctively Indigenous female perspective.⁹⁴

This chapter is inspired and guided by an important question that Kanapé Fontaine raised in her 2016 TEDx UQAM Women talk: “Comment est-ce qu’une femme autochtone au 21^e siècle peut peut-être penser son époque par rapport au passé en imaginant le futur, mais en même temps complètement enracinée dans le présent?” (“Réflexion,” 1mm27ss).⁹⁵ I argue that Indigenous herstory provides Innu women writers with a conceptual space to poetically articulate their critique of heteropatriarchal settler colonialism that is needed to understand contemporary Indigenous women’s identity quests and their transformation into Innushkueu through writing. More specifically, I will analyze how Indigenous herstory constitutes a medium for women writers to denounce past and ongoing settler colonialism, to restory patriarchal settler narratives, and to explore complex questions of identity and (re)discover themselves as Innushkueu. The focus of this chapter is Innu women’s poetry, and, more specifically, I will analyze selected poems from Maya Cousineau Mollen’s debut collection *Bréviaire du matricule 082* (2019; *BM082*), from Manon Nolin’s collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* (2016; *MPAN*), and from Kanapé Fontaine’s third poetry collection *Bleuets et abricots* (2018; *BA*). In an attempt to bring

⁹⁴ Québécois scholar Marie-Eve Bradette underlines, in her 2021 essay on Pachano’s *Geniesh*, that the two texts are marked by a different focus though: “celui de la mère chez [Antane] Kapeshe qui voit ses enfants être amenés au pensionnat, celui de l’enfant chez Pachano” (72), who experiences Indigenous residential schools first-hand. Also note that I employ the term “autobiography” here to describe a form of “Indigenous intellectual production [...] that preserve[s] Indigenous knowledge and specific tribal understandings for their descendants and subsequent generations” (“Indigenous Autobiography” 170), to use Métis scholar Deanna Reder’s words. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Indigenous women’s autobiography.

⁹⁵ Transcriptions of oral sources are mine.

the voices of different generations of Innu women together, I will discuss their poetry in conversation with selected passages from Antane Kapeshe's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*.⁹⁶

Maya Cousineau Mollen, Manon Nolin, and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine

Born in 1975, Maya Cousineau Mollen is originally from Ekuanitshit, an Innu community at the North Shore of Quebec, but currently lives and works in Muliats/Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal (see Figure 7).⁹⁷ She was adopted into a Québécois family chosen by her biological mother, but her foster parents kept her close to her Innu family, community, culture, and territory so that she considers herself today “une personne bien implantée dans mes deux cultures, innue et québécoise” (Cousineau Mollen, “Identité autochtone”). Cousineau Mollen has written poetry since the age of 14 and published individual poems since 2008, for example in *Mots de neige, de sable et d'océan* (2008), edited by Maurizio Gatti, and in the bilingual collection *Languages of Our Land / Langues de notre terre* (2014), edited by Susan Ouriou. Cousineau Mollen published her debut poetry collection *Bréviaire du matricule 082* with the Indigenous publishing house Éditions Hannenorak in 2019, in which some of her earlier published poems were included. Her second collection *Enfants du Lichen* was published in 2022.

Like many other well-known Innu women writers, such as Joséphine Bacon, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, and Naomi Fontaine, Cousineau Mollen participated in acclaimed Innu writer Michel Jean's edited collection of short stories, *Amun* (2016), where she published “Mitatamun

⁹⁶ Note that I will cite Antane Kapeshe in French translation from different editions that I mention as follows: *JSMS* 1976, *JSMS* 2015 or *JSMS* 2019. I provide the translation from another edition in footnotes if there are important differences. Passages and sentences in Innu-aimun, which I provide in footnotes to include Antane Kapeshe's original voice, are from the revised 2019 edition.

⁹⁷ For more detailed biographical information, see Gatti (*Littérature amérindienne* 253-254; *Mots de neige, de sable et d'océan* 71) and Cousineau Mollen's author profile on the website of Wendake's Indigenous Book Fair *Kwahiatonhk!*.

(Regret).” More recently, Cousineau Mollen contributed a short essay entitled “Ishkueu en *terra nullius*” to the collection *Libérer la culotte* (2021), edited by Geneviève Morand and Natalie-Ann Roy, which deals with her personal journey of discovering and expressing sensuality and sexuality as an Indigenous woman. However, for the community organizer and activist, writing remains largely a side project.

Manon Nolin, Innu from Ekuanitshit, a community located on the east coast of northern Quebec, was born in 1986, and is an Innu actress, poet, and beader (see Figure 7).⁹⁸ Nolin appeared in Wendat dramaturg Yves Sioui Durand’s directed film *Mesnak* (2011), in which she played the role of Sapatesh’s daughter.⁹⁹ Nolin published her first poems in the book/CD *Les bruits du monde* (2012), edited by Laure Morali and Rodney St-Éloi. Nolin, and Cousineau Mollen, “participated in the Canada Council for the Arts-funded Aboriginal Emerging Writers (AEW) Program (now the Indigenous Writing Program) at The Banff Centre in the Canadian Rockies,” a program that “brings in renowned Indigenous writers from across the country and abroad to mentor Indigenous emerging writers” (Ouriou 6) and that helped publish emergent francophone Indigenous writers from Quebec in both their original and translated voices. The result of this program was the bilingual collection *Languages of Our Land / Langues de notre terre* (2014). Nolin contributed four poems to this important (French-English) collection, which aimed at promoting Indigenous writers living in Quebec and writing in French and thus seeks to bridge the gap between Indigenous literatures written in French and English. In 2016, Nolin published her debut poetry collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* with the Éditions Hannenorak, and

⁹⁸ Biographical information on Nolin is scarce. There is no author profile on the website of Wendake’s Indigenous Book Fair *Kwahiatonhk!*, and as an emergent writer who published after 2009, there is no entry in Gatti’s anthology *Littérature amérindienne*, either.

⁹⁹ *Mesnak*, a Shakespearian drama anchored in contemporary reality, is the first feature film written and directed by an Indigenous filmmaker from Quebec. The film received three American Indian Movie Awards in 2012, including Best Film.

some of her previously published poems are also included in this collection. Nolin's poetry collection is divided into four subsequent parts ("Rouge," "Déracinée," "Vulnérable," and "Bouleversée"), in which she deals primarily with questions of identity and connection, colonial wounds, and environmental destruction. Morali and Saint-Éloi describe Nolin's poetry as "[une] poésie [dite] d'une voix pure et indélébile" (179), and, through her poetic writing, Nolin undoubtedly reinscribes Innu/Indigenous women's presence in a settler-colonial past and reality.

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine was born in 1991 in Baie-Comeau and is originally from Pessamit, an Innu community on the North Shore of Quebec, but she grew up outside her community from the age of five and is now based in Muliats/Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal (see Figure 7).¹⁰⁰ One of today's most prolific women writers in Quebec, she published her first poetry collection *N'entre pas dans mon âme avec tes chaussures* (NEPAC) in 2012 and has since published three other books of poetry in a biennial rhythm, namely *Manifeste Assi* (2014), *Bleuets et abricots* (2016), and *Nanimissuat / Île-tonnerre* (2018; *NIT*), all released with the Montreal-based publishing house Mémoire d'encrier. Kanapé Fontaine released her first novel, *Nauetakuan, un silence pour un bruit* in 2021, and she has published individual poems and other texts in a variety of journals and collections for a decade now, for example in the collections *Les bruits du monde* (2012), *Amun* (2016), and *Wapke* (2021; edited by Michel Jean). Kanapé Fontaine is a highly demanded speaker at book fairs, readings, conferences, and other events, and she appears regularly on the (inter-)national stage. Most of her work, poetic and non-fiction, has been translated into English, a fact which, in addition to her literary prizes and nominations, testifies to the visible and esteemed position she holds in Quebec's contemporary literary

¹⁰⁰ For more detailed biographical information, see Kanapé Fontaine's author profile on the website of Wendake's Indigenous Book Fair *Kwahiatonhk!* and the special issue on Innu writing in *Littoral* (2015). Some more biographical information related to her artistic work can also be found in Chapter 4.

scene.¹⁰¹ Moreover, in collaboration with Arianne Des Rochers, Kanapé Fontaine has been involved in translating Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's work into French: *Cartographie de l'amour décolonial* (2018) and *On se perd toujours par accident* (2020), both published by Mémoire d'encrier. Translations of creative and theoretical texts help bridge Canada's linguistic divide and bring together Indigenous writers living across Turtle Island, who have been separated by imposed language barriers, whether they express themselves in English, French or their Indigenous languages. As Anishinaabe writer Armand Garnet Ruffo contends: "it is strangely ironic that even [Indigenous people] were divided along linguistic lines, namely the colonizer's languages" ("Afterword" 112).¹⁰² Kanapé Fontaine's implication in translating L. Simpson's work is also specifically significant in terms of promoting Indigenous feminist theories in Quebec. Kanapé Fontaine's poetic rebirth as Innushkueu in *Bleuets et abricots*, for example, strongly echoes what L. Simpson explores as "kwe as resurgent method" in *As We Have Always Done* (2017): "Le monde attend que la femme revienne comme elle est née: femme debout, femme puissance, femme résurgence" (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 7).¹⁰³ For both, Kanapé Fontaine and L. Simpson, the empowerment of Indigenous women constitutes a form of Indigenous resurgence.

¹⁰¹ Howard Scott translated Kanapé Fontaine's poetry into English: *Do Not Enter My Soul in Your Shoes* (2015), *Assi Manifesto* (2016), *Blueberries and Apricots* (2018). Her latest collection *Nanimissuat / Île-tonnerre* (2018) has not yet been translated into English. Her co-authored book of non-fiction appeared as *Kuei, My Friend: A Conversation on Racism and Reconciliation* in 2018; it was also translated into German *Kuei, ich grüße dich: Gespräch über Rassismus* (2021).

¹⁰² As I have written elsewhere, "the linguistic barrier affects anglophone and francophone Indigenous writers and prevents them from having a stimulating intercultural exchange and, consequently, also from forming one strong Indigenous literary family" (Janssen, "Reading and Teaching" 87), as experienced first-hand by Ruffo: "It occurred to me then that here we were, an assembly of Native writers from Canada touring Australia with the goal of forging links with other Indigenous writers while 'one of our own' [Innu poet Rita Mestokosho] stood on the periphery of our own literary family, isolated by a linguistic barrier" because she writes in French and Innu-aimun and does not speak English fluently ("Afterword" 111). For more information on the linguistic divide, see the special section on "Indigeneity in Dialogue: Indigenous Literary Expressions Across Linguistic Divides," published in the journal *Studies in Canadian Literature* (2010).

¹⁰³ English translation: "The world waits for woman to come back as she was born: woman standing, woman powerful, woman resurgent" (Kanapé Fontaine, *Blueberries and Apricots*, "Prologue").

All three Innu women poets under discussion are known for their activism and community engagement. Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine have all been involved in the (Quebec branch of) the Indigenous grassroots movement Idle No More, which at least Nolin and Kanapé Fontaine explicitly name in their poetry: “**Idle No More**” (Nolin, *MPAN* 55; original emphasis) and “Idle no more / under a snowy sun // Our steps of clay and glory / the monstrence lethargy / is at its end” (Kanapé Fontaine, *Assi Manifesto* 74). According to Kanapé Fontaine, the Idle No More movement has initiated “un mouvement de réaffirmation identitaire des femmes à l’intérieur des communautés autochtones partout au pays et donc, à travers le monde” (“Réflexion” 13mm32ss).¹⁰⁴ Living on reserve, Nolin’s activism seems to focus on questions of environmental exploitation, pollution, and destruction as well as urbanization and industrialization, as these forces directly affect her own and other Indigenous communities in the North, and she uses her poetry to warn about anthropogenic ecological catastrophes that will affect all life on Earth. Cousineau Mollen, on the other hand, is deeply engaged in Montreal’s urban Indigenous community, for example as a member of the Wolfpack Street Patrol, a project that supports people without homes. “Fondamentalement engagée, particulièrement envers la cause des femmes autochtones,” as she is described in her online author profile, Cousineau Mollen founded the Indigenous student association at the Université Laval, she was an elected council member as Youth Representative for the Quebec Native Women association, and she worked for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (“Maya,” *Kwahiatonhk!*). Her social activism is processed in her poetry, where both Indigenous homelessness in urban settings and (physical and representational) violence against Indigenous women are major themes. Kanapé Fontaine’s activist stance is evident in her participation in the

¹⁰⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the Idle No More movement, see Chapter 4.

collection *Sous la ceinture: Unis pour vaincre la culture du viol* (2016), edited by Nancy B.-Pilon, which speaks back to rape culture in modern societies and is closely linked to the (inter-)national crisis of Indigenous femicide. With Deni Ellis Béchard, Kanapé Fontaine also co-published a book of non-fiction, *Kuei, je te salue* (2016), which constitutes of an epistolary exchange on the topic of racism between the two authors.

By using poetic writing as a vehicle to denounce injustices that Indigenous Peoples, and particularly Indigenous women, experienced and continue to be confronted with, Innu poets Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine join the ranks of other engaged and activist Indigenous women writers in Quebec, such as Jane Pachano, An Antane Kapeshe, Rita Mestokosho, and Marie-Andrée Gill, to name only a few. I read and analyze the poetry of the three selected Innu women poets in conversation with examples from Antane Kapeshe's key work *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* because, as Gatti notes in *Être écrivain amérindien au Québec* (2006), Antane Kapeshe "est devenue un modèle d'écrivaine innue, une référence littéraire pour plusieurs" (149), and, as I suggest, specifically for younger generations of Innu women writers. I use this approach to situate the beginnings of Indigenous herstory, at least in written and published form, with the emergence of early texts written by Indigenous women, such as Antane Kapeshe and Pachano in Quebec. This approach is also useful to underline what Métis scholar Emma LaRocque calls "cultural continuity through writing" ("Reflections" 161), although, as Antane Kapeshe states in her preface in 1975, "il ne fait pas partie de ma culture d'écrire" (*JSMS* 2019, 13).¹⁰⁵ According to LaRocque, however,

¹⁰⁵ I provide the original (1976) and revised versions (2015 and 2019) of discussed passages in footnotes if they differ in important ways to demonstrate how the translated text has been modified since its first publication. Whereas the 1976 and 2019 versions read as "il ne fait pas partie de **ma culture** d'écrire" (*JSMS* 1976, 9; *JSMS* 2019, 13; my emphasis) and therefore refer to the traditionally oral nature of Innu culture, the 2015 edition reads as "il ne fait pas partie de **ma vie à moi** d'écrire" (*JSMS* 2015, 89; my emphasis), which, in my interpretation, may wrongly allude to Antane Kapeshe as an illiterate person. Nêhiyaw-Métis-Nahkawè literary critic Janice Acoose-

“[w]riting is really about ‘telling,’ and ‘telling’ originates in orality. Whatever it is that we are telling, [...] and however we do it, orally or in writing, as long as we are doing it, we are expressing a live and dynamic culture” (“Reflections” 162). From this perspective, writing constitutes another medium for telling stories and acts as a complement of orature rather than replacing or erasing oral traditions.

The Resurgent Power of Indigenous Herstory

Herstory is generally defined as “history written from the point of view of women, and giving importance to their experiences and activities” (“Herstory”). Coined by second-wave feminists in the early 1970s as a counter-expression to history, the term “herstory” is a neologism, blending the possessive pronoun “her” and the noun “history,” even though the term “history” etymologically derives from the Greek and Latin word “historia,” meaning “narrative.” History is thus not a compound word of the possessive pronoun “his” and the noun “story.” However, feminists have played on the difference between *history* and *herstory* to differentiate between patriarchal and feminist viewpoints on history, arguing that conventional historiography is traditionally written as “his story,” that means, by men and from a male perspective. Black activist Blair Imani, for instance, states in her introduction to *Modern HERstory: Stories of Women and Nonbinary People Rewriting History* (2018): “While ‘history’ focuses on men and the stories of patriarchs, ‘herstory’ deliberately prioritizes the stories of women, people of color, and LGBTQ people” (IX; original emphasis).¹⁰⁶ As counter-narratives intentionally seeking “to

Miswonigeesikokwe argues: “Until very recently, Indigenous women were thought of as not only voiceless but also illiterate, the worst of the oppressed, and in some cases, not worth mentioning” (*Iskwewak* 1995, 66).

¹⁰⁶ Imani’s book includes the herstories of Indigenous women, such as Adrienne Keene, a Cherokee scholar “[w]orking to end the stereotyping and erasure of Native communities” (113) and Allison Renville, a Standing Rock Sioux activist (41).

challenge official versions of patriarchal history” (Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortín 5), herstory seeks to center the voices and perspectives of formerly marginalized, silenced, and erased individuals and groups, especially those of women. In accordance with other women, such as Imani, I understand herstory as an inclusive approach seeking to foreground the stories of women, and I draw on L. Simpson’s understanding of “the word *kwe* to mean woman within the spectrum of genders” (*As* 29). In the context of Innu women’s writing, I employ the word “Innushkueu” to describe Innu women’s poetic transformation as it allows me to circumvent “the rigidity of the colonial gender binary” and to “recognize a spectrum of gender expressions” (L. Simpson, *As* 29).

The concept of what I call “Indigenous herstory,” however, is more than history un- and re-written by Indigenous women.¹⁰⁷ Indigenous herstory is an approach that foregrounds Indigenous women’s voices, experiences, and their contributions to past, present, and future (activist) movements and positions them as changemakers. Moreover, Indigenous herstory works as an intersectional approach that emphasizes the nexus between colonization, paternalism, and heteropatriarchy or, in other words, an approach that unveils and critiques the deep connections between (settler) colonialism, racism, and sexism, as all these forces simultaneously impacted Indigenous women and continue to shape their lives. “Intersectionality,” Imani writes, “is a way of understanding the various forms of oppression in society and how they impact us according to our overlapping identities” (18). Indigenous herstory recognizes intersectional theories and thus functions as a tool for Indigenous feminist critique, but also a conceptual space that allows Indigenous women to explore different kinds of ruptures; to express their varied, complementary,

¹⁰⁷ In *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman* (2000), Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson uses the term herstory in the context of Indigenous women’s life writing as follows: Indigenous women “who have written their mothers’ life herstories” (1-2).

and sometimes also contradictory facets of identity; and to envision decolonial alternatives of reality. I understand Indigenous herstory not exclusively as an attempt to “restory Canadian history” (Regan 20) from a feminist perspective (that is, a feminist critique of conventional historiography), but also as female-centred stories that give importance to the voices, perspectives, roles, responsibilities, experiences, and activities of Indigenous women.¹⁰⁸ All Innu women writers under discussion offer their herstories, that is, (hi)story written from an Indigenous female, feminine, or feminist perspective. Resisting sexist classifications, these Innu women’s stories are not framed through their relationships with men, but through their relationships with other women, their ancestors, family, and community, as well as with other-than-human kin and the environment, as first described in the creation story of Sky Woman. All three poets, as well as Antane Kapeshe, emphasize their position as Innu women in relation to others and thus shift the focus from men to women and from individuality to collectivity.

Towards the end of *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, Antane Kapeshe critiques settler colonial culture and urban modes of living: “Aujourd’hui, je comprends que c’est la vie de Blanc qui m’a fait du tort à moi, femme innu et c’est pour cela que je ne déménage pas en ville,” and she bases her understanding on her own experiences, observations, and critical analysis as an Innu woman: “Depuis le temps où j’habite ici au lac John, j’ai soigneusement analysé la culture du Blanc ainsi que ma propre vie culturelle innu” (*JSMS* 2015, 148).¹⁰⁹ Antane Kapeshe practices an approach of knowledge production that

¹⁰⁸ Even though I focus my analysis on Indigenous women’s writing as a strategy of empowerment, this does not mean, at least in my understanding, that all herstories must essentially be written by women. Female-centred creation stories, for instance, can be told by Indigenous men as well, as Wendat author Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui illustrates with his book *La femme venue du Ciel* (2011), which tells his version of the Wendat creation story.

¹⁰⁹ Innu original: “Kashikat ninishtuten, e inniuan, kauapishit utinniun eukuan ka matshi-tutakuian. Eukuan ka ut eka atapian nete utenat. Tanite muk¹¹ nin nishituapaten nitinniun, apu tat kauapishit tshetshi anu uin nishtuapatak nitinnu-inniunnu. Ka tatupipuna apian ute Tshuan-shakaikanit, niminu-tshishkutamatishuti kauapishit utinniun mak nin e inniuan nitinniun” (*JSMS* 2019, 182). Antane Kapeshe specifies that she lived there for two decades: “Pendant les vingt années où j’ai habité au même endroit ici au lac John” (*JSMS* 2015, 148).

is essentially grounded in her personal experiences as an Innushkueu who is integrated into a larger web of interdependent relations. Largely overlooked or dismissed at the time of publication, Antane Kapeshe's approach has since been indirectly backed up by Indigenous women theorists, among them specifically Laguna Pueblo/Sioux scholar Paula Gunn Allen and Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson who have both developed methods of critical analysis that focus on their perspectives as Indigenous women. Gunn Allen, for instance, contends in her seminal book *The Sacred Hoop* (1986) that "[her] method of choice is [her] own understanding of American Indian life and thought," and she stresses that she "stud[ies] and write[s] out of a Laguna Indian woman's perspective" (6).¹¹⁰ Gunn Allen, who self-identifies as an Indigenous feminist, prioritizes her point of view as a Laguna Pueblo woman and positions her subjective perspective as a valid form of knowledge (production).

Like Gunn Allen, L. Simpson states, in her chapter "Kwe as Resurgent Method" in *As We Have Always Done* (2017), that she draws on her individual experiences as a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg woman as a method to create knowledge: "My life as a kwe within Nishnaabewin is *method* because my people have always generated knowledge through the combination of emotion and intellectual knowledge within the kinetics of our place-based practices, as mitigated through our bodies, minds, and spirits" (29-30; original emphasis).¹¹¹ The commonalities between Antane Kapeshe's approach and L. Simpson's method become particularly evident in the following statement, in which the latter identifies personal feelings, thoughts, and experiences as valid aspects for critical analysis: "I've paid great attention to my thoughts, emotions, and

¹¹⁰ It must be noted that Gunn Allen also draws on a variety of methodologies from different fields, such as anthropology and literary and women's studies because of the interdisciplinary nature of Indigenous Studies.

¹¹¹ L. Simpson's alludes to a holistic understanding of the human being that recognizes their intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical realms. This understanding is central to many Indigenous philosophies and described, for example, in the Medicine Wheel, which I discuss in detail below.

experiences as a kwe living at this particular point in time, and I've used this to critique settler colonialism and to generate thoughts on radical resurgent responses" (L. Simpson, *As* 30).

In Quebec, Innu writer An Antane Kapeshe is one of the first Indigenous women who, in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, creates this important link between personal life experiences and collective experiences of "the larger structures and process of settler colonialism" (L. Simpson, *As* 27).¹¹² Commenting on Antane Kapeshe's literary treatise of her individual and the Innu's collective experiences of colonialism, settler scholar Sarah Henzi recognizes Antane Kapeshe's dualist voice telling her story as an Innushkueu: "not only does she offer her readers a specifically Innu perspective on the colonial history of Québec, but she reinscribes [...] her voice as an Indigenous woman that we are compelled to listen to" ("Recovering and Recontextualizing" 278), and in doing so, Antane Kapeshe practices what I described earlier as Indigenous herstory.

The Paris-based publishing house Éditions des Femmes published, in 1982, a French re-edition with the title *Je suis une maudite sauvagesse: Indiennes d'Amérique du Nord*, where only Antane Kapeshe's preface appears in the source language, Innu-aimun. Some scholars, such as Sarah Henzi and Myriam St-Gelais, argue that this editorial choice to erase Antane Kapeshe's original voice (that is, her text in Innu-aimun) is a political one that prioritizes the publisher's feminist mission: "Ce choix éditorial montre bien que ce qui intéressait cette maison d'édition n'était pas tant la spécificité de la culture innue de [Antane] Kapeshe que la portée féministe du texte. Dans cette perspective, [Antane] Kapeshe devenait la porte-parole des 'Indiennes d'Amérique du Nord,' tel qu'indiqué sur la couverture" (St-Gelais, "Genèse" 144).¹¹³ The

¹¹² Cree author Jane Pachano creates a similar link in her residential school narrative *Geniesh* (1973).

¹¹³ See also Henzi's afterword to her translation of Antane Kapeshe's text for a brief discussion of political and editorial choices of the 1982 edition ("Recovering and Recontextualizing" 299n28).

French edition's revised title alludes to colonial imaginations of Indigenous Peoples, or, more specifically, Indigenous women, as one monolithic group that can, in turn, be represented by one selected author, in this case Antane Kapeshe. Although I take issues with the French publisher's tokenist attitude (that is, Antane Kapeshe as a representative and speaker for all Indigenous women on Turtle Island), there is undoubtedly a striking Indigenous feminist stance in Antane Kapeshe's text that deserves attention.¹¹⁴

Chippewa scholar Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux underlines the challenging process of storytelling that Indigenous writers experience in a settler-colonial world: "by telling our own narratives through a variety of mediums, we are undertaking a heroic journey, a journey that begins with speaking and writing our own truths in regards to our personal and community experiences" ("Narrative" 53). Antane Kapeshe's truth is deeply anchored in her experience as an Innishkueu, but to my knowledge, Antane Kapeshe never self-identified as an Indigenous feminist, even though "a rich history of Native feminist theories circulated both within and against whitemain feminism and other academic fields since at least the 1960s" (Arvin et al. 11). Antane Kapeshe's feminist stance, however, is not rooted in academic discussions and conversations, as she had never access to this milieu, but it derives, as I suggest, "from a long line of activism and [Indigenous] intellectual thought" (Arvin et al. 11). Antane Kapeshe's book illustrates that Indigenous feminism constitutes "an ideological framework not only of intellectuals but also of activists," as political science scholar and Indigenous feminist Joyce Green (of English, Ktunaxa and Cree-Scots descent) stresses in her essay "Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism" (2007, 25).

¹¹⁴ Even though the goal of the French feminist publisher is to promote women's voices, their editorial strategy ironically consists of a colonial act of suppressing Indigenous women's voices, as Acoose contends: "Another method used to suppress the voices of Indigenous women [...] is to use one person's life as representative of a whole culture" (*Iskwewak* 1995, 67).

Antane Kapesch made a valuable contribution to Indigenous feminist theories and practices with the publication of her autobiography because of her memorable identity markers and her enactment of individual and intellectual sovereignty. As examples, in her preface to *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, Antane Kapesch situates herself specifically as an Innu woman: “moi, une femme innu” (“Préface,” *JSMS* 2015, 89), and throughout her book, she repetitively uses this or similar expressions as markers of her identity and perspective as an Innushkueu, deeply embedded in her Innu culture.¹¹⁵ Antane Kapesch employs specific identity markers to “make substantial advances in understandings of the connections between settler colonialism and both heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism” (Arvin et al. 11). In her groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasizes that the position and point of view of Indigenous women should be understood in a relational sense: “In positioning myself as an Indigenous woman, I am claiming a genealogical, cultural and political set of experiences” (12). I argue that Antane Kapesch’s practice of publicly affirming her perspective as Innushkueu in her literary work cannot be underestimated and plays a crucial role in transmitting Indigenous female self-esteem in order to rekindle and celebrate Indigenous womanhood and cultures, as younger generations of Innu/Indigenous women have shown in their more recent cultural productions.

“Langue rouge” - Denouncing Patriarchal Settler Colonialism

¹¹⁵ Innu original: “innushkueuian” (*JSMS* 2019, 12). The original 1976 and the 2019 editions both read as follows: “moi une Indienne” (“Préface,” *JSMS* 1976; “Préambule,” *JSMS* 2019, 13). Henzi kept the 2015 version for her translation into English: “me, an Innu woman” (*JSMS* 2020, 7). In her afterword to the English translation, Henzi explains her choice: “Of course, the word ‘Indian’ was common in the 1970s, but it seemed far too inappropriate to use throughout in a contemporary translation; thus I maintained that revision, and used the word ‘Innu,’ in the hopes that it would reflect better how the author referred to herself and to her people. However, in instances of direct speech by a White person, I did leave the word ‘Indian,’ so as to reflect the inherent violence and racism in those interjections” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 293).

In the first chapter “Kauapishit ushkat ka takushinit nitassinat / Au début, quand le Blanc est arrivé sur nos terres” in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, Antane Kapeshe links the settler colonial project to the exploitation and destruction of Indigenous lands as well as to the intentional destruction of Indigenous cultures and languages: “[le Blanc] voulait tuer notre culture à notre insu, il voulait tuer notre langue à notre insu et il nous volait notre territoire” (*JSMS* 2019, 27).¹¹⁶ Antane Kapeshe’s testimonial writing reveals that “colonialism has functioned not only politically and territorially but on the linguistic level as well” (Teves et al. vii), for example through the violent imposition of colonial languages, such as English, French, and Spanish. Writing in these “langues conquérantes / soi-disant meilleures” (Nolin, *MPAN* 27) constitutes, for most Indigenous authors, a dual process which Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkew describes as both “a political act and an act of healing that provides the foundation for the process of decolonization” (“Myth” 211). In the poem “Errance,” Cousineau Mollen’s female speaker evokes this dual process of writing in French: “Enfant colonisée, j’en suis bien consciente / La langue de Molière est mon île” (*BM082* 28). The first line reads as a political statement that very consciously recognizes the speaker’s experience of being/feeling colonized, yet critiques settler colonialism, whereas the second line establishes writing in the French language as a valuable means of expression and a possible avenue for decolonization.

Colonial languages constitute the linguistic framework in which most Indigenous writers today must operate. According to Ruffo, “the majority of Native writers in Canada [work] either in English or French – with some embedding their Native languages within these dominant

¹¹⁶ The 2015 editions read as follows: “[le Blanc] voulait assassiner notre culture innu à notre insu, assassiner notre langue innu, et ainsi nous dépouiller de nos terres” (*JSMS* 2015, 96). Innu original: “tshimut ui nipatapan nitinniunnannu kie tshimut ui nipatapan nitaimunnannu kie nitassinannu nitshimutamakutan” (*JSMS* 2019, 28).

languages” with the objective “to reach as wide an audience as possible” (“Afterword” 113).

While it is certainly true that most contemporary Indigenous writers speak, write, and publish in one of Canada’s official languages, it is crucial to contextualize this reality as a consequence of “linguicide,” that is the intentional destruction and “disappearance of Aboriginal language[s],” targeted particularly through past and present educational systems in Quebec and Canada (L. Fontaine, “Redress for Linguicide” 199), as described, for example, by Antane Kapesih. Innu writer Naomi Fontaine critically engages with writing in French by describing the gradual loss of the Innu language over generations in *Shuni* (2019):

J’écris en français parce que c’est la seule langue dans laquelle je sais écrire. Ce n’est pas mon choix de ne pas écrire en innu. Cette décision a été prise bien avant ma naissance.

Elle était inscrite dans toutes les mesures assimilatrices que mes grands-parents, parents et moi avons subies. On m’a instruite en français. On m’a fait croire que ma langue était mourante. Qu’il ne fallait pas trop s’y attacher, un animal en captivité dans un abattoir.

J’ai grandi en ne sachant lire ni écrire l’innu-aimun. J’ai grandi en croyant que de ne pas savoir lire ni écrire l’innu-aimun était acceptable.

Aujourd’hui, je dois me défaire de mes idées rétrogrades et dans un processus d’affirmation, absolument, je dois apprendre à écrire et à lire l’innu-aimun. (38)

N. Fontaine’s future response to the question why she does not write in her language, Innu-aimun, illustrates that, for many Indigenous writers, the question of language is not about their personal linguistic choice, rather, it is a severe consequence of colonial and assimilative strategies implemented by settler-colonial structures a long time ago, as Harjo and Bird stress: “When our lands were colonized the language of the colonizer was forced on us” (23). Language is essential to cultural identity and the revitalization of Indigenous languages, such as imagined

by N. Fontaine, thus constitutes an important element in the process of decolonization. Bilingual publications, such as the literary works written by Antane Kapeshe and Bacon, illustrate how Innu women writers, who can speak and write fluently in their mother tongue, seek to preserve Innu-aimun through writing, and how they promote Indigenous cultures by offering their texts, in translation, to a larger public.¹¹⁷

Most Indigenous women writers today are forced or choose to work in colonial languages, but they are continually “reinventing the enemy’s language,” to use the famous expression coined by Indigenous poets Joy Harjo (Muscogee) and Gloria Bird (Spokane). Indigenous herstory invites women to claim their voices and to speak up, but, as Harjo and Bird remind us in *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, Indigenous women reshape colonial languages to reflect their realities and to critique patriarchal settler colonialism: “‘Reinventing’ in the colonizer’s tongue and turning those images around to mirror an image of the colonized to the colonizers as a process of decolonization indicates that something is happening, something is emerging and coming into focus that will politicize as well as transform literary expression” (22). Indigenous women’s critical engagements with colonial languages, and their creative reconstruction, take different forms in their cultural productions. Innu authors like Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine customize the French language to their needs by integrating the Innu language into their poetry, whether through the inclusion of Innu words or expressions or through more subtle strategies, such as expressions of their “particular way of perceiving the world” (Harjo and Bird 23) and being in the world. Early in *Ma peau aime le Nord*, Nolin’s lyric speaker makes an important statement about the languages she uses for different occasions, such as thinking, speaking, and writing: “j’écris mon histoire dans une langue colonisée // je PARLE

¹¹⁷ In a reversed way, Mestokosho, who writes her poetry in French, sometimes includes Innu translations.

innu dans la langue de ma mère / je PENSE innu / j'ÉCRIS innu dans une langue étrangère // ma détresse s'écrit en français" (*MPAN* 10; original emphasis). Nolin's poem exemplifies the strong presence of Innu-aimun even though it is written in French, and especially the line "j'ÉCRIS innu dans une langue étrangère" evokes Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong's important statement in "Land Speaking" (1998) that "Okanagan, my original language, the language of my people, constitutes the most significant influence on my writing in English" (146). Although they are not always visible for the non-Indigenous reader, Indigenous languages and the knowledge contained within those languages and their speakers undeniably influence Indigenous women's writing.

In an untitled poem in the collection's second section "Déracinée," Nolin continues to counter the erasure of Indigenous languages by stressing that "je parle une langue rouge" (*MPAN* 27), a strong opening line which highlights both her ability to speak Innu-aimun and her attempt to reinvent or indigenize the French language. "To reinvent the enemy's language is," as LaRocque underlines, "a re-creative process" (*When* 22) that allows Indigenous women writers to reflect their realities and to envision decolonized and just futures. As such, colonial languages like English and French are "now as much our vehicle[s] of creative expression as [they are] our vehicle[s] of resistance" (LaRocque, *When* 22). In the second stanza of the same poem, Nolin does not shrink from addressing the weakening and loss of Innu-aimun and other Indigenous languages because of declining numbers of fluent speakers in communities: "ma langue, langage de ma terre / hurle dans mes songes / pour ne pas périr / comme les langues mortes / des vieux sages" (*MPAN* 27).¹¹⁸ The stanza's first line alludes to the inseparable nature of Indigenous

¹¹⁸ In an untitled poem in the first section of her collection, Nolin directly addresses Québécois society (by using the second person singular form "tu/you" in a collective sense) and their fear to lose their French language, distinctive culture, and (collective) identity as well as their efforts to protect and preserve their language to prevent the loss of culture, language, and identity. Nolin's speaker ironically remarks: "c'est drôle nous sommes pareils" because "nos

languages and the territories they evolved from, situating the connection between land and language that Armstrong describes: “language was given to us by the land we live within” (“Land Speaking” 146). In the third and fourth stanzas, Nolin continues to reconnect elements that have been separated by colonization and settlement, most importantly the deep connection that exists between Indigenous Peoples, their languages, and their homelands: “racine de ma terre ancestrale / une parole, une langue / celle de mes ancêtres / porte ma terre promise // celle de mon berceau / qui devient ma terre / et ainsi le territoire de ma langue / demeure l’*innu-aimun* de ma vie” (*MPAN* 27; original emphasis). Writing in French, the speaker praises her mother tongue and evokes the centuries-old knowledge of the land and her ancestors that is contained in the Innu language. This poetic work of reparation emphasizes, according to Armstrong, “the significance that original Native languages and their connection to our lands have in compelling the reinvention of the enemy’s language for our perspectives as indigenous writers” (“Land Speaking” 146). Considered from a different perspective, Nolin thus warns how the destruction of the Innu language involves the destruction of Innu Knowledge, traditional philosophies, and culture. Similarly, Kanapé Fontaine maintains that colonization and settlement have resulted in many Indigenous people’s weakened relations with, or even disconnection from, their lands and their kin, and she stresses that this separateness leads to a drastically weakened sense (and in some cases even loss) of Innu/Indigenous identity because it is so intrinsically linked to the territory and environment (“Poétique”).

batailles et nos craintes / se ressemblent” (*MPAN* 11). This poem deals with Indigenous-settler relations in Quebec in an attempt to create mutual understanding and thus to facilitate (intercultural) comprehension and respect, elements that are needed to peacefully co-inhabit a shared territory. I thus read this poem as a literary attempt to forge links between Indigenous and settler nations in Quebec. At the same time, however, this poem implicitly critiques past and present colonization and the violent imposition of the French language.

Episkenew suggests that the strategy of reinventing the enemy's language involves "the subversive nature of the practice of writing in English to recover Indigenous communities" ("Myth" 212). In other words, Indigenous women writers consciously turn to colonial languages to express their realities and to share their truths with a wide audience. Indigenous herstory can therefore be seen as a cultural transmitter. Nolin's poetry, for example, includes important statements on translation, notably poetic writing as a form of cultural translation and, in a larger sense, cultural education: "j'aimerais traduire ma vie / parler de mes racines / tirer mon histoire des réserves // je sais qu'elle attend que je la cueille" (*MPAN* 12). The speaker here overtly expresses her desire to share her history and culture with her readership. These lines also imply that Innu/Indigenous histories and stories have always been present, but settler society has merely listened to those (hi)stories kept in the reserve. Nolin's poetry offers her a way to tell her story, to translate Indigenous life, and to liberate forgotten or ignored voices and stories of her people. The written word constitutes, for Nolin, a creative means to resist colonial oblivion and to counter politics of forced assimilation and erasure. Such a position is evident when she writes: "je veux te conter de ma plume / la poésie de mon peuple" (*MPAN* 12), which emphasizes the significance of telling stories and writing history from the speaker's particular point of view as an Innu woman and is therefore a powerful statement on Indigenous women's literary self-representation.

Self-representation in cultural productions empowers Indigenous women writers to explore and reconnect with their Indigenous languages, and there are many contemporary Innu women poets, such as Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine, "who incorporate native language in their work" (Harjo and Bird 25). Whereas Cousineau Mollen seems to "feel the need to include a glossary of terms in order for the work to be accessible to a larger audience" (Harjo

and Bird 25), Nolin's collection is not accompanied by a glossary that translates or defines Innu words.¹¹⁹ I understand Nolin's approach as another strategy of cultural education because she forces readers, who are not familiar with the Innu language, to do their own research if the context does not provide sufficient information for the (non-Indigenous) reader to understand the words. Episkenew's following statement on the diverse readership of Indigenous literatures provides a supplementary interpretation: "Because Indigenous writers are cognizant of their diverse audience, they have embedded a multiplicity of implied readers within the text of their narratives, so that each category of implied reader will understand the narrative somewhat differently, depending on their societal positionality" ("Myth" 212-213). From this perspective, Nolin addresses a specific Innu readership by including the Innu language into her poetry without providing a glossary. Nolin's writing can therefore be understood as a gift that is returned to the Innu community.

Like other well-known, English-speaking Indigenous poets such as Rita Joe ("I Lost my Talk"), Jeannette Armstrong ("History Lesson"), or Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm ("Stray Bullet – Oka Re/vision") who "write stories in poetry form" to express "a comment, protestation or even a correction aimed at history" (Rita Joe qtd. in Armstrong and Grauer 13), younger generations of Indigenous women in Quebec, such as Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine, employ poetry "as a way to get through an audience, and voice what matter[s] to us as subject" (Armstrong, "Four Decades" xvi).¹²⁰ More specifically, these three Innu women poets use poetic writing to contest the white-washed version of North American history and they strive to restory the colonial history of Quebec from their perspectives as Innushkueu, as exemplified by

¹¹⁹ Interestingly, Kanapé Fontaine's original French poetry collections do not provide a glossary, but the English translation *Assi Manifesto* does.

¹²⁰ The three above mentioned poems by Joe, Armstrong, and Akiwenzie-Damm are all published in the anthology *Native Poetry in Canada* (2001), edited by Jeannette Armstrong and Lally Grauer.

Cousineau Mollen: “Lueur millénaire / Au cœur de la noirceur” (*BM082* 60). The word “noirceur” evokes, of course, *la Grande Noirceur*, the Great Darkness, a political period in Quebec corresponding to the years of the political regime of Maurice Duplessis (1936-1939 and 1944-1959).¹²¹ The expression “alludes to the population’s suffering during this time” (Dupuis), and Cousineau Mollen uses it in a similar way, referring, however, to “la noirceur de la colonisation” (*BM082* 20) and thus addressing Indigenous Peoples’ suffering and resilience. In *Enfants du lichen*, however, Cousineau Mollen declares the end of darkness for Indigenous women because of the revitalizing and resurgent work of Indigenous word warriors, among others:

On nous croyait plus mortes que vives / Plus effacées que jamais [...]

C’était sans compter nos guerriers / Artistes, pourfendeurs, clairvoyants

Qui de leurs pinceaux, de leur talent / Nous ramenaient une à une à la vie [...]

Redonnaient à chacune sa beauté / Et soulignaient sa dignité

De la noirceur invisible et gourmande / Nous étions ressuscitées. (20)

In these lines, Cousineau Mollen highlights the resurgent and empowering nature of Indigenous literatures and activism, and she uses the metaphor of resurrection to point to an Indigenous reawakening that characterizes contemporary movements of Indigenous resurgence.

Smith contends that “reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization” (31) because “to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit you have to have a sense of your own history and identity” (Horn-Miller, *Distortion and Healing* 20). LaRocque argues that writing only becomes beneficent or harmful through the writer’s use of the medium: “obviously,

¹²¹ In her foreword to the 2019 re-edition of Antane Kapeshe’s autobiography, Naomi Fontaine identifies the political period of the Great Darkness as one of the reasons for the radical (social, political, economic) transformation that then takes place in the province: “À l’époque où [Antane] Kapeshe écrit son essai, le Québec est en pleine révolution. Il y a tant à faire pour évacuer une fois pour toutes la Grande Noirceur” (*JSMS* 2019, 7).

literacy is a two-edged sword dependent on whether humans use it for oppressive or emancipatory purposes” (*When* 21).¹²² As “a modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other” (Smith 31), who is positioned in binary opposition to those representing the colonial system, Western historiography was primarily used to oppress and to maintain power over Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous herstory, in contrast, serves “emancipatory purposes” by speaking back to (settler) colonial and patriarchal domination. The literary process of restorying history and turning it into Indigenous herstory thus allows Indigenous women to take control of cultural narratives and to counter their centuries-long misrepresentation or erasure, as exemplified by Joe’s poignant lines: “I am not / What they portray me / I am civilized” (*Poems* 2). Mohawk lawyer Patricia Monture reminds us, in her article “Women’s Words: Power, Identity, and Indigenous Sovereignty,” of Indigenous women’s long tradition of talking back to heteropatriarchal settler colonialism by stating that “Indigenous women have been naming and standing against the irony of colonialism and its impact on our lives as women for a very long time” (155).¹²³ As mentioned above, Indigenous herstory as a counter-narrative to Indigenous women’s misrepresentation and erasure in colonial discourses has a long tradition on Turtle Island, and Indigenous women writers from Quebec continue the tradition of “naming and standing against” the insidious forces of colonialism.

¹²² LaRocque speaks particularly about forms of syllabic writing and literature, but I would include digital literacy as another form of literacy that, as the analysis of Skawennati’s digital art project in Chapter 1 demonstrated, is used by Indigenous artists as a medium to support Indigenous resurgence.

¹²³ I understand the “irony of colonialism” in Monture’s statement as settler colonialism’s destructive force while being built on the European idea that Indigenous nations need to be “protected,” which implies a way of thinking that favours the myths of progress, civilization, and Enlightenment. Besides, this understanding assigns a child-like status to Indigenous Peoples, a position that is further developed in the paternalistic laws of the *Indian Act*. The modern Canadian nation-state, which has evidently been actively involved in Indigenous Peoples’ genocide and contributes to ecocide through irreversible environmental destruction, continues to promote its international image of the nature-loving and peace-keeping nation.

A central element of Indigenous herstory consists of Indigenous women “writing themselves and their people into history as subjects to and of their own making” (Emberley, “Aboriginal Women’s Writing” 100). Antane Kapesh’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* is, of course, a poignant example of how Indigenous women writers “are claiming an unambiguous self-determination to tell their own stories, and are doing it in their own way” (Emberley, “Aboriginal Women’s Writing” 100). Emergent Indigenous women poets continue this tradition and Nolin, for example, promises her grandmother in her collection *Ma peau aime le Nord*: “Pour toi / Nukum / j’écris notre histoire” (MPAN 5; original emphasis). Innu/Indigenous Peoples’ re-inscription into historical discourses is necessary because of their absence in history, as evoked by Nolin’s female speaker addressing her grandfather: “je te raconte notre histoire / je chante dans le tremblement du *shaputuan* / toi, grand-père mon territoire // pardonne à la lune la noirceur de notre peuple / une histoire sans toi sans moi sans notre peuple” (MPAN 5; original emphasis). Rather than rewriting key events of Québécois history from an Indigenous female point of view, Nolin restories history by re-inscribing her presence as well as that of family members, ancestors, and kin relations into settler consciousness. In other words, she refuses to remain silent, invisible, contained, or even erased from public discourse, and poetry offers her a generative platform to be listened to and to self-actualize through writing.

Kanapé Fontaine is, like Nolin, deeply committed to restorying patriarchal history in her third collection *Bleuets et abricots*, as she explains in a talk in Stockholm: “mon but a été, par la poésie, de renverser l’histoire, de renverser le patriarcat [...] et d’éduquer les gens par rapport à une histoire de l’Amérique d’un autre point de vue” (“Natasha Kanapé Fontaine lit,” 16mm36ss). In her long poem “La Migration,” the female speaker pledges the land to remember both its

original inhabitants (Indigenous Peoples) and those who radically altered its story (colonizers and settlers): “Je prie / garde mémoire / pays mien / femme-terre / indigène / souveraine victorieuse // Pays mien ô / garde mémoire / de ceux venus changer ton histoire / renverser le cycle de tes règles” (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 76). The repetition of the expression “Pays mien/Land of mine” serves as a lyric reclamation of Indigenous land, which the female speaker claims as hers, as supported by her identification as “femme-terre/land woman” accompanied by the adjectives “indigène/indigenous,” “souveraine/sovereign,” and “victorieuse/victorious” (*BA* 76; *Blueberries and Apricots* 54). The female speaker then announces that she will re-inscribe the land and Indigenous Peoples into history: “Mes descendants diront / Nitassinan / Assi // Je reviendrai nommer l’île / lui donner son histoire / son nom ne sera plus inégal // Nul ne peut être digne / de la terre / si la dignité n’est redonnée / aux femmes / aux hommes / aux enfants // à qui on l’avait / dérobée” (*BA* 78), and thus Kanapé Fontaine concludes her collection with a powerful statement on Indigenous dignity and connectedness to the land. Kanapé Fontaine’s work ultimately exemplifies one of the most recurring themes in Indigenous women’s writing, which “is one of connection – to other people and to nature” (Cruikshank 3).

Wesley-Esquimaux contends that Indigenous women “are increasingly using their voice to reclaim lost stories and narratives” (“Trauma” 20). Biased versions of history that marginalize, ignore, or erase Indigenous perspectives are challenged in Cousineau Mollen’s poetry when she reclaims history as she knows it: “J’ai l’humilité de mon Histoire / Celle que tu ne connais pas” (*BM082* 27). Denouncing settler historiography and colonization constitutes an important strategy of restorying history and Nolin’s female speaker challenges Indigenous misrepresentation or absence in historical documents and how these acts have affected younger generations of Innu people: “une existence sans histoire // la mémoire des origines perdues / dans

une génération égarée / qui cherche son sang / dans l'essence de ses racines / malmenées par l'Histoire" (*MPAN* 26). Smith, like many other Indigenous thinkers, stresses that history is needed "for understanding the present" (31) as well as the past and the future, and the erasure of a people's history therefore results in uprootedness, as described by Nolin's speaker. Cree scholar Neal McLeod contends that "one of the challenges of contemporary Indigenous poetics is to move from a state of wandering and uprootedness towards a poetics of being home" (10).¹²⁴ This "poetics of being home" is enacted in Innu/Indigenous women's poetry by re-inscribing the deep connection with Indigenous homelands and communities. By using their voices and reclaiming lost narratives, they re-inscribe their presence within the settler-colonial state and re-write the historical narrative of Indigenous absence.

Corn tassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi remind us that "[t]he nation-state of Canada offers a very different version of history than those of Indigenous nations - one that glosses over the colonial legacies of removing Indigenous peoples from their families and homelands when enforcing assimilationist policies, all of which were intended to eradicate Indigenous nations" (138). Another key element of Indigenous herstory is therefore to denounce settler-colonial practices of Indigenous removal and erasure as well as re-inscribing the deep connection that Indigenous Peoples have always had with the land. Antane Kapeshe, for example, describes how living on reserve feels like being sentenced to life imprisonment: "Aujourd'hui, moi, une femme innu, je me sens très lasse et nostalgique à rester toujours au même endroit, il n'y a qu'aux alentours de ma maison que je me promène et je sais qu'aussi longtemps que je vivrai, jamais je ne pourrai

¹²⁴ Rita Joe expresses a similar understanding in the prologue to her autobiography: "Being strangers in our own land is a sad story, but, if we can speak, we may turn this story around" (*Song* 14). Cousineau Mollen's poetry is also deeply marked by her state of wandering, for example in her poems "Errance" and "Nikaui."

m'évader de l'enclos où le Blanc m'a enfermée" (*JSMS* 2015, 151).¹²⁵ Antane Kapeshe's description illustrates how an enforced sedentary lifestyle contradicts the traditionally nomadic culture of the Innu, which Antane Kapeshe lived and practiced for decades until the 1950s. Emergent Innu poets, such as Nolin, also address the reserve system: "mon peuple humilié // oublié / enfermé dans des réserves" (*MPAN* 26). In accordance with Antane Kapeshe, Nolin's female speaker understands the reserve as a form of containment that furthers colonial amnesia. Many of the fifty-five Indigenous communities in Quebec are situated in removed and rural territory and not easily accessible, and thus easily forgotten (see Figure 7).

Cousineau Mollen addresses Indigenous removal from their homelands both in terms of territorial dispossession and urbanization. For example, Cousineau Mollen's female speaker declares Indigenous territory as unceded, "ma terre non cédée" (*BM082* 26), but poignantly evokes past and ongoing theft of Indigenous land with the expression "anorexie territoriale" (*BM082* 25). Urbanization is a major theme in Cousineau Mollen's poetry, in which she "fait résonner l'identité innue dans le territoire de Montréal/Muliats/Tio'tia:ke" ("Maya," *Kwahiatonhk!*). Literary work dealing with the urban experience of Indigenous Peoples is becoming more common, "not only because urbanization and industrialization has had an impact on Aboriginal cultures, but also because the Aboriginal population is increasingly urban" (LaRocque "Reflections" 167). Pierre Lepage confirms in *Mythes et réalités sur les peuples autochtones* (2019) that "[u]n nombre de plus en plus grand de personnes d'origine autochtone vivent en milieu urbain," and he emphasizes that those "n'en sont pas moins des personnes autochtones conscientes et fières de leurs identité" (105), as alluded to by Cousineau Mollen in

¹²⁵ Innu original: "Kashikat e inniuian mishta-mueshtatapiani peikutau epian, muk" anite uashka nitshit ekute pepamuteian kie nitshisseniten tshe ishpish inniuian, apu nita tshika ut tshi pikuiian katshi tshishtikanikatut kauapishit" (*JSMS* 2019, 188).

her poetry. Settler scholar Carole Lévesque contends that the Idle No More movement “a inspire profondément l’autochtonie urbaine canadienne,” and Indigenous women writers located in urban centres, such as Cousineau Mollen and Kanapé Fontaine, represent “l’image de cette nouvelle modernité citoyenne autochtone” (11). However, Lévesque reminds us that “la présence des Autochtones en ces lieux précède beaucoup la création même de ces villes” (14), and Cousineau Mollen claims Montreal as Indigenous territory by using Indigenous names of place, and more specifically the Innu term “Muliats” for referring to this city.

In the poem “La sauvagesse épuisée,” Cousineau Mollen’s female speaker evokes the hectic experience of living in Muliats/Montreal: “Exténuée de toi Muliats // Mon regard est cerné, ma tête tourne / Le béton devient ma toundra // Mes mains d’Ishkueu se blessent / Aux aspérités de l’urbanisation,” and compares urban life to life in her community in the North: “Si loin est le son du tambour de mes grand-pères / Le doux bruissement de la mer, mon alliée // Ma peau dorée pâlit sous la lumière des néons/ Mon cœur tressaille dans sa solitude // Il erre dans la brunante / Il cherche Atik^u” (*BM082* 18).¹²⁶ The speaker’s reference to her heart’s state of wandering evokes her uprootedness, but it also connects with another important theme in Cousineau Mollen’s poetry, namely homelessness in urban centres, which are both closely related to the aim of “writing home” in Indigenous poetics. Cousineau Mollen’s poem “Muliats, souterraine” directly addresses the issue of homelessness: “Tu retournes sous la terre / Tant de fatigue // Le métro, confident de tes silences / Assure tes fuites,” “Tu es une louve de nuit / Qui court les lieux mal aimés,” and “Tu retournes sous la terre / Là se cachent les derniers vestiges / De cette humanité flageolante” (*BM082* 19). Many Indigenous individuals are drawn to urban centres “parce qu’il n’y a pas d’opportunités d’emploi ou de logements disponibles dans leurs

¹²⁶ Atik^u means caribou in Innu-aimun.

communautés” (Lepage 105). The voluntary or forced removal of individuals from Indigenous communities is thus linked to other systemic problems, such as inadequate housing (including access to clean drinking water), poverty, and access to health care, education, and employment. However, access to housing in urban centres also remains a challenge for Indigenous people due to systemic racism, as Lévesque states with regard to the overrepresentation of homelessness among Indigenous people: “Quant à l’incidence de la condition itinérante, elle est au moins sept fois supérieure à celle observée parmi la population canadienne” (4). Cousineau Mollen, in particular, uses her poetry to draw attention to the epidemic problem of Indigenous homelessness in cities, which is linked to the larger process of past and ongoing colonization on Turtle Island. Métis scholar Jesse Thistle argues that Indigenous homelessness “is best understood as the outcome of historically constructed and ongoing settler colonization and racism that have displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories” (6). The Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness defines Indigenous homelessness as follows: “Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities” (qtd. in Thistle 6). Consequently, Indigenous homelessness is not limited to being houseless, but it essentially means being disconnected from community, culture, and land because of settler colonialism. Although Cousineau Mollen does not specifically address Indigenous women as a particularly vulnerable subgroup of homeless Indigenous populations, it must be noted that Indigenous women “of all ages experience a disproportionate burden of housing problems” and they “also

face specific and persisting vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation, violence and murder” (Caryl Patrick qtd. in Thistle 21). Indigenous women’s experiences of homelessness can thus be directly linked to multiple forms of gendered violence and femicide.

It has been recognized that “Indigenous women have always been at the forefront of their communities in naming and combatting colonization, genocide, and gendered violence” (“Open Letter”), and Indigenous women writers continue this activist tradition. Innu women poets will “use the word ‘genocide’ to talk about what happened to their families, communities, their way of life” (Narine 4). Kanapé Fontaine, for instance, writes about “Orgueil / et génocide” (*BA* 70) in her poem “La Migration,” Cousineau Mollen refers to “de guerres génocides” (*BM082* 55), and Nolin shares her fear of genocide: “j’ai peur du génocide” (*MPAN* 33). Moreover, Cousineau Mollen vividly describes “l’horreur de l’assimilation” and “[le] cœur blessé par ces écoles sans âme” (*BM082* 69, 74) in her lyrical treatise of residential schools, as experienced by her mother.

In response to the multifold experiences of colonialism, genocide/femicide, racism, violence, and assimilation, all decried by Indigenous women’s “sanglots d’injustice” (Cousineau Mollen, *BM082* 71), it might seem surprising that “[t]he Indigenous arts and humanities have a great deal to offer about how to think an ethics of nonviolence” (“In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 220), as settler scholar Julia Emberley argues. This ethics of nonviolence includes “defamiliarizing colonial history and opening one’s eyes to the storytelling insights of Indigenous writers whose work insists on generating a howl or cry that can no longer be silenced” (Emberley, “In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 220). This non-violent, pacifist, yet activist stance is obvious in Cousineau Mollen’s poem “Colère rouge,” where she talks back to colonial injustice and violence and demands “Que nos armes soient les plumes de paix / Nos cris

de rage, chants de sérénité” (BM082 71).¹²⁷ Innu/Indigenous women writers therefore act as what Gunn Allen calls “word warriors” (*Sacred Hoop* 51), who peacefully, yet unapologetically defend and protect their culture through writing.

Kanapé Fontaine, for her part, underlines the significance of this metaphor and act of the generative cry in Indigenous literatures with the very first sentence in *Bleuets et abricots*: “Un cri s’élève en moi et me transfigure” (7).¹²⁸ Interestingly, one French word for cry - “cri” - is a part of the French verb for writing - “écrire” – which can also be found in Kanapé Fontaine’s prologue to her third poetry collection: “J’écris pour dire oui. À moi. Femme” (BA 7). Kanapé Fontaine uses her writing, or *écriture*, to publicly scream her existence and inscribe herself as a human being, as a woman, as an “Innu Ishkueu” (BA 75). Black feminist writer, educator, and activist bell hooks attributes speaking and writing to transformative passages from silence to speech, from object to subject, and from idleness to agency: “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back’ that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice” (128). I argue that Kanapé Fontaine employs poetic writing as an emancipatory strategy to liberate her Indigenous female voice in a decolonizing gesture towards communal liberation. She generates this metaphorical cry in her poetry to end the haunting silence that marks her ancestors and to practice cultural continuity through writing: “Forcer les portes du silence. Assurer la trace. Redonner vie aux ombres, aux

¹²⁷ In her recently published poetry collection *Enfants du lichen*, Cousineau Mollen reinforces this unapologetically activist, yet pacifist stance that characterizes Indigenous resistance and resurgence: “Turtle Island est fébrile / Ses enfants grondent / Car ils sont plus forts // Animés du feu de la rébellion / Armés lourdement de plumes d’aigle / Ils sont dangereux et menaçant” (77).

¹²⁸ English translation: “A cry rises in me and transfigures me” (*Blueberries and Apricots*, “Prologue”). I include Howard Scott’s English translations in footnotes to illustrate the diversity of nouns and verbs that can be used to translate the French noun “cri” and the verb “crier.”

enfants brisés, à la parole qui ne sait plus dire oui. Qui ne sait plus se tenir. Qui ne sait plus tenir parole” (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 8). Kanapé Fontaine’s poetic cry ultimately represents the silenced or unheard cry of her ancestors and symbolizes Indigenous Peoples’ reawakening.

In the “Second Movement” in *Bleuets et abricots*, Kanapé Fontaine further employs the imagery of the cry as a literary strategy to both denounce and reclaim lost dignity and identity: “Je me souviens / d’avoir eu un nom / un visage / un regard / une route / une voix / un poème / un cri” (*BA* 62).¹²⁹ These lines, and particularly the expression “je me souviens” in direct relation with the past tense (“avoir eu”), and the political nature of the slogan, illustrate Indigenous women’s experience of being rendered invisible and silenced because “Native women who held political power were a threat to this kind of a [patriarchal and colonial] system” (“Powerful History”), as Cree-Métis feminist Kim Anderson underlines. From this individual and collective experience of oppression evolves hooks’ concept of “talking back” as a practice of cultural resistance:

For [writers from oppressed, colonized, exploited groups], true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power, it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such it is a courageous act; as such it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced. (126)¹³⁰

Kanapé Fontaine takes up the official Quebec motto “Je me souviens/I remember,” which is meant “to remember the history of Québec and its renowned historic figures [such as

¹²⁹ English translation: “I remember / having a name / a face / a gaze / a road / a voice / a poem / a cry” (*Blueberries and Apricots* 42).

¹³⁰ Though not stripping their writing of creativity, hooks clearly positions writing from colonized subjects as a political act of resistance in response to colonial strategies of silencing and erasure. This also applies to Indigenous writing, but Indigenous literatures cannot be reduced to their elements of resistance or, even worse, be defined solely as creative responses to the atrocities of settler colonialism. For a more detailed discussion of so-called Indigenous resistance writing, see Chapter 3.

Amerindians, explorers, missionaries, soldiers and public administrators from the French regime as well as some British figures]” (Deschênes). However, rather than acknowledging the diversity of historical actors and specifically Indigenous nations’ contributions to the survival of settlers in early-contact times, the Quebec motto is often interpreted as a specific call to remember the province’s French heritage, which has become a source of national pride, meaning here French-Québécois pride. Kanapé Fontaine deconstructs the motto by describing the negative impacts that British and French colonization had on Indigenous nations and the modern forms of colonialism that continue to affect Indigenous communities.¹³¹ Kanapé Fontaine appropriates the motto by remembering her ancient lineage as well as Innu philosophies and traditions, thus assuring cultural continuity, which constitutes an important element in Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor’s concept of Indigenous survivance, which includes “moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal” (*Manifest Manners* 53). In her TEDx talk, for example, Kanapé Fontaine proudly presents herself as a “héritière d’une grande philosophie traditionnelle, de grandes cultures qu’on tente de revitaliser” (“Réflexion” 8mm57ss) and thus demonstrates her own understanding of Indigenous survivance.

In her long poem “La Migration,” Kanapé Fontaine seems to respond to the state, described earlier, of not “having a name / a face / a gaze / a road / a voice / a poem / a cry” (*Blueberries and Apricots* 42), when her female speaker announces: “J’ai enfin retrouvé mon nom / j’ai enfin retrouvé mon visage” (*BA* 73). And it is through the act of crying that the female

¹³¹ “The Québec motto dates from 1883, but it became official a half-century later when it was formally introduced into the description of Québec’s new coat of arms adopted on December 9, 1939. It has appeared on Québec licence plates since 1978” (Deschênes). The province of Quebec uses legislation and political decisions, and particularly language policy, to protect and preserve the French-Québécois language and culture. *La Loi 101* gives French a priority and thus a special status in Quebec. Indigenous nations critique this law because it furthers the weakening and loss of Indigenous languages, most of them already in danger.

speaker rediscovers “how to speak [and] how to scream” but also “how to cradle / how to weep / how to moan” (Kanapé Fontaine, *Blueberries and Apricots* 55). This generative power is particularly evident in the original French lines where Kanapé Fontaine uses the rhetorical device of the anaphora (“mon cri saura”) to stress the significance of the cry: “mon cri saura parler / mon cri saura hurler / mon cri saura bercer / mon cri saura pleurer / mon cri saura gémir” (*BA* 77).¹³²

Like Kanapé Fontaine and Cousineau Mollen, Nolin situates her *écriture* as a form of cultural continuity ensuring that her ancestors’ voices – resonating in her own literary voice - will be heard: “redonne-moi la voix / pour faire entendre / le cri de mes ancêtres” (*MPAN* 33). In the collection’s third section “Vulnérable,” Nolin’s female speaker alludes to the liberating effect of howling and crying and situates these vocal expressions, whether spoken by humans or by nature, as a strategy for healing: “[du vent] hurle / sur tes blessures / qui vieillissent” (*MPAN* 43) and “à l’aube je chante / mes racines / le jour j’apprends / la forêt / à la tombée de la nuit je crie / mes souffrances / et puis je danse” (*MPAN* 45). Nolin’s references to the natural elements and the cycle of a single day – “à l’aube,” “le jour,” and “à la tombée de la nuit” – evoke the Medicine Wheel, a highly significant symbol in Innu and many other Indigenous cultures across Turtle Island that represents the circle of life.

The teachings behind the Medicine Wheel represent the very essence of Indigenous beliefs and worldview: deep connection of all aspects of life. In imaginary and visual forms of representation, “la roue de la médecine est un grand cercle en fait, qu’on sépare en quatre parties, en quatre couleurs qui représentent les quatre éléments, les quatre directions et les quatre grands vents qui proviennent donc de toutes les directions,” as Kanapé Fontaine explains in her TEDx

¹³² English translation: “my cry will know / how to speak / how to scream / how to cradle / how to weep / how to moan” (*Blueberries and Apricots* 55).

talk (“Réflexion” 5mm10ss). The Medicine Wheel symbolizes how everything flows in a circle, and as such, the four sections are dependent on each other to create balance and harmony, as symbolized by the full circle. As a teaching tool itself, the Medicine Wheel provides a basic framework for Indigenous learning processes as it represents an interconnected system of teachings that helps Indigenous people to learn about the different seasons, directions, elements, colours, and the natural cycle of life from birth to death, and much more. According to Stó:lō educator Jo-ann Archibald (Q’um Q’um Xiiem), the Medicine Wheel provides Indigenous people with a “philosophical concept of holism [that] refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual [...], emotional, and physical [...] realms to form a whole healthy person,” and the image of the circle “symbolize[s] wholeness, completeness, and ultimately wellness” (11). This (w)holistic framework guides Indigenous people to live in balance, to respect all creation on Mother Earth, as described by Gregory Cajete (Navajo):

The Indigenous ideal of living ‘a good life’ in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving ‘to always think the highest thought’ [...] Thinking the highest thought means thinking of one’s self, of one’s community, and one’s environment richly. This thinking in the highest, most respectful, and compassionate way systematically influences the actions of both individuals and the community. It is a way to perpetuate ‘a good life,’ a respectful and spiritual life, a wholesome life.” (qtd. in Archibald 12-13)¹³³

For L. Simpson, “living in a good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial meta-narrative in and of itself” (*Dancing* 41), and this balanced wholeness is something that Cousineau

¹³³ The teachings of the Medicine Wheel are also evident in Horn-Miller’s telling of the story of Sky Woman: “The challenges Sky Woman faces affect her both physically and emotionally, throwing her sense of balance. As she deals with each of these challenges through critical engagement with herself and those she loves, Sky Woman learns how to think for herself, how to be respectful of others, how to endure suffering. It prepares her for what is to come” (“Distortion and Healing” 19-20). Note that some Indigenous intellectuals intentionally use the “w” in holistic to refer to Indigenous wholistic frameworks that look at the whole person.

Mollen's female speaker also strives for: "Rebâtir sur les cendres chaudes / Une existence de femme sereine" (BM082 53).

For some contemporary Indigenous women writers, like Nolin or Armstrong in *Whispering in Shadows* (2000), it is not only the cry but also "its opposite, a whisper [...] that will not be silenced" (Emberley, "In/Hospitable 'Aboriginalities'" 220). In the last poem of the collection's second section "Déracinée," Nolin evokes the whisper, which appears first as a soft, yet empowering murmur generated by the drum: "sous le chant d'un tambour / qui murmure à mon âme / j'écris ma poésie," and which then turns into a strong beat: "j'exhibe mon cœur / un nouveau battement" (MPAN 34). In her short reading of Nolin's debut collection, Nathalie Armand evokes the poet's tone which resembles a "voix chuchotée d'une conversation intime," but she specifies that "[j]amais murmure n'aura été aussi affirmé" (90), thus evoking both Nolin's refusal to be silenced and her affirmation as Innushkueu through writing.¹³⁴ Similarly to Nolin, Cree writer Rosanna Deerchild evokes the whisper in "I Am an Indian Poem":

I am my mother's story / My grandmother's story / My great grand //

all the way back //

I am the returning voice / From the silence of my mother / Who had her tongue stolen / In residential school //

A thousand women / stand behind me / Whispering / Singing / Holding the story / Blood line //

I breathe them in / And poetry breathes me out (242).

¹³⁴ In her latest poetry collection, *Enfants du lichen*, Cousineau Mollen specifically addresses the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and in the poem "Tu n'a pas de nom," the speaker uses the imagery of howl and murmur as narrative elements of critique: "Dis-moi belle sauvagesse / As-tu hurlé avant de périr? // Ou le silence a-t-il été ton dernier rôle / Quand la rivière t'a accueillie?" and "Dans la poésie de tes derniers moments / Tu n'as pas de nom / Le murmurer pour ramener ta mémoire / Fait de moi une dissidente sacrilège // Souviens-toi, belle enfant, du Registre / Tu n'as pas de nom // [...] Tes épitaphes seront murales / Car désormais, tu as un nom" (18-19).

In Deerchild's poem, the whisper emerges from the many generations of Indigenous women who have been silenced. The whisper is thus a relational element that connects the voices of several generations who refuse to remain silent and who speak out through Deerchild's poetic voice.

“Ma plume identitaire” - Becoming Innushkueu through Writing

Indigenous herstory involves what Smith calls “researching back,” a process that incorporates “a ‘knowing-ness of the colonizer’ and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination” (8). Kanapé Fontaine argues from a similar position when she says that it is essential for Indigenous women to rediscover themselves in accordance with Indigenous traditional philosophies, which ascribe “une valeur particulière à la femme” (“Réflexion” 7mm25ss), one of these values being her power to give life. This “retour vers soi” (“Réflexion” 9mm36ss), as Kanapé Fontaine calls it, is exemplified in contemporary Innu women's poetry through the female speakers' identity quests and their affirmative self-identification as Innushkueu.¹³⁵ Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine all employ poetry in partly autobiographical and testimonial form to deal with complex questions of personal and collective identity, to lyrically trace their identity quests, and to testify to their becoming Innushkueu through their writing. Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle foregrounds this transformative power of writing in her revolutionary autobiography *Bobbi Lee* (1975), when she states: “I became a woman through my words” (230).

¹³⁵ Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine reveals in an interview that she is now able to accept “qu'elle puisse être elle-même un modèle” (Collard). Kanapé Fontaine links her process of self-discovery to her capacity of being a role model today: “J'ai toujours été à la recherche de moi-même, de la partie la plus vraie, sensible, naturelle de ma personnalité. Je pense que je peux donner un exemple aux autres en leur disant : si je suis capable de me rendre là, d'autres personnes en sont capables aussi” (qtd. in Collard).

L. Simpson emphasizes that “knowledge is intimate” in many Indigenous cultures and argues that “individuals have the responsibility for generating meaning in their lives, for discovering their place in the world with the guidance of their names, spiritual relations, clan affiliations, their own gifts, desires, talents, and skills sets and by actively engaging the world” (*As* 28). Innu women’s writing illustrates how these women come to terms with their individual desire and responsibility to explore, through their gift of storytelling, who they are, where they come from, with whom (in a non-anthropocentric sense) they are related, and their place in the world. “This internal work is a necessary and vital part of living responsibly and ethically within our grounded normativity,” L. Simpson explains, “It is my sovereignty” (*As* 30). This sovereignty, which settler scholar Isabella Huberman calls “souveraineté individuelle” (“Si” 116), is overtly expressed by Antane Kapesh when she asserts: “Il n’y a que moi qui connais ma vie, il n’y a pas de Blanc qui connaisse mieux que moi ma vie d’Indienne” (*JSMS* 2019, 181).¹³⁶ Antane Kapesh’s autobiography is strongly marked by her presence as an Innushkueu grounded in her Innu culture as well as by the cultural pride she expresses throughout her text.

As part of generations who have experienced many cultural ruptures due to settler colonialism, urbanization, and industrialization, amongst other things, Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine lyrically express their need to rediscover themselves and to reclaim their dignity as human beings and Innu/Indigenous women. For example, Cousineau Mollen’s poem “Errance” alludes to her state of restless wandering in search of herself, and the female speaker

¹³⁶ Innu original: “Tanite muk^u nin ninishtuapaten nitinnui, apu tat kauapishit tshetshi anu uin nishtua patak nitinnu-inniunnu” (*JSMS* 2019, 182). The 2015 version reads as follows: “Il n’y a que moi qui connaisse ma vie, il n’y a pas un Blanc qui connaisse mieux que moi ma vie innu” (*JSMS* 2015, 148). The original 1976 version reads as the 2015 version, except for the last part of the phrase: “ma vie d’Indienne” (*JSMS* 1976, 215). The revision in the 2019 version is important here because the mood shift from the subjunctive (“connaisse”) to the indicative (“connais”) represents a shift from something imaginary or hypothetical to a real-world event or experience. As such, this grammatical shift of mode validates Antane Kapesh’s statement. Moreover, the expression “ma vie d’Indienne” foregrounds Antane Kapesh’s life experiences as an Innu woman, whereas “ma vie innu” focuses on her ethnic and cultural background.

identifies writing as a safe space to explore her identity: “Ma plume identitaire / Mon sentier de solitude écrivain” (BM082 28). These lines evoke L. Simpson’s understanding of the intimate process of self-exploration that is at once individual and, simultaneously, collective, as it connects the speaker to her community, history, culture, and territory. The speaker’s described solitude refers to her inner work enhanced through writing, a process that is necessary to deeply engage with herself to reclaim her identity as an Innushkueu living in relation with the world around her.

Nolin’s collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* is also characterized by the female speaker’s identity quest, as exemplified in an untitled poem in the first section “Rouge”: “je suis / une femme rouge / qui se cherche / depuis longtemps / je m’oublie” (MPAN 22). The speaker’s statement that she is a “red woman” expresses a certain self-affirmation as an Indigenous woman, but the lines following this statement illustrate how the speaker is torn. In a similar, yet radically different manner to Cousineau Mollen’s description of writing as a safe space, Nolin’s lyric speaker creates her own safe space to explore her identity, an imaginary world that, at the same time, contains and isolates her from the real world: “je me perds / dans un monde imaginaire / poursuis une vague / qui m'emporte ailleurs” and “je me suis créé un monde / juste pour moi / qui m’empêche de me dévêtir / de crainte d’être repoussée” (MPAN 22).¹³⁷ While the speaker’s words describe the power of literary creation, and how imaginary worlds constitute spaces of protection, they also reveal the solitary nature of the speaker’s safe space because it disconnects her from the world and social interaction. The avoided act of denudation, which I read in a figurative sense of an intimate opening, evokes the female speaker’s vulnerability as

¹³⁷ Nolin’s lines in this poem strongly remind me of N. Fontaine’s opening text in *Kuessipan* (2011), where she admits having created an imaginary world in her book to be able to describe her community: “J’ai créé un monde faux” (9). Moreover, Nolin and N. Fontaine both express their desire to be understood: “juste être comprise” (*Kuessipan* 9).

well as her fear of being judged and rejected once she opens up to other people and the world, although she desperately wants to be understood: “je suis / simplement une femme / qui veut être comprise” (*MPAN* 22). Even though she admits, by using the voice of her female speaker, that “je me suis toujours cachée / déçue du monde qui m’entoure / ce monde imparfait / qui se cache derrière le masque du mensonge” (*MPAN* 22), Nolin comes to the foreground and reclaims her space through poetic writing.

Contemporary Innu poetry is produced in a settler-colonial and patriarchal context, in which Indigenous Peoples are still administered by the *Indian Act*. Innu women writers deal with settler politics of identity and gender in Quebec and Canada and, more specifically, they critique the *Indian Act* and how this colonial set of laws continues to define Indigenous people through Indian status.¹³⁸ The title of Cousineau Mollen’s debut poetry collection *Bréviaire du matricule 082* clearly addresses her legal status as provided by the *Indian Act*, and she continually refers to her imposed colonial identity as a Status Indian, symbolized by her personal registration number 082. Cousineau Mollen powerfully demonstrates that “colonialism has not ‘ended’ and continues in new forms through Indian Act policy and legislation” (Kubik and Bourassa 25). The opening poem in her collection, “Sept Fois,” which I read as a critique of the Christian story of Creation, enumerates different strategies of colonial oppression and relates these collective experiences to the female speaker’s life.¹³⁹ The poem’s first stanza “Au premier jour de mon premier souffle / On me baptisa avec un numéro” (Cousineau Mollen, *BM082* 13), for example, tells how the

¹³⁸ Indigenous women have been particularly impacted by the *Indian Act* because of its additional gender-discriminatory sections that are informed by heteropatriarchal ideologies. Nevertheless, Indigenous male authors contest colonial biopolitics just as much as female writers, as illustrated, for example, by the collective in the book *The Indian Act Revisited* (2009), edited by Louis-Karl Picard-Siouï. This book accompanied the first contemporary Indigenous art exhibition curated by the Huron-Wendat Museum in Wendake.

¹³⁹ I read Cousineau Mollen’s poem as a critical analogy to the Christian story of Creation because of its title “Sept Fois” as well as the speaker’s references to the “days of her existence” which evoke the seven days during which the Earth was created according to Christian beliefs.

female speaker receives her legal identity as a registered Status Indian by being “baptized” with a number right after her birth. The speaker critically alludes to religious practices through her use of the verb “baptiser/baptize” but foregrounds the dehumanizing nature of “legally naming” Indigenous people by attributing numbers instead of using their names. The second stanza “Au deuxième, on me donna une terre de réserve / Pour y ensevelir mes premiers rêves” (Cousineau Mollen, *BM082* 13) then refers to the colonial reserve system, where Indigenous communities are contained and confronted with difficult realities. Stanzas three to six can be read as allusions to the Indian residential school system, which forcibly separated Indigenous children from their families, communities, and homelands, violently re-educated Indigenous children according to Western and Christian beliefs by destroying their cultures, and brutally altered Indigenous children’s physical appearance, as described in the poem: “Au troisième, on extirpa dans la douleur / La sauvagerie de mon âme // à l’aube du quatrième jour / Je laissai espérance, amour-propre et fierté // Étrangère en mes terres, au cinquième acte d’existence / Ma chevelure fut sacrifiée, offrande chrétienne // Au sixième, purgée de mes ancêtres / On m’avorta des enseignements de la survivance” (*BM082* 13).

In contrast to the preceding stanzas marked by oppression, the seventh stanza indicates a turning point when the speaker “disobediently” states: “Je laissai les mains assoiffées de ma vie / S’approprier cette septième fois” (Cousineau Mollen, *BM082* 13). In the last stanza, which differs from the previous ones in terms of the format, the lyric speaker self-identifies: “Je suis Marie Maya Mollen,” followed by her official recognition as a registered Status Indian: ““Marie Maya Mollen matricule 082, est un Indien au sens de la *Loi sur les Indiens*, chapitre 27 des *Lois du Canada*”” (Cousineau Mollen, *BM082* 13). The use of quotation marks is not necessarily an ethical engagement with a text written by someone else but suggests a formatting strategy that

allows Cousineau Mollen to distinguish her self-identification from her imposed colonial identity as prescribed and fixed by the *Indian Act*. In the settler definition, solely her given (Christian) names identify Cousineau Mollen as a woman, while the legal language used in this text generically refers to her as an “Indien,” thus using the masculine form of the French language. Although the word “Indien” in this legal context indicates the use of the generic masculine, which means that this word includes women as well as men, this example equally illustrates how deeply embedded patriarchal and sexist structures are in colonial languages, as the generic masculine furthers the invisibility or even erasure of women and their voices.¹⁴⁰

While stanzas one to six deal with the individual and collective experiences of colonial oppression through a myriad of genocidal and assimilative strategies, stanzas seven and eight tell of the speaker’s reclamation of her life and, more specifically, the appropriation of her (birth) name in order to reclaim her identity as an Innushkueu. The female speaker’s statement “Je suis Marie Maya Mollen” (Cousineau Mollen, *BM082* 13) conveys a strong meaning despite its simplicity, both through its content and form. As mentioned above, the format of the last stanza is different from the seven previous ones, which are all composed of couplets while the final stanza is constructed of four lines and therefore channels the reader’s attention. Moreover, the speaker quotes the official text recognizing her Indian Status, and thus sets it off from the

¹⁴⁰ “The definition of Indian in colonial legislation (1850 to 1867) was broad based, mostly sex neutral and focused on family, social and tribal/nation ties. [...] The *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* in 1869 and the first *Indian Act* in 1876 introduced a narrower definition of an Indian. These early post-Confederation laws established sex-based criteria, specifically rules of descent through the male lines in the definition of Indian. Women and children were usually included under the man’s name and not as separate individuals under the legislation. Further, the legislation removed Indian status from an Indian woman who married a non-Indian man and also prevented their children and future descendants from acquiring Indian status and the associated benefits. Therefore, beginning in 1869, the definition of Indian was no longer based on First Nation kinship and community ties but instead, built on the predominance of men over women and children, and aimed to remove families headed by a non-Indian man from First Nation communities. Subsequent amendments to the *Indian Act* between 1876 and 1985 further entrenched sex-based criteria and continued to narrow the definition of an Indian” (Government of Canada, *Collaborative Process* 1-2).

previous text representing her own voice. This formatting technique allows Cousineau Mollen to underline the forcibly imposed nature of this legal status which significantly differs from her self-identification, most clearly because it grounds her in the present as an Innu woman. The use of the first-person pronoun “je/I” reflects the speaker’s self-representation and thus differs fundamentally from settler representation, which uses the third person. Québécois literary scholar Jonathan Lamy Beaupré examines the subjectivity and individual voice of Indigenous women writers expressed through their first-person singular perspective: “En plus d’effectuer ce travail de correction du point de vue colonial, les poètes des Premières Nations déploient des univers avant tout personnels, où le sujet s’exprime en son propre nom. Dire ‘je’ participe de la décolonisation puisque celui qui dit ‘je’ s’affirme en tant que sujet souverain, affranchi” (133). In addition, the grammatical use of the present tense in the expression “Je suis” particularly asserts the female speaker’s existence in the contemporary world and highlights her persistence and resistance despite acts of genocide, femicide, and assimilative strategies by settler society. Consequently, the female speaker’s “physical presence denies the American myth of the vanishing red man” (Harjo and Bird 30), and her self-identification constitutes an example of narrative agency that speaks back to the colonizer’s legal definition.

The female speaker’s appropriation of her name in the poem “Sept Fois” is a fundamental act of re-humanization that seeks to revoke the colonial act of objectification through the attribution of numbers, whether as markers of legal identity or as dehumanizing methods of “naming” in residential schools.¹⁴¹ Interestingly, in this opening poem, the speaker appropriates, and here I assume, her birth name, Marie Maya Mollen, which is different from the one she uses as an author, namely Maya Cousineau Mollen. I assume that Mollen is the family name of her

¹⁴¹ Xat’sull author Bev Sellars’ memoir *They Called Me Number One* (2013) is a poignant example of how numbers forcibly replaced (Indigenous) names in residential schools.

biological (Innu) father, whereas Cousineau is the family name of her adoptive father whom Cousineau Mollen names in her dedication. Referring to the mother of Christ, Marie is a key figure in Christian mythology, and the public erasure of this part of her name points to Cousineau Mollen's strong rejection of Christianity, as other poems in her collection, and particularly "Colère biblique/Nishkatishiu," suggest: "Garde ta Bible / Elle me brûle" (BM082 56).

Other Innu women writers, such as An Antane Kapeshe and Shan Dak Puana, have also turned to this act of (re-)appropriating and reclaiming their Indigenous names.¹⁴² Antane Kapeshe is probably the most prominent example of an Indigenous writer in Quebec who refused her imposed Christian/French name and opted for her Innu name instead. The cover of the 1976 version of *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* gives both names - Anne André positioned after the French title and An Antane Kapeshe after the Innu title - whereas the 2015 and 2019 re-editions, published post-mortem, only indicate Antane Kapeshe's Innu name. I understand this editorial choice as a respectful way to recognize Antane Kapeshe's desire to be called by her Innu name, as clearly expressed in her book, as well as a highly ethical engagement with a text that consistently and fundamentally critiques colonization and Christianity.

¹⁴² Cree author Jane Pachano also talks about names in her book, for example in the first chapter: "I was born and given the grand old Indian name of Janie Margaret Matthews. Everyone, however, called me Geniesh, which means Little Janie" (*Geniesh* 4). In chapter 4, dealing with her attendance of day school, she recalls how she was listed under a different name in school, namely "Janie Esquimaux" and then explains why: "When I asked [my grandfather] why the teacher had insisted my name was 'Esquimaux,' he laughed and told me that was how we were listed in the Indian Affairs' files. It seems that my great-grandfather was an avid but lousy story-teller, always leaving out important details. His friends nicknamed him 'Esquimaux,' which means 'He leaves out' or 'Left-Overs.' When the first white men came, they called him Esquimaux also, and then the Indian agent made a list of all the Indians on the island, he listed my great-grandfather simply as Esquimaux. When his children were born, they were given Christian names - Box and William - at the insistence of the church, but the name Esquimaux was tagged on as a surname, and each generation was stuck with it" (*Geniesh* 32-33).

Similar to Cousineau Mollen's description of being baptized with a number, Antane Kapesh describes how the Christian baptism corresponds to the erasure of Innu names: "nous les Innu avions des noms innu et c'est quand nous avons été baptisés que nous les avons perdus" (*JSMS* 2015, 112).¹⁴³ Antane Kapesh continues to give her French name and her replaced Innu family name, which she adopted when marrying her husband, a tradition the Innu actually took from patriarchal Western cultures: "Moi par exemple, aujourd'hui je m'appelle madame André. Mon nom innu, celui des ancêtres de mon mari, est KAPESH" (*JSMS* 2015, 112; original emphasis).¹⁴⁴ The use of capital letters for her Innu name indicates Antane Kapesh's preference, as supported by the following statement: "Aujourd'hui je serais beaucoup plus fière qu'on m'appelle AN KAPESH car c'est mon nom innu" (*JSMS* 2015, 113; original emphasis).¹⁴⁵ As Antane Kapesh explains in her book, her Innu name connects her to her husband, her (extended) family and community, and the family lineage deeply connects her to their homelands. However, from an Indigenous feminist perspective, Antane Kapesh seems to critique the adopted practice of Innu women taking their husband's family name, when she states: "Je pense qu'il serait très important de nous mettre à la recherche de nos propres noms et de les conserver nous aussi jusqu'à la mort" (*JSMS* 2015, 113).¹⁴⁶ The original Innu text reveals that Antane is her Innu name, which has been replaced by the French family name André: "*Matam* Antane" thus equals

¹⁴³ Innu original: "Miam mate ninan e innuiat takuanipani nitinnu-ishinikashunnana ek^u anite eshikaitashuiat ekute uet utshipanit tshetshi ut unitaiat" (*JSMS* 2019, 82). The 1976 and 2019 versions read as follows: "nous avions des noms indiens et c'est du baptême que provient le fait que nous les perdions" (*JSMS* 1976, 89) and "nous, les Indiens, avions des noms indiens, et c'est du baptême que provient le fait que nous les perdons" (*JSMS* 2019, 79).

¹⁴⁴ Innu original: "Mate nin kashikat nitishinikashun *Matam* Antane. Ek^u nitinnu-ishinikashun, ninapem utishinikashunau aianishkat KAPESH" (*JSMS* 2019, 82).

José Mailhot, who translated Antane Kapesh's book, explains in a translator's note in the revised 2019 edition: "À l'époque où écrivait l'auteure, les femmes innues adoptaient en se mariant le nom de famille de leur mari, une pratique empruntée à la culture des Blancs" (*JSMS* 2019, 79n4).

¹⁴⁵ Innu original: "Kashikat anu nipa mishta-ashinen AN KAPESH tshetshi ishinikatikauian uesh ma eukuan nitinnu-ishinikashun" (*JSMS* 2019, 82).

¹⁴⁶ Innu original: "Nititeniten nin tshipa mishta-apatam tshetshi nanatuapatamatnitinnu-ishinikashunnana, kie ninan e innuiat tshe ishpish inniunanut tsheshi kanuenitamat" (*JSMS* 2019, 82).

“Madame André” (*JSMS* 2019, 79, 82; original emphasis), and, in an Indigenous feminist move, Antane Kapesh claims her own Innu name as well. Depending on how the first-person plural pronoun “nous/we” is interpreted (referring to either Indigenous people in general or, more specifically, to Indigenous women), this statement can, of course, also be understood as a critique of adopting Christian/Western names that replace and erase Innu names. Kanapé Fontaine poetically answers Antane Kapesh’s call to reclaim Innu names in her long poem “La Migration” in *Bleuets et abricots*: “Moi / femme d’entre toutes les femmes / nations d’entre toutes les nations / je reprendrai le nom de mes ancêtres,” and she links the recovery of Indigenous names to the recovery of Indigenous identity and dignity in the next stanza: “J’ai enfin retrouvé mon nom / j’ai enfin retrouvé mon visage” (*BA* 73). The anaphora “J’ai enfin retrouvé,” used in the two opening lines of this stanza, emphasizes the deep connection between Indigenous names, cultural and personal identity, and ties to family, community, and homelands, which have been ruptured by the erasure of Indigenous and matrilineal names.

Innu women’s critique of colonial and religious practices of (re)naming and their reclamation of Innu names constitutes a poignant example of what L. Simpson calls Indigenous women’s “generative refusal” (*As* 35). “At its core, kwe as method is about refusal,” L. Simpson states, and she specifies: “It is about refusing colonial domination, refusing heteropatriarchy, and refusing to be tamed by whiteness or the academy” (*As* 33).¹⁴⁷ This refusal is obvious in Cousineau Mollen’s poem “Colère biblique/Nishkatishiu,” where her female speaker asserts:

¹⁴⁷ Leanne Simpson’s statement that “kwe as method is about refusal” (*As* 33) strongly reminds me of Audra Simpson’s “politics of refusal” (11) in *Mohawk Interruptus*, which some women enact by embodying the “traditional woman” (226n13), as I have discussed in Chapter 1. Moreover, Leanne Simpson identifies Kanien’kehá:ka activist Ellen Gabriel as an example of “kwe as method in action”: “I think the first time I saw kwe as method in action was during the summer of 1990, when I watched Mohawk activist from Kanehsatà:ke Ellen Gabriel on the nightly news act as spokesperson for her people during the ‘Oka Crisis.’ The same unapologetic grounded truth that emanated from her during the summer of 1990 she carries with her to this day, not as a celebrity, but as a committed educator and language activist in her community” (*As* 33).

“Jamais je ne blanchirai / Je suis une femme rouge” (*BM082* 56). In the poem’s context, the process of turning white is a metaphor for adopting Christianity as well as Western culture and modes of being. Turning white thus represents a state of being assimilated, which equals abandoning Innu cultural practices and ways of being and thinking. Cousineau Mollen’s use of the future tense in the first line is important here because it indicates that she is not assimilated and, in accordance with the present tense used in the second line, it affirms her physical existence and identity as an Innushkueu in our present time. Moreover, Cousineau Mollen presents Indigenous nations and cultures as alive, just as Kanapé Fontaine does in her poetry: “nous sommes dignes / nous sommes vivants” (*BA* 39). Kanapé Fontaine and Cousineau Mollen both write back to Indigenous women’s dehumanization in settler narratives and inscribe their presence into our contemporary reality.

According to L. Simpson, “refusal is an appropriate response to oppression, and within this context it is always generative; that is, it is always the living alternative” (*As* 33). In other words, Indigenous women “don’t just refuse, they also embody an Indigenous alternative” (L. Simpson, *As* 35).¹⁴⁸ It is therefore not accidental that the movement towards Indigenous female liberation and resurgence, enacted through appropriation and reclamation, takes place on the seventh day of her existence, as Cousineau Mollen’s lyric speaker calls it in the poem “Sept Fois” (*BM082* 13). On the contrary, it can be read as a clear reference to the Seventh Fire, which

¹⁴⁸ Gunn Allen’s following statement resembles L. Simpson’s theorization of Indigenous women’s generative refusal:

“We survive war and conquest; we survive colonization, acculturation, assimilation; we survive beating, rape, starvation, mutilation, sterilization, abandonment, neglect, death of our children, our loved ones, destruction of our land, our homes, our past, and our future. We survive, and we do more than just survive. We bond, we care, we fight, we teach, we nurse, we bear, we feed, we earn, we laugh, we love, we hang in there, no matter what” (*Sacred Hoop* 190).

refers to our contemporary time characterized by Indigenous movements of resurgence. In her contribution to *Lighting the Eighth Fire* (2008), L. Simpson explains the Seventh Fire as follows:

I was reminded of a well-known Nishnaabeg prophecy, a series of sacred predictions that have foretold our history since the beginning of Creation. The later part of that prophecy relays that we are currently living in the Seventh Fire, a time when, after a long period of colonialism and cultural loss, a new people, the Oshkimaadiziig, emerge. It is the Oshkimaadiziig whose responsibilities involve reviving our language, philosophies, political and economic traditions, our ways of knowing, and our culture. The foremost responsibility of the “new people” is to pick up those things previous generations have left behind by nurturing relationships with Elders that have not “fallen asleep.”

Oshkimaadiziig are responsible for decolonizing, for rebuilding our nation, and for forging new relationships with other nations by returning to original Nishnaabeg visions of peace and justice. According to the prophecy, the work of the Oshkimaadiziig determines the outcome of the Eighth Fire, an eternal fire to be lit by all humans. It is an everlasting fire of peace, but its existence depends upon our actions and our choices today. (“Oshkimaadiziig” 13-14)¹⁴⁹

Innu writers, such as Cousineau Mollen and Kanapé Fontaine, express their generative refusal by evoking the prophecy of the Seventh Fire in their poetry. Kanapé Fontaine, for instance, evokes this prophecy on different occasions in *Bleuets et abricots*, when she states: “la septième génération se lève” (BA 36), and “cinq cents ans plus tard / sept générations après” (BA 58, 69).

¹⁴⁹ However, it is not only Indigenous Peoples’ responsibility to decolonize, as L. Simpson reminds us: “In order for the Eighth Fire to be lit, settler society must also choose to change their ways, to decolonize their relationships with the land and Indigenous Nations, and to join with us in building a sustainable future based upon mutual recognition, justice, and respect” (“Oshkimaadiziig” 14).

In addition, statements like “Nous nous soulèverons” (BA 56) in Kanapé Fontaine’s poetry indicate movements of Indigenous resistance and resurgence and thus evoke Indigenous women’s and people’s generative refusal. In her long poem “La Réserve,” Kanapé Fontaine offers a depiction of Indigenous resurgence that is performed by youth who are guided by their Elders and the voices of their ancestors: “Nos fils et nos filles sortiront des réserves / les aïeux sur le dos / les ancêtres à l’oreille / ils marcheront vers le Sud / retracer le Nord” (BA 65). These vividly descriptive lines of how Indigenous youth metaphorically give their Elders a piggyback ride exemplify how youth and Elders must work together in the Seventh Fire, as mentioned above by L. Simpson, in order to bring about decolonization and Indigenous cultures’ revitalization. Kanapé Fontaine then imagines the fruitful collaboration between youth and Elders as national and cultural regeneration, as alluded to in the last stanza of the same poem: “Le peuple / terres brûlées / se régénère / fruit / qui donne goût au verbe exister” (BA 68).

Innu women writers verbalize their generative refusal by using the theme of (re)birth. A key theme in Kanapé Fontaine’s collection *Bleuets et abricots*, she mentions her (re)birth in her prologue: “Un appel s’élève en moi et j’ai décidé de dire oui à ma naissance” (BA 7). The poet’s “naissance” here refers to her rebirth as “femme debout, femme puissance, femme résurgence” (BA 7), which is as a highly conscious act, as the female speaker’s lyric description of “l’accouchement de moi-même” (BA 13) in the collection’s opening poem “La Migration” suggests. These examples illustrate Kanapé Fontaine’s poetic approach to female transformation in *Bleuets et abricots*, which she has described in a public talk: “je voulais prouver que la femme autochtone est capable de changement par sa propre énergie de création” (“Natasha Kanapé Fontaine lit” 13mm45ss). What Kanapé Fontaine calls Indigenous woman’s “energy of creation” refers to her immense power as “bearer of life” (Armstrong, “Invocation” ix), as evoked in her

prologue: “Je sais donner la vie. Je suis féconde” (BA 7). Rather than understanding the metaphor of “Indigenous women as the givers of life” in a purely biological sense, I agree with scholars Gina Starblanket (Cree and Saulteaux) and Elaine Coburn to “think of ‘life’ in broader terms”: “Here life might lie outside the boundaries created both by colonial worlds and by traditionalist, essentialist Indigenous approaches, and instead be understood as the ways in which Indigenous feminists are creating open-ended yet relationally grounded possibilities for existing - for ‘being Indigenous’ now and into future generations” (102). Kanapé Fontaine’s *Bleuets et abricots* is a “discours d’une femme autochtone qui est revenue à la vie” (Collard), and her poetic rebirth as Innushkueu is a poignant example of how Indigenous feminist writers employ literature to re-inscribe their existence as Indigenous women and to reclaim their identity and culture.

Kanapé Fontaine uses the imagery of (re)birth to describe her resurgence as an Innu/Indigenous woman, the resurgence of her ancestors, and, finally, of the country. In the poem “La Chasse,” the female speaker imagines the country as “Kanata”: “Ta genèse s’appelle village” (BA 24).¹⁵⁰ Moreover, her and her ancestors’ resurgence can only happen through preceding acts of destruction, especially their liberation from Christianity and the Bible, as evoked in the same poem: “Je me souviens / transpercée par la lance qui tua le Christ / de passages de la Bible // [...] Je le jetterais ce livre / des mains de ma Nukum / mon Nimushum / et caribou Atik^u // [...] J’ai mangé le livre / J’ai redonné naissance à ma grand-mère / j’ai redonné naissance à ma naissance” (BA 26, 28). This destructive approach that is necessary for revitalization is even more evident in Kanapé Fontaine’s second poetry collection *Manifeste*

¹⁵⁰ Tonawanda Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman explains in her scholarly work “how Indigenous women’s writings unsettle colonial naming and organizing of land, bodies, and social and political landscapes” and she “highlights how they foreground Indigenous naming, and so conceptions of space, relationships, and autonomy in their place” (Starblanket and Coburn 100).

Assi, where her female speaker announces: “Je présenterai un feu immense / je brûlerai les écoles résidences / les papiers lois // Et d’un seul coup de vent / chasserai d’une main tous les pipelines / les caribous viendront / courir avec les bisons / les chevaux avec les cerfs / il y aura un grand frémissement” (*MA* 64). Shifting from the first-person singular voice to the first-person plural voice, the speaker then repeats the first stanza in a modified way to emphasize the importance of getting rid of the Indian Act and other oppressive colonial laws and of healing from intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools: “Nous brûlerons / les écoles résidences / les papiers lois” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 64). Finally, the two-line stanza “Nous incarnerons / un feu immense” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 64) metaphorically illustrates the purifying and healing power of fire through the violence of destroying the colonial structures as a beautiful and welcoming fire.

Cousineau Mollen deals with the theme of birth by asking what it means to be born into a settler-colonial nation-state in North America and to live here today as a Status Indian. In her poem “Naître et disparaître,” for example, her female speaker concludes that being born Indigenous is a political act: “Naître Autochtone est un acte politique” because she immediately and forcefully turns into an “Enfant immatriculée d’appartenance” (*BM082* 22). This registered and numbered identity marks the speaker who declares: “Je suis un code-barres / Je suis matricule 082,” and who feels objectified like “Une matière première / Comme cette terre non négociable” (*BM082* 22), thus comparing the objectification of Indigenous women/people under the *Indian Act* to the settler objectification of the land. This comparison is important because colonial legislation based on ideologies and politics of Indigenous erasure were introduced so that the colonial government and settlers had unlimited access to the so-called virgin land (as informed by the settler myth of Terra Nullius). “The Vanishing Indian is” therefore, as LaRocque

concludes in *When the Other Is Me*, “a quintessentially colonial desire and expectation” (126) to maintain power over stolen land and incredibly rich natural resources.

As the vocabulary used in the title of the poem “Naître et disparaître” suggests, the Indigenous subject disappears with their birth, becoming a number, a politicized and externally managed object. This reading is supported in the poem “Dis-moi” in Cousineau Mollen’s collection, where the female speaker calls out the discriminatory and paternalistic politics of the settler-colonial nation-state: “Chante cette légende / Où j’ai perdu mon humanité / Où j’ai gagné une indianité” (*BM082* 21). Cousineau Mollen uses satire when her female speaker ironically addresses her “indianité/Indianness” as something that First Nations members gained through the racist laws of the *Indian Act*. In contrast, legally becoming Indian through the attribution of a number came with the loss of humanity and dignity. Indigenous poetry points out the need for Indigenous people to reclaim their dignity from such racist structures, such as when Kanapé Fontaine’s speaker in *Bleuets et abricots* points out that her dignity is something that has been taken away from her: “je reprendrai ma dignité” (*BA* 74).

Indigenous women were particularly targeted through the patriarchal structures in the *Indian Act* and, more specifically, “the legal concept of ‘Status Indian,’ which carries the requirement that status follow in the male line, thereby excluding many women from membership in their communities” (Boyer, “First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Women’s Health” 617). In response to Indigenous women’s continued efforts to criticize discriminatory sex-based criteria of registration under the *Indian Act*, Bill C-31 (1985) was the first attempt to address sex-based inequalities in colonial legislation through the elimination of certain gender discriminatory provisions, and, more specifically, the concept of enfranchisement, which was practised as a patriarchal and colonial strategy to destroy Indigenous women’s political power, to

break fundamental family and community ties, and to further assimilation into mainstream Canadian society.

Cousineau Mollen lyrically deals with the provisions of the *Indian Act* that define how a person is entitled to be registered under this legislation and directly addresses categories that are now used to register Indians when her female speaker demands in the poem “Dis-moi”:

“Raconte-moi ce chapitre / Où je suis devenue une 6.1” (BM082 21). According to the registration formula in the *Indian Act*, section 6(1) includes so-called full status Indians, that means a person with two Indian parents, registered either under section 6(1) or 6(2), whereas section 6(2) includes so-called half-status Indians, that means a person with one “full status” Indian parent, registered under section 6(1), and one non-Indian parent. Although gender discriminatory passages were partially removed from the *Indian Act* after Indigenous women called them out publicly, for example through the 1985 amendment that allowed formerly enfranchised Indigenous women and their children to apply for reinstatement and to regain Indian status, the *Indian Act* remains a colonial law informed by a racist ideology of Indigenous erasure. This is most evident in the creation of a “second-generation cut-off” (Government of Canada, “Collaborative Process” 2), meaning that the third generation of children lose entitlement to registration when two successive generations of mixed parenting precede them.

The federal government continues to use its colonial power to control Indigenous people’s entitlement to Indian status and uses Indian registration to define who is Indian or not. Even though diverse theories and practices of blood quantum as measurements of Indianness and criteria for band membership are more present in the United States, it was introduced and applied as a legal principle of social hierarchization in Canada with the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* in 1869 and remains a guiding principle in the *Indian Act*, which builds on it in terms of passing on

Indian status. Contrary to populations where the “one-drop rule” is prevalent, for example one drop of “black blood” is enough to be racially classified as black, Indigenous populations are exposed to a system of assimilative biopolitics that seeks to erase Indianness.¹⁵¹ Horn-Miller discusses traditional and imposed concepts of identity and belonging and how some Indigenous people have embraced colonial thinking to define who they are, both individually and collectively:

In many cases, we have come to believe what someone else says of us and taken it on as our own ‘truth.’ An example of this is seen in the idea of using blood quantum as a measure of how ‘Indian’ one is. Many of our own people believe that this is an accurate measure of Indigenous identity when, in fact, as seen in old adoption practices of my ancestors, the notions of race and blood ‘purity’ have no place in our traditional concept of identity and belonging. The adoption and integration of non-Kanien’kehá:ka people served to replenish and balance communities. The use of blood quantum as a measure of identity by our people reflects a changed thinking. Instead of relationships between all

¹⁵¹ The “one-drop rule” has been particularly applied to Black or Jewish populations and illustrates how colonial biopolitics have been influenced by racist theories of “racial purity.” It is important to emphasize that the pseudoscientific concept of racial purity is a social construction reflecting racist ideologies of white supremacy. Meanwhile, researchers from different disciplines have deconstructed this concept and data proves that there is no scientific evidence for the existence of different races: “scientists [involved in the Human Genome Project] have concluded that humans are 99.9 percent similar and, indeed, there is only one race, the human race” (Kennedy et al. 364). Blood quantum theories refer to “genomic articulation[s] of identity,” and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear explains that Indigenous populations “have been a particular focus of this field of research since its emergence in the mid-20th century” (130). TallBear continues: “The blood of indigenous peoples, understood as storehouses of unique genetic diversity due to their presumed long physical and cultural isolation, is highly sought after, and to be collected quickly. Genetically defined, indigenous peoples are seen to be vanishing in an increasingly global world” (130-131). TallBear’s statement illustrates that the settler myths of racial purity and the vanishing Indian continue to prevail in modern sciences.

See also Palmater, *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity* (2011).

One difference between the “one-drop rule” and the “not enough rule” is that the former attributes a marginalized, inferior identity to individuals and collectives to underscore their racial difference from the dominant white society, while the latter performs an act of assimilation by stripping away a legal status that, although undeniably racist and colonial in nature, offers benefits to individuals and collectives, such as access to resources in the communities.

things being equal, they are now hierarchical. Therefore, as we became unbalanced, our families and communities became unbalanced. (“Distortion and Healing” 33n5)

Cousineau Mollen alludes to this imposed hierarchy of Indian status based on blood quantum when her female speaker, addressing an imagined Status Indian reader in the following two-line stanza in “Naître et Disparaître,” asks: “Es-tu plus heureux en 6.1 / Ou plus triste en 6.2?” (BM082 22). In fact, her question challenges the paternalistic administration of Indigenous people and questions how the classification of so-called Indianness affects Indigenous people on both an individual and a collective level. Moreover, her question, as I read it, critically asks if it is really this forcefully imposed legal status as a registered Indian that defines the individual, their sense of Indigenous identity and belonging, and their understanding of being in the world. Or is it, as her question might indicate, the individual’s upbringing, involvement in cultural practices, and relation to their family, community, and territory that “define” their Indigeneity? In any case, the female speaker in Cousineau Mollen’s poem “Uitshinapeueu” affirms her Indigenous female identity despite imposed Indianness: “La 6.1 que je suis ne cherche plus d’identité” (BM082 15) and exemplifies that identity and “culture [are] so much more than legal status,” as LaRocque reminds us (“Reflections” 152).

According to Indigenous feminist Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate), “Indigenous peoples themselves also privilege biological connection to ancestors (alongside connection to land), but they have evolved a more multifaceted definition of ‘indigenous’ that entangles political self-determination and mutual networking for survival in a global world” (131). As such, “indigeneity is much more complex than biological relations alone,” as traced by the registration formula in the *Indian Act*, and colonial legislation thus ignores how “indigenous peoples understand themselves to have emerged as coherent groups and cultures in intimate relationship

with particular places, especially living and sacred landscapes” (TallBear 131). TallBear emphasizes that “indigenous peoples’ ‘ancestry’ is not simply genetic ancestry evidenced in ‘populations’ but biological, cultural, and political groupings constituted in dynamic, long-standing relationships with each other and with living landscapes that define their people-specific identities and, more broadly, their indigeneity” (131). TallBear underlines a significant marker of Indigenous identity that colonial legislation, and most specifically the *Indian Act*, sought to destroy: relationality.

“Quête incontournable” – Affirming Innushkueu

Some Innu women writers explore questions of identity by addressing the “savagery/civilization divide,” which, according to Emberley, “constitutes the most significant binary opposition used by White European settlers to determine hierarchical relations between themselves and Indigenous peoples during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (“In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 211). Antane Kapeshe, for example, deals with the settler narrative of the savage and the civilized and, as a subversive practice, inverts this dichotomy in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*: “avant qu’un seul Blanc ne vienne ici dans notre territoire, nous étions déjà civilisés. Depuis que le Blanc est notre voisin, presque chaque jour nous l’entendons dire: ‘Les Indiens ne sont pas civilisés.’ Depuis qu’il est notre voisin dans notre territoire, nous les Indiens, nous constatons souvent que le Blanc est moins civilisé que nous” (JSMS 2019, 55).¹⁵² In *When the Other Is Me* (2010), LaRocque

¹⁵² Innu original: “kauapishit eshk^u eka peik^u ka takushinit ute nitassinat, shash nete nikanuenitetan innishun. Kauapishit ka ishishit uitshimakanitututshit, tshakat eshakumitshishikua nipetenan essishuet: ‘Innuat apu innishit.’ Kauapishit eshpish uitshimakanitututshit ute nitassinat, e inniuiat mitshetuau nimishkenan kauapishit anu iun eka innishit mak ninan” (JSMS 2019, 58). The 2015 version reads as follows: “avant qu’un seul étranger ne vienne ici sur notre territoire, nous étions déjà civilisés. Depuis que l’étranger est notre voisin, presque chaque jour nous l’écoutons dire: ‘Les Innu ne sont pas civilisés.’ Depuis qu’il est notre voisin sur nos terres, nous, les Innu, nous constatons souvent que le Blanc est moins civilisé que nous” (JSMS 2015, 105).

calls this binary opposition “the ‘civ/sav’ dichotomy” (37), and she examines how this framework served as an “ideological container” (38) for the systematic dehumanization of Indigenous Peoples needed to justify the (settler) colonial project, grounded in “the long-held belief that humankind evolved from the primitive to the most advanced, from the savage to the civilized” (39):

In Canadian terms, civilization is consistently associated with settlement, private property, cultivation of land and intellect, industry, monotheism, literacy, coded law and order, Judeo-Christian morality, and metal-based technology. [...] Such a ‘civilization’ is repeatedly outlined against ‘Indian savagery,’ in which savagism is seen as a psychosocial fixed condition, the antithesis of the highest human condition. Indians, then, by contrast, are delineated as wild, nomadic, warlike, uncultivating and uncultivated, aimless, superstitious, disorganized, illiterate, immoral, and technologically backwards. (41).

The subversion of binary opposites and the (re)appropriation of racist terms are “site[s] where ‘reinventing’ can occur to undo some of the damage that colonization has wrought” (Harjo and Bird 24). In the opening poem of her collection *Ma peau aime le Nord*, for instance, Nolin’s speaker states: “Je suis graine rouge / je suis Peau-Rouge” (*MPAN* 9), and thereby appropriates a colonial expression based on racist ideologies of physical appearance that is today considered racist and offensive. However, Nolin’s choice of vocabulary alludes to her transformation through writing, as her analogy of the seed that eventually turns into a plant suggests. The appropriation of colonial terms is thus only a first step in Innu/Indigenous women’s transformative process, often followed by their lyric treatise of complex questions of identity.

LaRocque stresses that “the characterization of Native peoples as savage has had a profoundly painful and destructive impact on Native peoples,” and she asks: “what happens to a people whose very essences have been soaked in stereotypes for half a millennium?” (*When* 100, 121). Gunn Allen’s following statement seems to answer LaRocque’s essential question when she states: “The colonizers’ revisions of our lives, values, and histories have devastated us at the most critical level of all – that of our own minds, our own sense of who we are” (*Sacred Hoop* 193). Nolin’s female speaker’s statement “je m’imagine mauvaise” (*MPAN* 16), for instance, informs how she has been “deluded into internalizing” (Gunn Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 193) a negative self-perception. According to LaRocque, “[t]he internalization of the grotesque, ignoble savage is perhaps the most damaging” because it “leads us to a sense of shame [...] and self-rejection” (*When* 121).¹⁵³ As exemplified by Nolin, Innu/Indigenous women writers point to this sense of shame and self-rejection in their cultural productions.

Cousineau Mollen, for example, addresses this feeling of self-rejection, or even self-hatred, in a self-investigative way in her poem “Moi, Akuatishkueu” (meaning “elle est une femme d’apparence exceptionnelle”; dedicated to Innu poet Joséphine Bacon) and links it to her identity quest: “Je m’apprivoise / Car jamais je ne me suis aimée / Je me découvre / Visage millénaire” (*BM082* 26). The female speaker’s process of self-discovery results in her subversive appropriation of the term “sauvagesse,” as well as her affirmation of womanhood, and her

¹⁵³ LaRocque contends that self-hatred often turns into hatred addressed towards other members of the collective, what she calls the “same-other”: “By same-other, I mean that one’s sense of racial shame is projected onto those of the same race or grouping, who are then unconsciously cast as other. Being ashamed of being ‘Indian’ means being ashamed not only of oneself but also of other Indians. [...] this process is excruciating and disorienting because it makes us hate what and who we love” (*When* 121). I argue, however, that contemporary Indigenous women’s writing does not manifest expressions of rejection of the “same-other” as early Indigenous women’s writings, such as Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, did. Antane Kapeshe, for instance, deals with internalized self-rejection in relation to the loss of political self-governance: “Après [que le Blanc] soit venu nous trouver sur notre domaine à nous, les Innu, nous ne valons plus grand-chose à nos yeux car nous ne nous gouvernons plus” (*JSMS* 2015, 151). In contrast, contemporary Innu women’s poetry, for example, is strongly characterized by powerful expressions of love and admiration for family and community members and Indigenous Peoples in general.

physical existence in the present evoked by her use of the present tense counters colonial and patriarchal missions of Indigenous women's erasure: "Je suis sauvagesse, je suis femme / Je reprends mon droit d'exister" (BM082 26). More specifically, the female speaker confronts the *Indian Act* and Indigenous women's misrepresentation in historical, cultural, and popular narratives: "Garde tes lois réductrices / Tes images dont je suis objet // Symbole d'un peuple de survivants / Mes yeux ont mille vies" (BM082 26). The speaker proudly embraces her Indigeneity as symbolized through the physical appearance of her face and eyes.

Emberley contends in her essay "In/Hospitable 'Aboriginalities'" that cultural representation may constitute a form of "representational violence" when used to consciously maintain hierarchies of social and political inequality:

This form of control over how technologies of representation culturally represent groups of people for the purpose of maintaining economic and political power over actual people constitutes a form of *representational violence* because of the real material effects that cultural representation has on peoples' perception of themselves and others as self-determined political leaders and cultural producers. (211)

Indigenous women's narrative agency is therefore even more important, and Maracle's autobiography *Bobbi Lee* exemplifies how literary self-representation allows Indigenous women to transform into affirmative Indigenous women: "Poetry and the comfort of my diaries – my books of madness I called them – where truth rolled out of my inner self, began to re-shape me" (230). Poetry, and literature in general, provides Indigenous women writers with a safe space where they can explore their identity and being in the world and trace their transformation.

Innu women writers reclaim this ruptured or lost sense of who they are by tracing their identity quests in their poetic texts. For example, Nolin's female speaker evokes her identity

quest in the first section of her collection, when she states: “je me cherche pas à pas / je ne me connais pas,” and she points to the difficulty of finding the right words to describe her existence as a contemporary Innu woman: “comment te dire qui je suis” (*MPAN* 14). The untitled poem continues with the speaker’s acknowledgement of cultural alienation: “je me suis égarée / j’ai perdu la trace de ma vie // qui suis-je / mon cœur a perdu la vue / qui deviens-je” (*MPAN* 14). These lines illustrate how the female speaker’s feeling of being lost is deeply linked to having turned away from Innu ways of being, thinking, and living, and cultural ruptures thus result in a weakened sense of the self that needs to be rediscovered and re-established. Moreover, the female speaker’s questioning of who she will become alludes to the future and, more specifically, to her transformation. However, her envisioned transformation gets a passive connotation when it is read in conversation with the final stanza of this poem, which ends on a rather hopeless note: “j’ai oublié mes rêves / je suis faible / immobile” (*MPAN* 14).¹⁵⁴ The speaker’s feeling of immobility is deeply linked to the feeling of being lost, vulnerable, and powerless, but I read it as a necessary break and time for reflection that is essential for the speaker’s self-exploration and self-discovery that will eventually nourish her affirmative transformation into Innushkueu.

This affirmative transformation is described in another untitled poem in “Déracinée,” the second section of Nolin’s poetry collection, where her female speaker begins to proudly reclaim and affirm her Innu roots: “origines sauvages // je maintiens mes racines / sauvagesse dans l’âme // quête incontournable / j’avance dans ce monde / ancrée aux ancêtres” (*MPAN* 32).

¹⁵⁴ Kapesch describes how younger generations of Innu find themselves in this state of being in-between, culturally and economically, because of forced acculturation or even assimilation: “Parce qu’ils sont allés à l’école du Blanc, nos enfants se trouvent à présent dans l’entre-deux: ils sont incapables de subvenir à leur vie avec la culture innu et ils ne sont pas habitués à la gagner à la manière des Blancs” (*JSMS* 2015, 111). This imagery can also be found in Nolin’s poetry, when her female speaker evokes feelings of cultural insecurity because of living in two different worlds: “incertitude du cœur / entre deux mondes / certitude de l’âme” (*MPAN* 32).

Nolin's choice of vocabulary in this poem – “origines,” “racines,” “âme,” “ancrée” – shows that her process of self-exploration, or what she calls her “quête incontournable,” is about returning to herself, to her ancestors, and to her traditional culture and philosophy, which she will find in herself, whether in her body, mind, or soul. In other words, Nolin's female speaker resists giving in to the assimilative forces of settler colonialism and she reincarnates as Innushkueu. Smith points out the importance of such transformations for Indigenous women: “To acquiesce is to lose ourselves entirely and implicitly agree with all that has been said about us. To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve ‘what we were and remake ourselves’” (4). Smith's statement and Nolin's poetry emphasize both the resistant and resurgent nature of Innu/Indigenous women's transformation into Innushkueu and evoke L. Simpson's concept of generative refusal.

Nolin's female speaker ends this poem on a hopeful and affirmative note: “immobile dans le passé / j'avance vers l'inconnu / sans taire / l'Indienne / de ces territoires” (*MPAN* 32). The first line of this final stanza evokes the female speaker's stagnancy, as it is also described in other poems in the collection, but situates it as a condition of the past and thus heralds a new era of Indigenous action and agency (and can be read as an allusion to the Idle No More movement). Moreover, the imagery of movement contradicts the passive connotation of the speaker's transformation in her earlier poem. This stanza clearly positions the female speaker as an agent of change who will create her own future by listening to her Innu woman's interior voice that is closely linked to the land.¹⁵⁵ Through the poetic process of “returning to [them]selves,” Innu women writers, such as Nolin and Cousineau Mollen, turn the “poetics of being lost” into a “poetics of retrieval [that] helps [them] to find [their] place in the world and balance in [their] lives” (McLeod 10), as envisaged by the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

¹⁵⁵ Cousineau Mollen's poem “Moi, Akuatishkueu” provides another example of how Innu women poets turn immobility into movement and female affirmation.

Nolin's appropriation of the colonial term "Indienne" in connection with the land as well as her use of the word "sauvagesse" in direct relation with "sagesse" in the stanza "ma jeunesse brisée par l'amertume / j'attends une sagesse / une vie de sauvagesse / sans chagrin" (*MPAN* 15) strongly remind me of Antane Kapeshe's appropriation of the same words in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*. Elements of linguistic reclamation and subversion as well as expressions of cultural pride in relation to the traditional Innu lifestyle on the land are most evident in Antane Kapeshe's postface where she fiercely and unapologetically states:

Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse. Je suis très fière quand, aujourd'hui, je m'entends traiter de Sauvagesse. Quand j'entends le Blanc prononcer ce mot, je comprends qu'il me redit sans cesse que je suis une vraie Indienne et que c'est moi la première à avoir vécu dans la forêt. Or, toute chose qui vit dans la forêt correspond à la vie la meilleure. Puisse le Blanc me toujours traiter de Sauvagesse. (*JSMS* 2019, 213)¹⁵⁶

Antane Kapeshe appropriates the expressions "Sauvagesse" and "vraie Indienne" and connects them with the Innu people's traditionally nomadic way of life in the woods. Like Antane Kapeshe, younger generations of Innu women writers reclaim these same terms to subvert the savagery/civilization divide. Nolin, for example, deals with the concept of savagery in an untitled

¹⁵⁶ Innu original: "Nin eukuan matshi-manitu innushkueu. Kashikat pietamani eshinikatikauian SAUVAGESSE nimishta-ashinen. Kauapishit pietuki essishueti nenu aimunnu, nitishinishtuten kauapishit nanitam nuitamak^u tapue eukuan nin tshitshue innushkueu mak kauapishit nuitamak^u ninishtam anite minashkuat katshi ut inniuan. Uesh ma kassinu tshekuan anite minashkuat ka ut inniimakak eukuan anu uet minuat inniun. Tshima nanitam petuk kauapishit tshetshi ishinikashit SAUVAGESSE" (*JSMS* 2019, 202). In the 1976 version, the word "bois" is used instead of "forêt" (*JSMS* 1976, "Postface"), and the 2015 edition uses the words "bois" instead of "forêt" and "Innu" instead of "Indienne" (*JSMS* 2015, 155). Henzi remarks in the afterword to her translation of Antane Kapeshe's text: "A final, important, word-related brainteaser was the expression 'dans le bois,' which I often translated as 'in the woods' or 'in the bush,' but which can also mean more broadly 'on the land'" ("Recovering and Recontextualizing" 294).

Interestingly, in the Innu original text, Antane Kapeshe first self-identifies as "matshi-manitu innushkueu" (*JSMS* 2019, 202) translated in French as "une maudite Sauvagesse," and then employs the French term "SAUVAGESSE" (*JSMS* 2019, 202) in capital letters to illustrate the imposed nature of this word.

poem in the collection's second section: "moi, femme innue colonisée / toi, grand-père à demi sauvage / et nos peuples anciens nomades / tout à fait sauvages" (*MPAN* 29).

In this final stanza, Nolin's female speaker describes the gradual process of the Innu's dramatically changed way of life, from nomadism to (forced) settlement, by comparing their "development" from "savage" to "colonized." Part of the concept of civilization is the removal and disassociation of societies from the environment; savagery therefore refers to the close connection that those societies have with nature, often represented by a subsistence lifestyle. In Nolin's poem, nomadism equals savagery but gets a positive connotation as it refers to living on the land in traditional ways. As such, Nolin's expression "demi sauvage," which she uses to describe her grandfather, alludes to the forced settlement of the Innu people in the mid-20th century and thus describes the generation of Innu people who, like Nolin's grandfather and Antane Kapeshe, lived on and off the land until they had to settle permanently in reserves. The expression "moi, femme innue" closely links Nolin to Antane Kapeshe as it is an example of intertextuality and constitutes a marker of both women's identity as Innu women.¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, the adjective "colonisée" in Nolin's poem distinguishes the two women and illustrates the generational distance that comes with different experiences of colonization.

Antane Kapeshe consciously employs strongly gendered colonial expressions - "Sauvagesse" and "Indienne" - as markers of identity to signal the double marginalization of Innu women. In the afterword to her translation of Antane Kapeshe's text, Henzi notes "that the original French title uses the word 'sauvagesse' - a very gendered (the female version of

¹⁵⁷ Métis scholar Warren Cariou argues that "an archive can be dangerous if it is the resting place of a story" (475), and I argue that examples of intertextuality such as Nolin's poetic reproduction of Antane Kapeshe's significant marker of identity - "moi, femme innue" - and her proudly reappropriated colonial terminology - "Sauvagesse" and "Indienne" - illustrate how archived texts can be turned into repertoire. Moreover, intertextuality in Indigenous women's writing serves as a strategy of literary recognition and as a practice of cultural continuity.

‘sauvage’) and racist term that cannot be rendered as such in English (‘savage’ thus being the best to be found” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 293). Consequently, the English terms “savage” and “Indian” cannot equally represent the double colonization and marginalization of Innu/Indigenous women that Antane Kapeshe clearly addresses and critiques in her book. Innu women, such as Antane Kapeshe, Cousineau Mollen, and Nolin, reclaim their Indigeneity, their humanity and dignity, and their womanhood by using these expressions in a subversive way in their writings, and they exemplify how Indigenous women writers “have redeployed and reinvented these words to signal new realities beyond settler colonialism” (Teves et al. viii).

Indigenous feminist theories and practices are characterized by perspectives in which “l’individu confirme toujours ses rapports avec la communauté” (den Toonder 187). For example, L. Simpson weaves her present existence as a Nishnaabeg woman into the larger narrative of her ancestors’ refusal to vanish: “I exist as a kwe because of the continual refusal of countless generations to disappear from the north shore of Lake Ontario” (*As* 34). Innu women poets address this refusal by referring to ancestors in their texts and by describing how they have continued practicing their cultures despite colonial oppression and various forms of violence. In Cousineau Mollen’s, Nolin’s, and Kanapé Fontaine’s poetry, it is particularly their grandmothers who, in enacting their traditional responsibility as “keepers of culture” (LaRocque, “Reflections” 152), ensured cultural continuity through intergenerational knowledge transfer.¹⁵⁸ In Nolin’s poetry, for example, the female speaker describes how her grandmother taught her traditional Innu art, such as beading: “grand-mère m’a appris / art merveilleux // je connais mes origines / ma riche culture / l’art autochtone est mon âme” (*MPAN* 28). The speaker’s references to Innu art and culture evoke *innu-tshissenitamun*, Innu Traditional Knowledge (ITK), defined as

¹⁵⁸ Kanapé Fontaine states the following: “une femme autochtone, quand elle reçoit ses enseignements, [...] elle apprend qu’elle est en fait une passeuse, une transmetteuse” (“Réflexion” 6mm36ss).

“contemporary and generations-old knowledge that Innu elders and some other Innu have as a result of living in the country” (MacKenzie and Hendriks 29). In her theorization of Indigenous resurgence, L. Simpson emphasizes the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission within the family as a vital site of resistance and cultural preservation: “When resistance is defined solely as large-scale political mobilization, we miss much of what has kept our languages, cultures, and systems of governance alive. We have those things today because our Ancestors often acted within the family unit to physically survive, to pass on what they could to their children, to occupy and use our lands as we always had” (*Dancing* 16). Indigenous women, especially writers such as L. Simpson and Nolin, stress the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission within families and communities as vital sites of Indigenous resurgence.

Cousineau Mollen’s female speaker identifies her *Kukum* (grandmother) as her cultural and emotional anchor and a source of wisdom in her poem “Kukum”: “Tu étais mon pilier quand j’étais égarée / Quand je doutais encore de mon identité // Je revenais à toi, mon doux pèlerinage / Kukum, toi qui calmais mes moments de rage,” and she highlights her grandmother’s non-judgemental attitude towards her granddaughter, who was adopted into a Québécois family: “Jamais tu ne me jugeais, moi, l’enfant adoptée / Tu pardonnais mes blanches absences” (*BM082* 77-78). These examples illustrate that Indigenous women “find our strength and our power in our ability to be what our grandmothers were to us: keepers of the next generation in every sense of that word – physically, intellectually, and spiritually,” as Armstrong notes, and she identifies “the fierce love at the centre of our power that is the weapon our grandmothers gave us, to protect and to nurture against all odds” (“Invocation” xi). Cousineau Mollen’s lines allude to her grandmother’s love towards her and how this deep and unconditional love acts as a source of empowerment. Campbell expresses a similar understanding of the role and power of the

grandmother as keeper of family and community when she states that “[h]er loyalty was to the children and she was responsible for passing on to them this knowledge so they could have a good life and, if they were ever lost, the lessons on the stories would guide them home” (Campbell in Anderson, *Life Stages* xvii-xviii). Grandmothers traditionally occupy important roles in many Indigenous societies due to their respected responsibility of intergenerational knowledge transfer through storytelling.

Both Cousineau Mollen and Nolin, describe their healthy relationships with their grandmothers, who act as vital knowledge transmitters. Nolin’s speaker encourages her grandmother to tell her stories: “grand-mère / raconte-moi / encore / ta vision / de la beauté” (*MPAN* 30), and thus emphasizes the importance of her grandmother’s words, stories, and perspective. Hélène St-Onge, director of the language sector at Tshakapesh Institute, stresses that “[l]a langue innue est une langue à tradition orale” and that “[j]usqu’à récemment, toute la transmission des connaissances se faisait oralement chez les Innus.” Nolin’s poem points at the performed, relational, and affective act of intergenerational knowledge transmission, traditionally taking place between grandparents and grandchildren in Indigenous oral cultures. This intergenerational connection described by Innu women poets is even more significant considering the family ties that had been intentionally damaged or broken by the Indian residential school system. In *Indigenous Healing*, Rupert Ross explains how residential schools impacted the Indigenous systems of intergenerational teaching through storytelling:

For the first time in centuries, the Elders had no one to teach during those long winter nights. Left without a role to play, they suffered terribly.

At the same time, the youth never got to hear the words of the Elders, never got to understand their language, their history, the lessons learned or the sacredness of life. The

connections between generations suddenly ceased, leaving everyone gasping for spiritual breath and confidence in the future. (49)¹⁵⁹

Like Cousineau Mollen and Nolin, Kanapé Fontaine also describes the strong connection to her grandmother - “*kukum* and et sa petite-fille” (NEPAC 56; original emphasis) - and the important role her grandmother assumed in practising, transmitting, and teaching Innu Knowledge, such as beading, producing moccasins, and speaking Innu-aimun: “le cuir du soulier artisan s’amasse / dans un sac noir de secrets de famille” (NEPAC 56). In her TEDx talk, however, Kanapé Fontaine evokes the difficulties that Indigenous women have faced as keepers and transmitters of Indigenous Knowledge and pays tribute to their contributions to the cultural survival of their communities: “c’est vraiment avec la force de nos femmes qui ont voulu, qui ont tenu absolument de nos grands-mères et nos arrière-grands-mères à tenter le plus possible de transmettre le plus grand qu’elles pouvaient de la langue, de la culture, de la manière de penser, de la philosophie et de la manière de fonctionner en société” (“Réflexion” 11mm18). Kanapé Fontaine expresses how Indigenous women have continued to transmit as much as possible of their languages, cultures, and ways of thinking despite the challenges they were and are confronted with. Indigenous children’s attendance of Indigenous residential schools and the prohibition of Indigenous cultural practices are only two examples of such challenges that made intergenerational knowledge transmission more difficult.

Emphasizing their desire to rekindle their cultures and knowledge practices allows Indigenous women to admit to both ruptures in the process of intergenerational knowledge

¹⁵⁹ Ross emphasizes “how residential schools had fundamentally damaged the medicine wheel” and he explains: “traditionally, youth were placed in the southern quadrant and Elders directly opposite them in the northern quadrant, straight across from them over the centre of the circle, often the place where the sacred fire glowed, giving life to everything that surrounded it. When winter came and activity was restricted by snow, cold and shortened days, that was the Elders’ time to teach youth the things they would need to know to grow into healthy adults. With the youth being taken to residential schools for (at least) the Teaching period of winter, there was no one facing the Elders across the sacred fire. [...] Everyone, and everything, was suddenly disconnected – and much poorer” (49).

transfer and the loss of some traditions caused by changing modes of life, from nomadism to permanent settlement. Kanapé Fontaine, for instance, identifies settlement and urbanization as important factors that contribute to the weakening or even disappearance of the Innu language: “ruines // je cherche quelques mots / d’*innu-aimun* / sous ma langue // je suis de la ville” (*NEPAC* 56; original emphasis). The speaker’s graphic description of how she looks for some Innu words under her tongue, however, indicates that she believes that the Innu language is (still) stored in her body because it has been transmitted by her ancestors. Even though Kanapé Fontaine is forced to relearn Innu-aimun, her mother tongue, her poetic image implies that language revitalization is possible and can be achieved.¹⁶⁰ Despite the ruptures and losses, Innu/Indigenous women act as “keepers of culture in contemporary modes” (“Reflections” 152), as LaRocque calls it, for example by integrating the Innu language (whether in rudimentary or elaborated form) into their poetry and by sharing their worldview marked by deep connection and interrelatedness.

In her latest poetry collection, *Nanimissuat / Île-tonnerre* (2018), Kanapé Fontaine alludes to cultural ruptures, such as language loss, but also to what Cree scholar Tasha Hubbard calls “blood memory” (148), when she states in her prologue: “La mémoire se transmet par le sang. Mémoire écorchée, démembrée, violée. Mémoire effacée de la conscience du peuple. Un grand vide se creuse d’une génération à l’autre. Lorsque le récit n’est pas raconté, il y a privation” (*NIT* 7). Kanapé Fontaine expresses her deep relationship with ancestors through embodied collective memory, which grounds her as an Innu woman: “Je me libère enfin. Être

¹⁶⁰ In “Redress for Linguicide” (2017), Lorena Sekwan Fontaine argues that the federal and provincial educational systems constitute key areas in which language revitalization should take place: “In spite of the detrimental role educational policy and institutions have had on Indigenous cultures, they now have a critical role to play in the revitalization of Indigenous languages since few Indigenous children are able to learn their languages at home” (183).

Innushkueu – femme et humaine – porter la mémoire de nos aïeules” (*NIT* 8). Kanapé Fontaine adheres to what Emberley calls “the Indigenous uncanny,” in which “the scene of telling is one of connecting, more often than not, to those who are no longer alive, but whose memory and life stories provide guidance for those who still endure the violence of the colonial-settler nation-state” (“In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 213). This understanding is particularly evident in this three-line stanza from the poem “La Marche” in *Bleuets et abricots*: “J’ai mémoire de la mort / embrasse le savoir sur le front / le retour des miens guidés par les ombres” (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 20). Kanapé Fontaine’s lines resonate with Moreton-Robinson’s statement of the female body which she understands as “the link to people, country, spirits, herstory and the future, and [as] a positive site of value and affirmational as well as a site of resistance” (*Talkin’ Up* 15).

According to Emberley, different forms of violence “worked concurrently to interrupt the flow of knowledge from elders, parents, and other adult kin to youth and children” so that the former could not provide their children “with an essential understanding of their history, values and identity” (“In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 210). Phyllis Old Dog Cross (Hidatsa) reminds us that such ruptures are not without “adverse effects”: “One of the major effects was the loss of cultured values and the concomitant loss of personal identity” (qtd. in Gunn Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 192). Innu women poets address various forms of cultural ruptures, and their poetic identity quests exemplify their concomitant loss of personal identity, which is, however, not irretrievable. In other words, Innu women writers demonstrate, through their lyric exploration and reclamation of Indigenous womanhood, that it is possible to regenerate their personal identities according to Indigenous philosophies despite past losses. Moreover, contemporary Indigenous women’s existence, presence, and agency, as expressed in their writings, proves that they have survived – physically, culturally, and spiritually – despite centuries of genocidal, oppressive, and

assimilative structures. Harjo and Bird recognize Indigenous women's survival/survivance as a strong political message directed towards the patriarchal settler-colonial nation-state: "That we are still here as native women in itself is a political statement" (30). Such a political undertone is evident in Kanapé Fontaine's long poem "La Migration" in *Bleuets et abricots*, where her female speaker seeks to reclaim the country, Kanata, through her persistent existence: "Je suis / j'existe / je suis venue apporter la lumière aux nations / je suis venue avec la lumière // Je suis revenue pour rester / je suis revenue pour prendre pays / lui donner son nom de terre" (BA 72). Kanapé Fontaine's lines are a political message addressed to the settler state, proudly declaring that the Indigenous movement of resurgence and decolonization is unstoppable.

Conclusion

In her debut poetry collection *Framer* (2015), Innu poet Marie-Andrée Gill evokes a collectively shared dream: "il y a notre rêve: une femme debout" (75). Similarly, in her TEDx talk, Kanapé Fontaine emphasizes that, for a long time, Indigenous Elders have insisted on Indigenous women reclaiming their place, voice, and strength: "Ça fait très longtemps que les Aînés nous disaient: 'les femmes, reprenez votre place, reprenez votre parole, reprenez la force de votre culture, de votre spiritualité'" ("Réflexion" 13mm08ss). By metaphorically giving birth to herself as Innushkueu in *Bleuets et abricots*, Kanapé Fontaine poetically responds to Indigenous Elders' urge to become this "femme debout, femme puissance, femme résurgence" (BA 7). In addition, the metaphor of the female warrior in Innu women's poetry exemplifies their struggle to reclaim their power. Dubbed as "la guerrière-poète" (BM082 8), Cousineau Mollen uses her gift of writing to break away from her imposed legal identity as defined by the *Indian Act* and, instead, fully embraces her existence as Innushkueu. In an empowering poem in *Ma*

peau aime le Nord, Nolin alludes to the “femme debout” as a female warrior and urges Indigenous women to stand up and take action: “Tiens-toi / debout / va devant // lève-toi / guerrière / va d’un bon pas” (*MPAN* 44). The final stanzas of this poem then beautifully describe Indigenous women’s collectivity, solidarity, resurgence, and leadership based on shared principles and philosophies: “un lien sacré nous unit // nous sommes les femmes sauvages” (Nolin, *MPAN* 44).

I agree with Gunn Allen that “not conflict and devastation but transformation and continuance” (*Sacred Hoop* 101) are two of the most important features of Indigenous women’s writing and Indigenous herstory. LaRocque contends that “by taking our rightful place in our contemporary world,” as demanded by Indigenous Elders, “[Indigenous women writers] are breathing cultural continuity. The act of writing is an act of agency, and agency is cultural continuity in its articulation of our histories, our invasions, and our cultural values” (“Reflections” 163). Innu women’s poetics of (settler) colonial history and patriarchal structures is thus necessary to dismantle and deconstruct them and create space for decolonial alternatives, as Armstrong reminds us: “To speak is to create more than words, more than sounds retelling the world; it is to realize the potential for transformation of the world. [...] What we speak determines our interactions. Realization of the power in speaking is in the realization that words can change the future and in the realization that we each have that power. I am the word carrier, and I shape-change the world” (“Land Speaking” 152). It is in this sense that Indigenous communities “send our word warriors out to meet” non-Indigenous people (Lindberg 343) and to teach them. Emberley, for example, argues that “Indigenous writers have taken back storytelling modes of representation and have created a new place from which to invite the reader, listener, or viewer in, so that she or he can take part in a process of re-envisioning Indigeneity today”

(“In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 212), which is, as Cousineau Mollen has taught us in *Bréviaire du matricule 082*, much more than an Indigenous person’s legal status.

LaRocque emphasizes that “Aboriginal writers’ cultural contributions to the Aboriginal (and wider) communities are profound” (“Reflections” 163), and, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, “l’écho de [la] voix [d’Antane Kapeshe] résonne encore chez de nombreux auteurs autochtones qui, aujourd’hui nous livrent leur imaginaire par l’écriture et enrichissent ainsi les littératures” (St-Gelais “Genèse” 145). More than just referring to the image of the female warrior in their cultural productions, Innu women writers, such as Antane Kapeshe, Cousineau Mollen, Nolin, and Kanapé Fontaine embody “warriors, fighting for positive change for Indigenous people” (Jobin 39), and they are therefore important role models for present and future generations.

L. Simpson contends, in *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, that Indigenous people’s belief in their transformative power is grounded and deeply embedded in their creation stories: “Gzhwe Mnidoo dreamt our world into existence. S/he dreamed us into existence, demonstrating that the process of creation - visioning, making, doing - is the most powerful process in the universe,”¹⁶¹ and she adds: “My Creation Story tells me that collectively we have the intellect and creative power to regenerate our cultures, languages, nations. My Creation Story tells me another world is possible and that I have the tools to vision it and bring it into reality. I can’t think of a more powerful narrative” (42).¹⁶² L. Simpson’s understanding of stories resembles Cherokee author Thomas King’s following words: “The truth about stories is that’s all we are” (*Truth* 2). The key

¹⁶¹ As L. Simpson explains in a footnote, “There is no gender associated with *Gzhwe Mnidoo* and it can be translated as life force, life essence, creator, the great mystery or ‘that which we do not understand’” (*Dancing* 46n55; original emphasis).

¹⁶² L. Simpson’s statement reminds me of Antane Kapeshe’s following words: “Moi aussi, femme innu, je serais heureuse de conserver ma vie culturelle et de me savoir pour toujours Innu. Moi aussi j’ai beaucoup de respect pour ma vie innu et j’en suis profondément fière car c’est la vie que le Créateur m’a donnée” (*JSMS* 2015, 149).

message of this statement is that stories shape our understanding of the world, of being in the world, and of who we are, and stories therefore have the power to transform individuals and whole societies.

Emberley reminds us that a particular function of Indigenous storytelling is to teach peaceful co-habitation and thus addresses everybody, Indigenous or not: “Indigenous storytelling, although varied among Indigenous peoples as well as specific to places and the genealogies of kinship ties, does in its contemporary manifestations embody a collective spirit of change in how we learn to engage critically with the world(s) we share and inhabit” (“In/Hospitable ‘Aboriginalities’” 213). Indigenous women undeniably embody the “moteur du renouveau social des Premiers Peuples” (Janin 118), but, insisting on the collective power needed to implement social change, Innu/Indigenous women writers resist shouldering the entire responsibility for regenerating Indigenous cultures and renewing Indigenous-settler relations across Turtle Island, and therefore, they “call on [their] readers to participate in social, political, and cultural change” (Beard 137). Maracle, for example, reminds her readers of their duty through attributing them the role of the trickster: “As listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose” (*Sojourner’s Truth* 13). While Indigenous women, as keepers and transmitters of Indigenous Knowledge and culture, play a crucial role for Indigenous resurgence, they should not be the only agents of change. On the contrary, it is as much our collective responsibility as a listening/reading/watching public of Indigenous stories to bring forward social change and social justice.

CHAPTER 3: Autobiographical Narratives: Expressions of Indigenous Resurgence

Gail Guthrie Valaskakis (Chippewa) and colleagues celebrate Indigenous women as “guardians of indigenous traditions, practices, and beliefs – and agents of change for their families and nations” (2) in their collection *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture* (2009). This understanding of Indigenous women’s transformative power is supported by Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine who affirms that “nous croyons avoir le pouvoir de changer les choses” (qtd. in Collard) and by Mohawk feminist Beth Brant who understands writing as a “mysterious and magical act that brings possibility of transformation” (*Writing as Witness* 120). This chapter argues that Innu women’s autobiographical narratives constitute expressions of resurgence, which I understand as a movement of transformation that is deeply anchored in Innu worldview and seeks to revitalize Innu traditional ways to ensure an Indigenous future on Turtle Island. Innu/Indigenous resurgence acknowledges living relationships, especially with and among Indigenous people, with the past and future, and with the land. As a relational practice, Indigenous resurgence is essentially informed by an ethics of care for the collective. This chapter will thus look at how Innu women writers in Quebec address “locally focussed and future-oriented cultural and community revival, characterized by a heavy lean against colonization and Eurocentric structures” (Valaskakis et al. 2) in their autobiographically-based narratives. More specifically, I will analyze An Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976; *JSMS*) and Naomi Fontaine’s *Kuessipan* (2011).¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Note that I will cite Antane Kapeshe in French translation from different editions that I mention as follows: *JSMS* 1976, *JSMS* 2015 or *JSMS* 2019. I provide the translation from another edition in footnotes if there are important differences. Passages and sentences in Innu-aimun, which I provide in footnotes to include Antane Kapeshe’s original voice, are from the revised 2019 edition.

Indigenous autobiographical forms of expression have a long tradition among Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island. In her dissertation *Âcimisowin as Theoretical Practice: Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition in Canada* (2007), Métis literary scholar Deanna Reder remarks: “Whatever the genre – from history, political commentary, public address, literary criticism or journalism – I noted that writing by Indigenous authors integrated autobiographical detail” (*Âcimisowin* 7), and she proposes an understanding of Indigenous autobiographical narratives “as a continuation of varying Indigenous intellectual traditions” (“Indigenous Autobiography” 172).¹⁶⁴ In doing so, she challenges the long-held belief that “the Indian autobiography has no prior model in the collective practice of tribal cultures” (31), as settler scholar Arnold Krupat writes in *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (1985), and that, as a result, “American Indian autobiography is a transitional genre, combining elements of tribal oral tradition and Euro-American written traditions” (Bataille and Mullen Sands 8).¹⁶⁵ When I use the term “autobiography” in this chapter, I do not refer to European conventions or transitional understandings of this genre, which privileges the life narrative and voice of a single individual. In contrast, I understand Indigenous autobiography in a relational sense that involves Indigenous oral storytelling traditions and produces “polyphonic texts with family members that demonstrate how the individual is embedded in

¹⁶⁴ Settler literary scholar Keavy Martin shares a similar understanding of autobiographically-based writing as part of Inuit intellectual traditions: “The genre of life history, however, is an effective way of ensuring that the knowledge shared remains grounded in the context of individual experience” (109). Like the Innu, the Inuit differentiate between two types of stories, as Martin explains: “The term for ‘life stories’ used in the Interviewing Inuit Elders series is *inuusirmingnik unikkaat*: stories from *inuusiq*, ‘one’s life, one’s experience.’ Interestingly, the elders made a distinction between this type of storytelling and others, such as the *unikkaaqtuat*, or traditional tales” (109).

¹⁶⁵ According to Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands, “American Indian autobiography is a transitional genre, combining elements of tribal oral tradition and Euro-American written traditions, both complex literary traditions when considered separately, but doubly complex when combined and adapted to narration of personal experience by tribal women. Defining just what constitutes an autobiography by an American Indian woman is not a simple task, since there are several kinds of autobiographies by Indian women” (8).

kinship relations” (Brewster xxii-xxiii).¹⁶⁶ Okanagan writer and literary scholar Jeannette Armstrong explains this phenomenon of Indigenous polyphonic texts as follows: “The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns” (qtd. in Hubbard 145). Cree scholar Tasha Hubbard concludes that Armstrong “moves beyond the containment of the first person to become a place for her community to speak and be heard [through this process]” (145), and I argue that Innu women writers use a similar strategy to transform their individual voice into a collective voice.

Early and contemporary Indigenous women writing autobiographically are literary trailblazers who, according to Nêhiyaw-Métis-Nahkawè literary critic Janice Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe, have “significantly challenge[d] literary trends” (“Post Halfbreed” 31). The publication of Cree/Métis writer Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* in 1973, today considered a literary classic in Canadian and Indigenous literatures, marks a milestone in the history of Indigenous women’s writing in English-Canada. With her “disturbing testimony to the ugliness of racism in Canada’s social history” (Petrone, *Native Literature in Canada* 120), Campbell tells a highly personal and yet collectively experienced story that sheds new light on Canada’s history, Indigenous-settler relations, and the marginalization of the Métis.¹⁶⁷ In Quebec, Cree

¹⁶⁶ In her essay “Not My Sister: What Feminists Can Learn about Sisterhood from Indigenous Women” (2004), Indigenous feminist Tracey Lindberg argues that colonial languages “cannot fully encompass the intricate web of relations in Indigenous families with the terms ‘kinship,’ [or] ‘extended family’” (343).

¹⁶⁷ Many Indigenous autobiographies have been analyzed as “testimonio” (see, for example, Natasha Dagenais, “Reclaiming Indigenous Space through Testimonial Life Writing”). The theory of testimony, or testimonio, originates from Central/Latin America and Jewish communities after the Holocaust of World War II. Testimony is a style of autobiography that is marked by a plural self; the autobiographical subject (the “I/eye”) of the testimony often speaks out as a member of community rather than as a merely individual, as John Beverley argues in “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio”: “Each individual testimonio evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences” (16). Ashcroft and colleagues emphasize that testimonio constitutes a genre characterized by marginality: “The existence of the genre at the margins of literature, its occupation between a zone of indeterminacy between speaking and writing, between literature and history, between autobiography and communal report, between the personal and the political statement, makes it most interesting” (211). Settler literary scholar Roxanne Rimstead contends that “the use of the term ‘testimonial literature’ has been applied mainly to

writer Jane (Willis) Pachano publishes *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (1973), an autobiographical narrative that reflects on her childhood and her attendance of two residential schools in Quebec and Ontario, in the same year. Three years later, in 1976, Innu writer An Antane Kapesh publishes *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, which deals with systemic racism and the oppression of the Innu people. Early Indigenous women's autobiographical writing was either mostly ignored at the time of publication, such as Pachano's *Geniesh*, or dismissed by settler critics for being too biased, angry, and polemic, for example, Antane Kapesh's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975). If not ignored or dismissed, early Indigenous women's autobiographical writing, such as Campbell's *Halfbreed*, was generally classified as protest or resistance literature. According to the influential Indigenous editor Gregory Younging, the first wave of Indigenous literature in the 1960s and 1970s was "characteristic of protest literature; political in content and angry in tone" (qtd. in Monture Angus, "Native America" 31). Indigenous women's writing undeniably includes elements of resistance and protest, but it is misleading to define early Indigenous women's autobiographies solely as "resistance writing" (Monture Angus, "Native America" 31) because such a categorization places colonization at the centre of Indigenous writing, which is then seen as a mere response to settler colonialism, and ignores elements of Indigenous orature and the continuity of Indigenous intellectual traditions.¹⁶⁸

narratives about extreme situations of violence, oppression, and silencing" (57), and the form of the testimony is therefore used to protest injustice within a context of cultural urgency. Testimonies of history, such as Campbell's *Halfbreed*, rewrite history to heal the ruptures (such as loss of language and culture, residential school experiences, trauma, addictions, psychological problems, and questions of identity). In an Indigenous context, Brant Castellano understands testimony as the act of "speaking about and grieving personal losses and experiences of abuses, as well as those within the family (intergenerational impacts) and community/people" (*Final Report* 118).

¹⁶⁸ In "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial," Cherokee literary scholar Thomas King critiques the application of postcolonial literary criticism, such as resistance writing, to Indigenous literatures because "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" (12).

Monture Angus, for instance, acknowledges the inherently resistant nature of Indigenous writing but suggests redefining what resistance means in an Indigenous context: “What is common among many Native American writers is our desire to write our resistance. This desire might sometimes be described as ‘decolonization’” (“Native America” 31).

Though received very differently at their time of publication, early Indigenous women’s autobiographical narratives are united through their authors’ unique perspectives as Indigenous women: voices that had long been ignored or dismissed in public discourses and academia because of “that vexed and vexing idea of *literature*, and how assumptions about what is or is not ‘literary’ are used to privilege some voices and ignore others” (Justice, *Why* xvii; original emphasis). Acoose, for example, critiques that “even though writers such as LaRocque, Campbell, Maracle, Culleton, and others were creating and producing work that represented Indigenous women as survivors of economic and political oppression, publishers dismissed their work as ‘biased’ and ‘bitter,’” and she continues that “[d]ismissing Indigenous women as important female creators and producers by using words such as *biased* and *bitter* was one of many strategies by publishers of Canadian literature (*Iskwewak* 2016, 50; original emphasis). However, as Acoose points out, autobiographical writing allows Campbell, Maracle, Pachano, Antane Kapeshe and other Indigenous women to publicly share lived experiences and to denounce the violent process of settler colonialism, past and ongoing oppression and discrimination as well as systemic abuse.

The categorization of early Indigenous women’s writing as protest literature goes hand in hand with ignoring its inherent components of Indigenous aesthetics. Innu poet Marie-Andrée Gill, for example, emphasizes the significance of Antane Kapeshe’s original and reedited work by saying that the “*republiation* donne enfin du pouvoir à cette autrice, qui rapporte les faits

conformément à sa culture traditionnelle” (“Eukuan” 11; original emphasis). In this short review statement, Gill underlines that Antane Kapeshe adheres to and values Innu storytelling traditions while employing writing, a medium that, according to Dezutter and colleagues, can be considered being “le prolongement de la tradition orale et non son effacement” (156). Through their autobiographically-based writing, early and modern Innu/Indigenous women writers thus “articulate aspects of cultural continuity and outline new methods of cultural revitalization” (Lacombe, “On Critical Frameworks” 256). In other words, Indigenous women’s writing is an expression of Indigenous resurgence.

Kanapé Fontaine emphasizes that “malgré toutes les tentatives pour nous faire disparaître, nous sommes encore là” (qtd. in Collard), and many contemporary Innu women writers, such as Kanapé Fontaine, Naomi Fontaine, Maya Cousineau Mollen, and Manon Nolin, to name only a few, continue the Indigenous tradition of autobiographical storytelling. However, the literary work of many of these women “stretches the boundaries of accepted academic form in such a way that they are not easily categorized” (Monture Angus, “Native America” 22), and I argue that this is also true for literary forms of expression. Fontaine’s literary work constitutes such an example of Indigenous storytelling that is, according to Western literary standards, not easily categorized because it involves forms of autobiographical and fictional writing. Québécois literary scholar Isabelle Huberman argues that Antane Kapeshe’s “inscription de sa propre expérience au sein de son essai évoque la structure d’un certain type de récit traditionnel innu,” namely the *tipatshimun* (114). Based on Innu storytelling conventions, both Antane Kapeshe’s and Fontaine’s literary texts can thus be considered being *tipatshimuns* because of their inclusion of lived experiences.

An Antane Kapesch and Naomi Fontaine

Born on the *Nitassinan*, close to Kuujjuaq, An Antane Kapesch (1926-2004) is an exceptional figure in the political, cultural, and literary landscape of what we now call Quebec.¹⁶⁹ In the 1960s, Antane Kapesch was actively involved in the local band council of the Schefferville Innu, most notably from 1965 to 1967 as chief of what is now the Matimekush reserve (see Figure 7). A decade later, Antane Kapesch started publishing her first books, namely *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976) and *Tanite Nene Etutamin Nitassi? / Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays?* (1979), and she also penned some short stories for children. Antane Kapesch is recognized for being the first Innu woman in Quebec to publish a book, her autobiography *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, which, according to Québécois literary scholar Simon Harel, struck in Quebec like “un coup de tonnerre dans le ciel serein et bleu du nationalisme de ces années là” (8).¹⁷⁰ With her autobiography, Antane Kapesch has “rock[ed] the boat, challenge[d], question[ed], and metamorphose[d] existing [literature and] criticism” (Acoose, “Honoring” 217).

Antane Kapesch represents the last generation of Innu nomads who lived on, with, and off the land and thus had a particular knowledge of the land, or “la connaissance du territoire,” to

¹⁶⁹ For more detailed biographical information, see Antane Kapesch's author profile on the website of Wendake's Indigenous Book Fair *Kwahiatonhk!* and Henzi's afterword to her English translation of Antane Kapesch's work (“Recovering and Recontextualizing,” especially pp. 281-283).

¹⁷⁰ Henzi remarks that “An Antane Kapesch's two books had been out of print for decades” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 280) before her literary oeuvre and particularly her autobiography received much attention in the last few years, as the various re-editions of her published texts show. In 2015, Les Éditions du CAAS re-published both *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* and *Tanite Nene Etutamin Nitassi? / Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays?* (originally published in 1976 and 1979 respectively). In 2019, the Montreal-based publishing house Mémoire d'encrier re-published *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* with a preface by Innu writer Naomi Fontaine. And in 2020, Wilfrid Laurier University Press published *I Am a Damn Savage; What Have You Done to My Country?*, a double edition with the English translation accompanied by the revised Innu text and an afterword by literary scholar Sarah Henzi who translated the texts from French to English. In their book review, Joséphine Bacon and Julie Depelteau explain the growing interest in Antane Kapesch's writing with the emergence of Indigenous studies programs and more research in the field of (francophone) Indigenous Studies in Quebec (257).

use Fontaine's expression (in Antane Kapesch, *JSMS* 2019, 7). Antane Kapesch was also a first-hand witness to the radical changes that occurred throughout her life.¹⁷¹ Cree author Tomson Highway underlines that Antane Kapesch's book is made of "the words of an Elder who has been there, who has seen her culture go, in one generation, from one of tools of bone, sinew, and stone, to one of computers" (330). Highway, who produces a rather critical review of Antane Kapesch's autobiography in *From Oral to Written* (2017), acknowledges Antane Kapesch's work, however, as "a valuable document" because of the author's literary documentation of the radical changes of her time (330). Antane Kapesch's book does indeed document how colonial and assimilative legislation implements dramatic political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological changes on Indigenous nations living in the North, a large region that had been long ignored by settlers: these changes include the shift from traditionally nomadic cultures that were self-sustainable using community-based politics to contained, dependent, and ruptured communities. In nine chapters, *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* traces the arrival and settlement of non-Indigenous people, capitalist extractive industries, and assimilative institutions in the northern parts of Quebec. Settler scholar Sarah Henzi, who translated Antane Kapesch's French version of *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* into the English *I Am a Damn Savage* (2020) and thus made this important book accessible to a larger readership, emphasizes that "[Antane] Kapesch's work needs to be not only recovered, but celebrated, and recontextualized as a keystone in the production of Indigenous writing" ("Recovering and Recontextualizing" 290).

¹⁷¹ The following stanza in Wendat author Jean Sioui's poem "Poussière de notre sang / Dust of Our Blood" illustrates these radically fast changes in a few compelling lines highlighting Indigenous people's loss of self-determination and agency by using the active and passive voice: "Mon père... / Un jour tu piégeais / Puis un autre jour on t'a piégé / Mon père... / Un jour tu chassais / Puis un autre jour on t'a chassé" (16); the English translation reads as follows: "My father... / One day you were the trapper / the next day you were the trapped / My father... / One day you were the hunter / the next day you were the hunted" (24).

Like her predecessor Antane Kapeshe, Naomi Fontaine is an exceptional figure in the francophone literary world, and her status is often attributed to her recognition as the first modern writer of Innu literature (Durand 143). Born in 1987, Fontaine grew up in her home community Uashat until the age of seven, when she moved to Quebec City with her mother and siblings after the sudden death of her father (see Figure 7). “Toute ma vie,” Fontaine acknowledges, “je me suis ennuyée de ma communauté” (*Shuni* 102), and this longing for her community translates into her literary work as community life in Uashat constitutes a central element of Fontaine’s writing. For instance, *Kuessipan: à toi*, Fontaine’s debut work published in 2011, depicts “a difficult but also in many ways cherished Innu life on a reserve in Northern Quebec” (65), as settler literary scholar Marie Carrière states in *Cautiously Hopeful: Metafeminist Practices in Canada* (2020). In *Kuessipan*, Fontaine offers “a palette patiently painted with portrayals without explanations” (Million, “Felt Theory” 61), and her latest book, *Shuni: Ce que tu dois savoir, Julie* (2019), therefore reads as a follow-up to *Kuessipan* because Fontaine, by directly addressing Julie/Shuni, now offers all the explanations that she refused to give in her debut work.

Besides being a writer, Fontaine works today as a teacher of French in Uashat, and her second book, *Manikanetish: Petite Marguerite*, published in 2017, deals with her experience of returning to the reserve and teaching there. As a successful and (inter-)nationally acclaimed writer, Fontaine is as an Indigenous role model. As I have written elsewhere, Indigenous writers and artists occupy today significant roles of cultural leaders and role models in their communities and nations, and their cultural productions have the catalyzing potential to instill hope among Indigenous populations, and particularly among youth (Janssen, “Le mouvement” 93). As such, Fontaine’s literary oeuvre in general is marked by critical hope, expressed by the author’s

depiction of her community through a loving gaze. *Manikanetish*, in particular, is a gift returned to her students, as Fontaine “dépeint ses élèves avec fierté pour qu’ils voient eux aussi toute la persévérance dont ils font preuve” (“Naomi” *Kwahiatonhk!*). Fontaine therefore consciously transforms her students into their own role models.

Fontaine has also published individual texts in collections and journals, such as *Les bruits du monde* (2012) and *Amun: Nouvelles* (2016) as well as *Littoral* and *Inter, art actuel*. Along with settler educators Olivier Dezutter and Jean-François Létourneau, Fontaine has co-edited the collection *Tracer un chemin/Meshkanatsheu: Écrits des Premiers Peuples* (2017), an anthology in French that seeks to bring francophone Indigenous literatures to the classroom.

As early as in 1976, Antane Kapeshe claims Innu rights to narrative agency in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*: “À mon avis, aujourd’hui c’est plutôt à nous qu’il revient de prendre la parole” (*JSMS* 1976, 39; 2019, 35), and many Innu women have since followed this call for literary self-representation.¹⁷² Fontaine, for example, expresses in *Shuni* the same understanding that positions her mother as the speaking expert of her community and culture when her mother states: “Je suis Innue. Je connais mon peuple, ses blessures, ses besoins. Je crois que je suis tout de même la mieux placée pour parler de ma communauté” (132). Now recognized as a “[g]ardienne de la pensée innue” and a “[v]éritable monument de la littérature des Premières Nations” (“An” *Kwahiatonhk!*), Antane Kapeshe has undeniably established a literary legacy with her oeuvre, and specifically with her autobiography, which is strongly reflected in contemporary Innu women’s writing. As such, her voice continues to resonate in the work of “nombreux écrivains, poètes et artistes de la nouvelle génération” (“An” *Kwahiatonhk!*), such as Cousineau Mollen, Fontaine, Gill, Kanapé Fontaine, and Nolin.

¹⁷² Innu original: “Nin nititenitamun, kashikat anu ninan ishinakuan tshetshi aimiat kassinu anite tipatshimu-mashinaikanit kie anite katshitapakanit uesh ma ute nitassinat” (*JSMS* 2019, 35-37).

The expression “moi, femme innue” in Nolin’s poetry collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* (MPAN 29), and Nolin’s and Cousineau Mollen’s subversive and thus proud self-identification as “sauvagesse” (MPAN 29; BM082 26), for instance, are important intertextual references to Antane Kapeshe. The tone in Kanapé Fontaine’s poetry, on the other hand, clearly echoes Antane Kapeshe’s activist voice. Fontaine, for her part, openly names Antane Kapeshe and the significance of her autobiography in *Shuni*: “Le premier livre de ma nation a été écrit en innu-aimun, *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu* · *Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*. C’est l’œuvre d’An Antane Kapeshe” (37). Fontaine credits Antane Kapeshe’s role as a trailblazer whose literary and activist voice has influenced her own thinking and writing: “Comme la pensée qui s’éclaircit à l’écoute d’une parole fondatrice. Mon histoire m’était enfin racontée” (*Shuni* 37).

Indigenous Expressions of Resurgence

I read Antane Kapeshe’s and Fontaine’s autobiographical narratives as expressions of Indigenous resurgence. Nishnaabeg writer and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson defines Indigenous resurgence as follows in her seminal book *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (2011): “Building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly reinvesting in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions” (17-18). Indigenous resurgence constitutes of a transformative movement aiming at political, legal, economic, cultural, and intellectual sovereignty based on nation-specific traditions. In chapter 6 “Kamakunueshiht mak kauaueshtakanit / La police et les tribunaux” in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, for

example, Antane Kapesh expresses Innu legal resurgence by saying that “[l]a police et les tribunaux ce n’est pas notre culture à nous, c’est celle du Blanc,”¹⁷³ and she continues to heavily critique the police and the justice system, which specifically target and abuse Indigenous Peoples: “Le Blanc n’éprouve pas de honte à ne maltraiter que nous, les Indiens. Il n’a pas honte du fait que nous sommes les seuls à aller constamment en prison et il n’a pas honte de nous traîner chaque jour devant les tribunaux” (*JSMS* 2019, 109). “Lorsque nous vivions notre vie d’Indiens,” Antane Kapesh argues, “nous ne voyions jamais de policiers, nous ne voyions jamais de prisons et nous ne voyions jamais de tribunaux” (*JSMS* 2019, 109), and the anaphora “nous ne voyions jamais” underlines the forcibly imposed nature of the settler police and justice systems on Indigenous societies.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Antane Kapesh alludes to Innu legal systems by saying that “[a]vant que les policiers n’arrivant ici dans notre territoire, nous avions déjà la civilisation nous aussi” (*JSMS* 2019, 109).¹⁷⁵

As a proponent of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty, Acoose critically observes that Indigenous people “have ceded not only vast territories of land, but also the territories of imagination and voice” (“Honoring” 221), and, like L. Simpson and other Indigenous (literary) critics, she therefore calls for the regeneration of Indigenous intellectual traditions through self-representation. Antane Kapesh, in particular, emphasizes her voice as an Innu woman, as exemplified by her use of expressions such as “innushkueuian” (*JSMS* 2019, 12), translated in French as “moi, une femme innu” (*JSMS* 2015, 89) or “moi une Indienne” (*JSMS* 2019, 13) in

¹⁷³ Innu original: “Kamakunueshiht kie kauaeshtakanit namaieu ninan nitinniunna, kauapishit nenu utinniun” (*JSMS* 2019, 108).

¹⁷⁴ Innu original: “Kauapishit apu shakuenimut tshetshi matshi-tutuimit muk^u ninan e inniuiat. Apu shakuenimut muk^u ninan e inniuiat nanitam kamakunueshiutshuapit tshetshi pitutsheiat kie apu shakuenimut eshakumitshishikua anite kauaeshtakannit tshetshi pimipanimut. E inniuiat nitinniunna ka ishinniuiat, apu nita ut uapamitshit kamakunuesht, kamakunueshiutshuap apu nita ut uapatamat, kauaeshtakanit apu nita ut uapatamat” (*JSMS* 2019, 108).

¹⁷⁵ Innu original: “Kamakunueshiht eshk^u eka ka takushiniht ute nitassinat, kie ninan shash nikanuenitetan innishun” (*JSMS* 2019, 108).

the preface to her autobiography. Goenpul literary scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that “[a]s subjects of their own gaze, the personal is political in Indigenous women’s texts” and she concludes that “self-presentation by Indigenous women is a political act” (*Talkin’ Up* 2, 3).

Fontaine’s literary work, on the other hand, is marked by her imagination, as she announces in the very first sentence of her opening text in *Kuessipan*: “J’ai inventé des vies” (9). Fontaine draws on Innu storytelling traditions, but she simultaneously creates new/alternative artistic traditions by blending autobiographical and fictionalized writing in *Kuessipan*, and she thus demonstrates the evolving nature of Indigenous intellectual traditions. As a transformative movement, Indigenous resurgence involves change. Métis scholar Emma LaRocque makes an important difference between natural and forced change: “Change was not and is not new to Indian and Metis culture. The issue is to differentiate between change that is imposed and change that comes from free choice. And change that is imposed is oppression” (“Tides” 77). Indigenous resurgence can thus be described as a conscious movement of change that seeks to reverse the effects of settler colonialism and oppression by regenerating Indigenous ways of being and doing.

In her feminist exploration of Indigenous resurgence in “Being Indigenous Feminists: Resurgences Against Contemporary Patriarchy” (2017), Cree political science scholar Gina Starblanket identifies the following three dimensions of the discourse on resurgence:

“First, I consider its temporal dimension, which looks at the way in which the discourse of resurgence invokes the past to inform our present and future-oriented theorizations; second, I explore the grounded or land-based dimension of resurgence, which involves looking to the land as a source of inspiration and education; and third, I examine the ‘everyday’ character of resurgence, which broadens the focus of political efforts from

large-scale, long-term forms of change to include those acts that take place within our daily relations and interactions” (24).

Antane Kapesh repetitively refers to the past when the Innu still lived on the land in her autobiography. Expressions, such as “vivre comme autrefois” (*JSMS* 2019, 65), evoke the Innu nomadic past.¹⁷⁶ In chapter 3 “Kakusseshiu-tshishkutamatun / L’éducation des Blancs,” more specifically, Antane Kapesh explains that the Innu still practised their nomadic way of life when the residential school in Sept-Îles was built in the early 1950s: “À l’époque où nous, les Indiens Montagnais, vivions dans le bois, on nous a construit une école” (*JSMS* 2019, 61).¹⁷⁷ Moreover, Antane Kapesh is a strong proponent of land-based education to revitalize “la vraie langue indienne que nous avons perdue”¹⁷⁸ because of forced settlement and urbanization: “Et il pourrait y avoir des Indiens qui lui donnent des cours dans le bois afin qu’il connaisse le bois. Nous, les Indiens, prétendons qu’il serait important que l’enfant indien connaisse le bois, il y a des enfants qui aiment y aller” (*JSMS* 2019, 75, 77).¹⁷⁹ The conditional tense (“pourrait”) indicates that land-based education in Innu-aimun was not a common practice in the settler educational system at that time, it rather constitutes an Innu teaching practice that Antane Kapesh seeks to revitalize.

Fontaine’s *Kuessipan*, on the other hand, is characterized by her description of everyday life and the everyday character of Indigenous resurgence. In her opening text, Fontaine acknowledges from the beginning “la difficulté d’aborder le récit du quotidien dans une réserve” (Harel 77), a place marked by colonial oppression: “J’aurais aimé que les choses soient plus faciles à dire, à conter, à mettre en page, sans rien espérer, juste être comprise” (*Kuessipan* 9).

¹⁷⁶ Innu original: “tshetshi ishinniuiat miam ueshkat” (*JSMS* 2019, 66).

¹⁷⁷ Innu original: “Ume ninan eshinniuiat *mautania*, anite minashkuat ka ut inniuiat, tutakanipan nikatshishkutamatsheutshuapinan, patetat-tatunnu ashu nish^{ti} ka itashtet mishta-atshitashun” (*JSMS* 2019, 60).

¹⁷⁸ Innu original: “nana tshitshue nitinnu-aimunna ka unitaiat” (*JSMS* 2019, 78).

¹⁷⁹ Innu original: “Kie tshipa tau innu tshetshi tshishkutamuat auassa anite minashkuat tshetshi nishtuapatak innu-auass. Uesh ma e inniuiat nitissishuenan innu-auass tshipa apatannu tshetshi nishtuapatak anite minashkuat uesh ma tau innu-auass menuatak tshetshi itutet anite minashkuat” (*JSMS* 2019, 80).

Fontaine then asks: “Mais qui veut lire des mots comme drogue, inceste, alcool, solitude, suicide, chèque en bois, viol?” (*Kuessipan* 9) and, by listing these so-called social ills entangling Indigenous life, she affirms that “[t]he secrets of Indigenous life are not secret” (120), as Brant states in *Writing as Witness*. The last three sentences of the opening text in *Kuessipan* emphasize Fontaine’s difficulty to write Innu everyday life: “J’ai mal et je n’ai encore rien dit. Je n’ai parlé de personne. Je n’ose pas” (9). Fontaine’s statement alludes to what Cree scholar Margaret Kovach identifies, in her seminal book *Indigenous Methodologies* (2009), as “an ethical responsibility to not upset a relational balance” (178), here the balance between the author/speaker and (members of) her community. As illustrated by Fontaine in her opening text, fictionalized and embellished writing based on lived experiences and observation helps her deal with this challenge and respect her “relational responsibilities,” which, according to Kovach, mutually “exist between the researcher and the Indigenous community” (178), or, in this instance, between the author and her Innu community. Kovach’s “relational methodology,” as Moreton-Robinson calls it, “involves being grounded in tribal epistemology, having a decolonizing and ethical aim” (Moreton-Robinson, “Relationality” 72), “seeks to genuinely serve others, and is inseparable from respect and reciprocity” (Kovach 178), elements that can all be found in Fontaine’s literary work. Armstrong expresses a similar understanding of relational responsibility in terms of the effect of spoken words, which, as I suggest, also applies to written words and storytelling in general:

When you speak, when you take language and put it out for someone to come up against, you not only have to assume responsibility for speaking those words, but you are responsible for the effect of those words on the person you are addressing *and* the thousands of years of tribal memory packed into your understanding of those words. So,

when you speak, you need to know what you are speaking about. You need to perceive or imagine the impact of your words on the listener and understand the responsibility that goes with *being* a speaker. (“Words” 27-28; original emphasis)

Relational or collective responsibility as a framework for ethically responsible writing embeds the “necessity to bring about positive change for Indigenous people” (Moreton-Robinson, “Relationality” 72). Fontaine and Antane Kapesh both respect this necessity by using what Unanga scholar Eve Tuck calls a “desire-based framework [which] is an antidote to damage-centered” narratives “by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope” (“Suspending Damage” 416). In doing so, Fontaine and Antane Kapesh write “for the benefit of [their] community” (Moreton-Robinson, “Relationality” 72) because they are “oriented towards the positive, not the negative” (Olsen Harper 189) despite or precisely because of their literary treatise of settler colonial oppression and violence as well as Indigenous resistance/resilience and survivance. The axiology of desire, as proposed by Tuck, evokes Starblanket’s temporal dimension of Indigenous resurgence: “Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*. [...] Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. It is integral to our humanness” (Tuck, “Suspending Damage” 417; original emphasis). As such, a framework of desire accounts for the loss or weakening, but, more importantly, points to the future by integrating hope.

L. Simpson’s resurgent element of regenerating Indigenous intellectual traditions is, in my understanding, a call for prioritizing Indigenous methodologies and theories when reading and analyzing Indigenous literatures. To draw on Indigenous theories for literary analysis of Indigenous writing means to valorize Indigenous ways of storytelling and to respect Indigenous

intellectual sovereignty. In accordance with many Indigenous women scholars and writers, such as Janice Acoose (*Iskwewak*), Lee Maracle (“Oratory”), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (*Dancing and As*), Kimberly Blaeser (“Native Literature”), Joséphine Bacon (Bacon and Depelteau, “An Antane Kapeshe”), and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine (“Poétique”), I read the literary texts under discussion as theory for literary analysis and Indigenous feminist expressions. Bacon and Depelteau, for instance, state that Antane Kapeshe’s work “est un geste politique fort, car il propose une théorie de la colonisation du Nutshimit” (257), and they conclude that *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* “est exceptionnel pour l’époque et encore aujourd’hui par ce geste, mais aussi pour sa théorie de la colonisation articulée par une innushkueu” (258). Bacon and Depelteau emphasize Antane Kapeshe’s voice and perspective as an Innushkueu, an Innu woman, and her theorization of settler colonialism through literary writing. As such, Antane Kapeshe’s autobiography “model[s] a culture-specific theoretical performance” (Acoose, “Honoring” 221), describing, in an accessible language, how and why the Innu were colonized. Kanapé Fontaine affirms in her talk “La poétique de la relation au territoire” (2017) that the Innu prefer to express how they see the world by using a philosophical or artistic language instead of a Western scientific language: “j’ai l’impression qu’on a souvent nommé cette relation par des poèmes, par de la musique, par différentes manifestations plutôt artistiques, musicales, sensibles, mais on l’a rarement expliqué de la manière dont la société dominante a tendance à expliquer des éléments, comme la relation au territoire, par exemple” (03mm22ss). It is thus paramount to remain “alert for methods and voices that seem to arise out of the literature itself (this as opposed to critical approaches applied from an already established critical language or attempts to make the literature fit already established genres and categories

of meaning” (232), as Blaeser contends in her essay “Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre” (1993).

Similar to Blaeser’s understanding of Indigenous literary criticism, Osage scholar Robert Warrior argues that it is critical for Indigenous writers and scholars to “struggle for sovereignty, *intellectual sovereignty*, and allow the definition and articulation of what that means to emerge as we critically reflect on that struggle” (“Intellectual Sovereignty” 6; original emphasis).¹⁸⁰ According to Warrior, “a growing number of American Indian intellectuals are realizing that American Indians must produce criticism as well as literature if the work of Native poets and novelists is not to become merely one more part of American Indian existence to be dissected and divvied up between white ‘experts’” (“Intellectual Sovereignty” 6). I agree with Blaeser and Warrior, and I am convinced that Indigenous literary criticism should be based mainly on Indigenous theories and practices. As a result, I base my literary analyses on Indigenous theories to ethically engage with Antane Kapeshe’s and Fontaine’s work. This means that I use Innu/Indigenous theories of storytelling and literary criticism and that I consciously refuse to use Western categories of literary classification, as employed by other literary critics. Carrière, for example, reads Fontaine’s *Kuessipan* as a work of “autofiction,” a term “widely used in Francophone literary criticism,” which “blends autobiographical and novelist genres to foster a personal, memoir-like work of fiction” (70). While literary analysis based on European concepts, such as autofiction, may seem valid for many settler critics, Warrior critiques how the “embrace of European theory limits” Indigenous literary criticism, and he argues that “the framework of intellectual sovereignty provides [an] alternative means through which to engage” Indigenous literatures (“Intellectual Sovereignty” 6). Antane Kapeshe, for example, never received a Western

¹⁸⁰ Indigenous literary criticism is much more developed in English-Canada and the United States than it is in Quebec.

education and, like Acoose whose “writing-self has been educated culturally by Nêhiyaw-Métis-Nahkawè stories that transfuse culture” (“Honoring” 221), she was solely educated in Innu traditions of storytelling, the foundation of her writing, as Gill reminds us in her short review. Antane Kapesch’s autobiographical narrative is therefore based on Innu storytelling traditions and should not be read as a Western autobiography. Reder argues, in her essay “Indigenous Autobiography in Canada: Uncovering Intellectual Traditions” (2015), that “Canadian Indigenous authors who write autobiographically are not borrowing or having imposed on them a European genre; they are drawing on ideas and traditions that their people have always considered, traditions which [...] include writing and speaking autobiographically” (185). Antane Kapesch and other “fore-runners” as well as “subsequent generations of Indigenous autobiographers draw on the traditions of their specific nations to narrate their lives” (“Indigenous Autobiography” 184), Reder contends, and I argue that Antane Kapesch and Fontaine ground their autobiographical writing in the Innu tradition of the *tipatshimun*. Instead of attempting to classify Innu women’s writing according to established European genres or to analyze it as postcolonial literature, I want to illustrate how Innu women writers adhere to their nation’s traditions and modes of storytelling while their work simultaneously and consciously “stretches the boundaries” of their storytelling traditions (Monture-Angus, “Native America” 22).

Like many other Innu/Indigenous women writers, Antane Kapesch and Fontaine both “speak as members of specific First Nations (whether or not they have status, are band members, or live on the reserve), as human beings more generally, and also as women” (Lacombe, “On Critical Frameworks” 257). This multi-perspective is particularly reflected through Antane Kapesch’s use of the Innu term “innushkueu” (*JSMS* 2019, 202), which points simultaneously to

her Innu identity, her position as a human being (“innu” meaning human being in English) and a woman (“ishkueu” meaning woman in English). Fontaine, on the other hand, does not particularly emphasize her identity as an Innu woman, but through her female narrator, her literary work reflects this perspective of an Innu woman. In addition, I would add to Lacombe’s three essential components of Indigenous women writers’ perspective that Antane Kapesh and Fontaine both speak as mothers and that their writing is clearly marked by their experience of being mothers. Antane Kapesh, for example, dedicates *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* to her eight children (JSMS 2019, 11), whereas Fontaine dedicates *Kuessipan* to her son “Marcorel, ma poésie” (*Kuessipan* 5), titles the book’s last section “Nikuss,” meaning “mon fils/my son” (*Kuessipan* 26), and writes about collective experiences with her son. Naming and placing future generations in autobiographically-based texts ensures, according to Acoose, that “they become rooted in collective memories and linked to the past; their textual presence ensures that future generations will always re-member [Indigenous] traditions” (“Honoring” 220). In doing so, both Innu women writers adhere to a future-oriented approach that is influenced by a living past and present.

I read Innu women’s writing as expressions of Indigenous feminist thought. Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine contends, indeed, that “être féministe, pour une femme autochtone, est une évidence” (Collard). In stark contrast, Fontaine declares in *Shuni* that she is not a feminist: “Je peux bien te l’avouer à toi, Shuni, je ne suis pas féministe,” and she explains: “Je ne ressens pas le besoin de me défendre en tant que femme. Je n’ai jamais douté de ma valeur de femme. On ne m’a pas éduquée ainsi” (*Shuni* 112). Fontaine recognizes the important work of feminism for women living in patriarchal societies: “Je conçois qu’ailleurs les femmes aient dû se battre pour leurs droits et pour l’égalité. Dans les sociétés dominées par les hommes, forcément leur

victoire a changé le monde,” but she doubts its significance for Innu societies, which, as she stresses, have traditionally valued women highly: “Mais Shuni, les choses sont bien différentes chez moi. Mon oncle m’a raconté que lorsque les hommes revenaient de plusieurs jours de chasse, bredouilles et affamés, affaiblis par les longs déplacements, ce sont les femmes qui les nourrissaient grâce à la chasse au petit gibier. Ces hommes savaient que leur survie dépendait d’elles. Ils les respectaient pour ça. Ils les aimaient” (*Shuni* 112). Stó:lō feminist Lee Maracle “categorically refuses the use of gender complementarity as a useful opposing political stance for women” (Carrière 67), and she thus has a strong opinion on gender complementarity, as described above by Fontaine, and its impact on Indigenous feminist theories and practices: “Although I believe the term gender complementary, coupled with the term governance, describes many societies of the past, it does not address our situation today. It unashamedly suggests that because we were gender complementary in the past we should not be feminists today. A different past does not form the foundation for opposition to feminism” (Maracle, “Indigenous Women and Power” 129). Moreover, Maracle argues that “Indigenous feminism seeks to the restoration of matriarchal authority and the restoration of male responsibility to these matriarchal structures to reinstate respect and support for the women within them. The dismissal of Indigenous feminism silences the whole” (Maracle, “Indigenous Women and Power” 149). So how are these two opposing, contradictory positions – of being an Indigenous feminist or not – commensurable? In their seminal essay “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy,” Indigenous feminists Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill state that “many scholars who never identified as Native feminists have made valuable contributions to Native feminist theories” (12), and I argue that this can also be true for Indigenous women writers who have never identified as Indigenous feminists, such as

Antane Kapesh, or who have even refused being considered an Indigenous feminist, such as Fontaine. In *Kuessipan*, Fontaine deals with themes that allude to patriarchal violence and settler colonial oppression, and I thus argue that Indigenous feminist theories can be used as “[a]s an ideological and activist framework that seeks to shed light on Indigenous women’s experiences of heteropatriarchal and colonial oppression” (Starblanket 21) to read and interpret Fontaine’s debut work.

Drawing on the observations of Indigenous feminists Shari M. Huhndorf (Yup’ik) and Cheryl Suzack (Anishinaabe) in “Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues” (2010), Carrière argues that “art and literature have had a key but critically neglected role in the development of Indigenous feminisms” (64), and she indirectly affirms that Indigenous story provides theory. Starblanket emphasizes that “Indigenous feminist analysis has the potential to provide an analytical framework that is attentive to the many dimensions of colonial violence, and can guide the resurgence of ways of being that are free from heteronormative logics of empowerment” (21). Although Fontaine resists being considered a feminist, her literary texts allow a reading as expressions of inclusive Indigenous feminist thought. This is best exemplified by the female narrator’s expressions of care for all members of the community in *Kuessipan*. Indigenous feminist Joyce Green emphasizes in the second edition of *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2017) that “Indigenous feminist work is done in the service of women, but also of children, men and communities” (“Taking More Account” 16), and this inclusive approach is inherent in Fontaine’s writing. In accordance with Carrière, I read Fontaine’s *Kuessipan* as an “enactment of a feminist ethics of recognition, relationality, and care – through a deeply localized, specific depiction of daily Innu life on the reserve” (78). Moreover, both Antane Kapesh and Fontaine express through their writing “values typical of Native cultures, where a

sense of self and the individual is grounded within a sense of responsibility to community and relationships” (Anderson, *Recognition* 29), which might be called an ethics of care for the community. For many Indigenous feminists, such as Kim TallBear and Audra Simpson, “Indigenous feminism became synonymous with ‘acting in good relation’ and ‘being responsible’ to community” (Nickel 2).

Question of Language

Acoose reminds us that “Campbell is one of the first few Indigenous women who appropriated the colonizer’s language to name her oppressors, identify the oppressor’s unjust systems, laws, and processes, and subsequently work towards de-colonization” (“*Halfbreed*” 139). Antane Kapeshe, in contrast, refused the imposed French language and wrote her books in Innu-aimun. In a short biographical note in *Tanite Nene Etutamin Nitassi? / Qu’as-tu fait de mon pays?*, it says that “An Antane Kapeshe n’est pas allée à l’école des Blancs. Son éducation lui vient entièrement de ses parents. Sa seule langue était l’innu. C’est d’ailleurs dans cette langue qu’elle a écrit” (43). I understand Antane Kapeshe’s “inability” to write in the colonizer’s language as her conscious decision to refuse being acculturated and assimilated into mainstream Québécois culture, as she states in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*: “quand on a pris mes enfants – qui sont des enfants indiens – pour leur donner une éducation de Blancs, je savais que moi je n’irais jamais à l’école. Aujourd’hui quand je vois cette éducation, je n’ai aucun regret car je comprends parfaitement que l’éducation des Blancs ne vaut rien pour nous, les Indiens” (JSMS 2019, 75).¹⁸¹ Antane Kapeshe illustrates the uselessness of

¹⁸¹ Innu original “Uesh ma nitauassimat e innu-auassiuht ka utinakaniht tshetshi kakusseshiu-tshishkutamuakaniht, nin nitshisseniteti tshé eka nita tshishkutamakauian. Kashikat uapatamani kakusseshiu-tshishkutamatun, apu tshékuan anite mitataman uesh ma nimiru-nishtuten, apu tshékuan ishpitenitakuak ut ninan e inniuiat” (JSMS 2019, 76).

Western education for the Innu people, from her perspective, which celebrates Innu ways of being and doing by critically lamenting how her children, who were forcefully acculturated through residential school attendance, have gradually lost their culture and become unable to understand and speak Innu-aimun and thus to communicate with their mother in their native language: “À cause de l’éducation de Blancs qu’ils ont reçue, aujourd’hui mes enfants ne connaissent rien de leur culture indienne, ils perdent leur langue indienne, ils mangent à peine de leur nourriture indienne, ils ont perdu leurs coutumes vestimentaires” (*JSMS* 2019, 73).¹⁸²

Indigenous languages are deeply connected to individual and collective identity, and the ability to speak their Indigenous language – or the loss of it – influences Indigenous women’s sense of self. “Women who have managed to hang onto their Indigenous language have found that it helps maintain and preserve their Indigenous identity” (*Recognition* 108), Cree/Métis feminist Kim Anderson emphasizes, and this is particularly evident in Antane Kapeshe’s writing, where she expresses a strong sense of Indigenous female identity, symbolized by the “nombreux marqueurs de subjectivité qui sont intégrés dans le récit” (Huberman 114). Fontaine highlights Antane Kapeshe’s pride, an expression of her Indigenous identity, which she identifies as being deeply embedded into the Innu traditional lifestyle:

Dans cette œuvre fondatrice, [Antane] Kapeshe se dit fière de ses racines. Fière malgré l’incroyable impasse historique qui nous a fait devenir petits aux yeux des nouveaux arrivants. Fière malgré la haine, le mépris, les préjugés et les réserves. Fière parce qu’elle

¹⁸² Innu original: “Tanite anitshenat nitauassimat nenu ut katshi kakusseshiu-tshishkutamuakaniht, kashikanit utinnu-inniunuau apu tshekuannu anite nishtuapatahk, utinnu-aimunuau unitauatm utinnu-mitshimuau shash minausht mitshuat, ka itashpishuht e innu-auassiuht unitauat” (*JSMS* 2019, 74).

Antane Kapeshe adds: “À présent on donne des cours de langue montagnaise à nos enfants. Le gouvernement aujourd’hui fait semblant de redonner aux enfants indiens une éducation indienne, uniquement pour nous contenter” (*JSMS* 2019, 75). Innu original: “Anutshish innu-tshishkutamuakanuat nitauassiminanat. Tshishe-utshimau kashikanit kutshipanitakashu kau tshetshi innu-tshishkutamuat innu-auassa muk^u tshetshi minuenitamat e inniuiat” (*JSMS* 2019, 76).

possédait, ce que peu possèdent désormais, la connaissance du territoire. Elle savait vivre à travers les espaces sans carte et sans boussole. Sans frontière. Elle puisait dans ses savoirs la force de se tenir debout à une époque où mon peuple était victime de son propre doute. (Fontaine in Antane Kapesesh, *JSMS* 2019, 13)

Acoose contends that Indigenous women who write “from places of strength – their own specific cultures [...] provide an abundance of new ways to see and thus to understand Indigenous peoples” (“Post Halfbreed” 31-32), and this is particularly true for Antane Kapesesh and Fontaine.

Anderson also addresses the loss of Indigenous languages that many Indigenous women have experienced: “Those who lost their languages because of residential school attendance or other pressures to assimilate have felt tremendous loss and separation from their people” (*Recognition* 108). Fontaine, for example, acknowledges her “incapacité à écrire correctement l’innu-aimun” and her restricted vocabulary of Innu-aimun, when she is asked by a settler journalist: “*Pourquoi choisir d’écrire en français?*” (*Shuni* 37; original emphasis). At the same time, Fontaine expresses her desire to relearn her mother tongue, and she includes a litany of Innu words in *Kuessipan* which “functions as a glossary of terms to relay particular forms of kinship epitomized by Indigenous philosophies of relationality” (Carrière 77):

Neka, ma mère. *Mashkuss*, petit ours. *Nikuss*, mon fils. *Mikun*, plume. *Anushkan*, framboise. *Auetiss*, bébé castor. *Ishkuess*, fille. *Nitanish*, ma fille. *Tshiuetin*, vent du nord. *Mishtapeu*, le grand homme. *Menutan*, averse. *Shukapesh*, l’homme qui est robuste. *Kanataushiht*, les chasseurs. *Pishu*, lynx. *Kakuss*, petit du porc-épic. *Kupaniesh*, un homme qui est employé. *Tshishteshinu*, notre grand frère. *Tshukuminu*, notre grand-mère. *Nuta*, mon père. (Fontaine, *Kuessipan* 26; original emphasis)

According to Carrière, “[s]uch invocations of community and relation convey not so much a form of nostalgia but a prolonged sense of time, a present stretched by a living past and an unknown future, a sense of time and knowledge that the narrator has learned from elders and ancestors” (77). The above passage is therefore a poignant example of Indigenous resurgence as understood by Starblanket who emphasizes the temporal, grounded or relational, and everyday dimensions of Indigenous resurgence.

Moreover, the cited passage demonstrates the narrator’s certain knowledge of her mother tongue and Innu culture as well as her desire to rekindle this knowledge through the spoken and written word. Fontaine alludes to the difficult process of linguistic resistance through language preservation and revitalization in *Shuni*, for example, when she evokes Innu Elders who tend to “innuïser les noms” so that Julie becomes Shuni (39); a strategy that seeks to reverse the colonial process of linguistic assimilation and linguicide, notably through the forced process of “francisation” in Quebec. Antane Kapesh stresses the difficulty of language learning in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*: “Moi je crois qu’une fois que l’enfant indien a perdu sa langue indienne, il lui sera extrêmement difficile de la retrouver” (JSMS 2019, 75),¹⁸³ and she also deals with feelings of regret due to the loss of language and culture:

Je suis d’avis qu’il est très important de bien enseigner aux enfants indiens – garçons et filles – toutes les choses de notre culture indienne parce que s’ils connaissent pas du tout leur culture, il pourrait y en avoir qui le regrettent plus tard. De nos jours, nous entendons

¹⁸³ Innu original: “Nititeniten nin, innu-auass katshi unitat utinnu-aimun, anumat tshika animannu kau tshetshi katshitinak” (JSMS 2019, 76-78).

souvent dire que tous les Indiens des autres endroits qui ont perdu leur culture et leur langue indiennes ont des regrets. (JSMS 2019, 79)¹⁸⁴

Although Antane Kapeshe never wrote in French herself, she is often celebrated as “la première femme autochtone du Canada à avoir publié des ouvrages en français,” but Dezutter and colleagues rightfully recall that “[s]es ouvrages ont d’abord été écrits en *innu-aimun* avant d’être traduits en français” (164). Fluent in her mother tongue, Antane Kapeshe writes in the Innu language although no standardized spelling system existed at that time.¹⁸⁵ “*Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* was published in a single, bilingual Innu-French edition, something that was unheard of in 1976,” as Henzi notes (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 282). To realize this pivotal writing project in bilingual form, Antane Kapeshe collaborated with linguist and anthropologist José Mailhot, who translated the text from Innu-aimun into French (in collaboration with Anne-Marie André and André Mailhot).¹⁸⁶ Innu poet Joséphine Bacon remembers this collective work: “Je la vois encore, dans le grenier de José!”

¹⁸⁴ Innu original: “Nititeniten nin mishta-apatant tshetshi minu-tshishkutamuakanit innu-auass, napess kie peikuan ishkuess, kassinu eishinakuak nitinnu-inniunna uesh ma innu-auass eka nashpit nishtuapatak utinnun, tshipa tshi tau tshetshi mitatak nete aishkat. Uesh ma mate anite aitassit ka itashit innu ka unitat utinnu-inniun kie utinnu-aimun, kashikat mitshetuu nipetenan e mitatak nenu” (JSMS 2019, 80-82).

¹⁸⁵ In the entry “History of Writing in Innu,” it is specified that: “The Innu language was written by missionaries – Jesuits, among others – who wanted to learn how to speak the language. [...] The Jesuits’ way of writing was passed down to the Innu over a long time and influenced the modern Innu writing system. Writing in Innu was standardized after a consultation process with speakers that began in the 1980s and ended in the 1990s. As a result, there now exists a standardized spelling system for the Innu language, which is official for all dialects and communities, with the exception of Mashteuatsh in Lac-Saint-Jean.” Henzi specifies that the Tshakapesh Institute “oversaw and funded the process of standardizing the spelling of the Innu language [from 1989 to 1997],” which helped revising Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*: “For this English version, as well as for the recently released 2019 French version by Mémoire d’encrier, the 1976 text was entirely revised and the spelling corrected in accordance with the publishing policy of Tshakapesh Institute” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 283-284).

¹⁸⁶ Settler scholar Maurizio Gatti excluded Indigenous literary works that were translated into French, such as Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, from his anthology *Littérature amérindienne du Québec* (2004, expanded 2009). He explains: “Quand un texte est traduit d’une langue à une autre par une personne qui n’est pas l’auteur originel, des adaptations et des changements linguistiques sont inévitables. Ainsi, on lira une réécriture du traducteur, mais qui ne peut plus être considérée au même titre que le texte source. Lire *Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* en français, c’est lire An Antane-Kapeshe à travers José Mailhot. Quoique la traduction soit fidèle et compétente, elle demeure une traduction” (Gatti, *Littérature amérindienne* 18-19).

(Bacon and Depelteau 256). Henzi argues that the bilingual format was “meant to reach the members of her community and instill a desire for resistance and to fight back, but also the broader Québécois audience, as a testimonial account of what was going on within communities” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 286). Moreover, the holographic edition of Antane Kapesh’s bilingual work testifies, just like Fontaine’s litany of Innu words accompanied by their French translation, to the resurgent nature of their writing because it encourages language learning, defined by L. Simpson as a central element of Indigenous resurgence.

The question of language, however, is more than a simple linguistic choice. Given the fact that Antane Kapesh never received any formal Western education, I argue that her narrative is essentially based on Innu traditions of orature and storytelling. For example, the use of repetition in Antane Kapesh’s work is a marker of oral forms of storytelling. “Dans mon livre,” Antane Kapesh insists, “il n’y a pas de parole de Blancs” (*JSMS* 2019, 13), which refers, of course, to her refusal to integrate the colonizer’s “original” voice – Antane Kapesh includes, nonetheless, a fictionalized version of the colonizer’s voice expressing what they should have said if they had told the truth.¹⁸⁷ Spokane scholar Gloria Bird contends, in *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, that “[o]ne of the functions of language is to construct our world. We are the producers of this world who create ourselves as well as our social reality, and we do this through language,” and she stresses that the “possibilities are unlimited” (in Harjo and Bird 39). Bird’s statement evokes Tuck’s desire-based framework for Indigenous narratives, which acknowledges the status quo of Indigenous social realities (often marked by colonial oppression) but encourages future-oriented approaches of storytelling. As such, “[w]riting offers both a means to resist and an opportunity to reinvent” (Anderson, *Recognition* 119). Antane Kapesh, for example, resists colonial domination

¹⁸⁷ Innu original: “Ute nimashinaikanit apu takuannit kauapishit utaimun” (*JSMS* 2019, 12).

by writing in Innu-aimun, a language she seeks to preserve and revitalize for future generations. On the other hand, Indigenous women, such as Fontaine, who have been educated in colonial languages, whether in English or French, employ those languages as a tool to resist, to reinvent, and to create. Monture Angus, for example notes that Indigenous women writers “most recently appropriated [colonial language] to tell things our way, through our own eyes, and in our own voice” (“Native America” 23), a statement that evokes the concept of Indigenous herstory. Monture Angus contends that Indigenous women writers “have learned to use a language that was forced upon us to create powerful messages which convey to you our experience,” a process that she calls “talking out” (“Native America” 23, 41n9). This process of “talking out” in the French language is evident in Fontaine’s writing where she shares the Innu experience of everyday life on the reserve. Like Antane Kapeshe’s narrative at her time, Fontaine’s “parole est tout à fait actuelle, sans fioriture, masque et apprêt, comme s’il revenait à Fontaine de nommer la réalité d’une vie actuelle” (Harel 79).

Antane Kapeshe employs a direct, often denunciatory language that also reflects her anger. As mentioned above, early Indigenous women’s writing has regularly been critiqued for being too angry, and settler literary criticism has dismissed anger as an inappropriate literary strategy. LaRocque critiques that Indigenous women’s “anger, legitimate as it was and is, was exaggerated as “militant” and used as an excuse not to hear us. There was little comprehension of an articulate anger reflecting an awakening and a call to liberation, not a psychological problem to be defused in a therapist’s room” (qtd. in Million, “Felt Theory” 63). Justice seeks to reinstate anger as a legitimate literary strategy by saying that “settler colonialism is unpleasant,” and he adds: “It doesn’t get any less so when we use less provocative language; if anything, erasing those complexities just becomes another form of violence” (*Why* 16). Dismissing anger

as an appropriate literary strategy has thus been another violent act of oppression that upheld colonial hierarchies. However, Indigenous women writers, such as Antane Kapesh, reclaim their right to be angry because they witnessed and continue to experience the violence of settler colonialism. According to Kanapé Fontaine, one of the challenges for Indigenous Peoples is how to transform the inherited trauma, experienced violence, and embodied anger into an energy that will radically transform and innovate our society (“Réflexion” 14mm52ss). For many Indigenous women, writing constitutes the tool for transformation and change. Linda Hogan, for example, states that “all the people I know who write, write because they feel it’s important to do so, and that it contributes to some kind of change” (qtd. in Akiwenzie-Damm, “We Belong” 89). Monture Angus emphasizes the liberating, healing, and resurgent effect of articulating her anger through writing: “My writing is very much soul cleansing. I write out the anger and the anguish of being an oppressed person. I write until I can live and celebrate my Mohawk identity again. Perhaps this is resistance; it is also survival” (“Native America” 27). In her talk “La poétique de la relation au territoire” (2017), Kanapé Fontaine, more specifically, identifies poetry as “une espèce d’exorcisme de toute la rage” (12mm20ss). For many Indigenous women, writing thus constitutes an act of emotional liberation, and expressing the felt anger is a necessary step towards healing. Similar to Kanapé Fontaine’s poetic exorcism, Brant openly states:

My point is that I was able to use writing to heal a wound that was very deep and festering. I was angry — writing brought me calm. I was obsessing about the past — writing gave me insight into the future. I was in pain — writing cooled the pain, brought me out of that condition. Writing was/is Medicine. It is the only thing I know that brings complete wholeness while it is making a visitation. Making love comes close — orgasm, like writing, is a spiritual communication. (*Writing as Witness* 119)

Like many other Indigenous women writers, Linda Hogan believes that “words have a great potential for healing, in all respects,” but she reminds us that “we have a need to learn them, to find a way to speak first the problem, the truth, against destruction, then to find a way to use language to put things back together, to live respectfully, to praise and celebrate earth, to love” (qtd. in Akiwenzie-Damm, “We Belong” 90). Antane Kapeshe’s anger helps her “speak the problem” and express her opposition to destruction.

Fontaine avoids anger as a literary strategy. Instead, her writing constitutes a narrative of love – for her family, community, nation, culture, and territory. Early in *Kuessipan*, Fontaine evokes how she uses fictionalization to create her narrative of love: “L’homme au tambour ne m’a jamais parlé de lui. J’ai tissé d’après ses mains usées, d’après son dos courbé. Il marmonnait une langue vieille, éloignée. J’ai prétendu tout connaître de lui. L’homme que j’ai inventé, je l’aimais” (*Kuessipan* 9). In *Shuni*, Fontaine emphasizes this narrative of love gifted to her community and the Innu people by declaring: “j’aime ma communauté. J’aime les Innus. Mon peuple. Ma nation” (85). Fontaine understands love as the most powerful way to transform our society and world, as she openly states in *Shuni*: “Je pourrais parler très fort, parler très bien. Dire des mots que personne n’a jamais prononcés avant moi. Je pourrais étudier l’histoire dans ses moindres failles, la récrire. Je pourrais passer ma vie entière à me battre contre tous les préjugés qui nous écrasent. Je pourrais t’écrire des milliers de lettres. Mais je crois sincèrement que c’est l’amour qui changera le monde” (86). Whether it is through the assertion of anger or love, both Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine express “sensual, emotive experiences [that] speak to Indigenous modes of persistence that transcend the legal language of the state, [and that] offer an incredible arsenal for imagining other possibilities” (Fagan Bidwell and McKegney 313).

Fontaine, in particular, emphasizes in *Shuni* that “l’Innu est sensitive,” and she adds: “C’est notre plus belle force et notre plus grande faiblesse” (147).

“Writing as Witness” – Innu Intellectual Traditions

In her preface to the 2019 re-edition of *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, Fontaine credits Antane Kapeshe for telling historical events from the Innu perspective: “Elle me racontait l’Histoire, celle que je n’avais pas entendue. La mienne. Un récit brutal, violent, impossible. Elle m’a appris que j’avais un passé auquel rattacher la flamme qui me consumait. Ce désir de me tenir droite, loin des préjugés, loin des mensonges, loin, très loin de la haine de soi. J’ai cru chacune de ses paroles” (Fontaine in Antane Kapeshe, *JSMS* 2019, 6). Fontaine (re-) discovers history through the eyes and voice of Antane Kapeshe, and her auto-historical narrative serves as a significant tool for restorying settler history as past and ongoing events of violent settler colonialism. Though studying the Indigenous context in the settler state of Australia, Anne Brewster emphasizes the importance of Indigenous autohistory and testimonial life writing as counter-narratives to Western historiography written from the colonial viewpoint: “The Aboriginal version of how Australia was settled (or invaded) has been invisible in the sense that it has not been public knowledge; it has not been included in history books” (xii). Indigenous autobiographies, such as Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, are therefore important historical counter-narratives. “Given the fact that most of settler North America has consistently been either wilfully or circumstantially deaf to the words and perspectives of Indigenous peoples throughout colonial history,” Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice states, “it is hardly surprising that the

issue of *voice* is both profoundly personal as well as political in Indigenous writing and oratory today” (“Significant Spaces Between” 116; original emphasis).

Antane Kapesh opens her second chapter “Ashini ka mishkakanit ute tshiuwetinit / La découverte du minéral dans le Nord” with the following statement: “Ceci est l’histoire de Tshishennish Pien et des Pères Babel et Arnaud. Vous ne trouverez cette histoire nulle part dans un livre car avant que le Blanc nous enseigne sa culture, nous les Indiens, n’avions jamais vécu de telle manière que nous écrivions pour raconter les choses du passé” (*JSMS* 2019, 35).¹⁸⁸

Antane Kapesh refers in this passage to Innu orature as a means of preserving and transmitting knowledge, and she clearly distinguishes between oral/Indigenous and written/Western forms of documenting the past, or historiography. Orature and writing are two different traditions of archiving the past, marked by radically different perspectives on past events, as evoked above by Antane Kapesh, and “[l]a tradition orale innue fait ainsi état d’événements sur lesquels les écrits sont silencieux ou dont ils parlent à peine” (Vincent 83). From this perspective, “Indigenous knowledge,” such as the historical knowledge described in Antane Kapesh’s autobiography, “is a source of resistance and decolonization” (Altamirano-Jiménez and Kermoal 8). Innu collective memory involves a “processus de l’archivage de l’information” (Drapeau qtd. in Vincent 85) based on the respect of specific “règles linguistiques utilisées pour rapporter les faits” (Vincent 85). Holders of Innu stories, for example Elders like Antane Kapesh, therefore embody the archive. Innu poet Édouard Itual Germain alludes to the fact that knowledge holders need to tell the mentally-archived stories with his expression “archives dormantes” (37). Métis literary

¹⁸⁸ Innu original: “Ume tipatshimun eukuannu umenu Tshishennish-Pien utipatshimun mak kauapikuesht Kakushkuenitak mak kauapikuesht Kauashkamuesht. Ume tipatshimun apu uiesh tshika ut mishkamek^u anite mashinaikanit uesh ma e inniuiat, kauapishit eshk^u eka ka tshishkutamuimit utinniun, apu nita ut ishinniuiat tshetshi mashinaitsheiat tshetshi uauitamat kassinu tshékuan nete utat ka pet aishpanit” (*JSMS* 2019, 34). The 2015 version reads as follows: “Ceci est l’histoire de Tshishennish Pien et des Pères Babel et Arnaud. Vous ne trouverez cette histoire nulle part dans un livre car avant que l’étranger nous enseigne sa culture, nous les Innu, n’avions jamais vécu de telle manière que nous écrivions pour raconter les choses du passé” (*JSMS* 2015, 99).

scholar Warren Cariou argues that the conventional, one-dimensional way of archiving involves a process from (oral) testimony to (written) document to (materialized) archive (475). I interpret Germain's expression in a reverse sense, involving a process from mental archive to written document including the writerly-speaking voice of testimony. This means that stories are already mentally archived through collective memory, but they need to be told again through the oral or written word so that they are remembered and valued.

Antane Kapesh resists the settler story of the “découverte du minerai de fer dans le Nord par le Père Babel,”¹⁸⁹ as celebrated by then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, by repetitively stating that “jamais je n'avais entendu mon père, ni d'autres Indiens, ni les Aînés raconter cette histoire” of Father Babel having discovered iron ore in the North (*JSMS* 2019, 39-41).¹⁹⁰ Moreover, she critically comments on the settler version, introduced by the phrase “Voici ce que j'en pense” (*JSMS* 2019, 37), and retells the story from her subjective perspective as an Innu woman, always emphasizing that it was the Innu who really discovered iron ore in the North.¹⁹¹ As such, Antane Kapesh's narrative voice constitutes a “conscious narrative technique” (Bataille and Mullen Sands 130), and her text is an example of how “Indigenous women's life writings make visible dimensions of the hidden history and colonial legacy of this country through their gaze as subjects” (Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up* 2).¹⁹² Moreton-Robinson's words evoke Black feminist scholar bell hooks' concept of “talking back” which involves turning the oppressed and silenced object into a speaking subject with agency. Many Indigenous women scholars, writers,

¹⁸⁹ Innu original: “Kauapikuesht Kakushkuenitak kashikanit eukuannu peikumitashumitannuepipuna ishpish tshi mishkak ashininu ute Tshiuetinit. Kashikat eukuan uet metuenanut” (*JSMS* 2019, 40).

¹⁹⁰ Innu original: “Nimashkateniten tanite apu nita ut petuk nutaui tshetshi tipatshimut kie kutakat innuat kie tshishennuat apu nita ut petukau tshetshi tipatshimuht” (*JSMS* 2019, 40). The 2015 version reads as follows : “jamais je n'avais entendu mon père, ni les autres Innu ni les Vieux raconter cette histoire” (*JSMS* 2015, 101).

¹⁹¹ Innu original: “Kauapishit nenu essishuet nin eukuan etenitaman” (*JSMS* 2019, 36).

¹⁹² Note that Moreton-Robinson writes about the Indigenous context in the settler state of Australia, but her statement can also be applied to the Indigenous context in Quebec/Canada that I focus on in this study.

and activists insist that, while attempted to be silenced and unheard in public discourses, Indigenous “women have not been silent” (Bataille qtd. in Acoose *Iskwewak* 1995, 65), as the lived practice of oratory in Innu/Indigenous communities demonstrates.

Antane Kapeshe’s herstory exemplifies that she had recognized “the potential of literature to re-write and challenge official versions of history” (Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortín 7), and she writes from her personal viewpoint as an Innu woman whose voice, however, is joined by that of her ancestors. Indeed, Antane Kapeshe includes the collective Innu perspective into her narrative, expressed, most importantly, by her father’s voice, but she stresses that “[i]l n’y a pas que lui qui détienne des histoires, il y avait aussi son père, son grand-père et son arrière-grand-père” (*JSMS* 2019, 41).¹⁹³ However, it is not only men who have preserved and shared those stories, but also women, as Antane Kapeshe stresses towards the end of chapter two: “Voilà l’histoire que mon père a entendu raconter par ses parents, par sa mère, par sa grand-mère et par d’autres Aïnés. L’Indienne qui a épousé le fils de Tshishennish-Pien est morte ici à Schefferville, elle est morte très âgée. Moi aussi j’ai souvent entendu cette femme raconter l’histoire de son beau-père, Tshishennish-Pien, qui a découvert le minerai ici” (*JSMS* 2019, 55).¹⁹⁴ Antane Kapeshe values Innu storytelling traditions by bringing her ancestors to her narrative, as Vincent explains: “lorsqu’ils relatent des événements, [les Innus] distinguent ceux dont ils ont été témoins de ceux qui leur ont été rapportés par leurs Aïnés” (78). This statement illustrates that “un récit de type historique,” like the *tipatshimun*, “est un récit collectif, commun à plusieurs familles et à plusieurs communautés” (Vincent 85). Antane Kapeshe thus illustrates that the Innu oral tradition

¹⁹³ Innu original: “Uesh ma nutaui namaïenu muk^u uin ka kanuenitak tipatshimunnu, utauia mak umushuma, utanishkutapana” (*JSMS* 2019, 40). The 2015 version reads as follows: “Il n’y a pas que mon père qui a conservé ces histoires, il y a aussi son père, son grand-père et son arrière-grand-père” (*JSMS* 2015, 101).

¹⁹⁴ Innu original: “Eukuannu umenu nutaui utipatshimun ka petuat uikanisha tepatshimuniti, ukauia kie ukuma kie kutaka tshishennua. Ne Tshishennish-Pien ukussa ka uitshi-maniti innushkueua, ekute ute nipipan ne Ishkueu Kaiatushkanunit kie shash mishta-tshishenniuipan ka nippit. Ne Innushkueu kie nin mitshetauu nipetuati tepatshimut nenu tipatshimunnu utshishennima, Tshishennish-Piena, katshi mishkaminiti ashininu ute” (*JSMS* 2019, 56-58).

allows expressions of a personal point of view (that is, Antane Kapesh's comments), but it is fundamentally "le résultat d'un savoir sur le passé qui est un savoir collectif, partagé" (Vincent 78). Antane Kapesh speaks as much from a perspective of personal experience and opinion as "from a place of collective memory," which is, according to Hubbard, a form of "'old' memory which reaches beyond the boundaries of an individual's mind" (139). In Antane Kapesh's autobiography, this collective memory is expressed "by bringing [her] ancestors, cultures, and languages" (Acoose, "Honoring" 217) to her literary work. In other words, Antane Kapesh's narrative demonstrates how lived experiences, as told by witnesses, become stories, and how stories then become a collectively shared memory and history.

Antane Kapesh's writing is deeply grounded in Innu modes of storytelling and the oral tradition. According to Québécois anthropologist Sylvie Vincent, the Innu differentiate between "deux catégories de récits, l'une regroupant les récits dits 'atanukans' et l'autre les 'tipatshimuns,'" and she explains that "contrairement aux atanukans, qui sont pourtant considérés comme des récits véridiques, les tipatshimuns ont ceci de particulier qu'ils relatent des événements dont des Innus ont été témoins" (78-79).¹⁹⁵ This particularity of the tipatshimun is evident in Antane Kapesh's autobiography. Québécois scholar Isabelle St-Amand emphasizes that "[Antane] Kapesh fait la relation écrite d'évènements dont elle a été témoin ou d'évènements qui lui ont été racontés par des Innus en ayant été témoins" ("Pouvoir" 74). Antane Kapesh alludes to this intergenerational transmission of knowledge by remembering how she used to listen to her father's stories: "Je l'ai maintes fois entendu raconter tout ce qu'il a vu et les

¹⁹⁵ The online Innu Dictionary translates the word "tipatshimun" as "une nouvelle, une histoire vécue, un récit historique." According to Vincent, the verbal form "tipatshimu" can be translated as "il raconte en conformité avec, il rapporte conformément à," "il raconte une histoire vraie, il rapporte une nouvelle" or "il raconte une histoire vécue, un fait, une nouvelle" (79). Note that there is no distinction between genders in Innu: "Il n'y a pas de féminin ou de masculine en innu" (Mollen, "Animé").

histoires qu’il a entendues concernant les générations passées” (*JSMS* 2019, 41).¹⁹⁶ In the 1976 and 2015 editions of *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, these “as-told-by” stories, that means stories or memories told by voices other than Antane Kapeshe’s own narrative voice, are transcribed in quotation marks, italics and indented, formally indicating the change of voice.¹⁹⁷ This formatting technique allows Antane Kapeshe to distinguish her own voice from those of other Innu storytellers and, more importantly, those of “Kauapishit” (*JSMS* 2019, 14), or “le Blanc” (*JSMS* 2019, 15), how she collectively refers to the colonizer and colonial institutions.

Moreover, this process of creating polyphonic narratives reflects Innu rules of oral storytelling that ensure reliability of told stories, as Vincent emphasizes: “les conteurs ont l’habitude de fournir leurs sources, indiquant qui leur a raconté tel récit et de qui cette personne le tenait” (85). Antane Kapeshe clearly names her father (and his ancestors), for example, as a source when she retells the Innu story of the discovery of iron ore in the North from his perspective and she uses his words as she memorizes them. In addition, Antane Kapeshe employs the strategy of naming witnesses of past events to give credibility to her story. As such, she directly refers to “l’Indien Tshishennish-Pien [qui] est le premier à avoir trouvé du minerai ici dans le Nord” and to Atshapi Antane, “l’arrière-grand-père de mon mari, le grand-père de son père” who “a conduit le Père Babel à l’intérieur des terres” (*JSMS* 2019, 43).¹⁹⁸ In doing so,

¹⁹⁶ Innu original: “Mitshetuau nipetuati tepatshimut nete utat aianishkat kassinu tshekuannu ka uapatak kie tan ka ishi-petak anite utat aianishkat tipatshimunnu” (*JSMS* 2019, 40). The 2015 version reads as follows: “J’écoutais souvent mon père raconter tout ce qu’il a vu et les histoires qu’il a entendues concernant les générations passées” (*JSMS* 2015, 101).

¹⁹⁷ Note that the 2019 edition only uses indent as a formatting technique to distinguish voices.

¹⁹⁸ Innu original: “ne innu Tshishennish-Pien eukuan uin ushkat ka mishkak ashininu ute Tshiuetinit” (*JSMS* 2019, 44); “eukuan uin ninapem utanishkutapana, ninapem utaia umushuminua” and “eukuan uin ka peshuat kauapikueshiniti Kakushkuenitaminiti ute nutshimit” (*JSMS* 2019, 44).

The 2015 version reads as follows: “l’Innu Tshishennish Pien [qui] est le premier à avoir trouvé du minerai ici dans le Nord” and Atshapi Antane, “l’arrière-grand-père de mon mari, le grand-père de son père” who “a conduit le Père Babel à l’intérieur des terres” (*JSMS* 2015, 102).

Antane Kapesh ensures that voices that were and continue to be marginalized, silenced or erased are now heard, as Bacon and Depelteau note: “Constatant que la parole des Innuat n’est pas entendue, Antane Kapesh consacre ses efforts à mettre par écrit son témoignage” (257). Antane Kapesh “s’associe à un groupe collectif sans toutefois prétendre parler *entièrement* au nom de celui-ci” with the creation of her polyphonic text, and she thus counters “l’idée d’une vérité unique et homogène pour tous les Innus” (Huberman 115; original emphasis).¹⁹⁹

Québécois scholar Isabella Huberman underlines that the category of the “*tipatshimun* admet naturellement le lien entre la subjectivité et la parole politique puisqu’il affirme la présence du locuteur et que la narration provient de son expérience personnelle” (114; original emphasis). This simultaneously personal and political stance in Antane Kapesh’s experiential narrative is best articulated in chapter 6 “Kamakunueshiht mak kauaueshtakanit / La police et les tribunaux” of *Eukuan nin matsi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, where she graphically describes instances of police brutality: “en arrêtant les Indiens, il arrive souvent que les policiers les blessent et qu’ils les expédient à l’hôpital. Quand ils arrêtent les Indiens, ils leur font toutes sortes de choses: ils les frappent à répétition, ils leur donnent des coups de pied, ils leur donnent des poussées dans tous les sens” (JSMS 2019, 111).²⁰⁰ More specifically then, Antane Kapesh retells an incident of police violence experienced by her son: “Au moment de son arrestation il avait apparemment été frappé par un policier, il avait une coupure à l’arcade sourcilière” (JSMS 2019, 113).²⁰¹ She recalls meeting the chief of police to inform him of this

¹⁹⁹ Kanapé Fontaine expresses a similar idea of her individual voice becoming a collective voice: “Dans mes deux derniers recueils [*Manifeste Assi* et *Bleuets et abricots*], j’ai écrit au ‘je’ pour dire ‘les autres,’ afin que nous soyons, que nous devenions, nous les autochtones, une collectivité plus forte” (qtd. in Collard).

²⁰⁰ Innu original: “Miam mate anitshenat kamakunueshiht innua miakunataui, mitshetuaui ushikuieuat innua kie mitshetuaui pitukaieuat anite akushiutshuapit. Innua miakunataui kassinu aitutueuat: ututamaueuat kie tatatshishkueuat kie nanatshipiteuat muk^u anite eshinakuannit” (JSMS 2019, 110).

²⁰¹ Innu original: “Nenu miakunakanit utamaukushapan kama kunueshiniti anite ussishikuapikanit, tshimaukushapan” (JSMS 2019, 112).

abusive act, but she receives a threatening answer to her call for justice. According to Antane Kapeshe, the conversation took place as follows:

Je lui ai dit: “Avez-vous entendu parler de ce qui s’est passé cette nuit? Il se trouve que deux policiers ont blessé mon fils.” Le chef de police me dit: “J’en ai entendu parler.” Puis il ajoute: “Si ton fils a été blessé par des policiers, ce ne doit pas être par mes hommes à moi, ce doit être par des policiers de la Gendarmerie royale.” Le chef de police me dit ensuite: “Quand les policiers ont blessé ton gars, une chance que je n’étais pas là, moi, il serait mort!” Puis il m’a montré un pistolet et m’a dit: “C’est avec ce pistolet que j’aurais tiré sur ton garçon et c’est dans la tête que j’aurais tiré.” À cela j’ai répondu: “Si tu tires sur mon enfant, il y en aura beaucoup d’autres sur lesquels tu vas tirer.” (*JSMS* 2019, 119-121)²⁰²

Antane Kapeshe’s description of institutionalized and systemic violence, as exemplified by police brutality against Innu people, is a highly important testimony. First, because it illustrates that her narrative consists of a simultaneously intimate and collective history. Indeed, Antane Kapeshe chose to tell “des histoires personnelles symptomatiques d’histoires se répétant de façon systémique” (St-Amand, “Pouvoir” 74), as exemplified above by the use of the temporal adverb “souvent/often.” Vincent affirms that “les événements qui sont racontés dans les récits de type historique semblent avoir été retenus parce qu’ils sont symptomatiques de phénomènes qui se répètent sans cesse ou pourraient se répéter” (87). The themes that Antane Kapeshe addresses in the nine chapters of her book all have one common thread: they represent a form of long-term

²⁰² Innu original: “Ekue itak: ‘Tshipeteti a tepishkat ka ishpanit, nitau, nish’ kamakunueshiht ushikuieshapanat nikussa?’ Ne utshimau-kamakunuesht ekue ishit: ‘Nipeteti’, nitik^u. Ekue ishit: ‘Tshikuss nenu ueshikuikut kamakunueshiniti, namaietshenat nin ninapemat ueshikuiat, innu-kamakunuesht ushikuietshe’, nitik^u. Ne utshimau-kamakunuesht minuat ekue ishit: ‘Ne tshikuss nenu ueshikuikut kamakunueshiniti mishku nin eka ka taian, tshikuss tshipa nipipan,’ nitik^u. Ne utshimau-kamakunuesht ekue uapatinit passikannu ekue ishit: ‘Tshikuss eukuannu umenu passikannu nipa passuati, anite ushtikuanit ekute nipa passuati.’ Nenu eshit ekue itak: ‘Ne nitauassim passuti, tshika mitshetu kutak auen tshe passut’, nitau” (*JSMS* 2019, 120).

systemic violence against Indigenous Peoples. In doing so, Antane Kapesh looks at the “broader context of institutionalized violence against all Aboriginal people,” and her clearly articulated critique “address[es] the failings within the justice and police systems that appear to target specifically Aboriginal people, and, in particular, Aboriginal women” (Olsen Harper 181).

Second, Antane Kapesh’s literary treatise of such instances of violence, as experienced by members of her family and community, reveals “how inextricably connected Indigenous people are to family and community” (Episknew, *Taking Back* 17). Episknew argues that this deep connection reaches to a point where the “joys and the sadness that our families and communities experience are our joys and sadness, too” (*Taking Back* 17). In *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism* (2000), Moreton-Robinson states that, according to Indigenous epistemologies, “experience is fundamentally social and relational, not something ascribed separately within the individual,” and she adds that “Indigenous women’s life writings are based on the collective memories of inter-generational relationships between predominantly Indigenous women, extended families and communities” (1). Antane Kapesh’s description of police brutality against her son and other members of the community illustrates this sense of relationality and deep connection. Moreover, Moreton-Robinson contends that “[k]in, extended family and community are important to Indigenous women because they are where social memory becomes activated through shared experiences, knowledges and remembering,” and she adds that Indigenous women’s autobiographies “are testimony to how bodies are enacted and experienced in very different ways depending on the cultural and historical position of different subjects” (*Talkin’ Up* 15), such as described by Antane Kapesh.

And third, Antane Kapesh’s testimony is significant because it allows comparing editorial practices in Quebec and Canada. “The inclusion of this passage [of police brutality], both in

[Antane Kapesh's] text and in reviews," according to Henzi, "is rather remarkable, since it is no secret that several texts written and published during that time were censored – most noteworthy, Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, whose publishers made her remove several elements from her original manuscript," among them a description of police violence ("Recovering and Recontextualizing" 286).²⁰³ Stó:lō author Lee Maracle recalls similar experiences of censorship in the 1970s:

I taped *Bobbi Lee*; Don [Barnett] edited it. We did not entirely agree on the editing; much was left out. [...] Choosing what to leave in and what to leave out is powerful. I never again permitted an editor to dictate to me what was to be left out and in. Today [2016], few editors would do that to an author, but, in 1976, it was common practice for the editor to have that much power. ("Looking Back" 429)

Moreton-Robinson thus rightfully observes that literary and editorial relationships "are representative of power relations between coloniser and colonised" (*Talkin' Up* 2), or, more specifically, between editor and author. Acoose, by drawing on Métis feminist scholar Emma LaRocque, adds patriarchal suppression to the hierarchal relationship between editor and writer and she

points out that publishers 'influenced by uncomprehending critics and audiences ... controlled the type of material that was published,' and hence male writers like Harold Cardinal, Howard Adams, George Manuel, Duke Redbird, Wilfred Pelletier, or

²⁰³ See Deanna Reder and Alix Shield's critical essay "'I write this for all of you': Recovering the Unpublished RCMP 'Incident' in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973)" (2019), which describes the editorial censorship of the time and the rediscovery of an erased passage. Reder and Shield write that, because of "renewed interest in the book" due to the publication of their essay, a "new edition of *Halfbreed* is being released in November 2019 with McClelland & Stewart" that "will include the missing passage" (n1).

Waubageshig were privileged over Indigenous women writers who in the late 1960s and early 1970s were struggling to make their voices heard. (*Iskwewak* 1995, 65)

In accordance with Antane Kapeshe's translator José Mailhot, Henzi emphasizes that Antane Kapeshe's "original manuscript of *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* underwent no such editorial censorship" ("Recovering and Recontextualizing" 286). A possible explanation might be the fact that Antane Kapeshe's book was published by Leméac as part of a special collection dedicated to francophone Indigenous writing, which was directed by Indigenous editor Bernard Assiniwi.

These two poignant examples from Antane Kapeshe's book – her restorying of the discovery of iron ore in the North and her critique of police violence – illustrate that there are diverse levels of discourse in her narrative. Antane Kapeshe's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* resembles Campbell's *Halfbreed* in the sense that both women are "writing in a way that has been shaped by [their] Elders" and "sometimes [their] language is a very politicized, activist discourse" (Fagan Bidwell and McKegney 311). In fact, Antane Kapeshe's book is shaped by what Gail MacKay calls "Indigenous Elders' discourse" (351). MacKay suggests that Campbell's use of direct quotes of her grandmother's voice strengthens "the idea that Cheechum is one of two narrators" in *Halfbreed* (360), and I argue that Antane Kapeshe, the first narrator/storyteller in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, employs a very similar strategy, which turns her father into a second storyteller, as it is particularly evident in chapter 2 "Ashini ka mishkakanit ute tshiuwetinit / La découverte du minéral dans le Nord." Acoose expresses a similar approach of including her ancestors' voices in literary criticism: "When I place in the written text *Nokom* [my grandmother], *Nicapan* [my great-grandfather], *Nimosom* [my grandfather], they become

speaking voices of Nêhiyaw-Métis-Nahkawè culture-specific stories that interrupt conventional forms of textual criticism and create spaces for cultural differences in the discourse of Indigenous literatures” (“Honoring” 220).²⁰⁴ Antane Kapeshe’s conscious inclusion of her father’s voice, amongst others, thus represents a literary strategy that seeks to interrupt conventional forms of autobiography and underlines cultural differences of storytelling. In Fontaine’s *Kuessipan*, this interruption of conventional forms of autobiography is particularly evident in her use of fictionalization. Fontaine does include other voices in her narrative, such as the words of a traditional Innu hunter, as the following paragraph illustrates: “Il a appris de ses années de chasseur, l’instinct. Il dit, sans arrogance, comme une promesse: Nous l’avons d’imprimé là, dans le sang. Nous irons chercher le caribou là où il se trouve” (*Kuessipan* 96). However, other voices or memorized stories as told to her are rare; Fontaine instead uses fictionalized characters and their interior, intimate life in her autobiographical narrative.

Innu women’s autobiographies are shaped by a politicized or activist discourse, whether expressed openly, such as by Antane Kapeshe, or more covertly, such as by Fontaine. According to Justice, Indigenous literatures are “political, in that [they affirm] the fundamental rights of Indigenous peoples to the responsible exercise and expression of our political, intellectual, geographic, and artistic self-determination” (*Why* xix-xx). Antane Kapeshe’s motivation to write and publish her book is political because writing, for her, equals an act of cultural defense, as she states in the foreword to her autobiography: “Quand j’ai songé à écrire pour me défendre et pour défendre la culture de mes enfants, j’ai d’abord bien réfléchi, car je savais qu’il ne fait pas partie de ma culture d’écrire” (*JSMS* 2019, 13).²⁰⁵ Although Antane Kapeshe differentiates between

²⁰⁴ In the Cree language, the relationship to oneself is part of the word, as such, *Nokom* translates as “my grandmother” whereas the more widely used and known term *Kookum* actually means “your grandmother.”

²⁰⁵ Innu original: “Ka ishi-mamitunenitaman tshetshi mashinaitshieian tshetshi tshishpeuatitishuian kie tshetshi tshishpeuatamuk nitauassimat utinniunuau, pitama nimiru-mamituneniteti uesh ma nitshisseniteti e

Innu orature and writing as a Western tradition in this statement, her book *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* demonstrates her “efforts to ensure cultural survival by translating to the written page culture-specific stories and criticism” (Acoose, “Honoring” 221). In *Histoire de la littérature amérindienne: oralité et écriture* (1993), Québécois literary scholar Diane Boudreau makes the same distinction between orature and writing as Antane Kapesh, but she then emphasizes the co-existence of orality and writing in Indigenous cultures: “L’introduction de l’écriture en langues amérindiennes n’a pas tué l’oralité ni abâtardi la tradition; à moyen et à long terme, elle aurait plutôt desservi les colonisateurs en rendant possible le discours de la résistance” (92). Conversely, LaRocque argues that “[w]riting is, in fact, an example of Native cultural fluidity” (“Reflections” 162), and she grounds the practice of writing in the art of storytelling: “That Aboriginal people are writing is in itself an act of cultural continuity. Any form of expression that is instrumental to our renewal is cultural continuity. Writing is really about ‘telling,’ and ‘telling’ originates in orality. Whatever it is that we are telling, [...] and however we do it, orally or in writing, as long as we are doing it, we are expressing a live and dynamic culture” (“Reflections” 162). Despite certain hesitations against writing, Antane Kapesh finally calls for Innu self-representation on the pages: “et je pense que, maintenant que nous commençons à écrire, c’est à nous qui avons le plus de choses à raconter puisque nous sommes aujourd’hui témoins des deux cultures” (*JSMS* 2019, 35).²⁰⁶ In *Shuni*, Fontaine includes the voice of her mother who expresses a similar understanding of self-presentation: “Je suis Innue. Je connais mon peuple, ses blessures, ses besoins. Je crois que je suis tout de même la mieux placée pour parler de ma communauté” (32).

mashinaitshenanut namaieu nin nitinnium kie miam e papam ipanian anite itetshe mishtautenat ne ut mashinaikan ka itenitaman tshetshi tutaman, apu shuk^u ut minuatanan” (*JSMS* 2019, 12).

²⁰⁶ Innu original: “Nititeniten, e innuiat tshetshipaniat tshetshi mashinaitsheiat, anu ninan nikanuenitenan tipatshimuna uesh ma ninan kashikat nishuait eshinniunanut nuapatenan” (*JSMS* 2019, 34).

Acoose contends that “the act of writing is a political act that can encourage decolonization” (“Halfbreed” 140), and Antane Kapeshe seeks to initiate this decolonizing process through writing. I read Antane Kapeshe’s work as a literary expression of “generative refusal” (As 35), a concept developed by L. Simpson that refuses colonial and patriarchal domination.²⁰⁷ This interpretation would be supported by Antane Kapeshe, as she states: “Nous, par exemple, sommes vraiment harcelés par les Blancs parce qu’ils veulent à tout prix être les maîtres dans notre territoire. Mais nous en avons assez d’être, depuis des années, gouvernés par les Blancs. Nous en avons assez d’être, depuis des années, malmenés par eux et nous en avons assez de les voir, depuis des années, nous manquer de respect” (JSMS 2019, 29).²⁰⁸ Antane Kapeshe clearly articulates the Innu people’s collective desire for self-determination and self-governance, whether political or cultural, and heavily critiques settler heteronomy. Moreover, Antane Kapeshe expresses Innu agency by positioning the Innu collective, grammatically and physically, as subjects (“nous”) and by using the anaphora “nous en avons assez d’être” as a marker of generative refusal. In *Shuni*, Fontaine expresses a similar understanding:

En politique, on entend de plus en plus la notion d’autodétermination. Depuis l’instauration des réserves, les Premières Nations vivent sous un système de dépendance à l’État. Aujourd’hui nous exigeons de prendre les décisions par nous-mêmes en ce qui concerne nos communautés, nos territoires, notre économie, nos populations, nos problèmes sociaux, notre éducation, notre identité. (142)

²⁰⁷ See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of L. Simpson’s concept of “generative refusal.”

²⁰⁸ Innu original: “Miam mate ninan e inniuiat shash tshitshue nuakaikunan kauapishit usham anumat anu uin ui mishta-tipenitam^u ute nitassinat. Nitishpannan ka tatupipuna tipenimimit kie nitishpannan ka tatupipuna matshitutuimmit kie nitishpannan ka tatupipuna manenimimit kauapishit” (JSMS 2019, 30). The revised 2019 edition differs only slightly from the original version (JSMS 1976, 30-31). The 2015 edition reads as follows: “Nous, par exemple, sommes vraiment harcelés par les Blancs parce qu’ils veulent à tout prix être les maîtres sur nos terres. Mais nous en avons assez d’être, depuis un certain nombre d’années, régents par les Blancs. Nous en avons assez de nous faire dénigrer et manquer de respect” (JSMS 2015, 97).

With depathologizing statements like these ones, Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine “resist all-too-easy, one-dimensional narratives of damage in order to expose ongoing structural inequity” (Tuck, “Suspending Damage” 417). Tuck emphasizes that “a framework of desire,” such as expressed by Antane Kapeshe in her above statement, “recognizes our sovereignty as a core element of our being and meaning making; a damage framework excludes this recognition” (“Suspending Damage” 423). Highway’s reading of Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* is marked by a damage-centred framework because he argues that “this book is where that victimhood stands most plainly articulated” and adds that “there is not much evidence in these pages of getting past that victimhood, and even less hope” (330). I heavily disagree with Highway on this because Indigenous autobiographical narratives “bring the reality home and allow the victims to de-victimize their consciousness and push back on colonization,” as Maracle contends in “Oratory,” and Indigenous women’s autobiographical expressions are therefore “empowering and transformative” (166).

Moreover, Tuck argues that “even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that – so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression” (“Suspending Damage” 416) and I argue that Highway’s damage-centred reading of Antane Kapeshe’s work constitutes such an act of aggression. Antane Kapeshe undeniably documents the pain and loss in individuals and her community by describing different forms of colonial violence and systemic oppression facing Innu people, and her autobiography testifies how the Innu have been terrorized by settler colonialism, but, as the above statement exemplifies, her writing goes beyond a narrative of Indigenous victimhood by attributing subjecthood, humanness, and agency to herself and to her community. Moreover, Antane Kapeshe’s cultural pride, strongly expressed in her afterword, constitutes a counter-example to Highway’s reading

of Innu victimhood and it illustrates that Antane Kapesh does not think of herself as damaged or broken, which, according to Tuck, would be an effect of damage-centred thought and writing (“Suspending Damage” 409).

I argue that Antane Kapesh turns to a new cultural medium – that is, writing – because she was disillusioned by politics, and she thus integrates an activist discourse into her autobiography. Antane Kapesh initially turned to local politics to preserve the Innu land (Innu assi), culture (Innu-aitun), and language (Innu-aimun), and “[c]e combat l’amène à devenir la première femme chef de la communauté de Matimekosh de 1965 à 1967” (“An” *Kwahiatonhk!*). Antane Kapesh informs her readership that she has first-hand experience of band council politics, as councilperson and as chief, and she thus knows her business: “Je sais ce que je dis parce que j’ai fait partie du Conseil de Bande pendant quatre ans. J’ai été premier conseiller pendant deux ans et pendant deux autres années, j’ai été chef” (*JSMS* 2019, 169).²⁰⁹ It is remarkable that Antane Kapesh, as an Innu woman at that time, was allowed to be actively involved in her local community politics and that she could occupy this position of political leadership. Henzi notes that “the status of the ‘Schefferville Innu,’ who were linked to their original bands of Uashat and Mani-utenam, was not recognized by the federal government until 1968” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 282), and I think that this official absence of legal recognition might be a reason why Antane Kapesh could be a female chief at all in the mid-1960s.

Antane Kapesh’s exceptional role in the world of Indigenous local politics becomes even more remarkable when it is read in light of Anderson’s following statement in “Leading by Action: Female Chiefs and the Political Landscape”: “For over a century, First Nations politics

²⁰⁹ Innu original: “Nitshisseniten uet issishueian tanite neupipuna nititati anite nekausseit, nishupipuna anite ushkat nekausseie nititati mak nishupipuna anite innu-utshimaunit. Kie miam etaian anite innu-utshimaunit, katshishe-utshimauatusseht eukuannu tshitshue mishta-atushkatamupanat tshetshi atapinanunit kau nete utenat” (*JSMS* 2019, 168).

have been ‘men’s business.’ Although indigenous women have always been active in their communities, chiefs within the *Indian Act* system have been predominantly male. This means that men have been charged with the official leadership, vision, voice, and direction of First Nations communities” (99; original emphasis). The *Indian Act* erased, or at least drastically limited, First Nations women’s presence and involvement in politics by implementing a patriarchal system of governance, the so-called band council. Maracle argues that the “establishment of the chief electoral system that initially did not allow women to participate is not connected to community, but rather it is connected to the federal government” (“Indigenous Women and Power” 149). Antane Kapeshe participated in community politics before the 1985 amendment of the *Indian Act*, which allowed First Nations women to participate in politics, was implemented, and she illustrates in her autobiography how she worked for the well-being of her community from inside the colonial system of the band council by fiercely opposing the Indian agents of the federal government:

Pendant mon mandat à la chefferie, les fonctionnaires [des Affaires indiennes] ont travaillé très fort pour que les gens redéménagent en ville. De mon côté, j’ai travaillé très fort pour qu’ils ne redéménagent pas. Les fonctionnaires et moi avons une tâche immense puisque nous travaillions dans des buts contraires : moi c’était pour qu’on construise des maisons aux Indiens ici, au lac John, et eux, pour qu’on les leur construise en ville. (*JSMS* 2019, 169)²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Innu original: “Nin nimishta-atushkateti tshetshi eka atapinanut nete utenat. Anitshenat katshishe-utshimau-atusseht mak nin mishta-mishapan nitatusseunnan tanite nishuait nitishi-atussetan: nin ute Tshuan-shakaikanit nitatushkateti tshetshi manukuakaniht innuat ek” uinunau nete utenat atushkatamuat tshetshi manikuakanniti innua” (*JSMS* 2019, 168).

After her mandate as chief, Antane Kapeshe was involved in Indigenous political associations: “Moi j’ai commencé à m’occuper de mes propres affaires du côté de l’Association des Indiens du Québec” (*JSMS* 1976, 207), a predecessor organization of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL). See Henzi’s afterword “Recovering and Recontextualizing” (298n25) for a brief discussion of these associations and their relation.

Moreover, Antane Kapeshe has first-hand experience of how colonial legislation, in particular the *Indian Act*, has impacted the Innu nation for decades. Antane Kapeshe was raised by her parents and extended family in the Innu's traditionally nomadic lifestyle, and she lived on the land with her family until 1953, when the family was relocated to Mani-utenam, "a reserve near Sept-Îles created in 1949, with its own residential school, which was in operation from 1952 to 1971" (Henzi, "Recovering and Recontextualizing" 281). In chapter 8 "Kakusseshiu-mitshuapa / Les maisons de Blancs" in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, for example, Antane Kapeshe recalls the many instances of forced relocation, a real odyssey of removal that Antane Kapeshe, her family and community had to endure with the beginning of Innu settlement in the 1950s: "En 1956, nous avons quitté les maisons qu'on avait construites pour nous à Sept-Îles, au bord de la mer, et nous sommes retournés dans notre territoire. À notre arrivée ici, nous nous sommes installés près de la ville [de Schefferville], dans des tentes" (*JSMS* 2019, 157).²¹¹ "Environ quatre mois après nous être établis près de la ville" (Antane Kapeshe, *JSMS* 2019, 161), however, the Innu "were quickly relocated (by June 1956) to Lake John, 3.5 kilometers away from the town" (Henzi, "Recovering and Recontextualizing" 282).²¹² And Antane Kapeshe continues to tell this odyssey: "Une dizaine d'années après être déménagés ici au lac John, aucune construction n'y avait encore débuté. On commençait alors à nous parler de redéménager là d'où on nous avait délogés. Le terrain qu'on envisageait nous donner en ville constituait la partie la plus sale et n'était qu'une petite pointe, ce qui nous ferait encore moins de terrain qu'auparavant" (*JSMS* 2019, 167).²¹³ Antane Kapeshe emphasizes that the

²¹¹ Innu original: "Patetat-tatunnu ashu kutuasht itashtepan mishta-atshitashun ka nakatamat nitshinana anite Uashat uinipekut ka tutakaniti, ka tshiueiat ute nitassinat. Tekushiniat ute ekue nuitshitan anite pessish utenat, nutinnu-mitshuapitan" (*JSMS* 2019, 156).

²¹² Innu original: "Uiesh katshi neupishimua apiat anite pessish utenat" (*JSMS* 2019, 160).

²¹³ Innu original: "Uiesh kutunnuepipuna katshi atapiat ute Tshuan-shakaikanit, eshk" nashpit apu tshakuan tshitshipanit tshetshi tutakanit. Shash tshitshipannanu tshetshi uauitamakauiat kau tshetshi atapiat nete ka ut

relocation to this “dirty” piece of land on the outskirts of Schefferville was not initiated by the Innu band council or the Innu population; on the contrary, it was imposed by the Department of Indian Affairs: “à mon avis ce n’était pas l’idée du Conseil de Bande ni celle de la population indienne, c’était celle des fonctionnaires du ministère des Affaires indiennes,” and Antane Kapesh then justifies her opinion with first-hand knowledge based on her involvement in the band council (*JSMS* 2019, 169).²¹⁴ The contested piece of land has since become the Matimekush reserve “to which most residents of Lake John had moved by 1972, following pressure tactics” by the federal government (Henzi, “Recovering and Recontextualizing” 282). As Antane Kapesh explains: “Les fonctionnaires [...] ont continue à parler aux Indiens, en leur mentant et en les intimidant, pendant quelques années encore” (*JSMS* 2019, 169).²¹⁵ Antane Kapesh and her family, however, “refused to move and stayed in Lake John” (Henzi, “Recovering and Recontextualizing” 283), as Antane Kapesh proudly emphasizes by directly addressing her reader: “Moi, déjà en 1967, je savais que personne ne me chasserait du lac John. Aujourd’hui, vous et moi le voyons, je suis au lac John” (*JSMS* 2019, 173).²¹⁶ However, in 1976, Antane Kapesh returned to Sept-Îles.

It is important to note that, according to Innu storytelling traditions, Antane Kapesh gives reliability and credibility to her narrative by providing her lived experiences, emphasizing both her political leadership role and her status as eyewitness of the federal government’s program of forced removal. In *Cautiously Hopeful*, Carrière draws on Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen

itshetishaukaiiat. Kie ne assi uiauitamakaiiat tshe minikaiiat nete utenat anu anite uet uinakuak mak muk^u anite e matshiteuiashit mak anite anu mishta-apishish niminikaunan” (*JSMS* 2019, 166).

²¹⁴ Innu original: “nin eukuan etenitaman” namaïenu nenu nekaussei utitenitamun kie namaïenu innuat utitenitamunau, katshishe-utshimau-atusseht eukuanat uinunau utitenitamunau” (*JSMS* 2019, 168).

²¹⁵ Innu original: “Katshishe-utshimau-atusseht eka kianieuht nenu kamashinatautishunanunit, pitama minuat tatupipuna ekue aimiepanat innua nianatu-kushtatshimaht kie nianatu-katshinassimaht” (*JSMS* 2019, 170).

²¹⁶ Innu original: “Nin kutuasht-tatunnu ashu nishuasht shash nitshisseniteti tshe eka tat auen tshetshi itshetishaut ute Tshuan-shakaikanit kie tshuapatenan kashikat nititan ute Tshuan-skakaikanit” (*JSMS* 2019, 174).

Mullen Sands' "imperfect description" (Carrière 73) of what they call "American Indian women's autobiography" (Bataille and Mullen Sands 4) in *American Indian Women Telling Their Lives* (1984) to analyze Fontaine's *Kuessipan*. Carrière argues that Bataille and Mullen Sands' definition, which understands Indigenous women's autobiography as a hybrid genre based on Indigenous oral storytelling traditions and the Euro-American tradition of autobiographic writing,

points to a number of important aspects of *Kuessipan* that make it an interesting work to examine in light of the issues with which Indigenous feminisms currently grapple: blurred boundaries between the personal and the political; the relationship of the individual to community; and the adoption both of Indigenous forms of storytelling and of Western modes of expression with the presence, to recall Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact, of the reliable first-person narrator of autobiography. (Carrière 73)

Although Carrière's interpretation of *Kuessipan* as a hybrid work of literature seems valid because it is based on Indigenous literary theory, I argue that Fontaine's – and also Antane Kapeshe's – "reliable first-person narrator of autobiography" derives from the Innu storytelling tradition of the *tipatshimun*, which is, as I have demonstrated above, based on a reliable storyteller because of their function as a witness and observer. Both Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine tell their stories from their perspective as witnesses and observers of Innu life.

Early Indigenous women's autobiographies, like Antane Kapeshe's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu* – *Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* and Campbell's *Halfbreed*, are fundamentally charged with truth-telling, that is, testifying to individual and collective experiences of colonization. Contemporary Indigenous women's writing is an expression of "une création autochtone porteuse à la fois de transformation et de continuité" (St-Amand,

“Légende”). As such, many contemporary Indigenous women writers, such as Fontaine, continue the tradition of truth-telling, but they transform their autobiographical writing into a form of “‘life writing’ that straddles the boundaries of autobiography and fiction and that uses imagination as a healing implement” (Episkenew, *Taking Back* 15). In the opening text of *Kuessipan*, Fontaine openly acknowledges that she employs imagination: “j’ai inventé. J’ai créé un monde faux” (9). “Devons-nous croire qu’elle se situe à des années-lumière de la tradition?” (78), as Harel asks in *Place aux littératures autochtones*, because Fontaine “challenge[s] the boundaries of fact and fiction” (Brewster xxii). Not at all, because autobiographical forms of expression that include elements of fiction have a long tradition among Indigenous Peoples. Justice, for instance, argues in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* that “Indigenous writers, scholars, storytellers, and knowledge keepers have, since our earliest ancestors emerged as distinct peoples, worked to articulate lived truths and imaginative possibilities through spoken, written, and inscribed forms and project them into a meaningful future” (xviii). In contrast to Antane Kapeshe’s autobiographical narrative based on lived experiences, Fontaine “a seulement trouvé une autre voie pour décrire l’existence sur la réserve, dans la réserve” (Harel 78). Still using traditional ways of Innu/Indigenous storytelling, Fontaine pairs “lived truths” with “imaginative possibilities,” as she evokes in her opening text: “Et ces autres vies, je les ai embellies. Je voulais voir la beauté, je voulais la faire” (*Kuessipan* 9). Fontaine creates her portrayals and vignettes of Innu life based on her observations, as she affirms in *Shuni*: “Mon travail d’écrivain m’amène à observer” (103), but she also embellishes what she sees and witnesses. *Kuessipan* can thus be read as what Algonquin literary scholar Michelle Coupal calls “Indigenous fictional testimony,” which she defines as “literature that gives evidence to the experiences of individuals or communities, often with pedagogical, therapeutic, or activist

impulses for a broad, that is, both Native and non-Native, reading public” (477). Fictional testimony provides Indigenous women writers “with a vehicle to open up a conversation with [their] community through story outside of more formalized practices” (Coupal 478).

Fontaine proposes imagination as a strategy of healing and resurgence in her opening text in *Kuessipan*: “Dénaturer les choses – je ne veux pas nommer ces choses – pour n’en voir que le tison qui brûle encore dans le cœur des premiers habitants” (9). These embers symbolize Indigenous Peoples’ resistance/resilience, illustrated, for example, in the speaker’s description of Innu women practising their traditions on a collective level, as described in the following passage:

Le battement du tambour fait lever les femmes en premier. Se suivent les unes les autres, dansent un pied en avant, l’autre légèrement replié. À la manière d’un boiteux. Laissent le chant approfondir chaque mouvement, chaque pas qui se veut lent, les mains près du corps. Souriant. Le cercle se forme intuitivement. Une femme téméraire pousse un cri. Un cri d’Indienne, fort, aigu. Il y a des rires, des échos à sa voix. Les mouvements s’amplifient, certaines jouent des épaules, accélèrent la pulsation des mains jusqu’aux hanches. Les jeunes se laissent conduire, imitent leurs parents. Le cercle est immense, les chaises vides. Puis le tambour ralentit. On applaudit le vieux et le chant du passé. Les regards se croisent, les yeux fiers. Le désir d’être soi. (*Kuessipan* 44)

This paragraph alludes to different elements of Indigenous resurgence, such as L. Simpson’s understanding of resurgence as a ceremonial and spiritual pursuit and Starblanket’s temporal dimension marked by a living past. Moreover, it highlights Innu/Indigenous women’s and Elders’ roles, or even responsibilities, to keep cultures and traditions alive by practising them and teaching them to younger generations, and the process of intergenerational learning traditionally

takes place through observation and imitation. The feeling of pride alludes to the healing and resurgent element of Indigenous cultural practices, such as dancing, singing, and drumming. The last sentence, and particularly the word “desire,” points to the author’s desire-based framework, which acknowledges loss, but emphasizes hope, dreams, and possibility.

Fontaine’s literary work is essentially marked by place. Most importantly, it is characterized by how Fontaine differentiates the reserve, as a colonial place, from the Innu community, from the settler city, and from Nitassinan, the traditional Innu territory. In *Shuni*, for instance, Fontaine emphasizes the significance to distinguish between the reserve and the community: “Il y a deux termes souvent amalgamés pour dire une réalité autochtone: la réserve et la communauté. Je crois qu’il faut savoir les distinguer” (101). “La réserve est un lieu,” Fontaine writes, and she stresses: “C’est le gouvernement qui a instauré les réserves. Les unes après les autres” (*Shuni* 101). Like Antane Kapeshe, Fontaine establishes the reserve as a constructed place symbolizing containment and forced settlement, imposed on the Innu by the federal government: “La réserve est un lieu de contraintes et de sédentarisation obligée. Des cabanes en bois et des chemins de gravier mal entretenus. La monnaie d’échange du territoire. C’est dans ces villages fermés qu’est née la première dépendance, celle qui a entraîné toutes les autres : la dépendance au gouvernement” (*Shuni* 101). Fontaine presents the reserve as a place of oppression, exclusion, and poverty, and, in opposition, the community as a space of relationality and collectivity: “C’est un ensemble, une réserve,” Fontaine states, “Un ensemble de choses qui dérangeant. [...] Qui sacrifient la beauté des gens en des lieux désœuvrés” (*Shuni* 99). According to Fontaine, the community builds the foundation of Indigenous societies and cultures: “La communauté s’est construite à travers les liens étroits que les gens ont tissés entre eux, avant et après la réserve,” and, declaring that “ce qui prime, ce sont les relations,” she emphasizes that

“[l]’importance que l’on accorde aux relations est restée aussi solide qu’elle l’était autrefois, lorsque dans la forêt, vivre en clan était une question de survie” (*Shuni* 102, 105, 106). Whereas the reserve is marked as a colonial place of oppression, the community is a space of Indigenous resistance and resurgence: “Aujourd’hui, elle résiste. Elle est notre pilier” (*Shuni* 102). In *Kuessipan*, Fontaine fictionalizes life on the reserve to create a space of love, care, and survivance: “Une réserve reconstruite où les enfants jouent dehors, où les mères font des enfants pour aimer, où on fait survivre la langue” (9).

Fontaine uses geographical naming and mapping as literary strategies in *Kuessipan* to familiarize the non-Indigenous reader with this specific place. Carrière notes that “the speaker names, lists, and at times even maps out the geography of reserve life in Uashat” (73). In a vignette in “Uashat,” the second part of *Kuessipan*, Fontaine describes the reserve in detail by mapping it:

Là, c’est l’école primaire. Ils l’ont bâtie il y a quelques années. Lorsqu’on la regarde de haut, on peut voir la forme d’un oiseau. Un aigle, je crois. Pour être poétique. [...] Là, c’est le CPE. Le projet a pris du temps à se concrétiser. L’extérieur ressemble à une cage à chiots peinte en orange. Je préfère le bleu et les formes d’oiseaux. [...] En continuant par là, il y a le cimetière catholique. Il n’y a pas beaucoup de tombes, et ce n’est pas parce qu’on ne meurt pas beaucoup. Le premier cimetière est de l’autre côté de la réserve. Ceux qui sont morts après les années soixante sont tous enterrés ici. [...] Le stade a toujours été là. La peinture rouge est délavée, le blanc écaillé. [...] On ne peut pas s’égarer sur la réserve. Ne t’inquiète pas. Elle est si petite. [...] Si tu continues ton chemin droit devant, il y aura du sable à tes pieds. Tu goûteras le salé de l’air. [...] Tu n’as qu’à traverser les

quelques épinettes. Alors tu verras la baie, la plage au sable doux, l'aluminerie, les îles, le fleuve comme une mer. L'océan, d'où tu es venu." (35-39)

The inclusion of mapping into her narrative helps Fontaine create a picture of Uashat and some vignettes, such as the one above, read as a "guided tour" with the speaker taking her non-Indigenous readership on an imaginary walk through the reserve. Fontaine's speaker therefore employs the second person singular "tu/you" in a collective sense to openly address the settler reader who has never been to the reserve. This reading of *Kuessipan* is supported by Fontaine when she writes towards the end of her book: "Je voulais t'amener là où rarement un étranger a mis les pieds" (90), namely the Innu reserve of Uashat in the North of Quebec.

The speaker's examples of geographical mapping and her detailed descriptions of specific places in *Kuessipan* allow the settler reader to see and discover the reserve, as Fontaine states: "Tu as vu la réserve, les maisons surpeuplées, la proximité, la clôture défectueuse, les regards fuyants. Tu as dit: Juste un peu de gazon, puis ce serait correct" (90). What Fontaine here describes are the visible effects of colonization that many Indigenous communities are left with, such as housing problems and poverty on reserve. The past tense ("tu as vu") indicates that the settler has seen the reserve, but only superficially, concentrating on the visible misery and suffering. I understand Fontaine's listing of the above-mentioned problems on the reserve as an attempt to sensitize the settler reader with the effects of colonization. However, this passage can also be read as Fontaine's critique of what Indigenous feminists Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill identify as the settler's "victimized story of the people" living on reserves, "resulting in a kind of 'poverty porn'" (Arvin et al 20). Justice critiques this toxic story, by saying that "the most wounding way in which this story of Indigenous deficiency works is in how it displaces our other stories, the stories of complexity, hope, and possibility" (*Why* 4). Justice here laments that settler stories of

Indigenous deficiency represent a form of erasure or replacement because they rarely leave any room for the “good stories” (Justice, *Why* 2) that are so essential for providing guidance, instilling hope, and rekindling Indigenous cultures after centuries of colonial and patriarchal oppression. The inclusion of the settler voice introduced by “tu as dit” therefore reads as a critique of so-called settler experts who propose how to improve Indigenous living conditions on the reserve. However, as the settler’s proposal to grow some grass implies, this improvement is only superficial and does not tackle the real source of the visible misery and the suffering of life on reserve: colonization and politics of assimilation. Arvin and colleagues argue that “uncritically ‘helping’/victimizing Indians [...] perpetuat[es] violence against Native peoples through denying them complexity and disregarding their hopes and plans for a future that they were never supposed to realize under settler colonialism” (20). In contrast to damage-centred perspectives and stories of deficiency, Innu/Indigenous women writers, such as Fontaine and Antane Kapesh, employ “desire-based frameworks [that] are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” (Tuck, “Suspending Damage” 416). “Such an axiology is,” according to Tuck, “intent on depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered” (“Suspending Damage” 416).

As a result, Fontaine changes the focus from the settler’s damage-centred perspective to her own desire-based perspective by stating that she would have preferred to show her non-Indigenous reader more than the reserve and the suffering, notably Innu being and traditional life on the land:

Mais ce que j’aurais aimé partager, c’est cette indicible fierté d’être moi, entièrement moi, sans maquillage et sans parfum, dans cet horizon de bois et de blancheur. De

grandeur, qui rend humbles même les plus grands de ce monde. En suivant la route du caribou, tu aurais vu la ténacité des hommes devant le froid, plus vivants que jamais, enfin dans leurs coutumes. Puis, au retour de la chasse, il y aurait eu du lièvre et de la banique, du thé sucré pour vous réchauffer. Tu aurais habité pour quelques heures la terre de mes ancêtres et tu aurais compris que le gazon ne pousse pas naturellement sur le sable. (*Kuessipan* 90-91)

The conditional perfect (“j’aurais aimé”) at the beginning of this paragraph indicates the settler’s unwillingness to see Innu pride tied to life on the land – in contrast to the misery on the reserve. Fontaine’s use of the present tense (“c’est”) then emphasizes both Fontaine’s individual and the Innu’s collective resistance to colonization and forced assimilation because they fight to preserve this feeling of pride that is so closely connected to a traditional lifestyle on Nitassinan.

According to Fontaine, time spent on the land, practising traditional activities such as hunting, and finally gathering together and sharing food, renders Innu people alive and makes them feel at home. The conditional perfect in sentences that describe these traditional activities (“tu aurais vu,” “il y aurait eu,” “tu aurais habité”) points to the settler’s unwillingness to share these experiences with the Innu people. However, with the expression “tu aurais compris” Fontaine stresses that lived experiences are necessary to understand Innu life. The grass, as I understand it, is a metaphor for acculturation and assimilation, or the forced process of becoming white and forgetting Innu ways of being and doing. Fontaine’s statement that “grass doesn’t naturally grow on sand” (*Kuessipan* 2013, 82), however, implies continued Innu resistance against assimilation, their survivance, and the maintenance of their traditions despite some losses.

Like place, time is an important element of Innu/Indigenous women’s writing. According to Vincent, Innu storytelling involves a “découpage du temps propre à la culture innue” (87).

Vincent specifies that “[c]e découpage n’est pas fondé sur un décompte d’années, mais plutôt sur une succession de grandes plages de temps caractérisées par des modes de vie différents” (87).

This means that the Innu storyteller, contrary to Western autobiographers or historians, provides no or only very few exact dates. Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine respect these elements of the *tipatshimun* in their literary productions. Both writers distinguish between the past, the nomadic life “avant l’arrivée du premier Blanc dans le Nord” (Antane Kapeshe, *JSMS* 2019, 35), and contemporary life marked by a Western lifestyle and, most importantly, settlement. Antane Kapeshe, for example, links oral storytelling to this particular understanding of time by stating that “chaque Indien possède des histoires dans sa tête, chaque Indien pourrait raconter la vie que nous vivions dans le passé et la vie des Blancs que nous vivions à présent” (*JSMS* 2019, 35).²¹⁷ In both autobiographical narratives, the term “autrefois” refers to the traditional life on the land, including traditional practices like hunting. Fontaine, for instance, states in the last vignette of her book’s second part “Uashat”: “Il paraît que les hommes portaient à la chasse autrefois, des semaines durant, qu’ils revenaient vers leur femme avec de la viande pour des mois” (*Kuessipan* 60), and Antane Kapeshe writes: “Quand autrefois nous vivions notre vie d’Indiens, si nous faisions un *makushan* [un banquet rituel], c’était de la graisse de caribou que nous mangions” (*JSMS* 2019, 37; original emphasis).²¹⁸ The expression “autrefois” serves as a temporal marker that is closely linked to the land and traditional practices. Words like “aujourd’hui” and “à présent,” on the other hand, refer to the contemporary way of life on the reserve, which is marked by (forced) settlement. Antane Kapeshe’s dream of land-based education in Innu-aimun

²¹⁷ Innu original: “Innu tapue apu takuannit umashinaikan muk^u nin eukuan etenitaman: kassinu innu papeik^u kanuenitam tipatshimunnu anite ushtikuanit, kassinu papeik^u innu tshipa tshi tipatshimun anite utat eshk^u nitinniunna ka ishinniuiat mak ume kashikat eshinniuiat kauapishit utinniun tshetshi uauitamat kauapishit ka ishpish uin aiatinimit tan ka ishi-uieshimimit” (*JSMS* 2019, 34).

²¹⁸ Innu original: “Ueshkat nitinnu-inniunna ka ishinniuiat, e makusheiat, eukuan atikupimi nimitshitan” (*JSMS* 2019, 34).

and Fontaine's vignette of the family father who "est las de ne jamais être à la hauteur" (*Kuessipan* 60) but who admires past generations of Innu hunters and wants to be like them, illustrate that both writers imagine the Innu future as fundamentally related to the land, and they both seek to revitalize Innu traditions that involve time spent on the land, such as hunting for subsistence. Moreover, both writers use very few specific dates in their autobiographical texts. In *Kuessipan*, Fontaine only mentions "les années soixante" (36) when she describes the Catholic cemetery on reserve. Antane Kapeshe offers some more dates in her autobiography, for example the year "1970," marking a centennial of the discovery of iron ore in the North, and the year "1953," when the Sept-Îles residential school was built, according to Antane Kapeshe's memory (*JSMS* 2019, 37, 61).

Fontaine's literary work is marked by vignettes carefully describing everyday life on the reserve, and sometimes also in the city. Fontaine's writing thus responds to an important element of Indigenous women's autobiography, as defined by Bataille and Mullen Sands: "Most of these narratives focus on the everyday aspects of life, family, social interactions, feelings and responses to experience, and record tribal customs and traditions as well" (130). According to Carrière, these "[v]ignettes of Innu life, some devastating and hopeless, others resplendent and empowering, are the very make-up of Fontaine's narrative" (74). Literary scholars Kristina Fagan Bidwell and Sam McKegney argue that "it's important to find a vocabulary that registers conflict and contradiction – and not as deficit" (311). In *Kuessipan*, Fontaine has successfully found this vocabulary, carefully documenting "le paradoxe de la beauté et de la souffrance" (29) in the community of Uashat. This paradox is particularly evident in Fontaine's description of an unnamed young man who moves from the reserve to "la grande ville" (*Kuessipan* 32) for medical treatment. It is this young man with the "regard fuyant qui ne veut pas fixer, autant qu'il

ne veut pas l'être à son tour" who embodies the paradox of beauty and suffering, as evoked in the opening paragraph of this vignette (*Kuessipan* 29). The description of the young man's physical appearance testifies to the speaker's desire-based framework, expressed through a loving gaze. However, adhering to an ethics of care, the speaker respects the protagonist's wish not to be observed and turns to a judgement-free description of the young man's apartment, his community, past events on the land, and his dreams.

The vignette of the unnamed young man exemplifies Innu resistance/resilience and survival/survivance. "Contemporary Native literature abounds," according to King, "with characters who are crushed and broken by circumstances and disasters, but very few of them perish. Whatever the damage, contemporary characters, like their traditional trickster relations, rise from their own wreckage to begin again" ("Introduction" 8). This resistance to disappear, as century-long proclaimed by the settler myth of the Vanishing Indian, is evident in this vignette: "Les traitements se donnaient dans la grande ville. Tu as quitté ton village, ta misère, ta destruction, tes amis, ta famille. Recommencer ailleurs, essayer, tenter le coup. Se soigner, pour survivre. Être survivant, de son propre corps. Il le fallait. Au bout de cette sale voie, il te restait encore de l'espoir. Partir" (*Kuessipan* 32). Fontaine here deals with physical survival and situates the city as a place of healing, but not home. This becomes evident through her use of different personal pronouns evoking proximity and relationality, or distance: "**Les** traitements dans **la** grande ville" are opposed to "**ton** village, **ta** misère, **ta** destruction, **tes** amis, **ta** famille" (Fontaine, *Kuessipan* 32; my emphasis).

In *Kuessipan*, Fontaine also seeks "to understand or remember the healing and nurturing qualities of the land" (Anderson, *Recognition* 107), as exemplified by the unnamed young man's trip to a summer camp:

Un été, tu es parti avec un groupe lors d'un projet que le Conseil de bande avait monté pour les jeunes dans le but de contrer la violence. Vous avez érigé vos tentes sur le bord de la plage sur l'île, la plus grande des sept que la baie abrite. La forêt recouvrait le morceau de terre que l'eau salée délimitait. Isolé, face à l'infini, le monde avait tout son sens. Tu as ressenti l'instinct des vieux chasseurs, prêts à combattre le pays en temps de misère. Tu aurais voulu demeurer à jamais sur cette île, la combattre, devenir un guerrier, un héros. Comme dans ce film avec cet auteur dont tu ignores le nom qui est seul, perdu et survivant. Survivant. À l'aube, il fallait déjà repartir. (Fontaine, *Kuessipan* 30)

This example illustrates how time spent on the land and reconnecting with nature by practising traditional activities helps “move beyond hurt and self-destructive coping techniques” (Narine 4), such as alcohol and drug abuse, as described by Fontaine in *Kuessipan*. In another vignette describing “la saison du saumon,” Fontaine evokes again the healing nature of the land and its sacredness, which allows people to temporarily give up drinking and find healing in the silence: “Ici, la terre est sacrée. Les hommes ne viennent pas y boire, les jeunes non plus. Le silence fait du bien à celui qui l'écoute et parfois même, on peut entendre le saumon qui remonte la rivière” (*Kuessipan* 46). Land-based healing and resurgence, however, is not about “returning to a frozen Indigenous past, it is about reclaiming Indigenous knowledge to make sense of the present and imagine future possibilities” (Altamirano-Jiménez and Kermoal, “Introduction” 8).

“Everyday stories, *âcimowina*, the stories that are the foundation of contemporary Indigenous literature,” Episkew stresses, “have transformative powers” (*Taking Back* 15; original emphasis). This transformative power of words is particularly evident in Fontaine's question closing the vignette of the unnamed young man: “Est-ce que quelqu'un t'a déjà dit que tu étais beau?” (*Kuessipan* 32). The adjective “beau/beautiful” refers to the protagonist's

physical appearance, as supported by the description of his face in the vignette's opening paragraph, but, most importantly, I understand it as being "good" or "worthy," and thus relating to the humanity and wholeness of a person. With this simple and yet complex question, Fontaine illustrates that "[l]es mots empreints d'amour, de compréhension et d'affirmation peuvent guérir" (*Shuni* 129). Moreover, I read the unnamed young man's clashing description of embodying both beauty and suffering as an analogy for the paradoxical life on reserve. "If Fontaine depicts Uashat as a place of neocolonial degradation, she also emphasizes its natural and communal beauty," Carrière confirms, and "Uashat, as it turns out, is a site of both stagnations and ambition, of both brutal reality and hopeful futurity" (74).

Conclusion

Despite their apparent differences, Antane Kapeshe's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* and Fontaine's *Kuessipan* show many similarities, most importantly, their adherence to Innu storytelling traditions. The reading of Antane Kapeshe's and Fontaine's literary work as tipatshimuns has demonstrated that "[t]he essence of orature remains embedded in the printed words" (Hubbard 143), and textual examples from both Antane Kapeshe's and Fontaine's work affirm Paula Gunn Allen's statement that "[s]tructural and thematic elements from the oral tradition, usually from the writer's own tribe, always show up in contemporary works by American Indians" (*Sacred Hoop* 4). Both Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine practise cultural continuity through writing by interweaving traditional elements of oral storytelling into their narrative. Antane Kapeshe and Fontaine are therefore still orators, as defined by Maracle:

An orator is someone who has come to grips with the human condition, humanity's relationship to creation and the need for a human direction that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all things under creation and who can present this as story in ordinary and entertaining language. The point of oratory is to create a passionate feeling for life and help people understand the need for change or preservation as the case may be. ("Oratory" 165)

Moreover, Antane Kapeshe's book is marked by her individual voice "auquel elle joint plusieurs voix différentes" (St-Amand, "Pouvoir" 74), and it is through this particular process that "she moves beyond the containment of the first person to become a place for her community to speak and be heard" (Hubbard 145). Although her autobiography is characterized by markers of subjectivity, Antane Kapeshe refuses to employ one of the most important narrative elements of Western autobiography – individualism – and inscribes her autobiography into Innu intellectual traditions, thus practising a form of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty.

Fictional testimony, like Fontaine's *Kuessipan*, "stands in as a storied proxy to conventional testimonials," such as Antane Kapeshe's *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu – Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, and it is "through its circulation to both Native and non-Native readers, [that it] represents the *chance* for change" (Coupal 478; original emphasis). In *Shuni*, Fontaine emphasizes that "les mots ont un pouvoir," and she specifies: "Le pouvoir de soulever des foules ou de les apaiser. Le pouvoir d'élever un pays ou de l'opprimer. Le pouvoir de rêver, de dire, d'instruire. [...] La parole est une redoutable" (104). Brant identifies Indigenous writing as "a brilliant and loving weapon of change" (*Writing as Witness* 115), which Indigenous women employ as a means of resurgence seeking "to restore and empower Indigenous Peoples, to reclaim our traditional selves, our traditional knowledge, and our right to be who we are and

should be as healthy, vital, and vibrant communities, unencumbered by depression, overwhelming grief, substance abuse, and traumatic responses” (Brave Heart et al. 288). Despite the transformative and healing power of Indigenous stories for both individuals and collectives, Episkenew recognizes its limits: “Although healing from the trauma of colonialism is a prime function of contemporary Indigenous literature, healing without changing the social and political conditions that first caused the injuries would be ineffectual” (*Taking Back* 17). To fully heal from historic and intergenerational trauma, profound change is necessary in all spheres that affect Indigenous Peoples. It is therefore important to note that, according to Henzi, “An Antane Kapeshe’s work radically changed both the literary and political scenes in Quebec” (“Recovering and Recontextualizing” 278).

Both Antane Kapeshe’s and Fontaine’s writing is clearly marked by their “affective experiences of belonging to communities and territories” (Fagan Bidwell and McKegney 312). This (be)longing is expressed through a desire-based narrative framework that explores the paradox of a better life in the bush (Nutshimit) and the contemporary way of life on the reserve governed by capitalist settler colonialism (Gill “Eukuan” 10). Antane Kapeshe’s and Fontaine’s narratives illustrate how “[t]he people who live in story are, like Native people everywhere, struggling and dreaming, caught between the beauty of what we know, and the ugliness of what has been done to our people, our land” (Brant, *Writing as Witness* 122). Moreover, this sense of belonging is evident in Antane Kapeshe’s use of anger as a literary strategy to defend her community and culture and in Fontaine’s narrative of love for her community and territory. Innu/Indigenous women’s emotive and experiential narratives “speak to Indigenous modes of persistence” and “offer an incredible arsenal for imagining other possibilities” (Fagan Bidwell and McKegney 313). Emphasizing the “creative and political potential through emotions,” Fagan

Bidwell and McKegney remind us that “literature doesn’t just depict or speak to communities, it creates them” (313).

CHAPTER 4: LAND-BASED POETIC ACTIVISM²¹⁹

Indigenous women have long been at the frontlines of socio-political, environmental, and cultural activism on Turtle Island, and they have been reclaiming and asserting their place in the literary art scenes in Quebec and Canada for a long time. This chapter argues that Innu women's environmental activism and their production of poetry merge into what can be called "land-based poetic activism." I understand land-based poetic activism as a strategy to sensitize a wide audience to environmental exploitation, destruction, and injustice; issues that are inseparably interwoven with Indigenous Rights and questions of social justice. For this reason, the larger goal of land-based poetic activism is to support real-world activist movements of ecological protection, social justice, and Indigenous sovereignty.

The main theme of this chapter is the land, or, more specifically, Innu women's relationship with the land, their poetic and political claims for Nitassinan, the traditional Innu territory, and their sense of responsibility to protect it from irreversible destruction.²²⁰ The Innu word "Nitassinan" translates as "our territory" and the Innu possessive markers "nit-" (prefix) and "-(i)nan" (suffix) (translating as "our but not yours;" Mollen, "Marques") essentially reflect this inherent right to collective ownership over the traditional territory occupied by the Innu of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula (see Figure 7). The term "Innu Assi," which particularly Innu

²¹⁹ This chapter is based on an earlier and much shorter version entitled "Rita Mestokosho's and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's Land-Based Poetic Activism" which has been accepted for publication in a collection on ecocriticism and literatures in Quebec, edited by Elspeth Tulloch (McGill and Queen's UP; under peer review). I thank Elspeth for her insightful comments on the submitted essay.

²²⁰ In his ground-breaking book on ethical writing and publishing practices in Indigenous contexts, *Elements of Indigenous Style* (2018), Cree publisher Gregory Younging explains that the word "claim" (especially when used in the expression "land claim") "is problematic for Indigenous Peoples because it implies that they must apply to obtain ownership over land, not that they have inherent ownership" (57). Instead, he proposes the more appropriate term "Indigenous Title" that I will prioritize when I refer to the Innu people's "right to ownership over, or compensation for, lands they traditionally occupied" (Younging 57).

poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine seizes on in her collection *Manifeste Assi* (2014), means “Innu land” and refers to a smaller territory than that of Nitassinan, generally composed of the reserve (community), additional overlapping land, and sites of patrimonial importance.²²¹

What I discuss in this chapter as Innu women’s expressions of land-based poetic activism is not a radically new concept. Indeed, it has a long tradition among Indigenous women that can be traced back in Canada to Mohawk poet E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), who was internationally renowned for her public performances. In her famous poem “The Cattle Thief” (1895), for instance, Johnson lyrically gives voice to the daughter of the supposed Cattle Thief, who angrily calls out land theft and the settlers’ exploitation of the flora and fauna while the Cree are starving: “What have you left to us of land, what have you left of game / What have you brought but evil, and curses since you came? / Have you paid us for our game? how paid us for our land?” (*Flint and Feather* 15). And Johnson closes her poem with the daughter’s powerful reclamation to “Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game; / Give back the furs and the forests that were ours before you came; / Give back the peace and the plenty” (*Flint and Feather* 15-16). In Quebec, Innu leader and writer An Antane Kapeshe deals, in *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976; JSMS), with issues of land deprivation and the impact of large-scale industrial exploitation of natural

²²¹ Based on collaborative research with the Pekuakamiulnuatsh located at Lake Saint-John, settler linguist Sükran Tipi explores the significance of place/space in the construction of Innu/Innu identity and offers comprehensive explanations of different Innu terms: “Quand les Innus réfèrent aujourd’hui à leur territoire ancestral pour affirmer leurs droits qu’ils n’ont jamais cédés, ils utilisent la dénomination *Nitassinan* qui se traduit littéralement par ‘notre territoire’ dans leur langue, l’*innu-aimun*. Le Nitassinan est alors l’appellation que l’on retrouve dans la littérature traitant des revendications territoriales et dans les documents officiels élaborés par les Conseils de bande au niveau local et déposés dans le cadre de consultations avec les instances gouvernementales. Entre eux, les Innus préfèrent utiliser *Tshitassinu* qui est une dénomination à caractère plus inclusif et qu’ils traduisent communément par ‘notre territoire à nous autres,’ et qui est employée dans un contexte local, en parlant de codes de pratique pour la chasse ou la pêche ou bien de la pratique d’activités culturelles. Enfin, *Nutshimit*, avec ses variantes selon les différents dialectes (*Nutshimits*, p.ex.), se traduit littéralement par ‘dans le bois, dans la forêt’ et est une vieille appellation, à laquelle font référence surtout les Aînés, quand ils utilisent des expressions telles que ‘monter en territoire’ ou pour parler du temps où les Innus vivaient encore selon un mode de vie nomade ou semi-nomade. Quand le mot *Nutshimit* est utilisé, c’est dans un registre de langage qui est ‘la langue originaire du territoire’” (101).

resources, forced settlement and residential schooling, cultural ruptures and losses, as well as experiences of racism and settler violence against her people. Discussing the literary and cinematographic work of Innu writers in her essay “Le pouvoir de la parole, d’An Antane Kapesh à Réal Junior Leblanc” (2015), Québécois literary scholar Isabelle St-Amand emphasizes the role and impact of literature and art “pour résister à l’incursion des intérêts miniers, forestiers et hydroélectriques, ainsi que pour dénaturiser l’insistant projet colonial qui met à mal le peuple innu” (74). Indigenous writers recognize the potential of artistic projects to voice their opposition and consciously instrumentalize art in a political manner, albeit not exclusively.

Referring to the larger Canadian context of Indigenous women’s history of publication, Métis feminist scholar Emma LaRocque underlines the important place that poetry occupies in the field of Indigenous women’s writing: “Since the 1960s, thousands of published poems have been written by Aboriginal women. [...] The growing list of books of poetry by Native women is an indication of the significance of poetry in our cultures” (“Reflections” 159). LaRocque then rightfully identifies poetry as “a strong and active avenue of creative expression for Aboriginal women” (“Reflections” 159). Wendat poet Éléonore Sioui’s debut collection *Andatha* (1985) is recognized for being the first book of poetry published by an Indigenous woman in Quebec, and there has been a significantly increasing number of such publications since 2009, the year in which acclaimed Innu poet Joséphine Bacon’s debut collection *Bâtons à message / Tshissinuatshitakana* (BM) appeared. In the new millennium, poetry has fast become one of the preferred literary genres of Indigenous women writers in Quebec, and Innu women are exceptionally involved and represented in this field, as Italian literary scholar Maurizio Gatti states: “Si l’on compare les décennies 1970 à 2000 aux années 2000 à 2015, l’ascension de la littérature innue et de ses principales représentantes a été foudroyante au cours des 15 dernières

années” (qtd. in Durand 145). The significance of Innu women’s poetic contributions to the arts and society in general resonates with their institutional recognition in form of literary awards, prizes, and honours, both nationally and internationally.

Innu women have been using their poetic voices to speak back to, resist, and destabilize patriarchal, capitalist settler colonialism, which constitutes the social framework that has shaped their past and continues to influence their contemporary reality. In addition, poetry offers a space in which they can imagine and share their decolonial visions of an environmentally sustainable and socially just future. Hence, Innu women’s poetry acts as a form of poetic activism inasmuch as it challenges existing colonial narratives by conveying their specific perspectives as Innu women, which draw heavily on their individual and shared lived experiences as well as on Innu ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies. Innu women poets also focus on the issue of land, a recurring and important theme in their writing. Contemporary Innu poetry gives voice and agency to the land poets love, protect, and call home.

The main corpus of this chapter will draw on the poetry of Rita Mestokosho and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, two Innu women who are both poets and activists for Indigenous and environmental rights and who both employ the literary tool of land-based poetic activism to fight against capitalist settler colonialism’s destruction of the Northern flora and fauna in times of ecological crises. More specifically, I will analyze selected poems from Mestokosho’s collections *How I See Life, Grandmother / Eshi uapataman nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère* (2011; *CJPVG*) and *Née de la pluie et de la terre* (2014; *NPT*) and from Kanapé Fontaine’s collections *Manifeste Assi* (2014; *MA*) and *Bleuets et abricots* (2016; *BA*) in the context of their ecocritical treatise of the past, present, and future.

Rita Mestokosho and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine

Born on the Nitassinan in 1966, Rita Mestokosho is from and still lives in Ekuanitshit, an Innu community situated in the Côte-Nord region of Quebec (see Figure 7).²²² As a community councillor, cultural and environmental activist, educator, and poet, her body of work testifies to her long-standing struggle to protect her homeland, Innu Assi; her mother tongue, Innu-aimun; and her culture, Innu-aitun (“Rita”). Mestokosho is the first Innu woman to publish a poetry collection in Quebec, *Eshi Uapataman Nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère* (translated in English as *How I See Life, Grandmother*). The poems were originally released in a bilingual Innu-French format in 1995 and later re-edited by Swedish and French publishers (2009, 2011, and 2014), sparking interest among Innu and other Indigenous communities and a wider (inter-)national readership (Gatti, *Littérature amérindienne* 264).²²³ The poet’s lyrical voice, addressed to her nukum, grandmother, as the original collection’s title informs readers, allows Mestokosho to dialogue and intimately share her personal, and yet undeniably culturally-informed, view of the world, in which the land plays an essential role as a sustaining physical, cultural, and spiritual element threatened by the devastating forces of capital-driven industrialization, resource extraction, and settler colonialism.

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine is a multi-genre artist and activist for Indigenous and environmental rights. She was born, in 1991, in Baie-Comeau and is originally from Pessamit, an Innu community on the Côte-Nord of Quebec, but she grew up outside her community from the

²²² For more detailed biographical information, see Gatti (*Littérature amérindienne* 263-265), Mestokosho’s author profile on the website of Wendake’s Indigenous Book Fair *Kwahiatonhk!*, and the special issue on Innu writing in *Littoral* (2015).

²²³ The original, bilingual (Innu-French) collection from 1995 is barely accessible. The Swedish publishing house Beijbom Books relaunched a bilingual (Innu-French) and trilingual (Innu-French-English) collection in 2009 and 2011 respectively. In 2014, the French publisher Bruno Doucey released an extended, bilingual (Innu-French) collection with the new title *Née de la pluie et de la terre*.

age of five and is now based in Montreal (see Figure 7).²²⁴ One of today's most prolific women writers in Quebec, she began her literary career as a spoken word poet, marking "le territoire du Québec par ses slams 'territoriaux' dès 2012" ("Natasha," *Kwahiatonhk!*). Kanapé Fontaine has been dubbed "la slameuse territoriale" ("Natasha," *Institut Tshakapesh*) because of her lyrical treatise on the land, demonstrated, for instance, in one of her most famous slams, "Les jours des feux, des tambours et des meutes" (2012). As Québécois literary scholar Joëlle Papillon explains, Kanapé Fontaine wrote and performed this bilingual (French-Innu) slam to support Innu women activists who, in 2012, organized a 900km long march from Mani-Utenam to Montreal symbolizing their opposition to the hydroelectric "development" of Unamen, the Romaine River, and the province's economic megaproject of the Plan Nord (Papillon, "*Bleuets*" 87; Giroux, "Résistance innue" 72).²²⁵ In 2014, a filmed version of the same slam was again used to promote a protest march along the St. Lawrence River, this time organized by a diverse group of environmental activists who demanded an end to bitumen and crude oil pipeline projects that would transport these dangerous resources from Alberta's tar sands to Canada's eastern provinces ("Marche"). These environmental causes remain key issues in Kanapé Fontaine's poetic work, notably in her second and third poetry collections, *Manifeste Assi* (2014) and *Bleuets et abricots* (2016). Kanapé Fontaine unapologetically declares Turtle Island as belonging to Innu women, and by extension all Indigenous women in *Manifeste Assi* by bluntly unveiling and often angrily denouncing the violent history of genocide, the ongoing reality of settler-colonial occupation and ecologically devastating resource extraction on stolen Indigenous land, and, in a less-angry yet determined style, advances her claims in her subsequent collection.

²²⁴ For more detailed biographical information, see Kanapé Fontaine's author profile on the website of Wendake's Indigenous Book Fair *Kwahiatonhk!* and the special issue on Innu writing in *Littoral* (2015).

²²⁵ For a detailed analysis of Innu resistance against the Romaine Hydroelectric Complex project, see Giroux, "Résistance innue."

Kanapé Fontaine states about her poetic approach in *Bleuets et abricots*: “en retraçant l’histoire de mon peuple, j’ai voulu redonner la parole aux femmes en tant qu’héritières du territoire” (qtd. in Collard).

As one of the first published contemporary Innu poets, Mestokosho has achieved a noteworthy status among Innu women writers, and Kanapé Fontaine is today one of the most acclaimed women poets in Quebec. However, both writers inherit, acknowledge, continue, complement, and extend the important, inspiring, and celebrated yet often still marginalized work of other past and contemporary Innu women writers, such as An Antane Kapeshe, Joséphine Bacon, Naomi Fontaine, Marie-Andrée Gill, Maya Cousineau Mollen, and Manon Nolin, to name only a few. Kanapé Fontaine, for example, uses intertextuality as an important literary device to honour her poetic predecessors, such as Bacon and Mestokosho, and their important literary oeuvre (Papillon, “*Bleuets*” 88; Kanapé Fontaine qtd. in Gatti, “Natasha” 131). Furthermore, Innu women’s preoccupation with the land is echoed in the short documentary film *Blocus 138: la résistance innue / Blocus 138: Innu Resistance* (2012) by Innu filmmaker and poet Réal Junior Leblanc. This film, the final text of which also appeared as the poem “Blocus 138 – La résistance innue / Roadblock 138 - Innu Resistance” in the bilingual collection *Languages of Our Land: Indigenous Poems and Stories from Quebec / Langues de notre terre: poèmes et récits autochtones du Québec* (2014), complements my analysis of Innu women’s land-based poetic activism, as it sheds additional light on the strong involvement of Innu women in environmental, and therefore also socio-political, activism that derives from past and present territorial and social injustices.

In keeping with Cherokee scholar and writer Daniel Heath Justice’s argument that “Native literature is an expression of intellectual agency as well as aesthetic accomplishment and

that it has a role to play in the struggle for sovereignty, decolonization, and the reestablishment of Indigenous values to the healing of this wounded world” (“Currents” 336-337), I read the literary texts discussed in this study for expressions of Innu worldview and elucidate the analysis with academic criticism from the field of Indigenous (literary) studies, prioritizing, whenever possible, Indigenous (women’s) voices.²²⁶ I consider Mestokosho’s and Kanapé Fontaine’s poetry as their individual work, in which they share their own unique opinions and visions. Although these may not necessarily be those held by their communities, the influence of the poets’ cultural heritage and their people’s past and contemporary socio-political situation on their writing cannot be ignored, as LaRocque contends: “One’s own voice is never totally of one’s self, in isolation from community. At the same time, one’s self is not a communal replica of the collective” (*When* 29).

United through strong cultural bounds, such as origin stories, Innu-aimun, values and responsibilities, common activities on the land and relationships with the land, the Innu communities living across a vast, boreal territory in Northern Quebec and Labrador are nonetheless also culturally diverse.²²⁷ Traditionally a nomadic people who spent and continue to spend time in the *nutshimit*, the interior of the land and their traditional hunting grounds, the Innu were among the first Indigenous Peoples to encounter European explorers and settlers, and yet they were among the last, as recently as in the middle of the 20th century, to be forcibly settled in permanent reserves (Tanner); individual and collective memories that Antane Kapesesh vividly recalls in her autohistory *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite*

²²⁶ Much of the critical theory used in this chapter stems from Indigenous scholars in English-Canada and non-Indigenous scholars in Quebec, a necessity that can be explained by the different stages of Indigenous literary production and criticism in English-Canada and Quebec.

²²⁷ The editors of the publication *Environmental Impact Assessment Terms / Tshe ishi-matenitakuak atusseun aimuna*, for example, specify in their preface: “Although Innu-aimun is a single language spoken in both Labrador and Quebec, there are many regional differences” (MacKenzie and Hendriks vii).

Sauvagesse. According to data published by Statistics Canada, 11,360 people reported speaking *Innu-aimun* (“Aboriginal Languages” 2), which means that, at least statistically, the majority of Innu still speak their language (Lepage 103). However, as a direct consequence of forced residential schooling in one of the official colonial languages (French or English), Innu linguist Yvette Mollen considers *Innu-aimun* today a “langue en danger” (“Technologie” 77). Innu women poets play a crucial role in (re-)claiming, reviving, and promoting the Innu language when they overtly address linguistic issues in their writing, include Innu words and expressions in their poetry (with or without providing translations or glossaries) or publish multilingual collections that include poems in *Innu-aimun*.

Poetic Activism, or the convergence of politics and poetics²²⁸

Whether it is through the assertion of the Innu language or values and rights related to Innu Assi, the Innu land, both Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine produce poetry from a political and activist position. Their land-based poetic activism constitutes what Wendat art critic Guy Sioui Durand identifies as “le point de départ d’une double opération d’oralités politique et poétique” (6), and Kanapé Fontaine confirms that being Indigenous implies being political: “L’indien est politique, qu’il le veuille ou non” (qtd. in Gatti, “Natasha” 130). Political practices include, as Québécois political science scholar Dalie Giroux explains in her article “Expressions de la doublure corps/terre dans l’imaginaire politique autochtone contemporain au Canada” (2009), different forms of activism, as well as the workings of the legal system itself. Though

²²⁸ The concept of what I call “poetic activism” reminds me of “artivism” (see Chapter 1) because both concepts highlight the deep connection between art and activism and acknowledge art as a means of political expression and a catalyst for social change. Still, I understand poetic activism more as a complementary sub-category of activism because of its restriction to poetry/poetics. I further limit my analysis to environmental aspects of Indigenous poetic activism that are deeply related to Indigenous Rights and Indigenous Title. Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong, for instance, emphasizes the connection between Indigenous Rights and Indigenous activities of environmental protection: “Indigenous rights must be protected, for we are the protectors of Earth” (“Sharing One Skin”).

clearly addressed within the legal system, Indigenous land and rights claims are also tackled through a multitude of activist strategies, and these poetically advocated claims for Nitassinan are an essential element of Mestokosho's and Kanapé Fontaine's land-based poetic activism.

First Nations in Canada are still governed by the paternalistic legislation of the *Indian Act*, a set of laws that regulates Indigenous self-determination and self-governance and minimizes Indigenous political agency and power, as Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle contends: “Politically oppressed people struggle in the context of law to change the laws of the oppressor so as to free themselves and become unhindered” (“Just” 41). When oppressed and marginalized groups, such as Indigenous populations, are denied and excluded from political power, activism, in all its guises, often remains the only strategy by which they can signal resistance and ensure that their voices, concerns, and demands will be heard, as exemplified by the “Idle No More movement [which] is re-storying Canada – using public gatherings and mass media, it is actively re-telling stories which have been silenced, minimized, and denied, but also provides multiple forums to share stories that inspire hope and promote social and political change” (McLean 93). Social movements, such as Idle No More, “are large informal groupings of individuals or formal organizations focussed on specific political or social issues; in other words, on carrying out, resisting, or undoing a social change” (Valaskakis et al. 5).²²⁹ Mi'kmaq scholar Pamela Palmater explains, more specifically, that “Idle No More is a coordinated, strategic movement” originally initiated by Indigenous women “as a way to oppose Bill C-45, the omnibus legislation impacting water rights and land rights under the Indian Act,” that “grew to include all the legislation and

²²⁹ For a detailed and comprehensive contextualization of the Idle No More movement, see the Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The Winter We Danced* (2014). For the Idle No More movement in Quebec, see Widia Larivière, “Idle No More: Prendre la parole et travailler ensemble” (2020).

the corresponding funding cuts to First Nations political organizations meant to silence our advocacy voice” (“Why Are We” 39).

Activism can be defined generally as the use of direct and noticeable, often public, action to achieve political or social changes, and can include operations of protest and physical resistance or disruption. As “specific movement-supporting activities that are promoted by environmental [actors, groups or] organizations” (Tindall et al. 910), ecological activism encompasses diverse strategies and manifestations, such as the occupation of land, blockades or barricades, public demonstrations, (protest) marches, signing petitions, and manifestos, to name some of the most common and successful practices. The “Innu occupation and blockade of the Canadian Air Force/NATO base at Goose Bay, Labrador,” which “was led largely by Innu women to challenge the further dispossession of their territories and the destruction of their land-based way of life by the military industrial complex’s encroachment onto the Innu peoples’ homeland of *Nitassinan*” is a great example of such “land-based direct action” (Coulthard, “#IdleNoMore” 33-34). As participants in “an explicitly non-violent movement” (Coulthard, “#IdleNoMore” 36), the Idle No More activists’ expressed their resistance using an approach based on “slow escalation from letters to MPs and ministers, to teach-ins, marches and flash mobs, to rallies, protests, and blockades,” in order “to give Canada every opportunity to come to the table in a meaningful way and address these long-standing issues,” and “escalation,” Palmater emphasizes, “would only occur if Canada continued to ignore our voices” (“Why Are We” 39). In the context of Indigenous activism, round-dances, drumming, and singing have been other activist performances accompanying the more common strategies of resistance, as alluded to by Kanapé Fontaine in her collection *Manifeste Assi*: “tournons en *round dance* ensemble” (82; original emphasis), “les tambours chuintèrent” and “je taperai du pied je taperai mon sol /

avec les miens les autres les chants de paix” (47). As early as in the prologue to her poetic manifesto, the poet declares: “puisque je suis ici à embrasser le sol de ma terre, *Assi*, je libérerai ses chants de femme. Que l’homme puisse se remettre à jouer du tambour” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 6-7).

Indigenous women are deeply involved in intersecting social movements, and “l’engagement considérable des femmes autochtones du Québec dans les débats et les actions qui touchent le territoire, l’environnement, les changements climatiques et la violence” (Léger and Morales Hudon 10) merits particular recognition. With her stanza “Je serai encore là demain / Nous serons encore là demain / Nous ferons encore la paix demain” (“Jours” 32) in her bilingual (French-Innu) territorial slam, Kanapé Fontaine lyrically deals with Innu women’s peaceful protest march and their blockade of the Route 138 and, most importantly, evokes “le chant des femmes, qui entonnent en innu aimun: ‘Demain nous serons encore là’” (St-Amand, “Pouvoir” 75). In *Manifeste Assi*, Kanapé Fontaine continues to create an inseparable link between walking as an act of continuing resistance and singing as an act of survivance: “Mitimetau les traces de nos ancêtres / nous marchons nous marchons / en âge des tempêtes” and “je chanterai mes plus belles berceuses / pour réveiller la survivance les peuples ma mère” (56). Unfortunately, Howard Scott translates “survivance” as “survival,” thus erasing Kanapé Fontaine’s clear reference to the Indigenous concept of survivance (which exceeds survival) from the poem’s final lines: “I sing my most beautiful lullabies / to awaken survival the peoples my mother” (*Assi Manifesto* 47).²³⁰

Allusions to these different types of public action and the deployment of the manifesto format both inform aspects of Kanapé Fontaine’s poetic work. For example, in “Les jours des

²³⁰ Unanga scholar Eve Tuck writes that “Gerald Vizenor’s (1994) concept of survivance is distinct from survival: it is ‘moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal’” (“Suspending Damage” 422).

feux, des tambours et des meutes,” Kanapé Fontaine titles the first part “I (Jour du Blocus)” (29) and the third part “III (Jour de la Marche)” (31), thus openly referring to the Innu roadblock of highway 138 and the protest march of over forty Innu women in 2012. The physical yet peaceful resistance of Innu women as a major strategy of activism seeking to protect their territory is a key theme in this slam poem, and Kanapé Fontaine uses the powerful image of hands as a symbol of resistance and solidarity in the opening lines: “Les mains en l’air, les mains tendues, / les mains tenues, les mains nues” (Kanapé Fontaine, “Jours” 29). Kanapé Fontaine’s imagery of raised hands here reflects Indigenous women’s resistance, protest, and determination to protect their territory and culture, whereas the empty hands refer to their peaceful mission - in contrast to heavily armed police forces that confront them. Moreover, the act of holding hands signifies Innu women’s solidarity and unity, but also serves as a physical barrier to the territory, and extended arms serve as human shields.²³¹ The raised or clenched fist is a global symbol of fighting oppression, and this symbolic gesture has been used at different occasions, mostly during protests of revolutionary social movements, for example, the Black Panthers, the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Idle No More Movement, and feminist movements. Moreover, the red handprint painted across the mouth has become a way of raising awareness for the fact that Indigenous women are at a significantly higher risk to be murdered or sexually assaulted, and as a symbol of solidarity with Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls it also represents the women who have been silenced.

Most forthrightly, as the title of her second poetry collection implies, Kanapé Fontaine lyrically employs the form of the manifesto. Early in *Manifeste Assi*, Kanapé Fontaine evokes

²³¹ The depiction of Indigenous women’s bodies as physical barriers to protect their kin can also be traced back to E. Pauline Johnson’s poetry; for instance in “The Cattle Thief” where the daughter courageously defends her dead father’s body from further assault and warns “the cursing settlers” in her Cree language: ““If you mean to touch that body, you must cut your way through *me*”” (*Flint and Feather* 14; original emphasis).

Innu cosmology, in which dream life is considered “as real as waking time” (Smallman 23), when her speaker longs for a dream needed to galvanize and guide her: “quel est le songe / manifeste que je dois écrire” (*MA* 17). The speaker’s vision quest is repeated on the collection’s next page: “Quel est le songe que je dois faire / la vision transparente un matin” and is, again, clearly related to her activism: “Quel est le manifeste / que je dois vous écrire” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 18).

Earlier in her poetic manifesto, the speaker addresses *assi*, the land herself, pledging: “Je t’écirai un manifeste / un manifeste amour un manifeste papier” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 13). Most importantly, the land as the speaker’s direct addressee (“te/you”) is represented as a living and sentient being, a lyrical strategy that allows Kanapé Fontaine to weave Innu ontologies, which recognize the land’s personhood, into her poetry. Moreover, the rhetorical device of the anaphora used in these lines (“manifeste”) points to Innu oral traditions, while the speaker’s open references to writing (“écrire” and “papier”) are generally considered part of Western traditions. In sum, the two lines demonstrate how Kanapé Fontaine blends orality and writing by taking advantage of Innu oratory and its mnemonic function and the written word and its long-lasting influence. Later in the same collection, the speaker asserts: “Lorsque je t’écirai ce manifeste / la-bàs je serai” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 69), indicating her intimate relationship with the land and her devout commitment to fight for her well-being. The speaker’s described presence can also be read as territoriality, “the act of laying claim to and defending [her ancestral] territory” (Hall and Reed Hall 10), as well as an allusion to her physical activism on the land she wants to protect. Kanapé Fontaine closes her collection with a strong message of hope, affirming the land’s spirit, vitality and survival despite ecological crisis and her own strong belief in the transformative power of a poetic manifesto: “Assi / lives // The poem is here / a manifesto / it will mark time”

(*Assi Manifesto* 76). This idea of transformative power is especially clear in the original French version: “Le poème est ici / un manifeste / il marquera le temps” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 87), the last line insisting that the poem will stand out in history. Kanapé Fontaine’s metaphor of the poem as a temporal marker of substantial change reminds me of tshissinuatshtakana, the Innu message sticks as spatial (and social) markers, as the speaker recalls earlier in the collection: “des bâtons marquent d’un trait le sol gelé” (*MA* 45). Similar to these important signposts, Kanapé Fontaine’s poetic manifesto leaves its traces for present and future generations and directs her readership towards an alternative understanding of the land and natural resources, one that recognizes that “their gifts multiply by our care for them, and dwindle from our neglect” (Kimmerer 382) or our careless exploitation. This same idea is repeated in the prologue to her succeeding collection, *Bleuets et abricots*, in which Kanapé Fontaine recognizes poetry as a powerful tool that will initiate a profound transformation: “Le poème est le mouvement qui féconde” (7).²³²

A manifesto is “a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer” (“Manifesto”) and, as history has shown, some manifestos are game-changing as they initiate periods of political, societal, and artistic renewal. While the most famous manifestos have often first and foremost articulated political intentions, artists have also employed this type of declaration to promote their visions, and their manifestos sometimes mark watershed moments, as is famously the case of Québécois painter Paul-Émile Borduas’s *Refus global* (1948). Igniting a debate beyond the arts, *Refus global* is seen as a precursor of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, a process of social change that would radically transform Quebec society and politics.

²³² For a more detailed analysis of how Kanapé Fontaine connects Innu women and the land in *Bleuets et abricots*, especially by using imagery of fertility and circularity, see Papillon’s article “*Bleuets et abricots*: la femme-territoire de Natasha Kanapé Fontaine” (2019).

Though not always directly activist per se, socially and politically conscious poetic performances have long been a part of the Quebec literary tradition, as evidenced for example by the famous *Nuit de la poésie* featuring nationalist Québécois poets in 1970 and, in particular, by Michèle Lalonde's legendary poem "Speak White" (1974).

Kanapé Fontaine's public appearances and performances at activist events, such as gatherings in Montreal organized by the Quebec branch of the Idle No More grassroots movement, can be understood, however, as adhering to a separate tradition, one enacting the specific political poetics of Indigenous poetry. As Mohawk spoken-word artist Janet Rogers affirms, there is a political component to Indigenous poetics: "The spoken-word poet can be described as a politically aware person, using his or her talents to relay passionate messages based on observations of social injustice, cultural prejudice, [and] environmental exploitation" (254). Kanapé Fontaine's environmentally activist stance is particularly evident in the final stanza of an untitled poem in *Manifeste Assi*: "Me tenir debout / la fonte des glaciers" (50). I read these lines as an allusion to both the female speaker's physical posture and activist stance in face of ecological crisis, here the significant environmental effects of human-induced climate change, and the poet's effort "to recast 'glacial' – once a dead metaphor for 'slow' – as a rousing, iconic image of unacceptably fast loss" (R. Nixon 13). In the French original, these lines stand for the speaker's resistance and resilience, although her exhaustion from constant struggles might be indirectly implied through Kanapé Fontaine's choice of the verb form. The expression "se tenir debout" is defined as "s'opposer avec fermeté, résister avec courage" and translates in English as "stand up to," meaning "to resist and defy the authority of (someone, especially one who is being abusive or unfair)" (Antidote). In *Assi Manifesto*, Howard Scott translates the last stanza as follows: "I stand there / the melting of glaciers" (41), positioning the speaker as a passive

observer of an ecological disaster instead of a determined agent of change. I thus argue that the speaker's powerful activist stance is lost in Scott's translation. Her involvement in activities of Indigenous activism, however, is again evoked by Kanapé Fontaine at the end of *Manifeste Assi*, where the speaker alludes to the "Idle No More movement, which has swept the country over the holidays" (Palmater, "Why Are We" 37): "Idle no more / sous un soleil de neige" (MA 85), and the speaker strongly declares: "La léthargie ostensible / est à sa fin" (MA 85).

For Innu women writers and activists like Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine, "la poésie et le militantisme sont imbriqués l'un dans l'autre" (Huberman 117), irrespective of their different approaches to land-based poetic activism. Whereas Kanapé Fontaine's poetic activism is marked by a militant, sometimes even aggressive tone, Mestokosho's writing is less denunciatory, yet not less powerful. Her activist stance is evident in her epistolary exchange with Québécois poet Denise Brassard, published in *Aimititau! Parlons-nous!* (2008), a collection of written conversations between Indigenous and (mainly) Québécois writers, edited by French poet Laure Morali. The Romaine River, her role as a sustaining element, the ecologically and culturally destructive power of a Hydro-Québec plant, and the Innu resistance against the systematic exploitation of the resources of the North are key themes in Mestokosho's letters in this publication. In her opening text, Mestokosho uses the poetic tool of the simile to convince her then unidentified addressee of her deep relationship with the river: "Je t'écris cette lettre pour te parler de la rivière Romaine, celle que j'aime comme ma grande sœur aînée millénaire," and she continues to explain the importance of the river, the salmon, and the traditional territory for her people: "Cette rivière est la route qu'empruntaient mes grands-parents pour retourner chez eux. Et chez eux, c'est le territoire traditionnel, celui qu'on veut inonder. J'en pleure intérieurement. Car la rivière, c'est le bonheur des Innus. Le saumon y vit encore aujourd'hui. Il nage en toute

liberté, et c'est à nous de le défendre, de le protéger" (in Morali 37). Mestokosho's words are vital for the reader's understanding of Innu/Indigenous cosmologies, and it is useful to elucidate how language shapes our understanding of (being in) the world and how translation can help to reflect a particular worldview. As Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer emphasizes in her seminal book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), Indigenous Peoples' recognition of personhood for all beings - including humans, animals, plants, rocks, soil, and water - is an essential feature of most Indigenous cosmologies. Mestokosho adheres to innu-tshissenitamun, Innu Traditional Knowledge (ITK), defined as "contemporary and generations-old knowledge that Innu elders and some other Innu have as a result of living in the country" (MacKenzie and Hendriks 29), by identifying Unamen, the Romaine River, as her kin and by acknowledging the agency of the freely swimming salmon, to give two examples. Mestokosho thus recognizes the personhood of the river and the salmon just as Kanapé Fontaine does with the land in her poetry. Moreover, Mestokosho mentions her responsibility to protect Unamen, which, according to Innu activist Melissa Mollen Dupuis, is one of the traditional roles of Innu women: "Les femmes innues ont un rôle traditionnel de protection de l'eau" (152). Deborah McGregor shares a similar understanding of Indigenous women's special relationship with water in her essay "Indigenous Women, Water Justice and *Zaagidowin* (Love)," where she emphasizes that "[m]any women have taken up the role of speaking and caring for water, thus renewing their traditional responsibilities" (74).

A literal translation of the above-cited paragraph would require the use of the pronoun "it" for salmon because species are generally discussed in the singular and not gendered in English, whereas the French language attributes the masculine gender to salmon. In contrast to colonial languages, "Innu-aimun is a gender-neutral language," meaning that there is no

grammatical distinction between the masculine and the feminine and “that pronouns and verbs can be translated equally as ‘she’ or ‘he’” (MacKenzie and Hendriks vii).²³³ The normalized use of “it” in English, however, reduces the fish to an object without agency, whereas the Innu language understands animals, including *utshashumek*^u (salmon), as animated beings (Mollen, “Animé”). Moreover, the Innu recognize salmon as kin and as beings with a spirit and agency. I want to acknowledge this Innu understanding of the world marked by relationality using the plural form for salmon in my translation:

I am writing you this letter to tell you about the Romaine River, the one I love like my big millennial-old sister. This river is the road that my grandparents took to return home. And home, that is the traditional territory, the one they want to flood. I cry inside. For the river is the happiness of the Innu. Salmon still live here today. They swim in liberty, and it is up to us to defend them, to protect them. (Mestokosho in Morali 37; my translation)²³⁴

Mestokosho’s use of the simile “comme/like” helps draw the reader’s attention to the mutual relations between the Innu, the river, and the salmon. Nevertheless, this poetic tool can undermine ITK inherent in the poet’s words because it risks reducing these lived and valued relationships to a mere metaphor nurturing the non-Indigenous readership’s romanticized expectations of all Indigenous Peoples living in close contact and harmony with nature.

Mestokosho names the different functions of the river as a vital transportation route, a source of essential sustenance for her community, and a place of home to emphasize the value of the Romaine River in Innu culture. In line with Kimmerer’s theorization in *Braiding Sweetgrass*,

²³³ Acoose confirms that “within most Indigenous languages there is no reference to gender” (*Iskwewak* 1995, 60).

²³⁴ After having translated this paragraph, I came across another published translation by Michèle Lacombe, which reads as follows: “I am writing this letter to talk to you of the Romaine River. I love her as I love my millenarian older sister. This is the route that my grandparents took to go back home, and it is their traditional homeland that would be flooded. It makes me cry inside. The river represents happiness for the Innu. Salmon still live there today, swimming freely. It is up to us to defend the salmon, to protect it” (“Pimuteuat” 171-172). Lacombe uses both a plural and a singular form for salmon in her translation.

Mestokosho posits the river as a gift of nature offered to the Innu which they must honour in return. In addition, the poet's lyrical and physical efforts to protect Unamen testify to her strong commitment to the Innu "culture of gratitude" that is deeply anchored in a "circle of reciprocity" and practised through "a pact of mutual responsibility to sustain those who sustain us" (Kimmerer 381-382). In other words, a gift comes with an ethical responsibility to "take care of it" (Kimmerer 382), as Mestokosho's poetic and epistolary texts emphasize.

The value of the river expressed in Mestokosho's letter differs substantially from Western understandings that measure the value of a resource by its potential of exploitation and accumulation of wealth. The poet's direct reference to the planned flooding of Nitassinan alludes to one of the side effects of damming the Romaine River as an important first step of the revived Plan Nord. Moreover, her described feelings about this radical transformation of her family's homeland, which will significantly alter the natural habitat for the region's wildlife, express her strict opposition to and disapproval of this controversial hydroelectric project. Mestokosho's description of the free salmon in particular points to "a covenant of reciprocity" (Kimmerer 382) that the Innu people must respect and honour. However, if the plural "nous/us" is interpreted in its broader sense based on the definition of "Innu" as "human being," it is our shared human responsibility to protect this (and other endangered and threatened) species and their natural habitat.²³⁵ This imagery foregrounds the poet's activist stance as she carefully paints a poetic, maybe even utopian, picture of the Romaine River as an industrially untouched yet peacefully inhabited waterway, symbolizing a balanced ecosystem in which reciprocal relationships and

²³⁵ This interpretation is strengthened by Mestokosho herself in the afterword "Écrire pour ne pas oublier," where she proudly states: "Je suis Innue, et Innu veut dire être humain" (*NPT* 104), and then explains her use of "the poetry of mankind ... [to] reawaken a conscience which once existed" (*CJPG* 91).

non-exploitative coexistence are possible – a picture that heavily contradicts the status quo of so many polluted, exploited, straightened, and dammed waterways on Turtle Island.

With regards to land and environmental issues around which activism led by Indigenous individuals and groups is often mobilized, it must be noted that there exist many different, partly conflicting environmental, socio-economic, and political positions in the communities. Economic reasons are only one motive for Indigenous participation in so-called development projects; others include the desire for self-governance, including Indigenous Peoples' say in land use and thus their active participation in political decision-making when it comes to their territory. These diverse opinions and visions of the future, especially in terms of environmental justice, sustainability, and sovereignty, have, according to Jean-Olivier Roy, led to a political fragmentation of the Innu nation (49). Innu scholar Pierrot Ross-Tremblay addresses this fragmentation in *Thou Shalt Forget: Indigenous Sovereignty, Resistance and the Production of Cultural Oblivion in Canada* (2019), and situates it as a conflict between community members who understand themselves as traditional guardians of their ancestral territory - that exceeds the artificially constructed borders of colonial reserves - and the band council, which, in his opinion, represents nothing more than the extended arm of the settler-colonial government and thus upholds paternalistic political and social structures:

Due to a way a life formerly determined by seasonal migration, occupation of the 'Innu homeland' was much different from what it is now. That said, some band members do not accept these contemporary borders and continue to assert that their ancestral domain extends, in accordance with ancient alliance and relations, to the territories formerly occupied for thousands of years by peoples of the wider Algonquian family and the Innu in particular. Whether or not the band council, instead of the traditional guardians (called

kupaniesh in Essipit), has authority over ancestral lands and family territories is a major issue in Essipit, as it is for most of the First Peoples in Canada. The band council being a colonial device, it is argued by a large proportion of people who have maintained strong ties with Innu ancestral domain that the band administration only has authority within the reserve and that ancestral lands beyond these borders should be taken care of by traditional family guardians. (2n5; original emphasis)

Moreover, Ross-Tremblay critiques how the current administrative system of the band council was imposed on First Nations to substitute for “traditional forms of governance” and therefore serves as a colonial device that perpetuates the territorial dispossession of Indigenous Peoples: “It was designed to support assimilation and facilitate the cession of land and extinguishing of ancestral sovereignty” (3n7). In “Enterrons le colonialisme,” Kanien’kehá:ka environmental and cultural activist Ellen Gabriel offers a similar critique of patriarchal band councils and links this type of governance to ongoing territorial dispossession: “Le processus de négociation entre les entreprises et les communautés autochtones est un système de prise de décision dysfonctionnel: il repose sur les conseils de bande, une entité sur la même hiérarchie coloniale qui génère encore plus de dépossession territoriale” (39). Gabriel urges Indigenous women to take back their rights: “Il est temps que les femmes autochtones reprennent leurs droits et leur autorité sur les territoires et participent de manière équitable aux décisions qui concernent nos droits à l’autodétermination” (40). She also calls for Indigenous women to act as decolonizing agents of change: “La décolonisation exige que nous soyons des agents de changement, que nous récupérions ce à quoi nous n’avons jamais renoncé : nos terres, nos gouvernements traditionnels et l’obligation qui en découle de protéger la terre pour les générations présentes et futures” (Gabriel 40).

Some Innu communities, for example Kanapé Fontaine’s home community Pessamit, are involved in different projects of resource development and extraction, such as forestry, mining, wind power, and hydro-energy, as well as commercial trapping and fishing (Lepage 103). Other communities, for instance Uashat mak Mani-Utenam and Ekuanitshit, where Mestokosho lives, are known as strong and active opponents of projects that will alter the environment and heavily impact on Innu land, resources, and wildlife. Despite the downright opposition of some Innu communities, their official disapproval of the Romaine River project, such as evidenced by two referenda in Uashat (2011), and many Innu leaders’ opinion that this hydro-electric project violates their rights, the band councils of Ekuanitshit and Uashat mak Mani-Utenam signed agreements of financial compensation with Hydro-Québec (in 2009 and 2014 respectively), knowing that this economic project would be realized with or without their consent (Giroux, “Résistance” 68-71). This particular example showcases what Gabriel criticizes and laments as the overruling of Indigenous Rights for the sake of Canada’s economic well-being, although the Supreme Court of Canada recognized Indigenous Rights in 1997 (Delgamuukw Case) and Indigenous communities’ free, prior, and informed consent is required for construction work on their territory: “Tel que l’histoire l’a démontré, les lois coloniales ont toujours supplanté les droits des peuples autochtones et continueront de le faire chaque fois que ‘l’intérêt public’ et la sécurité économique et énergétique l’exigeront” (39).²³⁶ There are numerous examples across Turtle Island where the settler nations’ economic interests were and continue to be used to justify the overruling of Indigenous Rights in favour of highly contested projects, such as the TC Energy’s Keystone XL, the Enbridge’s Line 3, and the Canadian government’s Trans Mountain

²³⁶ “The ‘Delgamuukw Case’ or *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* (1997) asserted that Aboriginal title is a communal right based in Aboriginal peoples’ culture relationship to the land, and that Aboriginal histories must be given due consideration as evidence in Canadian courts” (University of Alberta, “Lesson 8,” “Delgamuukw Case”).

pipeline projects, to name only three more recent megaprojects. Most importantly, these examples demonstrate the provincial and federal governments' as well as the extraction industry's prevailing settler-colonial ideology of economic growth and well-being based on large-scale resource extraction; an ideology forcibly put into practice through settler-colonial laws and unequal power relations. This Western ideology of progress omits the great risk that resource extraction projects pose for the environment and for the health of communities living close to those construction sites. The tar sands industry, with extraction sites mainly situated on Indigenous territories, for example, "poses grave threats to Indigenous rights, cultural survival, local waterways and environments, the global climate, and public health" ("CEOs" 1). Vulnerable and marginalized populations, such as Indigenous Peoples worldwide, bear a disproportionate share of environmental risks, and are therefore more often exposed to a process of environmental violence. Kanapé Fontaine and Mestokosho reject capitalist development projects that exploit resources in the traditional Innu territory and, more generally, that threaten our planet and all its inhabitants, as their writings, as well as poetic and physical activism, reveal.

Asserting Relations with the Land: Women, Land, People

Mestokosho's and Kanapé Fontaine's strong rejection of their homeland's exploitation is deeply anchored in their people's vision of Mother Earth as a living and sentient being. Moreover, this understanding celebrates Innu/Indigenous women's vital connection with the land - they are born from and into the land - and their reciprocal relationships with human and other-than-human beings as well as with the natural elements and entities.²³⁷ For example, in "La

²³⁷ Kanien'kehá:ka scholar Kahente Horn-Miller contends that "Kanien'kehá:ka women recognize that we have a closer tie to nature than men do, as we are the ones who bring forth new life and our spiritual, social, and societal responsibilities reflect this close connection. Our responsibilities work in counterbalance to those of men. Through the effects of colonization, however, our natural abilities and responsibilities have been eroded and our identities and

migration” in Kanapé Fontaine’s collection *Bleuets et abricots*, the speaker links her individual existence to that of the land and her nation through the use of the anaphora “Je sais dire”: “Je sais dire je suis / je sais dire le mot terre / je sais dire le mot peuple” (74).²³⁸ Again, this rhetorical device has a mnemonic function - for both the poet and the reader, especially when the poem is performed orally - and draws attention to how the speaker’s individual existence is linked to her land and people. Earlier in the same collection, the female speaker reclaims her Innu womanhood, expressed, for example, in the lines “Je suis femme la terre / d’où l’on a tiré mon nom,” but she categorically refuses being defined from the outside: “les missionnaires me disaient Montagnaise” and states instead: “moi je dis femme-territoire” (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 20). Therefore, as Kanapé Fontaine frequently does throughout her poetic work, she positions her speaker in *Bleuets et abricots* specifically as an Innu woman who, through her sensed, embodied, and lived, but also poetically imagined and reclaimed relationship with the land, is naturally tied to her homeland:

que je suis

Femme-terre

Innu Ishkueu. (*BA* 75)

Here, the use of Innu-aimun (“Innu Ishkueu” meaning “Innu woman”) strengthens the speaker’s reclamation of her identity as Innu and woman, where both are intrinsically connected to the land. Moreover, the visual layout of this long poem gives her statement weight because “Femme-terre” and “Innu Ishkueu” are the only lines in the whole collection that are set off towards the righthand margin, and the poet’s additional use of capital letters emphasizes the importance of

self-perception have been negated, disregarded, re-visioned, and reconstituted according to the ideals of another people” (“Distortion and Healing” 33).

²³⁸ Kanapé Fontaine’s lines of poetry remind me of Jeannette Armstrong’s words: “I know that without my land and my people I am not alive. I am simply flesh waiting to die” (“Sharing One Skin”).

these two lines. So positioned, they reflect what settler scholar Gabrielle Marcoux recognizes as the assertion of “an Indigenous essence of identity that is fundamentally different, fully assumed, politicized, and expressed with pride” (69; my translation).²³⁹ However, these lines should not be read in an essentialist way that reduces the speaker’s identity strictly to an Innu woman. In contrast, Anishinaabe literary scholar Niigaanwewidam Sinclair reminds us in his essay “Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures” (2010) that ethical readings “recognize the full humanity of Indigenous peoples” (301). As such, the female speaker should be seen “as a whole person with multiple identities that expand each other, rather than detract from or impoverish one another” (Fagan Bidwell and McKegney 311). Kanapé Fontaine strengthens this inclusive interpretation throughout her (slam) poetry because she presents different facets of herself - as a poet, an activist, a dancer, a lover, a future mother, to name only a few - and she therefore offers a complex image of the complementary parts of her unique identity. “[A]ll of those elements can be understood as integral to one’s identity, even if some are in conflict with one another,” settler scholar Sam McKegney remarks in his conversation with Inuk scholar Kristina Fagan Bidwell, and he adds: “They don’t have to be coherent, but they are interconnected and mutually generative” (312).

Moreover, Kanapé Fontaine’s reclamation of her (temporarily forgotten) mother tongue, Innu-aimun, allows her to self-actualize according to Innu ontologies. For Cree-Métis educator Kim Anderson, “[t]he use of Indigenous languages allows Native women to self-define outside of the misogynist paradigms that exist in the colonizers [sic] language” (*Recognition* 110). In this way, the return to, (re-)appropriation of, and inclusion of Indigenous languages is, according to Indigenous feminist Anderson, a path towards the empowerment of Indigenous women: “The

²³⁹ French original: “une essence identitaire autochtone fondamentalement distincte, pleinement endossée, politisée, et exprimée avec fierté” (Marcoux 69).

way in which various Indigenous languages are constructed can protect Native women from understanding themselves from a patriarchal world view” (*Recognition* 109).

Innu/Indigenous women’s sense of a fundamentally different identity from patriarchal settler societies, which are informed by an economic understanding of land, stems from a deep awareness of land-based origins, as Gabriel explains: “Le territoire, la Terre-Mère est ce qui nous définit; sans elle, nous ne sommes que les fonctionnaires assimilés des colonisateurs, des êtres dépossédés, passifs et incomplets, coupés de la terre et de ‘toutes nos relations’” (37). It is therefore this “belonging to specific places in the land [that] constitutes the most important paradigm of Indigenous ethnic identity,” or “land-embedded Indigeneity” (Lutz 77). This land-based identity is expressed, for instance, in Mestokosho’s poetry, especially in the line “Je suis née de la pluie et de la terre” (*CJPG* 72).²⁴⁰ This line opens her poem “Née de la pluie / Born of the Rain” and becomes, in a shortened form, the title of her bilingual (French-Innu) collection *Née de la pluie et de la terre* (2014). It reflects not only the idea of the female speaker being part of the land, but also of coming *from* the land herself. Huron-Wendat (auto-)historian Georges Sioui strengthens this point by saying that “our stories tell us that we come from the very soil of our land of America” (*Histoires* 101). Like similar sentiments in Kanapé Fontaine’s poetry, this assertion echoes the words of Laguna Pueblo and Sioux scholar, literary critic, and writer Paula Gunn Allen: “We are the land [...] that is the fundamental idea embedded in Native American life and culture” (“Iyani” 191). These, at first sight simple statements carry a profound meaning because they express both a particular understanding of the world, one centred around the land herself, and a particular sense of being in the world, one marked by relationality, as Kanapé Fontaine writes in her prologue to *Manifeste Assi*: “Assi en Innu veut dire Terre. / Au départ, il

²⁴⁰ Innu translation: “Tshemuak mak anite ut assit nitinniuti” (*NPT* 48).

n’y a qu’elle. Son ventre et son royaume. Sa cosmogonie du règne animal et végétal. Les arbres, les eaux, les loups et les hordes de caribous. Puis il y a le peuple. Les Innus. / Il y a moi. Forte d’un nouvel éveil” (5). In line with Mestokosho and other Indigenous women, Kanapé Fontaine’s words describe a non-anthropocentric cosmology, an alternative worldview that demonstrates how deeply the Innu - and many other Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island - are traditionally connected to the land and, according to Dene political scholar Glen Coulthard, testifies to “the central importance of land to Indigenous modes of being, thought, and ethics” (*Red Skin* 60). Moreover, Kanapé Fontaine’s words illustrate “the position that land occupies as an ontological framework for understanding relationships,” as Coulthard explains: “Seen in this light, it is a profound misunderstanding to think of land or place as simply some material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures (although it is this too); instead it ought to be understood as a field of ‘relationships of things to each other’” (“Place against Empire” 79).

Speaking about the Huron-Wendat worldview that understands life “as a sacred Circle of Relations uniting all beings of all forms and all natures,” Sioui confronts Western ideologies of human supremacy and, in stark contrast to this hierarchical thinking, foregrounds the human dependency on other beings: “Strictly speaking, there are no peoples, races, civilizations: there is only the human species of beings, a species even particularly weak and dependent on the other species and the families of beings that compose them: animal, vegetal, mineral, elemental, immaterial, supernatural” (*Histoires* 103). Sioui exposes what can be called the “anthropocentric fallacy of human exceptionalism,” a belief that completely ignores that the human’s very existence depends on the gifts of beings who can photosynthesize, namely plants, as Kimmerer gently reminds us in *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Despite the diversity of Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island and their varied cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies, this land-based

worldview represents the heart of their societies, cultures, economies, and politics. Further, this non-hierarchical, but circular worldview based on respect, gratitude, reciprocity, and interdependence is the pillar of Mestokosho's and Kanapé Fontaine's thinking and shapes their poetry.

As these opening examples suggest, Mestokosho's and Kanapé Fontaine's poetic activism involves affirming both the close, nurturing relationship between the land and women, as well as conceptualizing the land as mother, and natural elements and entities as kin. On the first point, comparing the position that the land and women occupy in many traditional Indigenous cultures, Māori feminist scholar Makere Stewart-Harawira confirms that "women and land were held in the highest regard in Indigenous societies" (128). Likewise, Kanapé Fontaine's collections *Manifeste Assi* and *Bleuets et abricots* are public statements, celebrating Innu land and reclaiming *Assi* as a land of women, as powerfully announced in her third collection: "Une femme se lèvera / vêtue de ses habits de lichen / vêtue de ses traditions / vêtue de son tambour intérieur" (BA 20). In an untitled poem in the first half of *Manifeste Assi*, the speaker presents her Innu female identity as intrinsically linked to and deriving from her female ancestors and *assi*, the land: "Je suis trois femmes en une / je suis la fille / la mère la grand-mère // Je suis ma grand-mère / ma mère / moi // Je suis la lune la terre la mer" (Kanapé Fontaine, MA 32). Rather than simply pointing to the different stages of life that many women go through, from girlhood to motherhood to grandmotherhood, these lines foreground a matrilineal heritage, expressed through the speaker's embodied memory of her ancestors, and a circular understanding of life stages. Drawing on Gunn Allen's conceptualization of the "seven ways of the Medicine Woman" (9) in her book *Grandmothers of the Light* (1991), Kimmerer illustrates how Indigenous women's "life unfolds in a growing spiral" from the Way of the Daughter, to the

Way of the Mother, to the Way of the Teacher (Grandmother), and finally to the Way of the Wise Woman, and how Indigenous women are connected to the land: “The spiral widens farther and farther, so that the sphere of a wise woman is beyond herself, beyond her family, beyond the human community, embracing the planet, mothering the earth” (Kimmerer 97). Kanapé Fontaine’s female speaker lyrically underlines this connection through her parallelism, strengthened by the use of the anaphora “Je suis,” and thus reflects a worldview, which recognizes “the earth and the moon as female relations” (Anderson, *Recognition* 107). More specifically, the earth is our mother and the moon is our grandmother, according to Innu cosmology.

This understanding of the land as mother and therefore as a living and sentient being with agency as well as of the Innu’s recognition of nature as kin is also reflected in Mestokosho’s poetry, notably in “Minuashu assi / Beauté de la nature / The Beauty of Nature.” Through the process of naming, the speaker here equates the land with the nurturing mother, and the river, the wind, and the moon with other close relatives:

Ne me dis pas que tu veux mourir / Quand la terre, ta mère te nourrit / Ne me dis pas que
tu veux partir / Quand autour de toi respire la vie. //

N’entends-tu pas ta sœur la rivière qui t’appelle? / Elle coule comme le sang dans tes
veines / N’écoutes-tu pas ton frère le vent qui te parle? / Il te dit : Confie-moi un peu de ta
peine. //

Ne regardes-tu pas parfois dans le ciel / Ta grand-mère la lune qui éclaire ta souffrance?

(Mestokosho, *CJPG* 20).²⁴¹

²⁴¹ Innu translation: “Eka ma ishi nui nipin / Peshish tshikaui assi uitapimishki / Eka ma ishi nui tshituten / Kassinu tshekuan e inniimakak anite etain. // Tshipetuau a tshishim shipu ka tshitepuatikua / Miam ne tshimik^u ka utshikaua etenitakuak / Tshinatutuau a tshishtesh nutin tshitaimikua / Peta ma tshinenekatenitamun ka tshitikua. // Tshitshitapin a mani uashkut / Tshukum tipishkau-pishim^u tshuashtenikua” (*CJPG* 19).

More than contemplating the land's beauty, as the title first suggests, this poem describes the mutual relationships between the natural bodies, elements, and beings as well as their care for each other. The speaker underlines, for instance, how the land offers her nurturing gifts to the addressee, Mestokosho's *nukum*, and thus cares for her like her mother. This line deeply echoes Native Hawaiian scholar Manulani Aluli-Meyer's worldview: "Indigenous people are all about place. Land/*aina*, defined as 'that which feeds,' is the everything to our sense of love, joy, and nourishment. Land is our mother. *This is not a metaphor*" (136; original emphasis). I argue that the speaker's analogy between the land and the mother cannot be read in metaphorical terms or as personification - understood here as the attribution of a human characteristic to an inanimate object - because this interpretation would consciously deny the Innu understanding of kinship with the world and their recognition of personhood for all beings, including those beings whom settlers and others understand as inanimate objects. According to Starblanket and Coburn, "the land does not signify an object that is merely taken away, returned, and repossessed," but "for many Indigenous Peoples, the land represents a web of living, constitutive relations, the nature of which has been irrevocably altered through colonialism" (87), and Mestokosho clearly alludes to this web of living relations by comparing the land and elements to close relatives.

Equally important to understanding such as worldview, the river in Mestokosho's poem is presented as a lifeblood, and has traditionally occupied an important role in sustaining the Innu, exemplified by the salmon imagery in other poems, such as in the bilingual poem "Tshiuetin, vent du Nord" (the Innu and French expressions both translate as "north wind"): "J'entends le saumon qui monte les rivières" (*NPT* 94). Given the importance of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities, the river's vital contribution to Innu life explains the long-standing and determined effort of Innu women to protect her from destructive forces. Above all, the speaker in

Mestokosho's "Minuashu assi / Beauté de la nature / The Beauty of Nature" appeals to the addressee to carry on and not to give up as long as nature provides everything needed to survive: "Permetts à ton cœur de s'ouvrir / Tu verras que la nature t'aidera" (*CJPGV* 20).²⁴² Inherent in this poem is the basic idea that the natural world is one of "our oldest teachers" (Kimmerer 213) because "we learn best *from* land" (Aluli-Meyer 136; original emphasis).

Moreover, Mestokosho strengthens the idea of mutual care in a stanza in her poem "Parfum de la terre," where her female speaker contemplates the mountain's splendour and listens to the river, enjoying being embraced by the land: "J'ai vu la montagne dans sa splendeur / J'ai entendu la rivière dans son désir / Quel plaisir et quel bonheur / D'être dans les bras de la Terre" (*NPT* 99). Like Mestokosho's speaker, Kanapé Fontaine's speaker underlines, in one of the last poems in *Manifeste Assi*, her trust in the nurturing, healing, and soothing qualities of assi, the knowledgeable land-mother, despite her being in a critical state of ecological decay: "Entre les troncs mourants du pays / j'offrirai mon cœur à assi // Elle sera ma mère / ma richesse / ma raison de vivre / ma drogue sale / ma liqueur imbuvable / ma tisane réparatrice" (86). In exchange to the land's care, Kanapé Fontaine "berce l'environnement et entame un processus de guérison avec lui" through her poetry ("Natasha" *Kwahiatonhk!*), as overtly expressed in *Manifeste Assi*: "Ma terre je la prendrai dans ma main / je la soignerai / avec un pan / ma jupe / essuiera ses larmes noires / mes cheveux ses joues creuses / je la bercerais en ses tremblements / je ne dors plus / l'endormirai sur mes genoux" (33). In this untitled poem, the speaker takes up the role of the nurturing, soothing mother and takes care of assi, and in doing so reflects the circle of reciprocity based on mutual responsibilities and an ethics of care.

²⁴² Innu translation: "Shena tshitei / Tshika uapaten assi tshe uitshikun" (Mestokosho, *CJPGV* 19).

Responding Poetically to Settler Colonialism, Territorial Dispossession, Environmental Destruction and Ecocide

Innu poetry is now produced in the context of historical North American settler colonialism which Coulthard conceptualizes “as a structure of domination predicated on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ lands and political authority” (*Red Skin* 151). Similar to Coulthard’s theorization, the authors of “Decolonizing Feminisms: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy” (2013) describe the “gendered process” (9) of settler colonialism as a “structure of society” based on the “exploitation of land” (Arvin et al. 12). Likewise, many Indigenous women, such as Kanapé Fontaine and Mestokosho, have been “drawing attention to gendered patterns of dispossession – land theft – while highlighting responsibilities towards the land, in contrast to a liberal colonial emphasis on ‘rights’ to ‘use’ the land, understood primarily as a potentially profitable resource” (96), as Starblanket and Coburn emphasize. According to Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, this “persistent social and political formation” of settler colonialism involves the disappearance of Indigenous Peoples: “In order for settlers to usurp the land and extract its value, Indigenous peoples must be destroyed, removed, and made into ghosts” (12). Settler colonialism concerns, of course, all provinces and territories in Canada, but Quebec has a specific history of colonization, often referred to as a so-called double colonization, initiated by French settlers and their descendants, and then superimposed upon by British authorities and subsequent English-speaking settlers.²⁴³

In addition, Quebec is marked by another important specificity: the province has no treaties from the 18th and 19th centuries and “it was not until 1975 that the first modern-day land

²⁴³ In Postcolonial Studies, the term “double colonization” is commonly used to refer “to the observation that women are subjected to both the colonial domination of empire and the male domination of patriarchy. In this respect empire and patriarchy act as analogous to each other and both exert control over female colonial subjects, who are, thus, doubly colonized by imperial/patriarchal power” (Ashcroft et al. 66).

treaty was entered into in Québec: [when] the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was signed with the Cree and Inuit peoples [sic] to make way for the James Bay hydroelectric development project” (Lepage 66). While this treaty includes parts of Nitassinan, the Innu were “excluded from the Agreement in Principle leading to the James Bay Agreement” (Tanner), and they have never signed a treaty, as Antane Kapesh stresses: “L’Innu n’a pas cédé son territoire de chasse et n’a pas renoncé à sa vie culturelle innu” (*JSMS* 2015, 115).²⁴⁴ In other words, the Innu have never ceded their land and rights, and this political context along with the complex question of land means that the Innu “ont été dépossédés de leurs terres et leur souveraineté a été usurpée par le Canada et le Québec” (Létourneau 21). However, this does not mean that the Innu and other Indigenous nations on Turtle Island have remained passive in light of historical and ongoing territorial dispossession and environmental exploitation: “When colonization and colonial policy threatened our Indigenous ways of being, our peoples resisted, organized, and mobilized at every point in history – we were not passive victims of colonialism” (L. Simpson, “Oshkimaadiziig” 13). The Kino-nda-niimi Collective shares a similar understanding when they state: “Indigenous peoples have never been idle in their efforts to protect what is meaningful to our communities – nor will we ever be” (21). On the contrary, many Indigenous individuals, groups, communities, and nations have spoken out and continue to speak back to those who have undertaken the theft of their unceded territories and the illegal (that is without Indigenous nations’ consent) exploitation of their land for economic reasons. Gabriel, for instance, outlines this long history of Indigenous environmental protection guided by Indigenous ontologies: “Les peuples autochtones ont grand besoin de comprendre le message de centaines de générations de

²⁴⁴ Innu original: “Innu apu ut uepinak unataun-assi kie apu ut uepinak utinniun. Niteniten nin, innu nanitam mushtuenitam tshetshi kushpit nite nutshimit muk kashikat mitshetuit nite tshekuan shash apu minupanit” (*JSMS* 2015, 39).

Premières Nations qui se sont battues pour protéger la Terre-Mère, l’habitat de ‘toutes nos relations,’ pour les générations présentes et futures” (40). In addition, settler scholars Elizabeth Cassell and Colin Samson explain how many Indigenous nations refer to historical documents and treaties, and particularly the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763, to defend Indigenous Title because this specific document “acknowledged indigenous rights to live a separate life” (111).²⁴⁵ Besides drawing on Indigenous oral sources - since 1997 recognized as legal sources - most Indigenous nations today base their legal land claims on this written document to justify them in court.

In her preface to the 2019 re-edition of Antane Kapeshe’s *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, Innu writer Naomi Fontaine outlines how the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples was and continues to be the cornerstone of the political project building the Quebec nation which heavily relies on the economic power of the territory’s natural resources. Exposing the nationalist agenda behind the provincial settler government’s exploitation of the land, Fontaine bemoans:

À l’époque où [Antane] Kapeshe écrit son essai, le Québec est en pleine révolution. Il y a tant à faire pour évacuer une fois pour toutes la Grande Noirceur. Le territoire devient le salut. La nationalisation de l’hydro-électricité, les mines de fer, la forêt comme un puits sans fond. Aucun sacrifice n’est trop grand lorsqu’on veut bâtir un pays. Il n’y a rien pour freiner l’ardeur nationaliste d’un peuple colonisé. Ni les Indiens. Ni leurs droits. Ni la dignité humaine. (in Antane Kapeshe, *JSMS* 2019, 7)

²⁴⁵ “The Royal Proclamation of 1763 is a document created by the British Crown that outlines rules for European settlement in North America. Although the document grants ownership of North America to the Crown, it states that Indigenous peoples still maintain title to lands and territories until a Treaty is agreed to (University of Alberta, “Lesson 3,” “The Royal Proclamation of 1763”).

Indigenous land claims have never been settled in Quebec. Unsurprisingly then, questions of Indigenous Title and land use become increasingly important on the political agenda, and they are inseparable from Indigenous nations' desire for self-determination and self-governance (Létourneau 20). Consequently, the Innu nation's declarations of Indigenous Title to their ancestral lands are an integral element of "Indigenous assertions of sovereignty and self-determination [that] de facto offer resistance to the necropolitics of powerful governments" (Dillon, "Indigenous Futurisms" 3).²⁴⁶

Past and ongoing territorial dispossession is predicated on the fact that the land is not only valuable to Indigenous communities but is also coveted by colonizing and settler forces for a host of reasons. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls concludes that land use is a main source of multiple tensions between Indigenous and settler nations: "the notion of drawing resources from the earth, for profit, has animated many of the most visible recent conflicts between governments and some Indigenous groups" (*Reclaiming*, vol. 1a, 584). Kanapé Fontaine succinctly and directly expresses Indigenous-settler conflicts based on this unresolved struggle about land and resources, stating that "les batailles sont noires pétrole" (*MA* 79). "Land is," as scholars Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and K. Wayne Yang contend in their renowned article "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (2012), "what is most valuable, contested, [and] required" (5) in settler states. The co-authors shed light on the abusive and traumatizing reality of past and ongoing capitalist settler colonialism, asserting that "the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, [and] cosmological violence" (Tuck and Yang 5). In addition, the three female authors of

²⁴⁶ Cameroonian political philosopher Achille Mbembe coined the term "necropolitics" and defines it as "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" (39). Influenced by French philosopher Michel Foucault, Mbembe's concept of necropolitics draws on the concept of biopower - "that domain of life over which power has taken control" (12) - but he argues that the Foucauldian concept is insufficient (39).

“Decolonizing Feminism” (2013) identify the “centrality of land” in Indigenous cultures as a major factor why “the dispossession of land and access to the ocean have been so materially and spiritually destructive to Indigenous peoples” (Arvin et al. 22). The land is thus at the heart of Indigenous epistemologies, but also at the heart of settler colonialism, and, as territorial dispossession and poetic land claims are recurrent themes in Indigenous (women’s) writing, both Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine directly address the resulting conflicts over the land and resources in their poetry, as well as Nolin and Leblanc.

As witnesses and critical observers of ongoing settler colonialism, continual land confiscation, and illegal construction work on Innu territory, Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine follow in Antane Kapesh’s footsteps and use their voices to expose and decry their people’s territorial and cultural dispossession in order to lyrically support their political and legal claims related to land. For example, some of Mestokosho’s poetic work deals with the Innu’s traumatic experience of land deprivation prior to the urbanization and industrialization of their traditional territory. In her poem “Nukum / Nukum (Grand-mère) / Nukum (Grandmother),” Mestokosho only hints at territorial dispossession when her speaker observes the radically changed way of life experienced by her grandmother, who nevertheless persevered: “M’apparaissant au loin comme la fleur de la fragilité / Rien ne pouvait ébranler l’esprit de cette femme / Malgré que son univers et sa vie aient basculé / Pour un monde nouveau où la magie se fane” (*CJPG* 50).²⁴⁷

The title of her five-stanza poem “Un peuple sans terre” in *Née de la pluie et de la terre*, however, openly refers to Mestokosho’s lyrical treatise on the theft of Innu land. In this poem, her speaker mourns the loss of land faced by an Innu man: “Sa peine sera immense comme la

²⁴⁷ Innu translation: “Nete katak” pet nukushitak, miam Uapikuniss eshinuak / Nasht apu ut tshekuannu tshi pikunikut ne ishkuu / Iapit utassi kie utinnium katshi mishkutshipannit / Tshetshi ait ishinakuannit nasht eka tshekuan ka ashtepanit” (Mestokosho, *CJPG* 49).

mer / Car il aura vu la terre disparaître sous ses pieds / Les hommes-machines l’auront dévoré les premiers / Pour en faire une nouvelle cité” (Mestokosho, *NPT* 85). The metaphorical image of the “hommes-machines/machine-men” connotes two things: first, it refers to (hu)man-operated machines involved in so-called land and resource development projects, and second, it represents beings without a conscience or spirit who are actively involved in ecologically destructive projects. Mestokosho refuses to limit illegal acquisition of land to the past; rather, her poem presents land theft as an ongoing colonial practice that, as, the use of the future tense indicates, the speaker fears will continue in favour of the settler-nation’s economic well-being. The most recent events surrounding questions of territorial dispossession and economic development based on neo-colonial and capitalist ideologies of resource extraction, such as the Trans Mountain and Keystone XL pipeline projects, as well as the federal and provincial governments’ failed actions of environmental protection confirm and justify the speaker’s concerns. Moreover, the female speaker links territorial dispossession to political oppression because the protagonist in the poem is unable to stop the machine-men from stealing his land and erecting a new city on it.

Still in the same poem, Mestokosho’s speaker employs the second person singular “tu/you” in a collective sense from the third stanza onward, to openly address the machine-men, who symbolize the settler nation state’s greed for land and natural riches. The speaker uses this form of direct address to publicly call out their involvement in destructive practices of land and resource extraction: “Là où l’entraide et le respect n’existent pas / Tu piétineras mon enfant, mais tu le fais déjà / Ta soif d’ambition et de grandeur nous tuera / Mais malgré tout cela, mon esprit survivra” (Mestokosho, *NPT* 85). Drawing on what Wendat dramaturg Yves Sioui Durand identifies as the universal Indigenous principles of respect, sharing, and liberty (“Sentiment” 34), Mestokosho’s speaker sets Innu values of mutual assistance, gratitude, and respect against

settlers' insatiable economic ambition; the allusion to two clashing approaches to the land and life in general ensues in the poem.

The poem, and the third stanza in particular, can be read as a “cautionary tale” adhering to Innu oral traditions and particularly Windigo stories.²⁴⁸ Anishinaabe scholar Grace L. Dillon identifies the Windigo as “a malevolent manitou whose insatiable appetite for human flesh can never be satisfied” and who “has the power to turn humans into cannibals who suffer the same voracity” (“Foreword” 18), and Ojibwe storyteller Basil Johnston states that “none [of the evil beings] was more terrifying than the Weendigo” (*Manitous* 221). In Mestokosho’s poem, the speaker’s reference to settlers’ boundless and lethal desire in the line “Ta soif d’ambition et de grandeur nous tuera” (*NPT* 85) alludes to what Johnston calls the “eternally starving” Windigo (*Manitous* 247), whose character and behaviour is antithetical to Indigenous values of respect, gratitude, and sharing. “Although the Weendigo is an exaggeration,” Johnston explains in *The Manitous* (1995), “it exemplifies human nature’s tendency to indulge its self-interests, which once indulged, demand even greater indulgence and ultimately result in the extreme – the erosion of principles and values” (224). The story of the Windigo, though not directly mentioned by Mestokosho, therefore functions as a reminder to honour those sacred principles of moderation, sharing, and gratitude.

Moreover, settler scholar Shawn Smallman points out how Indigenous oral stories, including the ones about the Windigo, change over time to accommodate the current generation and their needs: “Although the idea of the windigo was old, that does not mean it did not evolve or was timeless; instead, it may have been a belief that every generation interpreted based on its

²⁴⁸ The Windigo is familiar to Algonquian peoples on Turtle Island, among them the Innu. There exist many different spellings for this manitou, such as Windigo, We(e)ndigo, or Witiko. I use the term “Windigo” because it seems to be the most common English spelling. According to Basil Johnston, the Windigo is “a giant manitou in the form of a man or a woman” (*Manitous* 221), and can thus be both male and female.

own experience” (24).²⁴⁹ In a neo-colonial settler state with an economy based on capitalistic ideologies, this means that “allegorical adaptations invoke the sociopolitical tensions of contact between Euro-Western imperialism and Indigenous cultures,” as the Windigo has become synonymous with “Western capitalistic expansion and cultural appropriation,” or in other words: “Imperialism is cannibalism, the consumption of one people by another” (Dillon, “Foreword” 19). “Even though Weendigo is a mythical figure,” Johnston clarifies, “it represents real human cupidity” (*Manitous* 235). Consequently, “the Weendigos did not die out or disappear” over time, “they have only been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals” whose “cupidity is no less insatiable than that of their ancestors” (Johnston, *Manitous* 235). Whereas Mestokosho alludes to the Windigo trope by addressing land theft, urbanization, and the settler’s indifference to the suffering of Indigenous people in her poem “Un peuple sans terre,” Johnston uses large-scale industrial deforestation to exemplify the modern Windigo’s “spirit of excess” (*Ojibway Heritage* 167):

One breed subsists entirely on forests. [...] These modern Weendigos looked into the future and saw money – cash, bank accounts, interest from investment, profits, in short, wealth beyond belief. [...] It didn’t matter if their policies of clear-cutting to harvest timber and pulp resulted in violations of the rights of North American Indians or in the further impairment of their lives [...]. Nor does it seem as if these modern Weendigos have any regard for the rights of future generations to the yield of Mother Earth” (Johnston, *Manitous* 235-237).

²⁴⁹ “The windigo legend existed in Algonquian oral history for many centuries, long before the Europeans arrived in North America. However, the first European-written account of a windigo was by Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary who lived among the Algonquin people in the early-17th century in what is now Quebec” (“Windigo”).

Though she does not openly name the Windigo in her text, I argue that Mestokosho uses this mythical figure as a metaphor to explore longstanding issues of injustice; here past, ongoing, and anticipated territorial dispossession, resource extraction, environmental destruction, and urbanization that all have an impact on Innu social, cultural, and spiritual life and well-being. This reading is supported by Mestokosho's metaphor of the ghost-like machine-men who represent the greedy settlers and, like the Windigo, are indifferent to the suffering of the dispossessed Indigenous man: "The pain of others meant nothing to the Weendigo; all that mattered was its survival" (Johnston, *Manitous* 222), or the accumulation of wealth in capitalistic societies.

Dillon explains that "Native storytellers such as Basil Johnston challenge the assumption that the windigo is exclusively malevolent" (Foreword" 18): "Though Weendigo was fearsome and visited punishment upon those committing excesses, he nevertheless conferred rewards upon the moderate. He was excess who encouraged moderation," Johnston notes in *Ojibway Heritage* (167). Reading Mestokosho's writing from this perspective, I argue that Mestokosho's poetry also functions as a reminder to respect the limits of the land and to honour Innu principles of sharing. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer offers the story of the minidewak, the traditional giveaway of the Potawatomi, which emphasizes Indigenous values of moderation and gratitude:

The berries are always present at our ceremonies. They join us in a wooden bowl. One big bowl and one big spoon, which are passed around the circle, so that each person can taste the sweetness, remember the gifts, and say thank you. They carry the lesson, passed to us by our ancestors, that the generosity of the land comes to us as one bowl, one spoon. We are all fed from the same bowl that Mother Earth has filled for us. It's not just about the berries, but also about the bowl. The gifts of the earth are to be shared, but gifts are

not limitless. The generosity of the earth is not an invitation to take it all. Every bowl has a bottom. When it's empty, it's empty. And there is but one spoon, the same size for everyone. (382)

Kimmerer's story and Mestokosho's poem therefore remind us that gratitude, sharing, respect, and reciprocity are antidotes to greed and excess and thus become medicine to the Windigo (attitude and behaviour). Kimmerer is convinced that the "practice of gratitude lets us hear the badgering of marketers as the stomach grumblings of a Windigo" (377) and that the "revolutionary idea" of expressing gratitude (111) "celebrates cultures of regenerative reciprocity, where wealth is understood to be having enough to share and riches are counted in mutually beneficial relationships" (377).

In the fifth and last stanza of "Un peuple sans terre," Mestokosho's speaker finally calls upon the collective figure of the settler to stop the current and anticipated exploitation of nature to accumulate economic wealth: "N'enlève pas à la Terre son dernier souffle / Permetts à notre mère de respirer / Et de voir ses enfants courir à bout de souffle / Dans la nature qui est ma protégée" (*NPT* 85). The urgency to stop environmental destruction and to reduce anthropogenic damage, as evident in climate change for example, is underscored by the speaker's grammatical use of the imperative ("N'enlève pas" and "Permetts"). Mestokosho's poem offers a future-oriented vision of Innu/Indigenous stewardship of the land, taking into account and fighting for future generations who will inhabit the land. This whole stanza, but especially the expression "ma/ my protégée," underlines the speaker's sense of responsibility for protecting her land. Moreover, I read it as an urgent appeal to settler-descendants to finally accept their share in the global struggle for environmental protection, and this moral and activist stance is echoed in Kanapé Fontaine's poetic manifesto where she calls for intercultural alliances: "rejoins-moi sans

tarder” (*MA* 13). Both Mestokosho’s and Kanapé Fontaine’s writing evokes Gabriel’s opinion on Indigenous-settler relations in Canada, Indigenous Peoples’ sustained need to educate Canadians about their role as stewards of the land, and our shared responsibility to protect Mother Earth for future generations: “S’il est vrai que nos enfants nous importent, alors la lutte pour un développement durable et la protection de la Terre-Mère devient une obligation pour chaque individu, et pas seulement chez les peuples autochtones” (40-41).

Numerous Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmentalists and scientists argue that there is an urgent need to desist from Western capitalistic and excessive consumer-based modes of living that represent a major factor contributing to the global ecological crisis we have been facing for some decades already. Read in this context, Mestokosho’s fifth stanza is a direct warning addressed to the capitalist settler-colonial system itself: the speaker will continue to protect Mother Earth as long as she lives. Also, the poem refers to the speaker’s promise to respect her - and by extension Mestokosho’s - ethical responsibilities as an Innu woman, which include the protection and care of the land. These responsibilities are overtly penned in Mestokosho’s poem “Innu,” addressed to her grandmother: “Ton message est celui de protéger la terre / Je la protégerai aussi longtemps / Que je vivrai avec elle” (*NPT* 21).²⁵⁰ The female speaker’s reference to her grandmother’s message of environmental protection evokes traditional modes of ITK transfer: “Chez les Innus, la connaissance se transmettaient de génération en génération, de père en fils, de mère en fille, de grands-parents en petits-enfants” (St-Onge). This interpretation is strengthened by the closing lines of the poem, in which the speaker promises to

²⁵⁰ Innu translation: “Tshetshi shatshitain assi, / Nika shatshitain nuash ishpush uitapamak^u assi” (Mestokosho, *CJPGV* 15).

continue the Innu tradition of intergenerational knowledge transmission: “Mais je n’oublierai pas d’apprendre / Et de faire partager aux autres / Ton message si divin...” (Mestokosho, *NPT* 21).²⁵¹

Mestokosho’s desire and inherited responsibility to protect her land comes with the need for territorial reclamation in order to ensure environmental justice. The poet claims her territory and Innu identity in part through poetic and linguistic devices, figuratively reclaiming Nitassinan. Understanding her text in this way, it becomes shocking that French poet Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, who in his foreword to Mestokosho’s 2011 re-edited poetry collection, praises her oeuvre by deeming it to be “full of that feminine power which characterises ancient peoples,” while simultaneously reducing her power by declaring that “[h]er words do not lay claim to anything or demand anything” (Le Clézio in Mestokosho, *CJPG* 11). In her contemplative three-stanza poem “Ka auassiuian / Ma jeunesse / My Youth,” the female speaker describes her embodied relationship with the land at the same time that she claims the walked land as Innu land, intrinsically linked to her survival as an Innu woman: “J’ai marché pieds nus sur la neige de mon pays / Sans savoir où mes pas allaient me guider / Même le froid mordant collé à mes pieds / Ne pouvait arrêter mon besoin de survie” (Mestokosho, *CJPG* 36).²⁵² Her grammatical use of the possessive adjective “mon/my” before the noun “pays/country” is the most evident sign of her sense of entitlement to the crossed and therefore inhabited land. In addition, the French and English languages use possessive adjectives not only to refer to possession, but also to express (a feeling of) affectionate belonging, which speaks to the particular relationship that the speaker experiences with the land when she is in close contact

²⁵¹ Innu translation: “Muk^u apu nita tshika ut uni-tshissitutaman / Ka tshishkutamut tshetshi matinueian / Ne tshitaimun ka tapuamakak” (Mestokosho, *NPT* 20).

²⁵² Innu translation: “Nishashstuteti pemuteian nete kunit nitassit / Nasht eka tshissenitaman tshe itutemakak nimeshkanam / Eshpesh makunikuian tiakat / Apu tut nakanikuian inniuian” (Mestokosho, *CJPG* 35).

with it.²⁵³ Despite the clear political undertone in Mestokosho's speaker's reclamation of "mon pays/my country," powerfully implying Indigenous Title or "the Indigenous Right to collective ownership and jurisdiction over land and resources" (Younging 66), there is also a strong cultural component that communicates her embodied sense of belonging to the land. The female speaker's understanding of land and her connection with it are deeply embedded in her Innu worldview and thus radically differ from Western notions of private property, private land ownership, domination and capitalistic exploitation of the land.

Mestokosho's metaphor of walking invokes a nomadic past when the Innu traversed their traditional territory mainly by foot. Repeated in the poem "Tshiuetin, vent du Nord" in *Née de la pluie et de la terre*, walking constituted a major means of locomotion for the nomadic Innu, but more importantly, it symbolizes an embodied action that deeply connects them to their land and culture: "Est-ce que tu vois mes pas / Marchant sur la Terre notre mère de tous les jours / Tu ne marches pas dans le vide / Il y a une terre qui te porte" (Mestokosho, *NPT* 95). Mestokosho uses capitalization, or personification in Western literary terms to describe the fiction of inanimate personhood, as a grammatical strategy to demonstrate that she recognizes the personhood and the agency of the land, and the Earth. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer links the use of capitalization to differentiate Indigenous and settler understandings of (being in) the world:

Capitalization conveys a certain distinction, the elevated position of humans and their creations in the hierarchy of beings. [...] This seemingly trivial grammatical rulemaking in fact expresses deeply held assumptions about human exceptionalism," Kimmerer

²⁵³ Jérémie Ambroise, linguistic adviser at the Tshakapesh Institute, confirms that possessive affixes in the Innu language also express possession and (a sense of) belonging: "les affixes de possession en innu (équivalant aux adjectifs possessifs du français ou de l'anglais) expriment d'abord la possession (rôle syntaxique), mais tout comme en français ou en anglais, ils peuvent aussi exprimer un sentiment d'appartenance (rôle sémantique)" (E-mail to the author. 8 Sep. 2022).

stresses, “that we are somehow different and indeed better than the other species who surround us. Indigenous ways of understanding recognize the personhood of all beings as equally important, not in a hierarchy but a circle. (385).

In addition, Mestokosho compares the land again to our mother who carries us, evoking an image of how the land-mother cares for us. Especially the last one of the above-cited lines acts as a reminder that we, as human beings, are fully dependent on the land and other beings for our survival. This human dependency is also reflected grammatically because the land is the subject and the carried human being (“te/you”) is the object in this line.

Walking as both an act and a metaphor of the Innu’s nomadic past is also a common motif in other Innu women’s poetry, notably in Kanapé Fontaine’s and Bacon’s lyric writing.²⁵⁴ In an untitled two-stanza poem in the first part “L’autre nord / Nanim” in *Bâtons à message / Tshissinuatshtakana* for instance, Bacon’s speaker poetically describes this nomadic past, traversing the land while listening to it and looking for Innu signposts: “Ils marchent / sans courbure, / attentifs / aux sons de la neige / sous la raquette // des bâtons / à message / les attendent / au milieu du lac gelé” (16).²⁵⁵ As this example suggests, message sticks are deeply connected to the Innu’s nomadic lifestyle and reflect Innu principles of interdependence and sharing, as Bacon explains in the prologue to her debut collection of the same title:

“*Tshissinuatshtakana*, les bâtons à message, servaient de points de repère à mes grandparents dans le *nutshimit*, à l’intérieur des terres. Les Innus laissaient ces messages visuels sur leur chemin pour informer les autres nomades de leur situation. [...] Les *tshissinuatshtakana* offraient donc des occasions d’entraide et de partage” (BM 7; original emphasis). In another

²⁵⁴ Innu poet Maya Cousineau Mollen evokes walking as an expression of care in her poem “Takushipanu”: “Marche comme tu caresses le territoire / Habité du respect des rites anciens” (BM082 57).

²⁵⁵ Innu original: “Pimuteuat / Shutshi-pimuteuat / natutamuat / tshikashameuat tshetshi / mamakushkahk // *tshissinuatshtakana* / pakushenitamuat / tekushinitai / taushkam” (BM 17).

untitled poem in the first part of *Bâtons à message / Tshissinuatshtakana*, Bacon's speaker repeats in the opening lines how "Les anciens / marchaient sans cesse," but then testifies in the last two, anisometric stanzas how she lost their traces: "J'ai perdu la trace / de leur passage / vers la terre dénudée // sans guide / pour m'orienter" (22).²⁵⁶ In both poems, Bacon's speaker posits the land and her ancestors as important guides and teachers. The second poem, however, is marked by the absence of the Innu message sticks and thus metaphorically emphasizes the speaker's sense of being lost. The absence of those important signposts as a result of environmental and cultural changes (that is, the forced transition from a nomadic to a sedentary people) has tangible effects on younger generations not growing up in the old ways, as the speaker feels completely lost.

Message sticks and the metaphor of walking are, in French-Maliseet literary scholar Michèle Lacombe's reading of Bacon's poetry, "not only [referring] to the ancestors' life on the land, and to changing circumstances that have affected the speaker, but also to walking as a contemporary metaphor for poetic movement" ("Pimuteuat" 160). I understand Lacombe's "poetic movement" both literally and figuratively, pointing to the rapidly growing and evolving field of Indigenous literatures and the aesthetics of Indigenous poetics as well as to the transformative power of Indigenous (women's) poetry. The metaphor of walking, which includes in this context the act of following in the ancestors' footprints, is also useful to describe Indigenous cultural continuity and long-term resistance against the settler colonial system, two strategies that ultimately serve to legitimize Indigenous Title.²⁵⁷ In her short analysis of Antane

²⁵⁶ Innu original: "Tshimushuminanat nekanat / nanitam aiatshtapanat // [...] Kashikat / nunitauan nene umeshkanamuau / anite ka pimuteht mushuat // nipeikuteshin, / apu tshissenitaman / tshe ishi-tshituteian" (BM 23).

²⁵⁷ The Kino-nda-niimi Collective offers another link between footprints and resistance using online, independent, and social media as forums of expression in the Idle No More movement: "During the winter we danced, the vast amount of critical and creative expressions that took place is like the footprints we left in the snow, sand, and earth: incalculable" (25).

Kapesh's autobiography, St-Amand contends that collectively known stories about Innu ancestors who criss-crossed the traditional territory, marked and named the land serve to substantiate "la légitimité que ces histoires confèrent à l'occupation d'un territoire" ("Pouvoir" 74).²⁵⁸ In combination, these strategies assert Innu women's poetic claim for Nitassinan and advocate political and legal claims to the traditionally occupied territory; in Mestokosho's lyric writing this is expressed in a more subtle manner than in Kanapé Fontaine's more militant poetry.

Similar to Mestokosho, an important characteristic of Kanapé Fontaine's land-based poetic activism consists of denouncing the neo-colonial occupation of Indigenous territory based on land theft and poetically reclaiming the stolen land. Kanapé Fontaine is part of a much younger generation than Bacon or Mestokosho and links the nomadic lifestyle to her grandparents and ancestors as well as to an oral history, as evidenced by Innu collective memory: "il est dit que le monde a couru jusqu'ici / des bâtons marquent d'un trait le sol gelé" (*MA* 45). According to Cree scholar Tasha Hubbard, who draws on Cree scholar Neal McLeod's theorization of collective memory, "collective memory becomes an agent for Indigenous Peoples to remain grounded in their beliefs, to resist colonial thinking, and to open up space for 'the possibility of radically re-imagining constructed social spaces'" (149). In the same untitled poem in *Manifeste Assi*, the speaker alludes to Indigenous Title with the line "ma grand-mère gravit les montagnes" (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 45), emphasizing the Innu presence on their traditional

Using a similar imagery, Maracle critiques "the failure of Canada to walk in our shoes and learn from us" ("Just" 40) and evokes Kanapé Fontaine's title of her debut poetry collection *N'entre pas dans mon âme avec tes chaussures* (2012).

²⁵⁸ In *Indigenous Healing: Exploring Traditional Paths*, Rupert Ross cites a Hopi man who articulates his relationship with the Grand Canyon: "All this canyon is covered with our footprints. It's where we had our genesis; where some of our clans farmed and lived until we were called to the mesas. It is where we make our sacred salt trek. It is where our spirits go when we die. It is where we learned the Hopi way of life, and the lessons that guide us. And the key lesson is the lesson of humility" (46).

territory, which the poet uses to refute the European myth of *terra nullius*. The poet's critique of settler colonialism is also echoed in her reference to the European Doctrine of Discovery in *Manifeste Assi*: "Et tu m'as nommée / nouveau monde" (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 42).

More specifically, inveighing against territorial dispossession and genocide, two factors on which Canada as a country is essentially grounded, the female speaker mourns her loss in the opening lines of the long poem "La Migration" in *Bleuets et abricots*: "Je suis apatride // Je n'ai ni terre ni territoire / le pays est né / mon sang / ma colère" (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 69), before she announces her physical return to take back her land and her culture. "Je retournerai / à ces récits asphyxiés / par nos parents muets" (*BA* 71), Kanapé Fontaine writes to emphasize the female speaker's re-appropriation of Innu stories and culture that are deeply linked to *assi*, and she stresses her endeavour in the lines "Je remonterai le pays / aussi puissante que mes grands-pères / aussi rapide que mes prédécesseurs / aussi clairvoyante que mes grands-mères / que le pays lui-même" (*BA* 71). The speaker's acts of resistance and re-appropriation are again underlined in the following lines and emphasized through the rhetorical use of anaphora: "Je reprendrai possession de mes droits / je reprendrai possession de mon souffle / je reprendrai possession de mes routes d'eau" (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 71). The speaker finally wields her presence as a means to physically and linguistically re-appropriate her land: "Je suis revenue pour rester / je suis revenue pour prendre pays / lui donner son nom de terre" (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 72). For the speaker, this movement of taking back her land implies allowing the land to heal herself: "il [le pays] révélera ses secrets de tisane / la guérison des eaux et de la terre" (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 71).

Another key element of Kanapé Fontaine's land-based poetic activism constitutes calling out the ecologically, socially, and culturally destructive behaviour for which settler governments and big corporations are responsible. Kanapé Fontaine's activist stance is evident throughout her

poetry when she critiques different forms of environmental exploitation and destruction as well as the effects of anthropogenic climate change. In *Manifeste Assi*, for instance, her speaker refers to deforestation (“bois épuisés” 60), pipeline construction (“ils construisent partout des pipelines” 82), oil spills (“J’ai noir éclaté dans l’herbe” 80), resource-intensive processing of fossil fuel production (“Le mazout boit l’eau” 74), and melting polar ice caps (“Les calottes polaires se mordent” 72). In Kanapé Fontaine’s succeeding collection *Bleuets et abricots*, her female speaker continues to decry settler interventions into the landscape, for example through river channelization (“Détourner la rivière / de sa trajectoire” 29) and “pipelines” (71), but the speaker draws her attention to the restoration and rebuilding of Turtle Island in accordance with Innu/Indigenous values and principles and a future-oriented vision, as exemplified in the following two stanzas: “Je reviendrai / l’aube éclairera mes passages / plantera mes forêts // Mes descendants diront / Nitassinan / Assi” (78).

Kanapé Fontaine’s *Manifeste Assi*, and especially the second half of the work, is littered with clear references to fossil fuel production. Her powerful long poem “Amalgame de terre noire ma terre assi” (“Blend of black land my land Assi”), which concludes *Manifeste Assi*, immediately addresses the industrial exploitation of oil, its transportation via a network of pipelines, and the implied ecological dangers and disasters, such as oil spills. In the poem, her speaker enumerates famous historic events of Indigenous resistance on Turtle Island, like Wounded Knee and Oka, and juxtaposes them with allusions to controversial, highly contested resource extraction and development projects, most notably the Alberta tar sands, but also the Romaine River dam on the Quebec North Shore. I cite the three anisometric opening stanzas here in the French original and in the English translation because of their importance for my textual analysis:

J'ai noir éclaté dans l'herbe
l'herbe des chants anciens
en tonne sur les blés
les prés
Wounded knee mon cœur
Athapaskan
mon âme Romaine
Oka

Nitassinan

Nin
innu terre
terre assise
innu-assi" (*Manifeste Assi* 80)

I black burst in the grass
the grass of ancient songs in tons
on the wheat
the fields
Wounded Knee my heart
Athapaskan
My Romaine soul
Oka

Nitassinan

Nin
Innu land
Land *Assi*
Innu-*Assi* (*Assi Manifesto* 70)

Like Mestokosho, Kanapé Fontaine employs the possessive adjective “my,” both in French (“mon”) and Innu-aimun (“Nin”), to lyrically claim the Athabasca region (including the Athabasca River, Lake, Falls, Mountain, and Glacier) and the Romaine River as Indigenous territory. The alternation between the naming of an event marking Indigenous resistance and one alluding to a specifically threatened Indigenous place stages the struggle of Innu/Indigenous resistance, and hints at their resilience, determination, and perseverance in protecting their land. The reference to the land and its natural entities, such as the river as the speaker’s heart and soul, respectively, is more than symbolic. Like the organ of the heart that keeps humans and other species alive, the land and water serve as our fundamental sources of life and sustenance and thus ensure our survival. In addition, the river - as place - has a spiritual and cultural function for the speaker. Kanapé Fontaine’s own reference to the “sables / noirs de l’Athapaskan” (33) in *Bleuets et abricots* strengthens the interpretation of Athapaskan as a region. Considering, however, that Athapaskan can also be read as a reference to one of the major groups of First Nation languages, Kanapé Fontaine’s expression demonstrates how Indigenous languages are

intrinsically linked to the traditional territory of their speakers and as such, how both language and land are sources of identity. Reversibly, this means that territorial dispossession, forced displacement from the land, and environmental destruction have a direct impact on Indigenous Peoples, as Gabriel warns: “Il n’en demeure pas moins qu’à cause de la nature destructrice de l’extraction des ressources et de la contamination de tout l’écosystème, les peuples autochtones perdront en définitive une part précieuse de leur identité, de leur culture et de leurs modes de vie” (35).

Moreover, Kanapé Fontaine’s wordplay with “Nitassinan” (Innu territory), “Nin” (our), “Innu,” “terre/land,” and “Assi” (land) reinforces the speaker’s poetic land claim. Indeed, the two-word line “terre assise” in the original French means literally, if read as two nouns, “land” and “foundation” (in the sense of a solid structure); read as a noun and a qualifying adjective, it means “firm or stable land.” In the poem’s context, these meanings also allude to the land’s resistance against exploitation. Moreover, these evocative words serve as a reminder that “Land has always been a defining element of Aboriginal culture. Land contains the languages, the stories, and the histories of a people. It provides water, air, shelter, and food. Land participates in the ceremonies and the songs. And land is home” (King, *Inconvenient Indian* 218). Scott translated “assise” as “Assi” which seems a valid solution, specifically for vocal and performative reasons. In addition, his use of Innu-aimun, which is hidden in the French original’s line, underscores Kanapé Fontaine’s allusion to the land’s embodiment of Innu culture and her poetic reclamation of the land as Innu land. On the other hand, the translation cannot but erase the French’s double meaning and ignores thus how Kanapé Fontaine explicitly refers to the vital role of the land as a firm and stable presence of Innu culture and identity: “les Innus semblent

concevoir le territoire comme fondement de leur existence même, exprimé à travers des formulations telle qu’‘assise territoriale’” (Tipi 101).

North America’s destructively extractive attitude towards the land, exemplified by the Alberta tar sands in Kanapé Fontaine’s poem, is antithetical to the Innu’s “holistic, connected, or integrated approach to life” (Ruffo, “Why Native Literature” 114) expressed throughout the collection. As early as in her prologue to *Manifeste Assi*, the poet directly names “Alberta, Fort McMurray, Athabasca” (6), all known as geographical sites of oil extraction and exploitation, and then calls out the multinational pipeline company “Enbridge / et tous les autres sales carboneux” in her poem “Amalgame de terre noire ma terre assi” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 82). The powerful, destructive imagery in her four-line stanza “Ici le ciel est si bleu / mon cœur si noir si brut si explosion dedans / trop plein de tes chemins de fer abrupts / tes serpents virulents sur mon île ma Tortue” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 83) evokes the danger of exploiting the large deposits of bitumen or crude oil in the above-mentioned regions and exporting these substances via pipelines and trains, as confirmed in an open letter penned by Indigenous women, such as well-known environmental activists Ellen Gabriel, Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe), and Kanahus Manuel (Secwepemc), to stop financing the fossil fuel industry: “Transporting tar sands out of Alberta, whether via train, tanker, or pipeline, is a dangerous and polluting process” (“CEOs” 2).

Similar to Mestokosho’s lyrical description of the “machine-men” building new cities, Kanapé Fontaine’s speaker directly addresses settlers and denounces “tes odieuses machineries / acides sur nos peaux vitreuses” (*MA* 83), used to extract the land’s natural resources. Both Innu poets address neo-colonial practices that are emblematic of settler approaches to the land, as expressed by Cherokee writer and scholar Thomas King: “For non-Natives, land is primarily a commodity, something that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get for it”

(*Inconvenient Indian* 218). These capitalist, exploitative, and destructive practices heavily contradict Indigenous understandings of the land, which are deeply connected to their economy, politics, culture, and social life, as Gabriel emphasizes: “Les lois autochtones voient au contraire [aux lois coloniales] dans toute terre un bien précieux devant être préservé pour les générations présentes et futures; la terre n’a besoin d’aucun édifice ni de développement d’aucune sorte pour avoir de la valeur. Une terre en santé est gage d’une vie économique, culturelle, sociale et politique saine” (38). Earlier in *Manifeste Assi*, Kanapé Fontaine’s speaker points to the fact that “[a]t the point of extraction, tar sands destroy large swathes of boreal forest and require massive quantities of chemicals, water, and energy” (“CEOs” 2): “un pétrole brut / en mes poumons,” “Mon âme élan aux bois épuisés,” and “Le mazout boit l’eau” (*MA* 59-60; 74).

With the expression “my heart Athapaskan,” again read as a reference to the Athabasca area (including the land, the natural entities and the mainly Indigenous population living there) threatened by the anthropogenic dangers of the so-called development of the tar sands, Kanapé Fontaine’s speaker alludes in the fourth line of “Amalgame de terre noire ma terre assi” to the environmental and human victims of what King calls “the dirtiest, most environmentally insane energy-extraction project in North America, probably in the world” (*Inconvenient Indian* 219). Indeed, King classifies the exploitation of the Alberta tar sands as a form of “ecocide” (*Inconvenient Indian* 220). Similar to the concept of genocide which commonly refers to the systematic effort to destroy a social group, the term ecocide describes the “destruction of entire habitats, rather than just individual organisms or species” (Garrard 207). More specifically, ecocide can be defined as “the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished” (Higgins).

The author's use of the word "inhabitants" instead of "humans" in her definition reflects an inclusive and non-anthropocentric position, in which all beings affected by ecocide are considered. In the French original, Kanapé Fontaine's anisometric stanza "j'ai mal / j'ai mal au ventre / j'ai mal au ventre de la terre" (*MA* 81) strongly expresses her speaker's suffering using repetition. In the English translation, this effect is weaker because Scott replaced the three-line anaphora "j'ai mal" by the two-line anaphora "my belly aches," which is even ruptured: "I'm in pain / my belly aches / my belly of the land aches" (*Assi Manifesto* 70-71). Scott could not replicate the French original's structure of repetition through which Kanapé Fontaine creates her powerful effect. With each line and each fragment that she adds to the basic anaphora "j'ai mal," her speaker structurally and lyrically emphasizes her growing pain, beginning as a feeling, merging into a physically felt pain, finally stretching into the land. This specific stanza and the speaker's references to neo-colonial crimes against the land and its inhabitants throughout the collection support the interpretation of Kanapé Fontaine's lyrical treatise on ecocide. Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong powerfully links the different issues of neoliberal economics, capital-driven "development" projects, environmental destruction, and forced displacement, and she presents the destructive impacts as an embodied, felt, and lived experience that ruptures Indigenous people's connection with their land:

Land bonding is not possible in the kind of economy surrounding us, because land must be seen as real estate to be 'used' and parted with if necessary. I see the separation is accelerated by the concept that 'wilderness' needs to be tamed by 'development' and that this is used to justify displacement of peoples and unwanted species. I know what it feels like to be an endangered species on my land, to see the land dying with us. It is my body

that is being torn, deforested and poisoned by ‘development.’ Every fish, plant, insect, bird and animal that disappears is part of me dying. (“Sharing One Skin”)

Responding Poetically to the Exploitation of the North

Land-based poetic activism acts as an instigator, a force of rupture, and a catalyst that has the power to stimulate social and political renewal by using powerful imagery that critiques environmental destruction. In order to realize substantial change and enable “the power of Indigenous poetry to transform political spaces” (McLeod 12), however, I argue that poetic activism also needs to intersect with other forms of activism. Demonstrating their strong political and environmental leadership skills during the roadblock of the 138, Innu women’s determined efforts to stop the damming of the Romaine River and related construction work on their territory become politicized actions. Innu women therefore provide an example of this marriage between poetry and environmental activism when they literally put up their bodies as human shields against destructive and violent forces or lyrically treat this public protest. Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine alike address the Romaine River as a site of both destruction and Innu resistance, and they honour Innu women’s environmental activism in their writing. From a settler colonial perspective, however, this visible Indigenous presence on the land, symbolized by the human blockade and the protest march, represents an obstacle to the economic and societal well-being and development of the nation (Girard and Brisson 89). The settler state meets this situation with the criminalization of Indigenous protest, revealing the unequal power relations at play, but the dominant authorities’ strategies of arrest and containment do not and will not stop the Innu women, as Kanapé Fontaine informs them in the first section of her slam “Les jours des feux, des tambours et des meutes”: “On s’élève sur nos lignes, / nos femmes sont plus fortes que

les tiennes / Elles ont cent mille ans de résistance / dans le plus profond de leurs veines / Tu les arrêtes, tu les embarques, / mais tu verras, jamais elles ne s'éteignent / Et elles marcheront encore, / aussi longtemps qu'elles s'en souviennent" (29-30). The spoken word poet's reference to walking here signals Innu resistance, resilience, and survivance. As suggested earlier, Kanapé Fontaine rekindles the nomadic past of her Innu people in her (slam) poetry, and she continues this tradition of movement through lived memory in her politically and socially conscious writing by celebrating cultural continuity through the act and metaphor of walking. In *Manifeste Assi*, Kanapé Fontaine positions walking not only as a symbol of the past, but as present-day embodied resistance against settler colonialism and environmental destruction joined by other forms of resistance and empowerment, such as drumming, dancing, and singing: "que je danse / que je tape du pied au milieu des femmes" (38). As such, she turns cultural strengths into peaceful weapons seeking to protect the Innu and their homeland.

In his documentary film *Blocus 138 - Innu Resistance* (2012), Innu filmmaker Réal Junior Leblanc documents this public presence and peaceful action of a group of Innu in opposition to already ongoing and planned development projects, and he captures the emotion of the moment during the blockade.²⁵⁹ Although men also participated, Innu women, in particular, used this front-line form of activism and protest to manifest their determined resistance to the hydroelectric exploitation of the Romaine River, as St-Amand explains: "*Blocus 138* relate l'action de contestation menée par des militantes de Uashat mak Mani-Utenam qui performant, incarnent et expriment leur résistance au Plan Nord, en innu-aimun et en français, sur les lieux

²⁵⁹ According to St-Amand, the title of Leblanc's short documentary *Blocus 138 - Innu Resistance* evocatively echoes Alanis Obomsawin's long documentary film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) about the Kanien'kehá:ka Resistance ("Pouvoir" 75). In addition, both films visually witness and document Indigenous resistance against capitalist "development" projects from "behind the barricades," that is from the perspective of an Indigenous eyewitness.

mêmes du territoire qu’elles cherchent à défendre” (“Pouvoir” 75). Hydro-Québec’s megaproject on this river preceded the official launch of the Quebec government’s Plan Nord in 2011, but the issues around it are emblematic of environmental, cultural, and societal problems that the Plan Nord will bring when carried out. The Plan Nord, infamously called “the Tar Sands of the East” because of its feared ecological damage, was relaunched in early 2019 by the Legault government and covers 72% of Quebec’s total land mass. As explained in writing in Leblanc’s opening credits, this large-scale economic development plan aims to support mining projects, forestry, and hydro-electricity as well as the expansion of transportation routes and tourism in Northern Quebec, including on the traditional and unceded territory of the Innu. Though heavily focused on mining activities, the project also includes the construction of dams, and the damming of the Romaine River unofficially inaugurated the first phase of the Plan Nord.

In his seven-minute documentary film, Leblanc captures his people’s indignation in the face of settler and environmental violence as well as Innu women’s strong commitment to peacefully defending their homeland. Leblanc’s closing scenes evoke Skawennati’s closing scenes of the “Oka Crisis” in episode 3 of her *TimeTraveller*TM series because both artists depict the violent disruption and arrest of the gathered Indigenous protectors/protestors. Using the common film technique of the voice over, Leblanc accompanies his closing scenes with his poetic voice, narrating what he witnesses and thereby supporting Innu women’s peaceful resistance. His opening words “I hear still” evoke the lasting effect of the emotional experiences he documented; embodied knowledge engraved in his memory because it is saturated with feelings he heard and saw during the gathering: “I hear still / the cries of rage / and tears of despair / of my people” (Leblanc, “Roadblock 138” 52). In the next three stanzas, Leblanc uses of the anaphora “I have seen” to emphasize his credibility as a first-hand witness of the events,

and he begins to outline the unequal power relations at play. In doing so, he situates Innu women and Elders as a peaceful collective “armed with nothing more than a song and a drum” (McAdam 65) who gathered to protect their territory and, in contrast, depicts settler police as neo-colonial agents violently dispersing the demonstration: “I have seen women / defend Mother Earth / with songs of peace // I have seen my people / driven back / on our own land / by helmeted strangers // I have seen my elders / shedding tears / of forgotten pride” (Leblanc, “Roadblock 138” 52). Leblanc’s original French version of this anaphora (“J’ai vu”) used in his poem “Blocus 138 - La résistance innue” (50), reminds me of Innu writer Naomi Fontaine’s use of the same expression as anaphora in *Shuni*, where she also positions herself as a witness-observer of her community. More specifically, Fontaine refers to the protest march of Innu women: “J’ai vu une femme marcher sur la route 138, de Uashat à Ottawa, pour sauver son territoire. D’autres femmes se joindre à elle,” and their peaceful gatherings to protect their traditional territory: “J’ai vu des femmes se tenir par la main, formant un barrage devant une unité de policiers anti-émeute. Elles chantaient un makushan” (*Shuni* 148-149). Both Leblanc and Fontaine describe the same scene of Innu women’s struggle for environmental and cultural protection.

In the fifth stanza of his poem, Leblanc again evokes the unequal power relations that Indigenous environmentalists and activists face: “How can we / defend our heritage / and our children’s future / against the moneyed giants?” (“Roadblock 138” 52). Leblanc criticizes how money equals power in capitalistic societies, and thus easily overrules Indigenous initiatives of environmental and cultural protection. The next stanza is marked by two anaphoras which Leblanc uses to divide his message into two different parts, introduced by his emotions: “I weep / for all the rivers / they will divert / for all the forests / they will plunder / for all the lands / they will flood / for all the mountains / they will raze” (“Roadblock 138” 52-53). The first anaphora

“for all the” introduces parts of nature and refers to the vastness of the landscape and resources to be altered as well as the immensity of the effect of radical transformation. The second anaphora “they will” is followed by an enumeration of forms of ecological destruction caused by settlers. Throughout his poem, Leblanc crafts a dichotomy that separates Innu/Indigenous protectors and settler destroyers, and in the last stanza, clearly situates himself in opposition to the violent and destructive practices of the settler society: “To them, I will say always / from the depths of my soul / No” (“Roadblock 138” 53).

This deep commitment to environmental protection is also evident in both of Kanapé Fontaine’s poetry collections discussed in this chapter. In an untitled poem in *Manifeste Assi*, the speaker, through her grammatical use of if-clauses and the conditional tense, speaks to the speculative imagination of resisting the Plan Nord, its consequences for Canada as a settler-colonial nation-state, and the liberating effect for the land and Indigenous Peoples: “Et si je saccageais les portes des plans nord / faisais déchoir les ruines / dégrafais la terre ancêtre / il n’y aurait plus de pays / il y aura moi et ma mère / et ma sœur et mon frère et mon père / et les autres et les autres” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 47). The future tense in the lines following the if-clauses stresses the speaker’s willingness to fully believe in a healthy Indigenous future. Moreover, the final lines “La 138 est barrée / les clés quelque part” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 75) in the untitled poem beginning with the line “*Atik*” [meaning caribou] m’aperçoit” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 75; original emphasis) in *Manifeste Assi*, emphasize the speaker’s opposition to the Plan Nord by lyrically evoking the blockade as a strategy of protest and protection. More specifically, these lines point to Innu women’s resistance and their continuing action against the industrialized and commercialized exploitation of the North. Route 138 is the main highway to Quebec’s North, “following the entire north shore of the Saint Lawrence River past Montreal to the temporary

eastern terminus in Kegashka on the Gulf of Saint Lawrence” (“Quebec Route 138”), and thus mostly leading through Nitassinan. I therefore understand the speaker’s reference to the absent keys as the protectors’/protesters’ symbolic confiscation of the keys to the North, which metaphorically reinforces their physical blockade and suggests that absolutely nothing can stop Innu women activists from gathering, protesting, and protecting their land, as long as *assi* is threatened. In this context, Innu/Indigenous protest is better understood as a form of enacting their right to the land, and emphasizes the absurdity of settler violence enacted upon peaceful protectors/protesters by police forces, as alluded to in Fontaine’s *Shuni* (149), in Kanapé Fontaine’s slam “Les jours des feux, des tambours et des meutes” (30) and in her collection *Manifeste Assi* (“les lumières rouge sur l’asphalte / tes routes barricadées” 41), and most importantly, as documented in Leblanc’s short film *Blocus 138*.

For Kanapé Fontaine, ongoing resistance represents a powerful tool for environmental protection. Kanapé Fontaine’s female speaker overtly expresses, in her poem “La Cueillette” in *Bleuets et abricots*, her opposition to the Plan Nord. Especially the English translation of the poem’s title as “Gathering” recaptures the vivid image of Innu women in collective protest against Quebec’s megaproject. Most importantly in this poem, the speaker equates the Plan Nord with death: “Moi / je suis venue fermer / les portes du Plan Nord / les portes de la mort” (Kanapé Fontaine, *BA* 41).²⁶⁰ The rhetorical use of the anaphora “les portes de” underscores the deadly connection with the Plan Nord, a project which Kanapé Fontaine fears is lethal for her people and other inhabitants of the affected area. The poet’s metaphor of death is not limited to the decay and irreversible destruction of the land, flora, and fauna, but comprehends the actual death

²⁶⁰ The French original emphasizes the speaker’s determination and dedication to combat this megaproject through the complementary use of the personal pronoun “moi” in the first line; an emphasis that is absent in the English translation: “I / have come to shut / the gates of Plan Nord / the gates of death” (Kanapé Fontaine, *Blueberries and Apricots* 23).

of Indigenous Peoples as a direct consequence of environmental violence. Kanapé Fontaine thus powerfully alludes to settler scholar Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," which he defines as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2).²⁶¹ R. Nixon's concept critiques our inattention to the lethality of many environmental crises due to "the relative invisibility of slow violence" and thus the lack of "immediate," "explosive and spectacular" violence "erupting into instant sensational visibility," and he argues for a "rethinking [of] our accepted assumptions of violence" (2-3).²⁶² Kanapé Fontaine substantiates her allusion to slow violence in an untitled poem in *Manifeste Assi*, where her speaker decries environmental destruction in the second stanza: "J'ai une terre à mourir / avec les prairies magnétiques / les hauts blés carabinés / les eaux blondes toxiques" (71). These lines exemplify how "[c]limate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermath of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively" (2) because these ecological threats, R. Nixon notes, often "remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are geographically remote, too vast or too minute in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the physiological life of the human observer" (15). "To confront slow

²⁶¹ R. Nixon's concept of slow violence partly overlaps with Norwegian mathematician and sociologist Johan Galtung's term "indirect or structural violence" but, in contrast to Galtung's "static connotations of structural violence," slow violence emphasizes "questions of time, movement, and change, however gradual" (R. Nixon 10-11).

²⁶² Palmater indirectly refers to Nixon's concept of slow violence: "Although the Idle No More movement began before Chief Spencer's hunger strike, and will continue after, her strike is symbolic of what is happening to First Nations in Canada. For every day that Spence does not eat, she is slowly dying, and that is exactly what is happening to First Nations, who have lifespans up to 20 years shorter than average Canadians" ("Why Are We" 14). In *Manifeste Assi*, Kanapé Fontaine also uses the reserve as a colonial place to indirectly refer to the concept of slow violence: "si nous sommes mis à mort / à petits feux."

violence requires,” according to R. Nixon, “that we plot and give figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time” (10). In another untitled poem in *Manifeste Assi*, Kanapé Fontaine’s speaker incarnates the land, thus stressing her affective connection with the land, and targets the reader’s senses by symbolically using cancer to address the unhealthy exploitation of the land’s resources: “Je suis ce pays au sang noir / je suis une gorge brûlée / un pays enfoui” and “je suis ce pays au sang noir / j’ai un cancer au poumon gauche / j’ai un cancer à quatorze torrents / j’ai un cancer à l’ethnie folle” (78). I read the speaker’s reference to “this black-blooded land” with “a burnt throat” (*Assi Manifesto* 68) as a clear representation of the land’s natural crude oil deposits that the fossil fuel industry systematically extracts and processes. Moreover, the speaker’s “cancer in the left lung” and her “cancer in fourteen torrents” (*Assi Manifesto* 68) can be read as allusions to the Alberta tar sands and the locations of dams in Quebec, respectively. In both poems cited above, Kanapé Fontaine’s speaker hints at ecologically destructive consequences of “petro-imperialism, the megadam industry, [and] outsourced toxicity” (R. Nixon 5) that result in negative health impacts for all beings living in the affected area. The tar sands, especially, have a major impact on the environment and its inhabitants: “The carcinogenic and toxic pollutants released in the process have done irreparable and widespread harm to the health of First Nations communities in northern Alberta, their watersheds, lifeways, and their local ecosystems” (“CEOs” 2).²⁶³

Indigenous feminist Lindsay Nixon writes: “Colonialism and capitalism, which fuel resource extraction and environmental contamination are an attack on both Indigenous lands and Indigenous peoples’ bodies.” There is a connection here that is made evident in Innu/Indigenous

²⁶³ “Advances in bitumen processing techniques has had major social and environmental impacts on Indigenous peoples who live near the tar sands projects around Fort McMurray, Alberta” (University of Alberta, “Lesson 8,” “Bitumen”).

women's poetry. Innu poet Manon Nolin first published her poem "Origine égarée" in the collection *Les bruits du monde* (2012), and in the poem's second stanza she deals with environmental extraction in form of deforestation: "Aujourd'hui l'étranger bûche ta forêt / Il te dénude / Et tout ça pour construire / Une maison sans mouvance" (109).²⁶⁴ In this original version, I read deforestation mainly as an ecological problem of environmental destruction for settlement, the second person singular possessive adjective "ta" and the pronoun "te" addressing the land herself. Nolin also integrated this poem in her debut collection *Ma peau aime le Nord* (2016), though in a slightly different version, where the re-edited first two lines of the second stanza describe deforestation as an embodied and felt experience of physical, maybe even sexual, aggression against the female speaker: "aujourd'hui l'étranger bûche ma forêt / me dénude" (25). Like Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine, Nolin employs the first-person singular possessive adjective "ma/my" before the noun "forêt/forest" as an empowering symbol of territoriality, or Indigenous Title. Yet, her use of the direct object pronoun "me" changes the meaning of the lines and transfers it into a physically felt experience of nature's destruction that is similar to the one expressed by Armstrong in "Sharing One Skin," where she describes how her "body is being torn, deforested, and poisoned by 'development.'"

Moreover, Nolin's slight grammatical change - and yet radical change in meaning - opens an imaginative space to rethink Indigenous-settler relations in the affected areas of industrial resource exploitation. As such, it is valid to read both Kanapé Fontaine's and Nolin's lines as allusions to the direct link between resource extraction sites in the North and higher rates of

²⁶⁴ The original version of the poem was republished in French and translated in English as "Lost Origin" in the bilingual collection *Languages of Our Land / Langues de notre terre* (2014; edited by Susan Ouriou).

violence against Indigenous women and girls in those regions.²⁶⁵ The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls clearly states:

There is substantial evidence of a serious problem demonstrated in the correlation between resource extraction and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. Work camps, or ‘man camps,’ associated with the resource extraction industry are implicated in higher rates of violence against Indigenous women at the camps and in the neighbouring communities. (*Reclaiming*, vol. 1a, 593)²⁶⁶

Hargreaves identifies “white male violence as a root cause” (88) for increased violence against Indigenous women in those areas. The following statement from Melina Laboucan-Massimo (Cree), published in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, publicly names this destructive connection by using the imagery of rape as both a form of exploiting the land and sexually violating Indigenous women:

²⁶⁵ The indissociable connection between resource extraction and violence against Indigenous women constitutes a key element of ecofeminist theories. In *Ecofeminism* (1993, re-edited in 2014), Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva underline the relationship between gendered violence and environmental destruction: “Wherever women acted against ecological destruction [...], they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature,” and they emphasize the embodied experiences of violence: “The ‘corporate and military warriors’ aggression against the environment was perceived almost physically as an aggression against our female body” (14). In her article “Eco-Feminist Appropriations of Indigenous Feminisms and Environmental Violence” (2015), Lindsay Nixon critiques the emergence of Western ecofeminism based on Indigenous women’s so-called “environmental knowledges or environmental feminisms”: the “practice [of using traditional Indigenous knowledges to legitimate Western ecological and environmental concepts] is both an appropriation of Indigenous worldviews and an erasure of the settler complicity in genocide within these occupied Indigenous territories,” and she continues: “Ecofeminism that appropriates Indigenous environmental knowledges often fails to fully represent what environmental justice means to Indigenous communities. What is often ignored within these analyses is how neocolonial state violence, compounded by exposure to environmental contaminants, is embodied in very specific ways for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit peoples.”

²⁶⁶ The section “Deeper Dive: Resource Extraction Projects and Violence against Indigenous Women” (584-594) in volume 1a of the National Inquiry’s Final Report is completely dedicated to this complex issue. In the Supplementary Report of *Reclaiming Power and Place*, volume 2 of the National Inquiry’s Final Report that deals specifically with Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls in Quebec, there is the unsolved case of Anne-Marie J., a missing and very possibly murdered Innu woman who was 23 or 24 years old at the time of her disappearance in 1958. Though without official proof but brought up by testimonies, her disappearance can very probably be related to the presence of non-Indigenous loggers and their man camp (73-74).

The industrial system of resource extraction in Canada is predicated on systems of power and domination. This system is based on the raping and pillaging of Mother Earth as well as violence against women. The two are inextricably linked. With the expansion of extractive industries, not only do we see desecration of the land, we see an increase in violence against women. Rampant sexual violence against women and a variety of social ills result from the influx of transient workers in and around workers' camps."

(*Reclaiming*, vol. 1a, 586).

Kanapé Fontaine hints at this connection using sexual imagery in her long poem "Amalgame de terre noire ma terre assi": "ils construisent partout des pipelines ils oublient / on s'appellera 'bois du pétrole' / 'vagin de javel' 'tu veux mon pipeline dans ta bouche?' diraient les autres" and "your hands in my land" (*MA* 82-83).

Mi'kmaq poet Shannon Webb-Campbell explores this connection between violence against Indigenous women and nature in the last two stanzas of "Elegy Revised," included in her completely revised poetry collection *I Am a Body of Land* (2019): "I am a woman unprotected like our waterways // [...] I am a boreal river where we can no longer swim" (43). Webb-Campbell's use of the anaphora "I am" and the simile ("like") underline the comparison between Indigenous women and the land/river and their shared experiences, and both lines denounce how settler systems fail to protect Indigenous women and the environment from various forms of exploitation, oppression, and violence. Instead, the poem's final line refers to nature's status quo marked by destruction and pollution and paints a rather dark reality. However, the statement "I am not someone who wants you to forget any of this" (43) alludes to the speaker's and Indigenous women's resistance and resilience and resumes Webb-Campbell's lyrical critique of settler colonialism and its destructive forces. In addition, her poetic voice joins those of other

Indigenous women poets in Quebec, such as Mestokosho, Kanapé Fontaine, and Nolin, on their journey to combat social and environmental injustices.

The North, this territory that attracts exploitation companies because of its (sub-)terranean riches, is fleshed out as an (already) inhabited place in Mestokosho's collection *Née de la pluie et de la terre*. Addressing the settler reader who has never been to the evoked North in "Tshiuëtin, vent du Nord," the speaker writes in the first line of the second stanza: "Moi je vous parle du Nord / À la manière des pas des ancêtres / Silencieux et respectueux" (Mestokosho, *NPT* 94). Mestokosho's speaker is able to speak about the North because of her knowledge of the land: "Car je connais le Nord pour l'avoir écouté" (*NPT* 94). These lines resonate with the idea that "[w]ithin Indigenous contexts land is not property, as in settler colonialism, but rather land is knowing and knowledge" (Arvin et al. 21). Coulthard shares a similar understanding of place when he writes: "Place is way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world – and these ways of knowing often guide forms of resistance to power relations that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place" ("Place against Empire" 79). Mestokosho evokes this resistance in her poetry by repeating the first line of the second stanza with the additional word "vrai" ("real" or "true") before "Nord/North" in the first line of the third stanza. In doing so, Mestokosho disturbs "une certaine idée du Nord toujours au cœur de l'imaginaire québécois" (St-Amand, "Pouvoir" 74) when her speaker states: "Moi je vous parle du vrai Nord / Toi qui ne vois pas le Nord / Toi qui vis dans un rêve matériel / Ton regard ne va pas loin / Regarde au-delà de tes ambitions" (*NPT* 94). Mestokosho crafts a poetic counter-image to the settler notion of the North as *terra nullius*, typically represented in the (neo-)colonial imagination as a vast, empty, uninhabited territory waiting to be explored, occupied, and exploited. Like Antane Kapeshe in her

autohistory and Kanapé Fontaine in her territorial (slam) poetry, Mestokosho's land-based poetic activism

remet clairement en cause le discours culturel québécois du Nord comme territoire vierge à coloniser, en toute innocence, comme réservoir de ressources naturelles à exploiter, comme espace à occuper, voire à conquérir ainsi que le formulait le Premier ministre Robert Bourassa en lien avec le développement hydroélectrique de la Baie-James dans les années 1970. (St-Amand, "Pouvoir" 74)

Innu women writers' restorying of the North as a place traditionally inhabited by Innu and other Indigenous Peoples is significant here because it strengthens their poetic claims for Nitassinan as well as Indigenous Peoples' Indigenous Title.²⁶⁷

In contrast, the poet's North is a lived reality, a collectively and respectfully shared environment that is home to a multitude of animals, trees, waters, and Indigenous Peoples. Mestokosho insists that the protection of Nitassinan will be key to a balanced ecosystem in times of ecological crisis, and that the North will play a crucial role for (human) survival: "Alors regarde le Nord comme ton dernier souffle / Garde-le pour demain / Tu en auras besoin" (Mestokosho, *NPT* 95). Mestokosho is clearly cognizant of our very dependence on the land and her resources, while capitalist entities, both corporations and political parties, ignore this fact in favour of short-term economic profit. In her afterword "Writing is a way of not forgetting" ("Écrire pour ne pas oublier..."), Mestokosho speaks out against the environmentally, culturally, and physically damaging forces of capitalist resource exploitation: "our traditional land is

²⁶⁷ Starblanket and Coburn argue that "[t]he foundations of the Canadian state rely on the simultaneous continuity and containment of Indigenous relationships to the land – that is, continuity of Indigenous 'consent' to share the land and containment of forms of relationship that interfere with the state's exercise of perfect territorial sovereignty. This echoes contradictory movements to erase Indigenous worldviews and practices, while selectively recalling Indigenous presence to legitimate state claims" (88), such as in the North.

continually under threat of destruction by the big forestry companies, hydroelectric dams and mines. Our way of life and our survival cannot be separated from the life and survival of the rivers, forests and lakes” (*CJPG* 91).²⁶⁸ Based on her Innu understanding of the world that acknowledges relationships and interdependency, Mestokosho knows that local environmental activism is key to preserving the fragile ecosystem of the North, which can help protect the whole planet in this unprecedented environmental crisis, most visible in the anthropogenic effect of climate change and global heating. Innu/Indigenous women such as Mestokosho, Kanapé Fontaine, Nolin, and Webb-Campbell are all part of a process that Rob Nixon argues is writer-activists changing the way we view the land from a Eurocentric perspective, and, as he argues, the “narrative imaginings of [these] writer-activists may thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen” (15).

Conclusion

Poetic activism, in addition to front-line activism in the real world, plays a key role in supporting local activities of resistance by introducing and sensitizing Indigenous and settler readers to interrelated questions of environmental and social (in)justices. Guy Sioui Durand, in his article “Au regard de l’aigle, les Indiens sont partout et nulle part!” (2009), specifically celebrates Innu writers’ creative resistance against environmental exploitation: “sur la Côte-Nord, au Gépèg (Québec), il faut estimer l’impact international de la résistance d’une faction d’écrivains and d’artistes *innus* (et de leurs alliés) contre le harnachement hydroélectrique de la rivière Unamen (Romaine)” (4; original emphasis). One of the outcomes of land-based poetic

²⁶⁸ French original: “notre terre traditionnelle est toujours menacée par la destruction des grosses compagnies forestières, des barrages hydroélectriques et les mines. Notre vie et notre survie sont attachées à celui des rivières, des forêts et des lacs” (*CJPG* 90).

activism may thus be the stimulation of readers and, ideally, their active involvement in local movements for environmental protection and social justice that will eventually have a wider, if not global, impact, as Stewart-Harawira urges: “It is from that intersection [of the politics of local and global] that we must decolonize the local and transform the global” (136). Idle No More, as “a movement originally led by indigenous women” that “has been joined by grassroots First Nations leaders, Canadians, and now the world” (Palmater, “Why Are We” 39), represents a poignant example of how local manifestations can turn into a global movement. Moreover, Idle No More emphasizes the critical role of Indigenous women as protectors and agents of change:

Indigenous women 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 us through word, song, and story. (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 23)

Indigenous-led environmental activism has “forced the cancellation” of different resource exploitation and extraction projects and has thus generally “marked a victory for Indigenous rights and sovereignty,” transmitting “a powerful signal that fossil fuels are not the future of our economy” but “renewable, sustainable energy” (“CEOs” 2, 4, 5). Palmater argues that “First Nations, with our constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights, are Canadians’ last best hope to protect the lands, waters, plants, and animals from complete destruction – which doesn’t just benefit our children, but the children of all Canadians” (“Why Are We” 40).

The authors of “Emotions of Environmental Justice” argue that “[e]nvironmental justice activism, like all social movements, is fueled by strong emotions,” such as rage, fear, hope,

betrayal, grief, anger, guilt, or even helplessness (Bacon and Norgaard 117). Kanapé Fontaine, for instance, states in her prologue to *Manifeste Assi*: “Il y a moi. Forte d’un nouvel éveil. Il m’aura fallu voir un mouvement transformer le visage des foules, de ma province, de mon pays, pour que je puisse atteindre cette force du tonnerre d’un espoir grandiose” (5), and she finishes her long poem “Amalgame de terre noire ma terre assi” in *Manifeste Assi* with her female speaker’s statement of different emotions expressed through writing: “J’ai rouge écrit ma peur rouge / hurlé ma rage ravalée” (84). Mestokosho’s writing, on the other hand, is often characterized by sorrow caused by environmental destruction and cultural ruptures. Therefore, Innu women’s land-based poetic activism is clearly marked by their speakers’ “affective legacy of [their] experiences,” growing into “a felt knowledge that accumulates and becomes a force that empowers stories that are otherwise separate to become a focus, a potential for movement” (Million, “There” 31-32).

As many Indigenous writers, thinkers, and scholars argue, stories, in every possible form, shape our understanding of the world and our identity, and they therefore have the power to transform individuals, groups, and whole societies. G. Sioui Durand underlines Mestokosho’s belief in her writing: “elle ne douta point du pouvoir politique des mots, que d’autres voudraient bien ne voir confiner que dans le poétique” (6). Kanapé Fontaine’s second collection *Manifeste Assi* also exemplifies this union of the poetic and the political in Indigenous poetics. Her poetry opens a (dream-)space where the speaker imagines a decolonial world, as expressed for example in this first stanza of an untitled poem: “Je t’écirai un manifeste / où je puis délivrer mes empires / mes espérances” (Kanapé Fontaine, *MA* 49). The inextinguishable faith in their lyrical voice and its societal and political impacts are the essence of Innu women’s land-based poetic activism.

Both Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine refer to the metaphor of the linguistic and creative weapon that will bring profound change to the world. Reinforcing her statement “la poésie c’est une arme secrète” (Mestokosho qtd. in Premat 91), Mestokosho declares poetry in French, her second language, to be a weapon used to revive an environmental conscience, in particular, a sense of human responsibility to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants: “Si faire parler la Terre à travers la poésie de l’homme pour faire renaître une conscience qui a déjà existé, je le vois comme une mission d’écrire en français. C’est aussi un besoin comme l’instinct de survie que nous possédons tous” (*CJPG* 90). Mestokosho opens her poem “Ka nakatuenitak assinu / Gardien de la Terre” with the line “Ma pensée est intimement liée à la Terre” (*NPT* 75), evoking how her “teachings as an [Innu] person permeate her writing, even though she chooses to write in [French]” (Hubbard 144), exemplified forthrightly by Innu expressions of worldview, kinship relations, and personhood of all beings.²⁶⁹ However, Mestokosho clearly states that “[l]a langue française n’est pas celle de ma mère;” in contrast to Innu-aimun, her mother tongue, which is “une langue intime, proche de la terre” (*NPT* 104). In “Écrire pour ne pas oublier,” Mestokosho therefore posits writing in French as an act of reinscribing and sharing her cultural difference: “Écrire en français pour ne pas oublier ma différence, une différence que je partage avec vous à travers la poésie” (*NPT* 104).

Likewise, Kanapé Fontaine justifies her use of the French language, stating that “le français sera mon arme de déconstruction massive contre le colonialisme ... [et] mon arme de reconstruction massive” (“Parole” 25). Here Kanapé Fontaine plays imaginatively with words; while her statement clearly alludes to images of weapons of mass destruction, responsible for both genocide and ecocide, ultimately it proclaims the poet’s counter-use of the colonizer’s

²⁶⁹ Innu translation: “Tapitin nimitunenitshikan anite pessish tekuak assi” (*NPT* 74).

language as a weapon of resurgence that will rekindle Innu ways of being, thought and action. Both women poets appropriate the colonizer's language and use their poetry in French to educate a non-Indigenous readership and, most importantly, to revive Innu land-based ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies that are deeply anchored in the Innu's local and specific relationship with the land they have come from and have lived on and off for millennia. Anderson, like many other Indigenous thinkers, argues that "[g]rounding in our particular geographic territories is also significant in terms of maintaining one's Native identity," and more specifically, that this "relationship with the land is critical to Native female strength and resistance" (*Recognition* 106, 108).

In their numerous poetic, epistolary, and activist texts and performances, Mestokosho and Kanapé Fontaine establish the land, their Innu female identity anchored in the land, and their ethical responsibility to protect Nitassinan and Mother Earth as the instigators of their poetic activism, and they demonstrate how "[r]elationality, accountability and land-locked Indigeneity are complexly interconnected" (Lutz 74). Along with these poets, I am convinced of the potential of Innu/Indigenous women's land-based poetic activism as one of the creative weapons to bring profound change to the world. This understanding resonates with Kimmerer's opinion that poetry, literature, and art constitute possible avenues to honour our moral responsibilities and to give back to the land: "Imagine the books, the paintings, the poems, the clever machines, the compassionate acts, the transcendent ideas, the perfect tools. [...] Gifts of mind, hands, heart, voice, and vision offered up on behalf of the earth. Whatever our gift, we are called to give it and to dance for the renewal of the world. In return for the privilege of breath" (384).

In *The Fourth World: An Indigenous Perspective on Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Activism*, Métis/Cree/Assiniboine author Grace Ouellette argues that "Aboriginal women have

their own strategy for social change” (38), and land-based poetic activism seems to be one of these strategies for social and environmental transformation that Innu women in Quebec turn to. Conveying both a strong political and ethical message, Mestokosho’s and Kanapé Fontaine’s land-based poetic activism constitutes a tool to publicly voice their opposition to the industrial, profit-driven exploitation of the North, including the massive damming of the Romaine River and the renewed, large-scale project of the Plan Nord. Their poetic treatise of these simultaneously environmental, socio-political, and cultural issues helps bring the protectors’/protestors’ voices, many of them Innu women, to the forefront - voices that have been systematically silenced by the provincial and federal governments, capitalistic companies, and mainstream mass media. In addition, Kanapé Fontaine’s and Mestokosho’s poetry serves as a warning to the settler nation-state that Indigenous women, communities, and nations continue to assert Indigenous Title and that they will ultimately take back and care for their homelands, according to their rights and responsibilities as descendants of the First Peoples of Turtle Island. Innu women’s poetic activism is therefore a form of care, extended out of love for their community, nation, people, all their kinship-relations, and the land. It mirrors their special relationship with their homelands and reflects their responsibilities toward the land and all beings because, as G. Sioui Durand states, “la protection de l’environnement est centrale pour les Indiens vivant en étroite relation avec la nature” (6). Related words that better describe this understanding of activism, whether poetic or not, would thus not be protest and resistance but protection and assumption of responsibility. However, as Kanapé Fontaine reminds us in *Manifeste Assi*, it takes a particular perspective, our attention and our engagement to see the land’s beauty and to recognize her gifts: “Elle est belle ma mère / si vous la voyiez” (61).

CONCLUSION: INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S WRITING AS A CREATIVE WEAPON FOR CHANGE

The publication of An Antane Kapeshe's autobiography *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* in 1976 marks a milestone in the history of francophone Indigenous literatures in Quebec. In her dedication, Antane Kapeshe writes: "*Et je serais heureuse de voir d'autres Indiens écrire, en langue indienne*" (JSMS 2019, 11; original emphasis).²⁷⁰ Almost five decades later, there is a flourishing market of Indigenous literatures in Quebec, on Turtle Island, and elsewhere in the world where Indigenous writers use literature as a vehicle for change. Antane Kapeshe's words have influenced generations of Innu women writers, inspiring authors to follow her encouragement to write, and most of them colour their stories with an activist stance like her own. Today, Indigenous women writers and activists, such as Skawennati, Rita Mestokosho, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, Naomi Fontaine, Maya Cousineau Mollen, and Manon Nolin have become "role models for all First Nations people as successful individuals who proudly identify themselves as Aboriginal" (Gray 281).

In the foreword to her autobiography *Song of Rita Joe* (1996), Mi'kmaq poet Rita Joe expresses a similar desire for a growing corpus of Indigenous literatures read by an Indigenous public: "My greatest wish is that there will be more writing from my people, and that our children will read it," and she adds: "I have said again and again that our history would be different if it had been expressed by us" (*Song* 14). Joe's statement critiques dominant societies that have used narrative strategies in colonial discourses to oppress, marginalize, dehumanize, and erase Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, Joe's statement points to the significance of Indigenous

²⁷⁰ Innu original: "Kie nipa minueniten tshetshi uapataman kutak innu tshetshi mashinaitshet e innushtenit" (JSMS 2019, 10).

self-expression and self-representation. Indigenous women's stories, like those told by Skawennati, Antane Kapesh, and Fontaine, act as important counter-narratives and seek to restory the history of Quebec and Canada as well as our contemporary and future reality.

For the women under discussion in this dissertation, writing serves as a means to explore and express what it means to be an Indigenous woman in our contemporary time, and, more specifically, what it means to be Innu or Kanien'kehá:ka. Questions and explorations of cultural identity are an important part of Indigenous women's writing in Quebec and can be linked to experiences of deracination due to patriarchal settler colonialism. The question of cultural identity is multifold, and for Indigenous Peoples it often has an important additional dimension because of past and ongoing experiences of colonization. In the context of Indigenous cultures and languages, the question of what it means to be Innu, for example, essentially implies what it means to be human. According to the online Innu dictionary, the word "Innu" designates an Innu or First Nations person, but also means "human being." After centuries of dehumanizing experiences, Indigenous women writers have reclaimed their humanity and femininity by revitalizing Indigenous languages and knowledges, as illustrated by Innu women's poetic reclamation of the word Innushkueu. Moreover, Indigenous women writers extend the essential questions of what it means to be Indigenous and human to the question of what it means to be in contact with other human beings, other-than-human beings, and nature. In their cultural productions, Indigenous women writers and artists in Quebec explore what Dene theorist Glen Coulthard identifies as "a conception of [...] identity which locates us as an inseparable part of an expansive system of interdependent relations covering the land and animals, past and future generations, as well as other people and communities" ("Place against Empire" 82). Indigenous

literatures, and particularly Indigenous women's writing, can therefore teach us important lessons about community, interdependence, and peaceful co-habitation.

Indigenous women writers in Quebec emphasize their connection with the land and multiple forms of relationality. Through their writing, many Indigenous women writers explore "the collective existence of Native women as tied to land, culture, and community," and they envision how Indigenous women and, more generally, Indigenous Peoples "can return to the lands, cultures, and communities [they] came from" (Tsosie 30). Yaqui scholar Rebecca Tsosie stresses Indigenous women's transformative power by stating that "we have the capacity to re-create ourselves, as contemporary Native women, by acknowledging the beauty of those things that give content to our existence and learning to heal the things that have caused us to feel pain and loss. Land, culture, and community are enduring components of who we are; they are vital to our self-determination, as individuals and as peoples" (30). The exploration of the self and the (re-)connection with the community and the land, whether through physical or narrative engagements, are essential elements of Indigenous women's poetic celebration of and transformation into Innushkueu.

It is paramount to acknowledge Indigenous women's resistance and resilience. Cree/Métis educator Kim Anderson, for example, contends: "In spite of being one of the most marginalized groups in North American society, Native women continue to hold onto a sense of their power to make change. They can appreciate the outcomes of their actions of the past and continue to look for ways to nurture the future" (*Recognition* 211). Anderson's statement emphasizes Indigenous women's long commitment to realize change in order to protect their families, communities, societies, languages and cultures. More specifically, Indigenous women writers and artists in Quebec represent what Wendat art critic Guy Sioui Durand calls "porteurs

d'espoir et de changement par l'art" (7), and this dissertation has aimed at demonstrating how Indigenous women writer's and artist's diverse creative expressions contribute to this desired change by focusing on Indigenous women artists' and writers' "rôle d'agent créateur et le caractère innovateur de leurs pratiques" (Papillon, "Imaginaires" §16).

Literature is a powerful vehicle for change. Métis feminist scholar and writer Emma LaRocque contends that "words and images are not just words and images. They can pack a powerful punch" (*When* 121). As I have demonstrated throughout this work, Indigenous women's writing is marked by what Cree scholar Neal McLeod calls a "visionary process," which allows Indigenous women "to imagine other possibilities and gives [them] a poetic map to reshape the world" (6). In Mohawk spoken-word artist Janet Rogers words: "we, as poets, are here to witness, ruminate, and creatively express our stories in verse to all that has gone, all that is now, and visions for the future" (253). Both McLeod and Rogers emphasize Indigenous artists' and writers' potential to create substantial change in the world by connecting the past to the present and future and thus recognizing the circular and relational understanding of time in Indigenous worldviews.

As my comparative analysis of Indigenous women's writing in Quebec has demonstrated, all Indigenous women writers that I discussed in this work employ literature – whether in autobiographical, fictionalized, poetic, or audiovisual form – to educate their readers and change societal structures and political systems. In *Taking Back Our Spirits*, Métis educator and literary scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew emphasizes this educational function of Indigenous literatures:

Indigenous narratives serve a socio-pedagogical function in that their objective is to change society by educating the settler readers about the Indigenous perspective of Canadian society. The narratives implicate settler readers by exposing the structures that

sustain White privilege and by compelling them to examine their position of privilege and their complicity in the continued oppression of Indigenous people. (17)

Episkenew's statement reminds us of our responsibility as settler readers of Indigenous literatures. In *Enfants de lichen*, Maya Cousineau Mollen expresses a similar idea by stating: "Je rêve d'un monde qui se repense" (67), alluding particularly to the settler society who needs to rethink their ways of life in face of ongoing settler colonization, gendered violence, and environmental crises. Indigenous women's self-representation is essential to Indigenous literatures' educational purpose because it conveys the unique perspectives and experiences of those women. Mi'kmaq educator Marie Battiste's statement that "there is more than one perspective required to view a box holistically" (xvii) is a promising approach to make space for Indigenous women's experiences, perspectives, voices, and writing and to counter their marginalization and erasure. Listening to the alternative stories of Quebec and Canada as told by Indigenous women writers is essential for all those who want to engage with Indigenous literatures in respectful and decolonizing ways.

In *Place aux littératures autochtones* (2017), settler literary scholar Simon Harel attributes Indigenous literatures in Quebec with a strong activist stance that has the power to ultimately transform society: "J'ai le sentiment que, dans le domaine québécois, les littératures des Premières Nations sont appelées à faire trembler le territoire sur ses assises" (117). In 1976, Antane Kapesh began the work of shaking the Quebec nation to its foundation, and contemporary Indigenous women continue this important activist work through their engaged writing. It remains to hope that future generations of Indigenous women writers continue to alter Quebec's literary landscape and their diverse readerships in order to bring forward their desired structural changes and decolonizing visions.

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