

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

***My, Her, Our Stories: Survivance and Trauma Healing
in Twenty-First Century Biostories by Native American Women***

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***My, Her, Our Stories: Survivance and Trauma Healing in Twenty-First Century
Biostories by Native American Women***

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Abstract

The trauma paradigm has shifted from being exclusive to the medical and psychiatric realms to being part of everyday discourse. Though literary interest in the subject has been continuing, its cultural representations in the Native American context are broadly liable to appropriation by Eurocentric academia with its underlying victimization rhetoric. With a view of decolonizing and indigenizing the trauma therapy paradigm, recent research by Native and settler mental health professionals have started incorporating postcolonial, feminist, and Indigenous analyses that recognize the social and political, instead of the clinical rationale of trauma, with the introduction of the enduring, intergenerational collective impact of settler colonialism, racism, and physical and cultural genocide. Meanwhile, not only is the topic vital but also the platform for its articulation. In this respect, despite the established autobiographical practices both in their pre-literate and contemporary forms, only recently have American Indian autobiographies by women surfaced as a compelling point of entry to Native American literature. My discussion is motivated by addressing a theoretical gap in research and proposes reorienting the emphasis away from settler colonial narratives of victimry towards Indigenous stories of survivance. It examines the Western centrality of trauma theory and probes the possibility of indigenizing the field in contemporary Native American women's biostories, with the promise of achieving healing. I argue that women reclaim and remember past and ongoing memories of traumas to turn them into narratives of individual and collective survivance by shifting the perspective of research from a damage-based to desire-based one. The major mechanism of survivance emphasized is restoration: of epistemology through storytelling, of the feminine through maternal subjectivities,

and of kinship with land through Indigenous spatial conceptualizations. Such restoration requires a balanced sense of identity and community through a reconfigured knowledge of the past. Addressing the topic depends upon a close textual analysis of six biostories by Native American women, namely, *My Body Is a Book of Rules* (2014) and *White Magic* (2021) by Elissa Washuta (Cowlitz), *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* (2019) by Alicia Elliott (Tuscarora), *Carry: A Memoir of Violence on Stolen Land* (2020) by Toni Jensen (Métis), *Poet Warrior* (2021) by Joy Harjo (Mvskoke), and *Gichigami Hearts: Stories and Histories from Misaabekong* (2021) by Linda Le Garde Grover (Anishinaabe).

The text-based analysis sits at the intersections of trauma theory, life writing studies, and Vizenorian survivance. Over the interdisciplinarity of my research, the analytical framework integrates insights from other theoretical strands, chiefly Indigenous feminisms. Specifically, I draw on Indigenous feminists' use of race and gender as categories of analysis to expose colonial ideologies and assert sovereignty while focusing on the principles of responsibility and reciprocity that make up the fulcrum of Indigenous feminism. What reverberates throughout the six chapters of the dissertation is the potential of an indigenized memory act in restoring what has been "stolen." Therefore, remembering stories and their enactment of Indigenous epistemologies is at the heart of healing efforts from the ravages of settler colonialism. This investigation aims to contribute novel insights to the discourse on trauma, autobiography, and decolonization while utilizing the invaluable theorizations by Indigenous scholars. The interest in this topic is equally motivated by the necessity for recentering Indigenous voices in the larger context of decolonization on the part of Indigenous peoples and DEI schemes on the part of settlers. In no way does this discussion claim to hold absolute truths nor push for reform. It is, however, an attempt

among many other scholarly ones to advance Indigenous resurgence and return to culture through reactivating Indigenous feminist tenets.

Key words: trauma, (counter)memory, decolonization, wellness, life stories

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Introduction

Background and Rationale of Research

Within Western philosophy, the understanding of traumatic symptoms revolved around the aftereffects of war, notably, with the proliferation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). By the 1990s, it was not just a medical and psychiatric subject but everyday discourse, as Fassin and Rechtman assert, it “has become a major signifier of our age” (xi). Recent research started incorporating postcolonial, feminist, and Indigenous analyses that had long considered the social and political, instead of the clinical rationale of trauma, with the introduction of the enduring, intergenerational collective impact of settler colonialism, racism, and physical and cultural genocide.

Though literary interest in the subject has been long-standing, its cultural representations in the Native American context are invariably “subject to appropriation by dominant discourses that serve the interests other than those whose lives are most at risk” (Madsen, “On Subjectivity” 3). “What constitutes trauma,” “[w]ho defines it,” and “[h]ow is it represented in literary texts” are near-rhetorical questions that animate debates around the topic (Madsen, “On Subjectivity” 2). Scant attempts at perusing this topic are performed from Eurocentric spaces, emphasizing the “ontology of victimization” (Emberley, *The Testimonial* 2). This sentiment is echoed by Dian Million, who posits that the “trauma economy” is articulated on the rhetoric of victimology, rather than empowering peoples (*Therapeutic* 10). On this account, Native—Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Dian Million, and Eduardo Duran—and non-Native—Kali Tal—mental health professionals advance the project of indigenizing trauma therapy paradigms. Healing from the colonial assault, as they

put it, is contingent on “working against Eurocentric bias” (Tal, *Worlds* n.p.), and the retrieval of Indigenous value systems as an alternative paradigm for trauma therapy.

It is also important to consider the literary space for the articulation of trauma. Despite the established autobiographical practices both in their pre-literate and contemporary forms, only recently have American Indian autobiographies by women surfaced as a compelling point of entry to Native American literature. Landmark studies include Arnold Krupat’s foundational books about the genre; *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (1985), and *Native American Autobiography: An Anthology* (1994); *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography* (1992) by Hertha Dawn Wong; and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001). As the genre of autobiography has started acquiring status as a recognized form of art, its capacity for opening scripto-therapeutic spaces has also been acknowledged. With extraordinary prescience, Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Sands’s prediction concerning Native American women’s autobiography validates the genre as a new avenue of inquiry into the topic:

It is likely that the narratives to come will reflect on the *growing self-consciousness Indian women* have about their roles *in contemporary society* . . . their narratives will inevitably articulate their *growing assertiveness both in tribal and white society*. . . . Sophistication and complexity will be heightened. It is also likely that as more and more Indian women acquire skills in writing, they will experiment more with style and structure and will take *fuller control of their narratives*, in many cases eliminating the role of recorder-editor from the narrative process. (134-35; emphasis added)

Presently, editorial doors are increasingly embracing the subversive creativity of the twenty-first century and, incidentally, concurrent with the transnationalization of feminism, new “domains of life story production” (Smith and Watson, “New Genres” 1) have allowed Native American women writers not only to control self-representation but also to unwrite the

conventions of the non-tribal autobiography that has held their voices and stories captive within its tradition.

Statement of the Thesis

Historically, both trauma and autobiography studies rendered the Native American subject as lingering in the discursive spaces of victimry. The intersection of these fields of meaning has proven congruent with research decolonization and is indicated by more recent studies, like Julia Emberley's 2002 *The Testimonial Uncanny: Indigenous Storytelling, Knowledge, and Reparative Practices*, which discusses the indigenizing of the testimonial discourse in terms of storytelling epistemologies.

Under the auspices of the decolonization of research, I argue that healing from trans/historical trauma by Native Americans is possible by shifting its articulation from the Western perspective, which traditionally emphasizes the "ontology of victimry" to reading it in terms of survivance, paradigmatic of desire-based research.¹ The texts I study are Native American women-authored life stories which subvert the damage-based rhetoric underlying trauma theory and ethnography by adopting a form of storying that defies Western literary conventions by recontextualizing tribal storytelling techniques. I propose to read them as biostories—an alternative to the overly trauma-informed and Western-centric memoir—where women authors control choices regarding self-representation, literary aesthetics, and contemporary topics. In so doing, I demonstrate that renewed autobiographical expressions steeped in tribal storytelling traditions can open textual sites for healing on Native American terms by affirming "survivance in the face of trauma" rather than "survival of trauma" (Madsen, "On Subjectivity" 1).²

¹ Tuck's desire-based research echoes Cynthia Wesley-Esquiaux's notion of "victorization" which, as she puts it, is relevant to women's "narrative as lived experience" (64). Aboriginal people in North America are shifting from stories of victimhood to stories of resilience and victories through the recovery of traditional wisdom and historic truths. Tuck further advances that "[t]he multiple stories we have to tell, the tapestries of pain and perseverance that have long shrouded our ability to speak with authority can and are being flung back and shaken to release strong narratives of recovery and strength" (64).

² In her reading of two Columbiads by Anishinaabe writers Gerald Vizenor and Louise Erdrich, Deborah Madsen distinguishes between "survival of trauma" and "survivance in the face of trauma" by delineating how these are played out in both books ("On Subjectivity" 1). By setting the two novels in dialogue against each other, Madsen

The aim of my dissertation is twofold. First, it proposes reorienting the emphasis away from settler colonial narratives of victimry towards Indigenous stories of survivance in the same line as Tuck (Unangax), who prescribes a desire-based approach to research in opposition to the damage-based one that enshrouds Native American communities in the narrative of victimry. The autobiographical practice is an important component in the history of Native American literature. Scholarship pertaining to Native memoirs primarily covers historical memoirs, conspicuous in Indigenous Studies critics' fascination with the "as-told-to" narratives and ethnographically minded works, despite the potentialities that this mode of expression offers in terms of analysis and themes. Therefore, this thesis attempts to update the literature with respect to Native American autobiographical writing by exploring their practice of decolonization regarding memory and trauma.

Second, my dissertation investigates the areas where Western theories of trauma perpetuate the very structures that created it, especially regarding its definition and the therapies deployed to "work through" it. Assuming that life writings to be analyzed are survivance narratives, I explore how they problematize the "literature of dominance" (Vizenor qtd. in Madsen, "On Subjectivity" n.p.) inherent to the reading of contemporary trauma, and that a key aspect of this problematization is translated in their engagement in the act of survivance. In what can be seen as an adoption of decolonizing strategies, autobiographical texts, by virtue of their self-expressive propensity, unsettle the Eurocentric cultural representation of Native American subjects, including their experience of trauma, using Native American methodologies, namely, survivance stories. Starting with the texts' breaking with the conventional conceptions of subjectivity dominating the Euro-American autobiographical tradition, they (re)consider the centrality of storytelling, gender, memory, and restoration in the representation of and healing from trauma. The second part of my

contrasts mere survival—idiosyncratic of Western trauma narratives—to survivance which marks Vizenorian postindian aesthetics and politics.

dissertation examines aspects of survivance hermeneutics as a restorative approach and their implementation in memoirs.

To this end, I analyze contemporary memoirs, by Native American women because they advance survivance—poetics and aesthetics—by reclaiming their subjectivity/agency in a traditionally white-male-dominated ethnographic discourse. Additionally, by its flexibility and generic indeterminacy, their embrace of self-narration as a mode of expression allows for articulating and transcending traumatic experiences using storying rooted in Indigenous strategies. Survivance aesthetics registered in the texts open spaces for restoring lost balance wielded by disruptive colonial practices in regard to land-based transmission of knowledge, kinship with the land, and sexual identity. Women’s life stories serve as a counternarrative to Western literary and historical accounts, and provide a renewed paradigm for reading and understanding the Native American experience in the United States.

The texts to be analyzed are *My Body Is a Book of Rules* (2014) and *White Magic* (2021) by Elissa Washuta (Cowlitz), *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* (2019) by Alicia Elliott (Tuscarora), *Carry: A Memoir of Violence on Stolen Land* (2020) by Toni Jensen (Métis), *Poet Warrior* (2021) by Joy Harjo (Mvskoke), and *Gichigami Hearts: Stories and Histories from Misaabekong* (2021) by Linda Le Garde Grover (Anishinaabe). Though all were published with the memoir label relatively simultaneously, these texts are distinct in key aspects. Most notably, the women authors hail from different tribal backgrounds.

My analysis is informed by the desire to delineate how survivance is enacted in these texts. The stories examined allow the Indigenous memoirist to unearth and restore the balance of the fractured histories related to land-based transmission of knowledge, kinship with the land, and sexual identity. In my argument, Native American women are “postindian warriors” because their biostories bespeak the “repudiation of victimry,” and it is manifested in their reclaiming of agency to write about their personal lives, or “self-presentation” in Moreton-Robinson’s terms (n.p.), as an “act of resistance, of self-definition by the

appropriation of and signification of the forms ‘natural’ to the oppressor” (Tal, *Worlds* n.p). This starts with turning towards a genre that defies the Western impulse to read Native American literature as “ethnographic reportage” (Washuta and Warburton n.p.). The choice of the life writing genre by Native American women gives prominence to self-determination through self-representation, thus transgressing Western understanding of subjectivity.

Critical Framework

The dissertation’s critical framework is primarily, but not exclusively, indebted to Indigenous scholars and theorists. In recent years, important moves have been made to critique the gaps between critical and Indigenous approaches to knowing and research—notably by Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith—and to bridge those gaps by placing Indigenous theories alongside critical theories and methodologies. Native American rhetors’ contribution to the expansion of the theoretical pantheon has long been dismissed. On this account, in deference to a lineage of Indigenous rhetoricians, I address a theoretical gap in both academic areas of trauma and life writing by substantiating and situating my argument within their scholarship. I draw on Native American authors who have been jostling for attention to the validity of their research methodologies and practices despite being culturally ethical and meaningful. Thus, I endeavor to place Indigenous theories alongside Western critical theories and methodologies.

My close literary scrutiny of memoirs sits at the intersections of trauma theory, life writing studies, and Vizenorian survivance—a junction rife with thematically charged instances from a Native American standpoint that directs towards introducing an overlooked theoretical concept of tribalogy. Due to the interdisciplinarity of my research, however, the analytical framework also integrates insights from other theoretical strands, chiefly psychoanalysis and Indigenous feminism. As my corpus comprises female memoirists, reading their stories entails addressing the Indigenous female experience and elicits a construal of the texts grounded in an Indigenist feminist framework. As L. T. Smith maintains: “[i]n positioning myself as an Indigenous woman, I am claiming a genealogical,

cultural and political set of experience” (n.p.). Indigenous feminism is proposed as an illuminating novel perspective vital to engaging with the crucial issues of cultural identity, nationalism, and decolonization, particularly in Indigenous contexts. I draw on Indigenous feminists’ use of race and gender as categories of analysis to expose colonial ideologies and assert sovereignty while focusing on the principles of responsibility and reciprocity that make up the fulcrum of Indigenous feminism.

In my understanding, women writers advance survivance and shift the research perspective from a damage-based to a desire-based one in representing transhistorical trauma in embracing a new work of restorying as a decolonizing methodology. Therefore, for all the writers examined in this dissertation, I argue that their stories about the trauma caused by “colonial unknowing” are inherently sovereign as they speak against the numbing effects of colonial violence and repudiate the motif of victimization.

The exiguity of attempts at opening the doors to Native American knowledge to call into question the cultural and literary representation of trauma in the Native American context in literature motivated my interest in the topic. The few that exist include Deborah L. Madsen’s discussion of this overlap in her article “On Subjectivity and Survivance: Rereading Trauma through *The Heirs of Columbus* and *The Crown of Columbus*.” Drawing on Tal’s groundbreaking chapter on subverting the Eurocentric bias in scholarship on trauma, Madsen advances reading Indigenous literature through the prism of the hermeneutics of survivance, thus subverting the models of trauma therapy paradigms that replicate the conditions that occasioned it in the first place. Critical studies that examine the imbrications between trauma studies and the autobiographical genre while employing the analytical concept of survivance remain yet to receive scholarly interest. A few attempts that combine different critical strands and speaking from an Indigenous position call to mind Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s compelling book chapter “Tellin’ it Straight: Self-representation within Indigenous Women’s Life Writings,” where she establishes subjectivity as a “site of activity,

meaning, and resistance” (n.p.), as well as acknowledges life narratives by Indigenous women as conducive to looking back at the colonial gaze that has been inherent to the anthropological discourse. Deanna Reder offers a riveting personal testimony about the power of contemporary Indigenous herstories as a literary tradition rooted in Cree and Métis storytelling. Alternatively, non-Indigenous perspectives include Julia Emberley’s advancement of the idea of working against “the ontology of victimry.” In contrast, Annette Angela Portillo’s work, which builds on the notion of “blood memory,” emphasizes the inherited nature of Native American stories in “canonical” nineteenth-century “as-told-to” autobiographies.

My topic continues the conversation initiated by these scholars. While their studies examine aspects of women’s practices in the autobiographical production and the changes occurring, very few attempts evaluated the embodiment of survivance as a paradigm for reading the Native American traumatic experience. Additionally, the applicability of Indigenous feminism as a critical methodology for indigenizing and understanding the trauma rhetoric in the genre has not sparked the interest of Indigenous studies scholars as yet.

Terminology

Naming constitutes the initial step towards decolonization and is seen as an act of sovereignty. Seeing the multiplicity of tribal affiliations, both in this study and generally speaking, it is problematic to refer to Indigenous peoples monolithically. The terms Native American, Original People, Indigenous, and Aboriginal are the most common designations in literary criticism by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, which offer a more politically correct substitution for American Indian. Indeed, the latter holds and sustains the traces of colonial epistemic violence because it finds roots in the misrecognition of the land and its original inhabitants.

While the terminology surrounding Indigenous populations is evolving in academia, “Native American”—as a reaction to American Indian and Aboriginal—emerged in the late

1980s. Generally, Indigenous peoples within the boundaries of the United States and Canada are referred to as Indigenous in its capitalized and adjectival form (Younging n.p.), replacing, thus, the stereotyped term “Aboriginal.” In the pre-contact period, Indigenous peoples had employed their tribal nations to identify themselves. These designations, however, were soon replaced by terms coined by European settlers, generally derived from the anglicization—or French and Spanish variations—of Indigenous names. Indigenous is a racist category, but it is also a collectivized political identity, particularly in settler colonial nation-states in the CANZUS area. Recently, AIM activist Leonard Peltier (Lakota, Dakota, and Anishinaabe) suggested dropping Indian from the American Indian Movement and replacing it with Indigenous. Therefore, I will use the terms Indigenous and Native American peoples interchangeably, with references to the tribal affiliations of the authors and theoreticians I quote using the spellings that comply with the preferences of the authors in question.

Structural Overview

My dissertation is divided into three major blocks: firstly, the Introduction contextualizes the research focus by explaining the contiguities of the areas of inquiry of my research. It outlines the rationale, the central thesis, the description of the study, and the conceptual background. Secondly, as my study relies heavily on critical paradigms and their attendant theoretical concepts that are routinely overlooked, I dedicate Chapter 1 to the theoretical background of my thesis. Since Native American decolonization of research requires “new ways of theorizing by Indigenous scholars” (L.T. Smith 38); I provide a cartography of the theoretical background and the attendant concepts relevant to each theoretical strand that guide me through analyzing the selected primary texts and help me attain a coherent conclusion.

My analytical endeavor distances itself from the prevenient interpretations of Native American women’s autobiographies as prolific of their damage and deficiency. As such, the second block comprises two chapters that outline the two major concepts that organize the study: trauma and memory. This part of the dissertation is concerned with reclaiming space in

the oft Western-dominated discourse of trauma.

The exigency of a new conceptualization, representation, and treatment of the experience form the focality of Chapter 2. As the Western trauma paradigm often does not capture the complexity of Native American experiences, particularly concerning colonization, genocide, and cultural erasure, a Native American-centered approach rooted in survivance offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding these experiences and their literary representations. As such, this chapter, “‘The Soul Wound’ in the ‘Ruins of Representation’” delves into the ways Western literary trauma theory failed to have come to terms with Native American traumatic experiences and proposes, instead, the application of decolonial thought to discuss it using the hermeneutics of survivance that fosters healing on Indigenous terms. In this chapter, I identify the Western trauma paradigm and pinpoint its inconsistencies with Indigenous cases, especially with its definition, its sources, and ways of coming to terms with it.

Both Western and Indigenous scholars claim that for a meaningful and ethical approach to trauma, it must be articulated by the afflicted peoples and with a consideration towards their worldviews. In the Indigenous context, I use the expression by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “as we have always done,” to refer to the need for the resurgence of the strategies employed by Indigenous peoples to heal by relying on story or restorying the past from their unique perspectives. Instead of lingering in the narrative of victimry, these new acts of storying emphasize survivance through their deployment of postindian aesthetics. So, I analyze “how [personal stories] intervene in the cultural representation of trauma and how they further [I]ndigenous trauma studies that [is] both visionary and transformative” (Emberley, *The Testimonial* 6). The rationale for this particular selection of texts for my analysis is their capacity to open new avenues of inquiry in literary trauma theory, because women’s “stories create spaces for resistance” (Sium and Ritskes 4). Due to their recent dates of publication and being penned by under-examined Native American women writers, except

for Harjo and Grover, these personal narratives have not, to my knowledge, piqued the interest of scholarly interest yet.

Starting from Halbwach's premise that "[p]ersonal and collective memories would be lost if society did not play a role in the process of keeping the memories alive, as each collective act of remembering increases the likelihood that individuals will remember and tell their personal stories" (qtd. in Gensburger 6), the focus in Chapter 3 entitled "Balancing Harm with Memory" is on fostering healing through re-membering, restorying and storytelling as a way to "play out" trauma.³ I rely on the processes by Dominick Lacapra that he deems necessary in trauma theory to heal from traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, I depart from them by using memory as a counter-performance which involves a reconnection with memory and bring to light what Kline refers to as "technologies of memory" (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 23) congruent with Indigenous epistemologies.

The third block in my dissertation—including chapters 4, 5, and 6— is more analytical than its predecessors. It follows a restorative framework enabled by the implementation of the desire-based approach. I proceed with employing the organizing framework of restoration through memory.⁴ Similarly, because of its inherent negative bent, Vizenor contends with the term since it implies the act of recuperation following illness. The theme of restoration is common in most postcolonial trauma criticism as they oppose Caruth's rigid and passivist melancholia and narrative trauma theory's negation of the value of narrative. Restoration connects narrativizing trauma to active resistance through re-storyation. The guiding principle of this block is achieving wellness through restorative endeavors, discernible in the biostories in three significant areas: voice, the land/bodies dyad, and maternal subjectivities. While these

³ "Working through" and "acting out" are two processes suggested by LaCapra, who was also inspired by the Freudian legacy of trauma theory. While these notions are presented as models of trauma healing, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and clinicians claim that they constitute a failure when applied in an Native American context, partly because of being premised on the notion of "belatedness" and reiterating what Caruth describes as the identification of trauma as unidentifiable only in language.

⁴ I felt disposed to abandon the term recuperation in my reading of the primary sources, given Mishuana Goeman's (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) belief that the physical recovery of the land is utopic.

three issues can be understood separately, they flow into one another in Indigenous terms as they require a land-based approach.

Chapter 4, “The Tribalo(autobio)graphical: A Necessary Act?” starts with women’s reclamation of the “rhetorical space” to articulate their politics of memory. The focus here is on the life narrative and the essay form. This brings me to the practical application of Indigenous memory politics, and how it is expressed. Here, I am greatly influenced by the relatively recent “genre,” where bio (life) meets story.⁵ The two terms conflate in the concept of *biostory*. I highlight the idea of restoration through re-storyation using the form-enabled “genre” of biostory the adoption of which is in itself a reclamation of the autobiographical practice that ossified the narrative of Native American women in a deficient mode of being.

As shown in the aesthetic choice of bracketing parts of the title, this chapter focuses on trauma in the life writing genre as an example of autobiographical writing. In the initial stage of my research, I wanted to focus on re-establishing an Indigenous autobiographical tradition to counter the argument of Indigenous romanticization of being inherently communal so they cannot have stories where the “I” takes center stage. However, I decided to shift my focus towards other ways women defy colonial unknowing as a path toward healing. As such, I introduce the new concept of biostory because the texts I am analyzing lend themselves to this new “categorization.” I was particularly drawn to this new sub-genre of life writing because of its poetics and thematic foci. This chapter is a probe into the potentiality of biostory as an alternative to memoir for “eating pain” or healing, a contemporary topic because it is akin to Indigenous resurgence. On the other hand, healing involves “sharing story,” but not simply so. According to J. Whitehead, healing also involves sharing one’s story

⁵ In her article “Gathering: The Politics of Memory and Contemporary Aboriginal Women’s Writing,” Leane Jeanine discusses Indigenous women’s creative expressions in their “application” and “expression” “of memory politics” (248). Drawing on Derrida’s “law of genre,” she is disinclined to apply the term “genre” when referring to the works she analyzes. Instead, she opts for “concept” to describe the documentary style Indigenous women use as a “poetic response” to the “deficit discourse” to which Indigenous people were consigned by the “colonial paradigm” (246).

to “make allowance for others” (qtd. in S. Welch n.p.). By selecting what to share and what to hide, people can control their experience of trauma and avoid being boxed in by the rhetoric of victimization and the voyeuristic impulse of Western ethnography.

Reading Native American trauma involves studying the incontrovertible connection between Indigenous people and land. Chapter 5, “Restor(y)ing the Land and Rethinking the Map,” is a critical exploration of space as figured in women’s work, where they engage with colonial spatialities and restore Indigenous kinship with the land to pursue curative ends and assert claims to sovereignty. The literary mappings allow Native American women authors to decolonize colonial maps and spatialities, reclaim a “stolen” sense of identity, and attempt cultural resurgence by restoring relationality with the land. Indigenous feminism and Indigenous spatial inquiry inform my reading of these memoirs. These two theoretical approaches share many points of intersection, including the understanding of land-based ethics as a prerequisite for decolonization, with the purpose of healing from disruptive colonial practices. Indigenous feminist scholars are concerned with exposing the colonial ideologies that shaped the construction of space and gender. For instance, feminist spatial inquiry scholars Tuck and McKenzie have advocated decolonizing spatial practices through (re)mapping and building place-worlds (130). In the same breath, the land is “mnemonic, [and] it has its own set of memories” that are given voice by Indigenous women writers through their stories (Byrd 118). The land remembers and constructs relationships. However, Nabhan argues that “our relationship with land cannot heal until we hear its stories” (qtd. in Kimmerer n.p.).

The issues of gender and sexuality are central to the history of settler colonization in North America. Capitalizing on Andrea Smith’s notion that “[i]t has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place” (*Conquest* 139), I investigate how the memoirists parallel the colonially-imposed heteronormative discourse

with the appropriation of tribal land. Richly informed by insights from Indigenist feminist thought, Chapter 5 reads Native American biostories' thematization of the land/body connection. The historical trauma of the body is tightly linked to the ongoing violation of settler colonialism of tribal lands. Native American authors' pressing for "the healing of soil and water in partnership with the healing of our bodies, spirits, and minds" (S. Hall n.p.) has guided my reading of biostories as it highlights how women writers restore the balance through reversals of the colonial discourse that subjugated their sexualities.

Finally, Chapter 6 continues with the restorative project, covering maternal subjectivities' reclamation by highlighting rematriation. In their life stories, Indigenous mothers enact a subjectivity that is defiant of the one constructed by settler colonialism. Theirs is exhibitiv of the Indigenous feminist movement of rematriation whereby they engage in an "active sense of presence" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 4) and survivance through a return to the feminine, a matricentric perspective, and a recentering of the trope. With its roots pointing towards the mother, rematriation is as much a revaluing of the feminine and gynocratic social model as it is about reconnecting with Mother Earth. O'Reilly believes that "motherhood is the unfinished work of feminism" (14). In "Bring Her Home": Rematriating Maternal Subjectivities," I advance the idea that rematriation is the continuance of Indigenous feminism as it shakes the very grounds upon which the patriarchal structure of colonialism was established. In this chapter, I explore how contemporary Native American biostory enacts rematriation by foregrounding motherhood's resistance to settler colonialism's pilfering their maternal subjectivity through an analysis of how performativity, positionality, and relationality are articulated in the biostories.

The conclusion capsulizes and restates the points raised in the interpretations of the texts studied in the body of the dissertation, illuminating the conclusions informed by the encounter of various epistemes. I highlight the major findings from each chapter building up towards an answer to the core argument of the dissertation. Native American women's

personal stories are metonymic of collective memories and embody the desire for survivance. The scriptotherapeutic nature of the autobiographical texts helps heal from colonial violence and, eventually, engenders the resurgence of Indigenous voices and epistemologies. The conclusion also points to the possibility of expanding directions for future research on life writing by Native American women and their adaptation into another outlet. Another avenue would be expanding the genre to contemporary modes of expression, like social media platforms. In this context, I wish to invoke Sophie McCall et al. editors of the 2017 book *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island* who criticize the narrow use of literature. Believing that it has a Eurocentric undertone, they privilege the term *story* as it resists categorization and underscores the possibility of other epistemologies. Story is more inclusive and opens the doors to other and othered histories. With these considerations in mind, I use the word literature throughout the dissertation to refer to the written and oral expressions by Native American peoples, pre- and post- contact. In addition, I employ the term in its plural form lest I run the risk of homogenization. Though the notion of applying a single framework to all tribes reiterates the Western research protocols in its cultural flattening of Indigenous cultures, my aim is not to generalize but to offer a renewed reading of trauma that could be attuned to tribal specificities.

Despite the choice of the women authors to write in English—noting that not all of them are fluent in their tribal languages—I refer to Abenaki rhetor Joseph Bruchac's contention that "Native American oral traditions and traditional values have breathed new energy into the adopted language" (qtd. in Cheyfitz 5). I use this quotation to address two different issues. Firstly, promoting a trans-Indigenous comparative reading of the memoirs would require using a unified language. English, thus, is seen in its pure material nature, i.e., a tool. Furthermore, in the same way it was used to wield power over Native American and Indigenous people, it is only natural to use it to dismantle the structure that created it.

Concerning the issue of orality, it is worth noting that various Native American writers

contend with the dichotomy of written/oral undergirding Indigenous literatures. Harjo, for example, articulates this issue in *Poet Warrior*. Her choice of poetry tells its own story about her celebration of the oral. To abide by the requirements of the present-day impulse for the written, however, orality is still vouched for by Native American artists, and this crystallizes in their embrace of literary forms and strategies that impress orality through the written word. To illustrate this point, Harjo writes in the acknowledgement section of *Poet Warrior* that during the process of the publication of her text, she felt the need to literally vocalize her life story before print: “I appreciate those who helped this manuscript . . . who listened as I read [it] aloud and provided insight and assistance” (221).

Primary Sources

Out of the sheer volume of works by Native American women in Indian Country that explore the imbrications of historical trauma and survivance, it is especially the selected texts that lend themselves to the focus of my research. I argue that through the use of the autobiographical mode of expression in conjunction with rooting their life narratives in story, the biostories under study convey survivance.

The age of these writers at the time of publication of their biostories is a particularly mentionable point. Except for “veterans” Harjo and Grover, the other authors have just started their literary journeys. As much as the age of the authors is worth addressing since I study biostories as a domain of life writing, I believe that the era when women recorded their life stories is surpassingly more purposeful. Living at a conjecture rife with political and social post-COVID upheavals, voices coming from the margin and commandeering the autobiographical arena emerge as particularly expedient in “emancipatory politics” (S. Smith, “The Autobiographical Manifesto” 189), working to instigate and drive transformation at the local and global levels.

These new voices wrote their life stories as a reaction to recent traumatic events that triggered collective memories. Meanwhile, Harjo and Grover’s memoirs come after extensive

experience with writing in various modes of expression. Despite the differences noted hitherto, the authors share in their subject position as Indigenous women, their “commonality of difference,” as well as their “shared experience of violence” (Emberley, *The Testimonial* 12). Additionally, the fact that their works lend themselves to being read as narratives of survivance in the face of trauma in all its forms is enabled by their amenability to biostory as a renewed act of storying. The stories and details are specific to the women’s tribes, but the issues resonate in other communities, peoples, and tribes in the settler nation-states of the USA and Canada. As such, this study is not meant to be comprehensive but exemplary, seeing the breadth of Indigenous histories with trauma and the depth of literary expressions by Native American writers as a resistance to the enduring colonial practices.

My Body Is a Book of Rules by creative writing professor Elissa Washuta (Cowlitz) was published in 2014, making it the earliest book I selected. Washuta reflects on intersections of her Indigeneity, a (mis)diagnosis of bipolar disorder, and the trauma of sexual assault. Washuta’s engagement in resistance is reflected in the embodied form of storytelling she adopts throughout the book, which is grounded in Indigenous traditions. Told in a non-linear fashion, her life story blatantly heeds Rifkin’s “rupturing of settler time” (*Beyond* 3), which defies the societal norms and narrative conventions embedded in colonial paternalistic structures of cultural and physical genocide. The sixteen chapters are a series of vignettes intercalated by a short “A Cascade Autobiography,” told in episodes and visually aligned in the center. This aesthetic choice will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 4. As someone who passes as white, Washuta interrogates the authenticity of her own Indigeneity while, at the same time, defies others’ dismissal of her Native roots. The emotional aspects of her experience represent the notion of felt experience. Washuta disturbs the reader with her eloquent composition, especially in her constant changing of pronouns, temporal manipulation, and deployment of primal and emotionally charged memories of pain and joy, all major tropes in her life story. Navigating her way through the outskirts of Seattle testifies

to Indigenous women's redefinition and unsettling of maps as an enactment of survivance. Washuta's personal narrative defies any attempt at closure in her healing journey, further articulating her resistance to settler conventions of time. Her embrace of a form that hinders believability through her narrated life is an affront to the clinical and objective telling of one's life story.

White Magic was published in 2021, further establishing the Cowlitz author as a powerful voice in Indigenous literary studies. Contrary to *My Body*, Washuta's second book uses the first person to eloquently express her aversion to the convention of genres, particularly narratives of progress. *White Magic* is a sophisticated exploration of the affordances of experimental literary forms in helping writers scrape through the legacies of colonial violence. Every essay muses the inadequacy of the conventional genres to tell stories of progress as they are nested in the colonial idiolect of violence, notably, being permeated with Western knowledge system values, notably, but not limited to, the conception of time.

A Mind Spread Out on the Ground literally means "depression" in Mohawk. The book was published in 2019 by Alicia Elliott (Tuscarora).⁶ She uses her personal experience with mental illness, impacts of colonization, and racism as the backdrop for her memoir, making her book a deeply felt one. Elliott wrote her life story because she had the choice to share her assault or "intentional[ly] [forget]" (135). When she "decide[s] to disclose" her trauma, she also decides about "the amount of detail" to tell (136). She references various Indigenous scholars, such as L. B. Simpson, Billy Ray Belcourt, Joshua Whitehead, Lee Maracle, Thomas King, and Richard Wagamese, which instantiates an Indigenous storytelling underpinning. *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* is a deeply emotive, yet whimsical life story that showcases the intersectionality of Indigenous women's experiences in North America, the

⁶ The Haudenosaunee confederacy, or the people who "made the house," is a coming together of the nations of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca. The sixth to join the league is the Tuscarora nation after leaving their traditional territory in North Carolina and Virginia ("Who We Are").

impact of trauma, residential schools, oppression, racism, parenthood, sexual assault, but ends with love.

Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land is Toni Jensen's first venture with personal narratives. As a Métis woman, she is acquainted with the violence meted out on the bodies of Indigenous women and land, and how it is glossed over and blanked out by the dominant culture. Jensen grafts her personal experience onto the historical, reflecting on how history is lived in the body, starting with a re-articulation of violence in the USA. With each chapter, Jensen reminds the reader that "surviving in one's country is not the same as surviving one's country" (qtd. in *The South Carolina Review* n.p.).

Gichigami Hearts: Stories and Histories from Misaabekong, released in 2021, unfolds the history of Gichigami—Lake Superior—entwined with Grover's Anishinaabe forebears' as they make it through colonization, displacement, and boarding schools. Their stories are perfect examples of *Mino Bimaadiziwin*, or the good life. The book revolves around Duluth, Minnesota, with rich depictions of the mosaic of neighborhoods that coexist as a community. Grover weaves multiple stories together: her family's, stories about underwater spirits, and the trickster figure, Nanaboozhoo. Oftentimes, the stories overflow with personal insight, which is indicated in the text either by a black and white family photo or an emotional poem. What shines through the narrative is that "the stories and what is real are larger, stronger, and more permanent than our frail chain of human existence" (Grover, *Gichigami* 15), thus entrenching her work in Native American epistemologies. Grover's not-so-personal life stories are passed down from generation to generation as "*debwe*, this is the truth" (Grover, *Gichigami* 15). Grover contemplates the intermingling truths of culture and identity with no vindictive feeling in the telling. She takes her role as storyteller dourly and maintains a reverent tone for the history she imparts.

Harjo's second personal narrative, *Poet Warrior: A Memoir* was issued in 2021.⁷ In this life story, Harjo indulges in an Indigenized practice of memory that is etched in Mvskoke (Creek) tradition and rituals. Hers is a memory act that enlivens the stories of histories of her family members, living or dead, restorying their experiences of sorrow and resilience with hers. Her invocation of memories reflects her peripatetic practice through the landscape stretching from New Mexico to the Amazonian rainforest. Her journey down memory lane also involves dreams and messages from other-than-human subjectivities, and touches on the esoteric with messages—poetry—inspired to her by the Old Ones. Thematically divided into six blocks, *Poet Warrior* chronicles the war stories of the Mvskoke Nation. Not abiding by any chronological pattern, Harjo entrenches her life story in the storytelling tradition of her tribe that rejects the linear view of time. She practices memory as a ritual towards achieving healing, even in whispered stories like her attempted rape.

In anticipation of the question regarding the uniqueness of Indigenous women in articulating the topic at hand, I argue that common among the authors is the role of gathering and weaving, a ubiquitous tradition in Native American tribes. These practices are conventionally associated with women as they gather things and craft the baskets/vessels that hold them. The process of gathering and storing is a cultural metaphor for collective and collecting memories at the heart of the autobiographical practice. Indigenous women's memory politics is thus to "regather and restore these family histories of trauma and resilience and to restory the nation that sits very shallowly at the surface of Country" (Leane 245).

Research Ethics

I wish to direct the attention toward my positionality as a researcher for the sake of culturally-minded and ethical research. As much as I am culturally alien to Native American peoples on Turtle Island, I intend this project as a contribution to the thriving Indigenous literary canon. Indeed, my interest in the topic grew from my realization that cultural

⁷ The first is *Crazy Brave* published in 2012.

resurgence efforts have started to yield tremendous impacts on Native American populations. Since I see similarities with the Indigenous cultural restoration in my region, for example, the Amazigh peoples of the Maghreb, I hope that, in the long run, I can create cultural connections with Native American peoples to help expand the horizons of Indigenous Studies and export it outside of the CANZUS area. Furthermore, I do not claim to be fully aware of the complexity and sophistication of Native American cultures, but my subject position as a post/neo/colonial woman with North African Indigenous roots has equipped me with a cultural sensitivity that I believe would create transatlantic connections with women of the world in the face of colonially-imbued forms of violence, notably meted out on women, and generally on racialized and othered subjects.⁸

⁸ Extensive parts from Chapter 5 appeared in “Narrative Cartographies of Native American Resurgence,” JAmIt!. A revised version of Chapter 4 “The Tribalo(autobio)graphical: A Necessary Act?” was published in Americana e-books. A revised version of Chapter 6 is under review for publication with HJEAS/DeGruyter. Short parts from the introduction and Chapter 1 appeared in a book review: “Aesthetically Sovereign,” Papers in Arts and Humanities. Extensive parts from Chapter 2, particularly, matrilineal memory are under review for a book chapter Matrilineal Family Saga Beyond Western Modernity.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Foundation

Introduction

With the memory boom previously articulated in the introduction, the growing interest in Native American experiences has been adventitiously ascendant with Indigenous scholars aligning themselves with decolonizing and indigenizing research, notably theorized by L. T. Smith, Jo-Ann Archibald, and Margaret Kovach. All accentuate the importance of decolonization as a pivotal step towards resurgence and sovereignty, tantamount to healing from the past/present colonial discursive violence. Evidently, “who” performs this project is a question answered in the Introduction of the dissertation. To expand the scope of the interrogation, I would also add: “what is,” “why carry out,” and “how to perform” this project, decisive questions in decolonization work which help frame my discussion of the topic.

Healing from traumatic past and present iterations is essential for achieving both resurgence and decolonization. Memory as a potent vessel of survivance rather than just a means of recollection positions itself as a therapeutic intervention. Narrativizing the traumatic past turns into an essential tool for reinterpreting experiences. Indigenous women authors do so by using counter-memory in biostories to defy prevailing historical narratives. Deploying the power of lived experience, these actions actively reorient the damage-centered epistemological lens through which Native American experiences used to be normatively researched. Chapter 1 offers a cartography tracing the theoretical and conceptual terrains my argument inhabits. It is organized around the questions posed previously. As such, I start by defining the project of decolonization and its main objective.

1.1. Decolonization of Research and Resurgence

I frame my discussion of healing from past and ongoing traumas within the overarching projects of decolonization of research and Indigenous resurgence. It was French thinker

Michel Foucault who reflected on the profound connection between power and knowledge, the former being constituted through accepted forms of the latter that he calls “regimes of truth” (*Power/Knowledge* 131). L. T. Smith maintains that research is an instrument of coercion and an underlying ideology of racialization. Western research brings a particular set of values and conceptualizations of time, space, subjectivity, gender relations, and knowledge, and is encoded in imperial and colonial discourses that influence the researcher’s gaze. L.T. Smith critiques dominant Western discourses of knowledge and their pretense of objectivity by demonstrating how their “regimes of truth” are situated within a particular cultural and social system that needs to be “decolonized.” In order to push back against these regimes of truth, privileging Indigenous concerns, practices, methodologies, and participation—voice and representation—is crucial to the project for decolonization.

Decolonization is typically associated with the mid-twentieth-century wave of processes through which subjugated peoples in former colonies of occupation sought to attain political independence. It is vital to note that in settler colonial nation-states like Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, such structural decolonization has remained rather conceptual.⁹ The same settler government systems imposed upon pre-existing Indigenous populations and their lands continue to remain in power today. In its most robust sense, therefore, decolonization involves nothing less than the dismantling of colonial power structures, be they political, epistemic, or social, with the ultimate goal of “repatriati[ng] . . . Indigenous land and life” (Tuck and Yang 1).

⁹ In his reflection on the politics of recognition in colonial contexts, Coulthard retrieves Fanonian theorizing, arguing that conferring self-determination to erstwhile colonized communities, such as the case for Indigenous tribes, occurs “from without.” He claims that in the context of recognition, only the structure of domination changes, but the subject position of the colonized is unaffected. This line of argumentation retrieves Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he avers that colonized subjects no longer have to struggle for their independence, but it is “negotiated, achieved through constitutional amendment, or simply ‘declared’ by the settler state and bestowed upon the Indigenous population in the form of political rights” (38).

Decolonization in academic contexts typically refers to theoretical, methodological, and praxis-centered approaches that actively decenter the dominance of Euro-Western knowledge structures. Decolonizing academia requires a rigorous dismantling of the ways that “the invisibilized dynamics of settler colonialism mark the organization, governance, curricula, and assessment of compulsory learning” in post-secondary institutions (Tuck and Yang 2). It also requires a stock-taking of “how settler perspectives and worldviews get to count as knowledge and research, and how these perspectives—repackaged as data and findings—are activated to rationalize and maintain unfair social structures” (Tuck and Yang 2).

According to Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg scholar L. B. Simpson, Indigenous resurgence is “a set of practices through which the regeneration and re-establishment of Indigenous nations could be achieved” (*As We Have* 16). It is a key term in Indigenous studies unmoored from Indigenous resistance movements. It was theorized notably by Yellowknives Dene thinker Glen Coulthard in *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) and L. B. Simpson in *As We Have Always Done* (2017). They both emphasize the role of resistance as a daily practice. Frequently invoked by Indigenous scholars and activists, Indigenous resurgence involves the “flourishing” of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and ethics as integral elements of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, and urges for a politics of refusal—as opposed to politics of recognition—towards the colonial state (Coulthard 154-79). “Grounded normativity,” a concept that both scholars center their interpretation of resurgence on, is the ethical framework and practices that stimulate resurgence and hinge on Indigenous relationships to land.

The practical realization of the decolonization of research demands a reorientation of its epistemic focus, grounded in efforts toward trauma healing as part of a comprehensive strategy to surpass the entrenched structures of colonialism. This will be discussed in

Chapters 2 and 3, where the Caruthian model serves as one from which Native American women carve out their own path through a memory act reflective of their belief systems. From the Greek meaning of “wound,” trauma refers to

[t]he self-altering, even self-shattering, experience of violence, injury, and harm. Trauma theory emerged from the concussion of psychoanalytic criticism and the study of Holocaust literature, whose underpinning is bearing witness to traumatic histories, allowing, thus, to attend to the suffering of the other. Crucial to the experience of trauma are the difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. (Gilmore, “Limit-Cases” 131-32)

It is specifically this conjecture that levelled the first critical stances against Western trauma theory. Trauma was first theorized in the field of psychology. Sigmund Freud’s approach to trauma in his foundational book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) helped introduce the term in everyday use from the 1920s onward, especially with discussions around “shell shock” and PTSD. As Freud defines it, “trauma” is “any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield; there is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus which have broken in and binding of them” (29-30).

Loosely inspired by Freud’s conceptualization, the current edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV) conceives of trauma as an overwhelming experience outside the realm of normal human experience. With its universalizing undertone, “normal” is generally influenced by specific social and contextual factors, and defined by consensus among experts in the field. Initially, trauma, in Freudian and Lacanian interpretations, crystallizes in “the return of the repressed and a sense of absence” (Balaev, *Contemporary* 5). The first wave of trauma studies scholars promoted the single-event conception of trauma because of its view as an occurrence outside of norm. It was not before the publication of Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) that trauma shifted from the psychoanalytic realm to the literary one, with

Caruth's emphasis on the unrepresentability of the event because of the impossibility of being "locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it is precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed* 4). The experience leaves the traumatized individual bereft of the linguistic ability to represent the event. Fragmentation is considered a result of such an experience, as the event shatters identity and destroys the psyche. As such, narrative expression is hindered because the extreme experience fractures language and consciousness, which further reinforces trauma's unspeakability. The Caruthian interpretation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) clarifies that:

[m]ost descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (*Trauma* 4)

In seeking to discard Caruth's theory of fragility and weakness as defining characteristics of the post-traumatic stage, for instance, Native American authors, irrespective of their tribe's traumatic histories, allocate an expansive narrative space to memories of survivance through moments of joy, despite the bitterness felt in both experiencing and witnessing trauma. They establish wellness as a counteragent to trauma because they "recogniz[e] that Indigenous philosophies and cultural practices provide the most appropriate and successful therapeutic techniques for individual and community healing" (Linklater 25). For example, the focality of survivor narratives in Western literature privileges closure, while Native American ones focus on continuity and resilience. Throughout my discussion, I use the term healing to refer to attempts at surmounting past and ongoing traumas caused by settler colonialism.

Tal succinctly avers: "If survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure. If the dominant culture

manages to appropriate the trauma and can codify it on its own terms, the status quo will remain unchanged” (*Worlds* n.p.). The answer to Tal’s concern came from Tuck, who mounted a critique of the prevalent tendency in Western academic and social discourses according to which Native American communities and othered groups are framed in terms of their trauma and damage: “One alternative to damage-centered research is to craft our research to capture *desire* instead of damage” (416). She argues that the damage-centered research framework reinforces a narrative of deficiency and victimry. This image is entirely at odds with the full complexity of the communities’ lived realities and experiences. A “desire-based” framework, she suggests, is a countermeasure that centers on what communities *want*, *desire*, and *create*, crucial actions that will recur at a later moment in the dissertation when J. Whitehead’s work on biostory comes up, particularly, in Chapter 3.

Heeding from Tuck’s desire-based research, *survivance* and *sovenance* against “victimry” emerge as the strategies to be deployed in women’s memory acts. That *survivance* is vital to the contemporary reading of Native American literatures is clear in the fact that it has animated the decolonizing project advanced by Indigenous rhetors and writers since the advent of the American Indian Literary Renaissance in the 1960s. An umbrella term for resistance and survival, *survivance* synthesizes the central tenets of the decolonization of cultures. It throws into relief the significance of creating a sense of “presence over absence, nihility, and victims” (Vizenor, “Aesthetics of Survivance” 1). Because of its versatility and trickster-like nature, *survivance*, as I read it, permeates all aspects of Indigenous life and acts like the glue that binds research with cultural expressions. *Survivance* reflects the desire to move beyond the victimization rhetoric that tailgates ongoing colonial violence.

Vizenorian *survivance* is an “unsaying” of the world in Native terms. It counters the negatory epistemology ingrained in settler relations with Native American communities and relayed through the vocabularies of “manifest manners” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 9). *Survivance* controverts the historical and cultural narratives that deeply infix Native

Americans perdurably in a state of absence (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 6). These narratives determine Indigenous individuals as inherent victims, who lack individual and communal agency. Contra this narrative, survivance means an active sense of presence.

Survivance “as a structuring epistemological principle, is political, cultural, and aesthetic, a resistance and counterinterpretation that constantly seeks to expose the workings of dominant colonialist ideologies in the production of everyday meanings” (Madsen, “On Subjectivity” xiv). In practical terms, engaging in survivance is translated in the act of “continu[ing] the transmission of tribal cultures, and knowledge to future generations through . . . creative storying in literature” (Madsen, “On Subjectivity” xv). I contend that the memoirs discussed in the dissertation are more fruitfully read as biostories because they highlight themes of resistance, activism, and cultural resurgence in response to trauma.

Vizenorian theorizing brings to the fore the notion of “Native *sovenance*” to set it apart from remembering as “that sense of presence in remembrance, that trace of creation and natural reason in native stories” (*Fugitive Poses* 15).¹⁰ It involves the practice of memory as resistance. Memories are active and present in ancestral knowledge passed down through stories, and story becomes a vehicle of continuance and ceremony in itself. Sovenance rests on the repudiation of victimry and relies on non-linear temporality. Vizenor focuses on the active presence and agency perceptible in Native American writers to carve out a space for themselves in broader national and global narratives. This is achieved through re-introducing elements of their cultures as an affirmation of their ongoing presence and relevance in the present.

My intent is to implement sovenance instead of survival in reading life stories where women do not seek to improve their situation by reversing the power structures of their relationships but through resistance to the concept of assimilation in pursuit of creatively balanced oppositions. Tal affirms that when traumatic stories are told and retold, they enter

¹⁰ The spelling of “native” is in the original.

the vocabulary of the larger culture and become tools for constructing national and cultural myths (*Worlds* n.p.). On this account, reorienting the Native American experience with trauma through the lens of survivance alters the popular stereotype of American Indians as damaged people, a “truth” calcified in the Western imaginary. My discussion in Chapter 3 is, thus, intent on “address[ing] how [women’s personal stories] intervene in the cultural representation of trauma and how they further an [I]ndigenous trauma studies that is both visionary and transformative” (Emberley 6).

1.2. Methodologies for Decolonization

Jo-Ann Archibald acknowledges storytelling as an incontestable project toward decolonization. In her view, story and storytelling humanize and give voice to people, which is deconstructive of the colonial “anti-storytelling agenda” (n.p.) because it is a counternarrative to colonization and its legal structures.¹¹ This defies the settler dismissal of storytelling as a source and conveyor of knowledge since “[i]t disentangles us from our entrapment in knowledge institutions; it breathes life into our process of healing and storying, shifting from a reliance on dead white men theories towards a clearer and firmer reclamation of Indigenous meaning-making and lived experience” (Archibald n.p.). In Native American epistemologies, stories are not merely narratives but dynamic processes that inform identity, transmit culture, and engage in survivance. The “entrapment” refers to the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks that are based on decontextualized knowledge. The expression “dead white men theories” contrasts sharply with “breathes life into our process of healing and storying” and highlights the vital role of storytelling in Indigenous cultures. Western knowledge is premised on compartmentalization, whereas Indigenous epistemologies—storytelling—are holistic and relational. This critique aligns with the broader

¹¹ Although Archibald’s contention seems to be based on a binary between storytelling and anti-storytelling, the latter being associated with colonization and its legal structures, this sentiment is not meant as a dismissal of any possibility of having stories coming from colonial voices. Her anti-storytelling argument, however, is premised on the idea that (oral) storytelling as epistemology was disavowed as less credible than those “contained in text” (n.p.) in colonial contexts, notably what she calls “law stories” (n.p.), those in which Native American communities affirmed sovereignty over land.

discourse on decolonizing knowledge, which seeks to dismantle the Western dismissal of Indigenous knowledge systems, including story and storytelling. The assertion of survivance as opposed to “entrapment” is at the core of storytelling. The shift toward “a clearer and firmer reclamation of Indigenous meaning-making and lived experience” underscores the significance of centering Indigenous perspectives. Storytelling is integral to this reclamation, as it embeds knowledge in lived experience and relational contexts, where interconnections with the members of the community inspire knowledge.

Old and new stories are a way of weaving relationships, human and non-human. This concept is captured in “restoryation” as learning to tell different stories about one’s relationship with the land.¹² For the purpose of my thesis, I use restoryation to convey the act of telling stories by Native American women that challenges the spurious accounts by the dominant society. In an Australian context, Leane also speaks of the necessity to “restory” the nation by [tribal] women in their writing by deploying their politics of memory and rewriting the stories of the land (245).

Autobiographical writing has had a significant influence on transformative and empowerment politics. I argue that texts by women, therefore, participate in self-consciously political self-referential acts as manifestos that work to dislodge “the old Eurocentric phallocentric ‘I’” (S. Smith, “The Autobiographical” 189). The choice of the life writing genre by Native American writers gives prominence to self-determination through a self-representative stance by “speaking in a voice that is decolonized or at least in the process of being decolonized,” a process that enables the individual “to reinvent themselves in a manner that is within their control” (Duran n.p.). As I understand it, assuming a decolonized voice allows women to re-center Indigenous experiences as they lived and felt them.

¹² “Restoryation” is a process described by ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan and referenced by Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer in her 2015 *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*.

Reclaiming a tradition in autobiographical expression is conflated with reclaiming voice. Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder proposes the concept of *âcimisowina* as a space for “telling [one’s] stories from [one’s] own perspectives” as an intrinsic component of decolonizing knowledge (*Autobiography* n.p.). The Nêhiyâw *âcimisowina* might come across as yet another ostentatious Indigenous-inspired term. However, Reder carves a legitimate space for autobiography in her storytelling traditions, claiming that it has always been “the preferred genre” (*Autobiography* n.p.) by the speakers of her language. Autobiography is deeply ingrained in most Native American/First Peoples traditions. But Reder reckons the unflinching efforts of the West to lack of recognition of Native American voices in the genre. Indeed, settler colonialism attempted to eliminate Native American people either by muting their voices or by including them in such a way that strips their authority as demonstrated in “as-told-to” texts.¹³ Reder’s contention that “autobiographies—*âcimisowina*—best allow us to assert control over our identities, histories, and knowledge systems” reaffirms the capacity of autobiography as a counter-discursive formation (*Autobiography* n.p.).

Native American autobiography by women will take on new contours, notably at the level of form. The shift from the oral to the written word stands as a testament to this transition. Accordingly, women can begin the work of stitching wounds by weaving their traumatic past and present into narratives of survivance, a memory work held within the configuration of scriptotherapy. This concept is central in Suzette Henke’s work as she theorizes the possibility of healing from traumatic experiences through acts of writing. Henke operationalizes her concept to explain the writing of traumatic experiences for a therapeutic purpose, explaining that “[a]utobiography could so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis that life-writing might provide a therapeutic alternative for victims of severe

¹³ Settler colonialism either silenced Native voices outright or allowed them to appear only in forms that vitiated their agency. In either instance, even when Native peoples seemed to be “included,” their political and cultural sovereignty was reduced to naught. *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), as told by John G. Neihardt, is illustrative of the erosion of Indigenous agency as the author covered the story of the Indigenous figure, interpreting his life through the filter of the amanuensis.

anxiety, and more seriously, of post-traumatic stress disorder (sic)” (xiii). S. Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography*, and Couser in *Memoir*, conceive of scriptotherapy as a sub-genre within the overarching autobiographical mode of life writing (*Memoir* 43). Understanding scriptotherapy in this capacity as “therapeutic re-enactment” (Henke 3) allows, thus, an attempt at self-healing.

In Bataille’s and Sands’ genealogical endeavor into the American Indian autobiography, both scholars conclusively validate Eurocentric hetero-patriarchal individualism as the nub of the genre and its sundry avatars—captivity narratives and Western hero narratives. Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography, for example, has been acknowledged as the archetype of American autobiography as it relates the idea of achievement and progress with property and individualism. An important detail by Bataille and Sands points out the stages of development of Native American autobiography, also noted by Krupat’s witty use of the preposition *of/by* in “many cases eliminating the role of recorder-editor from the narrative process” (Bataille and Sands 135). This watershed, spurred by the Native American Renaissance, signaled a significant shift in autobiographical expression on various levels because, in its early theorizations, the long-standing templates of Western autobiography have rested on celebrating the autonomous individual.

Recently, despite the traumatic experiences of Native American peoples being given modest attention, especially with the ascendancy of the memoir as an offshoot of the life writing genre that is concerned with trauma, their stories are still viewed from the prism of victimry. For Foucault, power and knowledge are inextricably linked and discourses are a means through which power operates, as they define and control the formation of knowledge (*Power/Knowledge* 133). Power is productive; it produces reality, domains of objects, and rituals of truth. By controlling discourse, those in power can shape what is known and how it is understood. By this token, American Indian autobiography is a discourse, not a mere genre, whereby the “ontology of victimry” and “native . . . absence” in Vizenor’s terms promoted its

dissemination. Western autobiographical writing served as a discursive formation to perpetuate the “Indigenous deficiency” rhetoric (Justice, *Why Indigenous* 3). Raheja and Fitzgerald contend that autobiography, when appropriated and signified by Native American authors, becomes a site of resistance. Therefore, it has the potential to contribute in meaningful ways to tribal communities’ processes of nation building and the reconfiguration of tribal intellectual and cultural sovereignty through the recovery of Native voice and agency in mediated texts (Raheja and Fitzgerald 1).

Woven from the threads of the intersection of life writing studies and decolonization of research, I propose “tribalographic” writing which is conceived as a method of “constructing a reality through storytelling that helps to ‘create a people’ and ‘author tribes’ by making explicit ‘unending connections to past, present, and future’” (Howe, *Evidence* 29-47). While there is no equivocality of what makes a text tribalographic, the referent points to works which are overtly “multivocal, auto/biographical, oral, and archival constellation[s] of narrative symbiosis” and interfuse the familial, tribal, and cosmic through a “symbiosis” of image, verse, and prose (Bauerkemper 4). With its propensity to bring things together, tribalography is, thus, a dynamic process that modulates and reconfigures the contradictions caused by colonial disruptions.

The twenty-first century has strengthened the position of the memoir in the autobiographical mode of expression, which has reached singular prominence. This development has worked in cahoots with the realization that there is a “gravitational pull between life writing and trauma,” and, as Gilmore adds, “[a]s the memoir boom lengthens, trauma remains central to its ongoing popularity and continues to shape the texts that define it” (*The Limits* xi). The upturn in the publication of autobiographies is related to the proclamation that this age is informed by trauma. Indeed, specific contexts inform social beings about what can be said, to whom, when, and how. Though autobiography and memoir are sometimes used interchangeably, it is a common belief that a memoir mainly covers a part

of life and usually concerns itself more with capturing scenes of particular worth. In their discussion of autobiography as a genre and its developments since the first personal accounts of their life, Smith and Watson point to the difference between “life writing” and “life narrative,” arguing that these two concepts are mistakenly used synonymously (*Reading Autobiography* 4). While life writing encompasses exclusively written accounts of self-narration, life narrative comprises various media formats, such as paintings, music, or social media posts. Consequently, the ubiquity of life narratives that come in new forms of self-representation challenge the traditional definition of western autobiography by virtue of their hybridity. Instead of rehearsing the prescribed distinction between life narrative and life writing, I am inclined towards embedding Martina Horáková’s theorizing of personal non-fiction—writing theory through a life story—and life writing—the interweaving of telling history and telling peoples’ lives—as these categorizations square nicely with my discussion of the decolonization of research and survivance (15). Together with my analysis of illustrative episodes in women’s life stories, a close study of the definition of biostories situate it at the intersection of these two categories, bridging, thus, personal experience and formal life writing.

The texts I selected for this research are memoirs, which, relying on Smith and Watson’s conceptualizations, can be described as life writing. Although memoir is a slippery term used to categorize a range of narrative forms, it does signal the focus on a particular time period in the autobiographical narrator’s life rather than the entire life span up to the time of telling. For my purposes, I resort to the term “life writing” since “the Indigenous women’s texts . . . do not fit the usual strict chronological narrative of autobiography” (Moreton-Robinson n.p.). Throughout my discussion, the terms life narrative, narrated life, life stories, and memoir will be employed fungibly up to the point where “biostory” comes into play, as a transformative act of storying of autobiographical narratives by Native American peoples in ways that respect and honour their histories. Biostory, as I will fully

explore in Chapter 4, is more fitting for reading Native American women-authored memoirs as survivance narratives.¹⁴

Because of its bent on covering different chronosophies of a life, with a focus on the historical juncture where the private and the communal mingle, biostory gives a rendition of a person's life story as they feel it and desire it, not as it should be told in patterns. Furthermore, biostory refers to first-person and self-representative texts that display experimentation at the level of the form of the text (Saul 13). J. Whitehead uses this concept to refer to his writing because it blends different modes of expression. As a new act of storying, biostory is not quite a genre as it is a renewed domain of autobiographical practice. I could add that biostory is an anti-genre "genre" that complies with the Native American calls for resurgence and decolonization of research which allows them to strip their voices, stories, and ways of being and knowing the world away from the long-held custody of whitestream academy.

As my corpus is composed of memoirs by women, reading their stories entails addressing the Indigenous female experience and elicits a construal of the texts grounded in an Indigenist feminist framework, notably in its application of race and gender as categories of analysis to expose the colonial ideologies while focusing on women's lived experiences. As a gender/sex-focused scholarly analytical framework, Indigenous feminism is relatively new. It unfurled in the early 1980s with Laguna Pueblo/Lebanese scholar Paula Gunn Allen.¹⁵ Significantly important are Kate Shanley's "Thoughts on Indian Feminism," in Beth Brant's edited collection *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*,

¹⁴ Since not all life writing forms are equally positioned (memoir, autobiographies, autoethnographies), I argue that recently-penned and published Indigenous women-authored biostories lend themselves to being read as survivance narratives, especially with the current conjecture of social, environmental, racial, and political activist projects led by women, together with the emergence of new autobiographical acts and practices that intersect with gendered positionalities and relations identified by S. Smith and Watson. While survivance can be implemented as an analytical lens for reading life narratives by different othered subjectivities, it remains context-dependent. Since the concept is rooted in Indigenous histories and worldviews, its universal transferability is not entirely possible to avoid quelling its specificity.

¹⁵ Following the 1983 Ohoyo Indian Women's Conference on Leadership, *Ohoyo Makachi: Words of Today's American Indian Women: A First Collection of Oratory by American Indian/Alaska Native Women* was published, establishing the officialization of Indigenous feminism and outlining its major tenets (Verble n.p.).

where she frames her exploration of Native American feminism's differences from white feminism. More recently, Goeman's reading of Indigenous-authored literature using Indigenous feminist analysis in her *Mark My Word* introduces spatial politics as a feminist analytical tool. While there is no totalizing approach to a singular Native feminism, there are "multiple definitions and layers of what it means to do Native feminist analysis [as a means of addressing] 'sexism and promote indigenous sovereignty'" (Goeman and Denetdale 10). Indigenous feminism is founded on the principles of respect, relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility, especially by women towards their kin which includes males, elders, land, and future generations. Indigenous women's activism is not a mere attempt at making their voices heard by reclaiming the narrative but also as a means to decolonization while maintaining self-determination and sovereignty.

Sandy Grande explains, "[f]or Indigenous women, the central dominating force is colonization, not patriarchy; and the definitive political project is decolonization, not feminism" (152), which sets it as resonant with the decolonization of research projects. Indigenous feminism unfolds along another path from white feminism. Whitemainstream feminism has been accused of being "an elitist lament for the marginality and dispossession of Aboriginal women" (Emberley, "Aboriginal Women" 102), a reason which bolstered Indigenous women to demarcate themselves from white feminism. Firstly, Indigenous feminism privileges balance and complementarity over equality between genders working toward "challenging, deconstructing, and disrupting normative sexual politics" (Mithlo 11). Secondly, Indigenous feminists value lived knowledge over abstract thought for theoretical positioning. This element exemplifies Tanana Athabascan scholar Million's feminist *felt theory* which accentuates Native American women's personal narratives being marked by emotions: "We feel our histories as well as think them" ("Felt Theory" 54).

Million's concept of *felt analysis* offers a critical approach to deconstructing the dehumanization of Native American peoples. It enables an Indigenous-centered kind of

storytelling, “a complex telling” that reveals the profound significance of their lived experiences. Indigenous women have drawn upon lived realities and revisited these experiences in their shared stories. Through felt theory, Million emphasizes the importance of linking personal experiences to broader political and social movements, creating spaces for storytelling that serve as acts of resistance and activism (*Therapeutic* 272). Million’s framework of felt analysis is a condign strategy when applied to life narratives, as it highlights the transformative potential of storytelling.

“Perhaps the most fundamental issue raised by Native American literature, particularly by women, and feminist theories is the issue of voice: *Who* can speak? And *how*? And under *what circumstances*? *What* can be said ?” (Donovan 7-8). My contention is to reorient reading women’s memoirs as trauma narratives from mere survival of trauma to survivance in the face of trauma, which would be salient answers to Donovan’s questions and, in my view, are contemporary autobiographical expressions by Native American women. Reading Indigenous women’s first-person writing as “political acts in themselves,” argues Million (*Therapeutic* 54), would also affect (white) scholarship. In and through their life stories, Indigenous women do not only create individual narratives to eschew the ethnographic methodology, Million suggests, but also participate “[i]n creating a new language for communities to address the real multi-layered facets of their histories and concerns by insisting on the inclusion of our lived experience, rich with emotional knowledges, of what pain and grief and hope meant or mean now in our pasts and futures” (“Felt Theory: An Indigenous” 54).

Although Indigenous feminism permeates the dissertation, it gathers particular momentum in Chapter 6 with a reflection on subjectivity. Under dominance, access to subjectivity is filtered through the “simulated presence of the other” (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 194). Vizenor’s proverbial phrase “manifest manners of dominance” (*Native Liberty* 1) echoes this simulation of the Native American as the tragic Other and victim of American Manifest Destiny. Vizenor contends that this simulation has “no referent, memories, or native stories,”

and the “postindian must waver over the aesthetic ruins of *indian* simulations” (*Native Liberty* 15). Therefore, healing requires the redefinition of the “Indian,” or through language and stories, thus, giving rise to an *other*.

In the same vein, because “the subject produced in life writing is merely an ideological effect” (Bérubé 340), its depictions in early autobiographies of Native American individuals were intended as an ideological construction. Native women’s subjectivities have been shaped by historically imbued representations of Indigeneity developed in anthropological and legal discourses. Moreton-Robinson points to how the emergence of the life writing genre was influenced by colonialism and its perpetuation of the traumatic research practice:

White Australia has come to “know” the “Indigenous woman” from the gaze of many, including the diaries of explorers, the photographs of philanthropists, the testimony of white state officials, the sexual bravado of white men, and the ethnographies of anthropologists. In this textual landscape, Indigenous women are objects that lack agency. (n.p.)

While rooted in an Australian context, the relevance of Moreton-Robinson’s contention extends to Native American women. “Returning the gaze” through reappropriating agency enables women to strip away the veil on which the discourse of autobiography is premised. Their subjectivity is reclaimed and made visible in women’s rematriation of performativity, positionality, and relationality.

The concept of subjectivity can be understood by grounding it in postmodernist and feminist scholarship. Regenia Gagnier defines the term as a product of multiple and shifting influences, where identity is not fixed or essential but formed through various layers of experience, power dynamics, and social scripts (8). In recent studies, it was concurred that subjectivity refers to the “lived multiplicity of positionings” (qtd. in Blackman et al. 6).¹⁶

¹⁶ Taking her cues from Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti defines the nomadic subject as one which operates in a relational community where subjectivity is “outward-bound and based on complex relations with a multiplicity of others, including non-human others” (“Affirming” n.p.).

Subjectivity throws into relief the attending notion of agency. Indigenous mothers share the collective vision of intercultural healing that emerges when they center Indigenous activism, ecological knowledge, cultural memory, and sovereignty of living in relationship with the cultural inheritance of land and other non-human kin.

A breakthrough of subjectivity theorization came with Braidotti's development of the posthuman subject. Her concept of "nomadic subjectivity" is a striking demarcation from the preceding isomorphic views on the subject. Nomadic subjectivity defies the rigid structures of Western subjectification:

When you *remember* in the intensive or *minority mode* . . . you defeat linearity to open up spaces of movement and de-territorialization that actualize the virtual possibilities frozen in the image of the past. Opening up these virtual spaces is a creative effort. When you remember to become what you are—a subject-in-becoming—you actually reinvent yourself on the basis of what you hope you can become, with a little help from your *friends*. (Braidotti, "Writing" 173)

To my understanding, Native American autobiographical subjectivity refers to this dynamic process of unfolding subjectivity outside the classical frame of the colonial subject, re-locating it into becomings. Remembering as an Indigenous woman (minority-mode) is a subversive act. I would add that "minority-mode" relies on other "technologies of memory" (Klein qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 23), or remembering differently as defying and "defeat[ing]" territorialization that establishes the locus of memory in the mind.

The reclamation of subjectivities is discernible, first, in the life stories' construction of matrilineal contexts, where women restore their role within their communities and, second, in the reappropriation of agency by re-assuming responsibility for one's and the tribe's traumatic stories, shirking off the status of the victim. Together, they coalesce in the concept of

rematriation, a framework for the resurgence of cultural practices for communal purposes.¹⁷ Although it can be understood as being semantically akin to repatriation—sending someone back to one’s country, in Indigenous understanding and for the purpose of this study, rematriation defies the notion of territoriality that is tightly linked to patriarchy and colonialism. Aligned with Indigenous feminist of decolonization, rematriation is “an embodied praxis of recovery and return, as well as a sociopolitical expression of both resurgence and refusal” (Gray 1). In essence, rematriation is “Indigenous women-led work” that consists of the “restor[ation] of sacred relationships between Indigenous people and [their] ancestral land, honoring [their] matrilineal societies, and in opposition to patriarchal violence and dynamics” (*Sogorea Te’* n.p.). Rematriation is achieved in women’s life narratives through their lyrical “weav[ing] [of] traditional and cultural knowledge back in harmony with the land” (*Sogorea Te’* n.p.). With its roots pointing towards the mother, rematriation is as much a revaluing of the feminine and gynocratic social model as it is about reconnecting with Mother Earth. I advance the idea that rematriation is the continuance of Indigenous feminism as it shakes the very grounds upon which the patriarchal structure of colonialism was established.

Rematriation enshrines the idea of a return to the land through a return to culture, with no reference to borders. It is central to Indigenous feminism that it rejects the colonial binary logic where male is the dialectic transcendent to female (Sneider 100). While the term has thrived essentially with ecological and land-based scholarship, it also involves performative acts that foster reconnection with communal and cultural practices, such as memory, storytelling, pottery, and basket weaving. Rematriation as a process involves a

¹⁷ This term was introduced by Stó:lō scholar Lee Maracle in her 1996 book *I Am Woman* where she argues that: “[t]he essence of Native culture still lives in the hearts, minds and spirits of our folk. . . . The expropriation of the accumulated knowledge of Native peoples is one legacy of colonization. Decolonization will require the repatriation and the rematriation of that knowledge by Native peoples themselves” (92). Although, in her view, rematriation is used in its literal meaning which thrums with a feminine resonance, her coinage is recognized as the first use of the term.

“re-story-ation” of knowledge which bolsters Indigenous well-being (Tuck, “Rematriating” 35). It is a rejection of the reductive premise of the return of objects as with repatriation. Rather, it forwards “returning the sacred to the Mother” (*Sogorea Te’* n.p.).

Rooted in the same theoretical lineage of Indigenous feminism, rematriation paves the way for the exploration of an indigenized place-based inquiry. This paradigm includes (re)mapping and building place-worlds and will be discussed in Chapter 5. They are visible at the level of the texts through the deployment of poetics of space or the use of geographical terminology and Native spatial signifiers to unsettle Western spatialities. In the Western philosophical tradition, the term “space” in its contemporary usage arose in the seventeenth century, emerging from Newtonian and Leibnizian ideations. Though this framework has evolved over time, in the Newtonian conceptualization, space is itself an independent entity, whether it is occupied by objects or events (Agnew and Livingstone 318). The Leibnizian notion foregrounds space as relational and dependent, holding no powers itself (Agnew and Livingstone 318).

In their criticism and update of these models of spatialization, Tuck and McKenzie distinguish between *place* and *land* on the grounds that the former is articulated from a human-centric Western place-based ontology, whereas the latter gives prominence to a land-based ontology as it highlights land as stenographic of an ecology and the sum of relations of the diverse elements interacting within it (56).¹⁸ The discrepancy between the Western and the Indigenous ideas of space is further expounded by Tuck and McKenzie as they draw on the Cartesian dictum “I think therefore I am,” noting that “we might imagine that ontology of place-based paradigms is something like ‘I am, therefore place is,’ in contrast, the ontology of land-based [research] might be summarized as ‘[l]and is, therefore we are’” (45).

¹⁸ As much as this distinction is compelling and much-needed for the decolonization of place from an Indigenous perspective, a deep introspection into the alterities between these two concepts goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

The first stirring of space inquiry is building place-worlds, a concept proposed by anthropologist Keith Basso, and reinvested by Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks. The process begins with attributing prominence to place because, as Basso and Brooks posit, the where of events matters as much as the what and its consequences. Therefore, “[w]hat happened here? Who was involved? What was it like?” are the questions, as Basso maintains, that stir building place-worlds (5). Basso and Brooks draw on Vine Deloria Jr., who states that creation stories “are actually more concerned with geography and spatiality . . . than with chronology and temporality” (qtd. in Brooks xvii). Being enmeshed with the decolonization of Western mapping practices, building place-worlds essentially involves a re-visionary and “a re-memory” act (Tuck and McKenzie 133).

Conversely, (re)mapping is defined by Goeman—the originator of the term—as “the labor Native authors and the communities they write within and about undertake, in the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making” (3). In line with Goeman’s use of the term, “(re)mapping” stems from her pursuit “to interrogate the process of mapping, both as a metaphor and as the physical mapping of lands and bodies [that] is not restricted to the mathematical; it may equally be spiritual, political, or moral” (16). It is, thus, a process which destabilizes colonial maps and reanchors Native presence by refusing epistemological erasure.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 has laid the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for my discussion of trauma healing in the Native American context. It offered a foundation for the analysis of the biostories in the next five chapters. My close literary scrutiny of memoirs is based on the confluence of trauma studies, life writing theory, and Vizenorian survivance. Through a text-based analysis, the key objective of my research is to attempt to further advance decolonization in the humanities by shifting the perspective of trauma theory from pathologizing Native Americans to deploying the prism of survivance, with a focus on the

autobiographical mode, offering, thus, a critical Indigenous perspective on American literary and cultural production.

All in all, Chapter 1 has distilled the various theories, approaches, and terms that the dissertation has been introducing and explaining in the Introduction. To investigate how Native American life writing can provide healing by evincing a different understanding of self and its relation to the Other, this chapter has clarified a set of theoretical assumptions that bear weight on Native American studies. Reading Native American literature while discounting that it comes down from a long tradition that precedes the European presence in the American continent would be spurious since it is woven into epistemologies extrinsic to most Western readers. To be fully appreciated, the reader is required to learn different ways of reading and relating to the surrounding world. Thus, I draw much from Native American sources in terms of epistemological clarifications and pragmatic implications that a critical theory has on Native and non-Native lives. Building on the theoretical foundations outlined above, Chapter 2 examines how these ideas manifest in the decolonization of trauma studies in the Native American context.

Chapter 2: “The Soul Wound” in the “Ruins of Representation”¹⁹

Liberation discourse involves taking a critical eye to the processes of colonization that have had a deep impact on the identity of Indigenous peoples; as a result, a new narrative of healing will emerge.

—Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*

Introduction

With its likening to the Jewish Holocaust, Native American trauma has oftentimes been misdiagnosed through Western psychiatry as individual pathology instead of being recognized as a response to past and ongoing colonial violence. As a result, Indigenous trauma has been depoliticized and framed as personal distress. The misconstrual of Indigenous experiences disconnects them from their historical context and denies them the need for decolonial healing. The Western framework of suffering is lacking in representing the communal intergenerational trauma of Native American peoples as they have different interpretations of what suffering is, how memory intervenes in reconciling with these experiences, and healing. Native American thinkers—although not exclusively—theorize trauma otherwise; they highlight survivance instead of mere survival; they discard the narrative of unknowing, vindicating the right to resolve grief and express pain and suffering.

In this chapter, my aim is to explore how the decolonization of trauma theory is reflected in women’s life stories by questioning the inadequacies of Western trauma theory. This chapter enriches literary trauma theory by offering a renewed reading of contemporary trauma narratives by Indigenous women and by recuperating their voices. To apply the guiding principle of reading trauma through the lens of survivance, I selected texts whose

¹⁹ “The Ruins of Representation” was first used by Vizenor in his article “The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance.”

literary identity locates them under the trauma narrative banner, where Native American women authors critically examine their experiences with trauma in its various manifestations, including historical, ongoing, gender-related, and race-related forms. For this investigation, I begin by applying a historical approach to chart the development and limitations of Western literary trauma theories, which paves the way for the possibilities engendered by including decolonization in this area. The ensuing section is an exploration of how a meaningful decolonization of trauma studies is attempted in Indigenous literary texts. Engaging with the foundations of trauma involves rethinking the basis of the ailment and looking into ethical ways to achieve healing by reframing research from a damage-based to a desire-based focus. Although this chapter is primarily theoretical, sporadic analysis of the primary sources will be utilized to support my claims.

2.1. Foundations of Trauma Theory

Caruth observes that “trauma . . . may provide the very link between cultures” (*Trauma* 11). Shared experiences of trauma would, thus, create a common ground of suffering which transcends cultural boundaries. Diametrically opposed to Caruth’s pathologizing universalism, postcolonial critics have been contending for trauma theory’s inability to fulfill cross-cultural ethical engagement. They denounce the emergence of a Western canon, which prioritizes the suffering of white Europeans at the undermining of cultural trauma of non-Western groups, instead of cultivating connections based on empathy and solidarity with the latter. Alternatively, Tal’s 1996 polemic book *Worlds of Hurt* casts doubt on the Caruthian approach to literary trauma by criticizing its narrowness and Eurocentrism owing to its compulsion towards the event-based and single catastrophic model of trauma. Instead, Tal argues that literary trauma theory would benefit from casting its net wider by incorporating insights from postcolonial and feminist theories.

Greg Forter’s early work uses the Freudian-Caruthian model as a point of departure to emphasize the difference between “punctual” trauma—a one-time catastrophic event—and

non-punctual trauma—ongoing and recurring, taking his cues from analyses of postcolonial texts that highlight the political and historical aspects of traumatic experiences (*Gender, Race* 98). Forter’s insights into trauma theory are relevant for reading postcolonial texts that expand the discussion to include the social, political, and cultural mechanisms at play in the representation of trauma. Forter examines the dialectic between the psychic and the social realms, instead of concerning his analysis of colonial trauma with therapeutic and anti-therapeutic approaches, notably the causes and social conditions of trauma (*Gender, Race* 76).

The view of the dialectic relationship between specific psychic and social worlds in novelistic representations places a different emphasis on the causation of trauma and its effects on subjectivity because it allows for an exploration of how trauma is produced and reproduced through colonial institutions, which underscores the “irreducible particularity of suffering” (Forter, “Colonial Trauma” 77). Forter attributes the “unrepresentable” character of trauma not to its “originary” nature but to the rupture exerted on Native American peoples with their “pre-colonial pasts and the prohibitions against remembrance” imposed under colonial domination (“Colonial Trauma” 77). This announcement invokes the fracture of kinship with the land and its ecology as a major purveyor of knowledge in Native American epistemologies.

The complexity of defining trauma in the Native American context, as well as the wariness of critical paradigms that further “racialist imagery of Indian stereotypes” (Madsen, “On Subjectivity” xvi), has impelled scholars of Indigenous Studies to refrain from embracing a discourse of trauma based in Western theoretical models. As these models emphasize the belated temporality of trauma (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4) and its unknowability except in language (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 59), they fail to grasp the full texture of the traumatic experience in the Native American context. Nomenclature matters in this situation, as it is through discursive formations, such as language, that epistemic and political colonialism is enabled.

In the case of trauma theory, Native American experience has been subsumed into social justice efforts. These schemes focus on broad categories, such as race, gender, and class rather than specific histories. In this respect, Indigenous peoples' traumatic past can be viewed through the narrow lens of minority struggle without fully engaging in their historical specificity. Likewise, their experience is liable to instrumentalization by political agendas, like diversity politics, whitewashing in its wake the lived experiences of the community at risk. As a result, despite the benevolent rhetoric sustaining social justice efforts, the uniqueness of Native American traumatic past is excised. One fine example is likening the Native American traumatic experience to the Holocaust because the latter was customarily considered "a floating signifier of other traumatic events," as noted by Stef Craps, because it is seen as the guiding model for the shaping of trauma theory (1). The implied "psychological universalism" of the Holocaust is understood as comprehensive of all traumatic experiences, constricting the phenomenon of trauma and PTSD to a specific time and geography.

2.2. Decolonization of Trauma Theory: "Worlding" Trauma Theory²⁰

While the introduction of postcolonial theory has ushered in a new dynamic into trauma studies, multiple possibilities can arise from including more voices from the margins with their specific histories. Despite their presumed autobiographical proclivity with their focus on the individual, biostories deal with individual lives as historical subjects, they reveal how collective experiences of historical trauma are imbricated with their evaluation of their identities. It follows that healing sought in literary spaces goes beyond an individual and essentialist view of the self.

Trauma theory continues to draw on Freud's theory about the unspeakability of trauma and the unconscious. However, an expanding body of work addressing the aftermath of

²⁰ This term was introduced by trauma scholars Herrero and Baelo-Allué (Introduction xvii), echoing the work of Rothberg, who advances a more "extended" model of trauma through "decolonizing and globalizing trauma studies" ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 226-29). Worlding, in their terms, is attempted by integrating experiences and texts as objects of trauma theory analysis, notably postcolonial literary texts which engage with trauma from distinct perspectives from the dominant paradigm.

slavery, intergenerational trauma, colonization, and relational and familial abuse reflects a broader scope (Gilmore, *The Limits* xii). Surfacing initially in postcolonial theory, the concept of decolonization from an Indigenous standpoint came into prominence with the work of L.T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), a significant watershed for Indigenous cultural sovereignty. Chiding the racialized thinking of European culture and its capitalistic undercurrent, L.T. Smith's intervention is intimated as foundational in establishing a tribally-ethical and Indigenous-centered research methodology, including trauma theory. Postcolonial trauma is the result of the growing disbelief in the Western model and the realization that it is culturally and ethically inadequate.

Feminist clinical researchers expanded the scope of trauma from a single event to include the ongoing violence of structural inequality in everyday life. Theirs is a model that outstrips the parochial Freudian-based literary studies of trauma, as previously introduced. Subjects exposed to racism and gendered violence, for example, can develop symptoms identical to PTSD, which can be succored through clinical intervention. This contrasts sharply with the American Psychiatric Association's definition of trauma as an event that is beyond the bounds of human experience ("Apology" n.p.). In this vein, Tal deplores the universalizing effect of the Western paradigm of trauma since usual "human experience" can only mean "usual *white male* experience" (*Worlds* 136). The ongoing traumas of minorities, including Native American populations and/or women, are politically silenced by a psychiatric vocabulary.

A step further into "worlding"—decolonizing the field—entails a foundational reconfiguration, notably, a core revision of the pathological understanding of trauma. This decolonizing project notwithstanding, trauma theory remains a privileged field of inquiry, for its access remains only half-open to Native American theoreticians and clinicians. In "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospects and Prospects," Irene Visser expands her work on the ongoing dialogue between trauma theory and postcolonialism as she expatiates on the

insular focus on Freudian psychoanalysis and sets out what she sees as the achievements and continuing challenges of the decolonizing project. In her view, for trauma theory to fulfil its promise of inclusiveness, an interrogation of Western secular modes of thought and a greater openness towards non-Western belief systems and Indigenous healing rituals is required.

Michael Rothberg notes that “[a]s long as trauma studies foregoes comparative study and remains tied to a narrow Eurocentric framework, it distorts the histories it addresses (such as the Holocaust) and threatens to reproduce the very Eurocentrism that lies behind those histories” (“Decolonizing Trauma” 227). Rothberg is joined by Gone and Kirmayer, who identify a few issues with Western trauma theory’s impulse to apply a universalistic approach to all traumatic experiences. Regarding the Native American context, they cite “ethical awareness,” “conceptual clarity,” and “methodological refinement,” and urge a reconfiguration of existing trauma models due to their inadequacy (Gone and Kirmayer 245). They see it as a corollary to colonialism, a disruption in the Native American transmission of a sense of identity. A more ethical reading of their experience entails discarding the notion of “the completed past of a singular event” (Craps, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies” 230). This could be accomplished by considering the present iterations of past events discernible in ongoing racial traumas. The moral implication of ensuring that terms are well-defined and appropriate to describe Indigenous experience with trauma lead to preventing harm and replicating the colonial structures which caused the ailment in the first place. Additionally, more reliable and efficient outcomes of trauma healing are achieved by continuously improving research or practice techniques.

The traditional model of trauma, Tal posits, “does not account for the sustained and long processes of the trauma of colonialism” (252). In the post- and decolonial understanding, however, traumatic occurrences happen in the quotidian and are the outcomes of forms of “social marginalization and its attendant effects, from micro-aggressions to institutional discrimination to social and historical erasure” (Levy-Hussen 44-45). The event-based model

of trauma is disputed because settler colonialism escapes being categorized as catastrophic. Rather, it is sustained and systemic, and manifests in ongoing social and structural violence, notably racial and gendered ones.

The pain of those who are classified in the West as “other” is often occluded by trauma theory which, consequently, renders it unrelatable. In Radstone’s view, trauma becomes a tool for constructing political relationships—deciding which pain is acknowledged—instead of a conduit for understanding suffering. In its wake, trauma theory can include groups by making their suffering visible and relatable, or exclude groups by denying them the same recognition. This discloses how empathy itself can be shaped by power. As Driftpile Cree scholar Belcourt articulates: “A decolonial theory that is not accountable to Indigenous politics as a site of colonial rupture erases the referent through which decolonization was mobilized in the first place” (“On ‘Moving Too Fast’” 2), decolonization of trauma theory needs to be articulated from Indigenous concerns for it to be meaningful, otherwise it would be a reiteration of the very structure that created it.

Indigenous resurgence in trauma studies then crystallizes in shifting the perspective from the Eurocentric focus on melancholia to resistance, and from a damage-based to a desire-based model of research that brings out Indigenous ways of knowing, the dismissal of which promoted colonial unknowing and the trauma that ensued. L. B. Simpson is referenced in three of the personal narratives I am analyzing. Being the bellwether of resurgence, she is reported saying:

I don’t necessarily want to “heal” because I am not damaged, diseased, or unhealthy. My responses to the intergenerational trauma of settler colonial violence are correct and strong and vital. . . . I want to have processed hurt and pain to the point where I can speak back to those words and harness the power of fear, hatred, and love into sustained mobilization—to the point where they don’t control me, but they are

experiences I can draw on when it is useful. (L. B. Simpson qtd. in Washuta, *White Magic* 10-11)

Washuta's referencing of Simpson is emblematic of Indigenous women's efforts to challenge the dominant narrative of trauma surrounding Native American communities. Washuta's life story bears the hallmarks of trauma, yet, resists being pulled down to a mere narrative of survival. Hers, much the same way as the other books I analyze, refuses to be reduced to the Western definition of trauma as outlined earlier. At the backdrop of resurgence, Simpson's reflection comes in Washuta's moment of clarity as a powerful act of pushing back against the narrative of damage and taking active agency as opposed to passive victimry. Her perspective on trauma healing foregrounds empowerment over Western conceptualizations of "damage" and "healing." This position is ensconced in the movement for resurgence in that it reveals responses to intergenerational trauma as a symbol of resilience. By seeking to process pain, Washuta's invocation of L.B Simpson emboldens her to transmute her pain into a source of power and survivance, thus enabling her to engage with and challenge the legacies of settler colonial violence.

On a related note, Tuck tears into damage-centered research because of how it is framed and carried out. Damage-based research is a strategy fuelled by the "fantasies" of Western scholarship which depict Native American peoples as "broken and depleted" ("Suspending" 409). Her postulate is to reimagine research in a meaningful way to "Native . . . and other disenfranchised communities" ("Suspending" 409) and subvert the invisibilization of Indigenous peoples despite being "over researched" ("Suspending" 411). Desire-based research is presented as a countermeasure whereby the focus is reoriented not only "to recognize the need to document the effects of oppression on our communities" but also to look at the consequences of the damage (Tuck, "Suspending" 409).

2.3. Put a Finger on the Soul Wound²¹: Trans/Historical Trauma, Unresolved Grief, and Ethnostress

This part outlines Native American understandings of suffering and possible ways of healing.²² In what follows, I advance a culturally informed approach to trauma that subverts the conformist view that characterizes Western literature. The inadequacy of Western representation of the Indigenous traumatic past reverberates in Gone and Kirmayer's declaration that "[c]haracterizing collective suffering in biomedical or psychiatric terms can lend force to claims for social, political and economic reparations. In the context of Indigenous policy and politics, however, medicalization can be far from emancipatory, furthering the reduction of multifactorial social problems to individual pathology and constructing Indigenous peoples as groups of dis-eased patients in need of better medical treatment rather than as oppressed communities that struggle for social and economic justice" (243).

In many ways, similar to the Western-constructed ailment of PTSD, the pathologization of trauma by a Western framework of psychiatry misconstrued the unique Indigenous experience: "Over time, the myriad effects of historical trauma, also known as a 'complex or cultural post-traumatic stress disorder,' have become deeply embedded in the worldview of Indigenous peoples, sometimes manifesting as a strong sense of separation and learned helplessness" (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 55). Although in various ways similar to the symptoms of Historic Trauma Transmission (HTT), post-traumatic stress disorder is limited to a singular event with a "beginning and an end," while HTT includes all of the historical traumas suffered by a people (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 55). Its impacts can be discerned in five areas: physical, economic, cultural, social, and psychological.

In Harjo's words, the response to HTT is visible in Indigenous peoples' developing "a kind of

²¹ Duran defines the term "soul wound" as a precursor to what came to be defined as historical trauma and intergenerational trauma (n.p.). From an Indigenous perspective, Duran explains, the soul wound is a metaphor for an "injury where blood doesn't flow" (Duran and Firehammer qtd. in Duran n.p.).

²² Memory is immensely informative in literary trauma theory. It will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

sensitivity, honed by experiencing an invading culture and figuring out how to move to save your life” (*Poet Warrior* 11).

As a counternarrative to the event-based model, Linklater acknowledges that “[i]n contemporary times, trauma takes the forms of sexual abuse, rape, psychological assaults, ritual abuse, accidents, environmental disasters, wars, and holocausts. However, Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island have been impacted by a unique form of trauma resulting from European colonization” (32). High suicide rates among teens, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), and extractive capitalism on Indigenous lands—pipelines in Minnesota, among others—are proof that for Indigenous people, European colonization and other forms of trauma mentioned above conflate, which not only further negates the single-event model, but adds other layers to distress. This overlapping results in what is identified as ethnostress, a feeling of “confusion and disruption that people were experiencing inside their world” which is an alternative to understanding the root cause of the conditions that surround Native American individuals and communities in recent times (Hill 7). Ethnostress is “the response to colonial trauma . . . it occurs when the cultural and joyful identity of a people is disrupted,” and is detectable in Indigenous individuals’ “reactions [which] surface as response patterns, feelings of powerlessness” (Antone et al. qtd. in Linklater 32). These reactions comprise high rates of suicide, family breakdown, and substance abuse (Linklater 33).

HTT theory, as discussed by Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, states that the “nucleus of traumatic memory” is “buried deep within the collective psyche” (n.p). It is the return of this “nucleus” that causes pain to resurface in subsequent generations. This argument accounts for the intergenerational character of trauma in Native American contexts. Similarly, due to ongoing oppression and settler colonialism “where there is a risk of traumatic violence, many members of a targeted group will be victimized (some repeatedly), while other members will escape physical harm. In such circumstances, the category of trauma ‘survivor’

is problematic, since every traumatized member of an oppressed community is aware of the potential for repeated victimization” (Tal, *Worlds* n.p.).

Against the Western therapeutic deadlock, Indigenous and non-Indigenous clinicians advanced trauma healing models centered on and informed by the specific worldview of the Indigenous communities they serve. Nancy Van Styvendale’s work on “trans/historical trauma” provides an indispensable conceptual model for decolonizing the field. Hers is a model that “has the potential to make a crucial intervention in trauma theory, invested as this concept is in an “event” that refuses historical location at the same time as it insists on being multiply lodged (220). Because, as Elliott claims, “[t]erminology is tricky” (5), Van Styvendale is tempted to consider Native/Indigenous experiences of trauma as “cumulative, collective, intergenerational, and intersubjective, the trauma of native peoples when understood as trans/historical, exceeds any attempt to fix its location or define its event” (203). The definition sits contrary to both event-focused and poststructuralist understandings of trauma popularized by Freud’s heirs. According to Van Styvendale, trans/historical trauma is both untethered from the catastrophic exceptional occurrence of first contact with settlers—the accidental model—and is characterized by its ongoing manifestations in the “continuation in everyday, material conditions” (Van Styvendale 220). Not only does trauma manifest in the internalization of oppression that returns to haunt the traumatized individual but equally refers to the ongoing nature of colonialism. Defining this type of trauma as trans/historical helps provide appropriate responses to achieve targeted healing.

The concept of trans/historical trauma offers an important intervention in trauma theory by emphasizing the persistent and multiply situated nature of trauma. It explores the idea that trauma is not merely a repetition of the past but a material phenomenon with its conditions and effects that broaden the scope of trauma studies. Brave Heart’s (Lakota) theory of historical trauma takes a more grounded approach to Indigenous worldviews, articulating trauma from within Native American worldviews. She centers Indigenous collective memory,

spirituality, and relationality, while connecting trauma not only to historical events but also to intergenerational healing practices rooted in Indigenous cultural traditions. Her theory builds on the trans/historical perspective by offering a more culturally resonant framework for understanding and addressing the unique traumas faced by Native communities.

Brave Heart conducted clinical studies on the trauma of the Lakota which resulted in her conceptualization of the term trans/historical trauma. With De Bruyn, she defines it as the collective emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations, resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide (64). Brave Heart also formulated the concept of “Historical Unresolved Grief,” which she developed from her attempt to locate the origin of trauma in her tribe in the hope of coming to terms with its effects. According to her, this grief was attended by the loss of land and its ecology, a loss which is an offshoot of the historical trauma of genocide, grief that has not been expressed, acknowledged, and resolved. Like trauma, it can span across generations.

Establishing the physical and cultural genocide of Native American peoples in the USA as the originary traumatic event would, therefore, be incongruous as expressed here: “Let go the pain of your ancestors to make way for those who are heading in our direction. . . . Call yourself back. You might find yourself caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse . . . then, you must do this: help the next person find their way through the dark” (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 94). Harjo maps out the sources of her pain, relating them to the consequences of settler colonialism and their attendant feelings of “shame,” “judgment,” and “human abuse,” shrouded as inherent to Native American populations. Allegedly, the displayed symptoms are precipitated by the narrative of “damage” as innate to their physical constitution.

Elliott articulates the same idea, blaming the present distress perceived among tribal members on the legacies of the residential and boarding school system:

Many could not communicate with their parents when they went home, if they went home at all. Many were abused. Many were malnourished. Many got sick. Many died. These stories filter through *our* families, told in action more than words—each former student now raising their kids the way their boarding school teachers had raised them. A legacy of shame and violence, trauma and pain, passed on from generation to generation like so many secrets. (72)

The specific choice of using quantifiers instead of personal pronouns in this passage to refer to the residential school system denotes a certain distance and detachment on the part of the author. While her family has been directly affected by this traumatic experience, Elliott's tone remains impersonal, which is further implied through the short statements. She, however, shifts from facts to a more subjective register through the use of "our" to pragmatize the experience as a drive for action. This passage sounds somewhat dispirited due to the intergenerational transmission of trauma, yet, it serves as a prelude to survivance as Elliott proceeds with a brief passage to talk about dark matter. The parallels between dark matter and "dark" in terms of race are unmistakable, as the opening of the essay explicitly creates this connection. In this particular section of her life story, Elliott points to the fact that daily reminders of racial discrimination exacerbate individual responses to trauma, thus, reinforcing ongoing vulnerability and eroding hopes for healing. When she exclaims that dark matter cannot be stopped, however, it is a declaration of survivance despite Western efforts to use race as grounds for reducing Native American people to a "survivable name" (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 85).

Reading the life stories of Native American women, one cannot fail to notice the staggering aura of trauma and distress, to varying degrees, as a result of colonization. It is critical to acknowledge that colonization, by proscribing ceremonies, abraded Indigenous practices of resolving grief. This is manifested in the United States' 1875 prohibition of Indigenous religious practices, noted by Brave Heart: "Traditionally, the Lakota maintained

cultural institutions which provided modes of coping and ceremonies to manage grief reactions” (2-3).²³ In turn, generations of Indigenous peoples were denied the right to participate in culturally embedded practices of relieving grief, which resulted in the affliction becoming unresolved and multigenerational. On accounts that “Native patients have suffered a profound wounding of the soul that ‘Western’ therapy exacerbates” (Gone, “Psychotherapy” 199), Duran advances a “soul wound psychotherapy” as an alternative method to the Western model (n.p.). Healing is both the desired result of therapy, especially as it bears upon Native American storytelling and its function in the community. Healing is considered a step towards the pathway of decolonization (L.T. Smith n.p.). In this sense, healing is not so much determined by biology, but it is one’s capacity to build harmonious relations with the surrounding world through language and the system of values it carries. It is, thus, a way of achieving wholeness disrupted by the shattering effects of traumatic experiences. Though “verbal working through it” (Alexander 33) and “narrative re-enactment” (Tal, *Worlds* n.p.) are presented as therapeutic means, Tal contends that narrativizing traumatic experiences is not consistent with all contexts and histories.

When addressing the rather serious problem of depression, Elliott’s discourse jumps from the factual to the historical re-enactment of her trauma in a fragmentary narration:

Initially, depression was known as “melancholia,” a word that first brought to my mind a field of blue cornflower and golden hay. Its trochaic metre gave it an inherent poeticism, an ingrained elegance. It was delicate, feminine. Hamlet’s doomed lover, Ophelia, definitely did not suffer from depression. When she floated down that river, decked in garlands, stones in her pockets, she was in the throes of melancholia. The term first appeared in Mesopotamian texts in the second century BCE. At the time, they considered melancholia a form of demonic possession. They weren’t alone:

²³ Brave Heart’s work was community-based and centered on the Lakota tribe. Although their experience cannot be universal to all Indigenous peoples due to the specific histories of each community, there are commonalities among them. Her model can be employed as a springboard for mobilization and for sparking decolonizing efforts.

ancient Babylonian, Chinese and Egyptian civilizations all attributed mental illness to demons overpowering the spiritually weak. Exorcism—which often entailed beatings, restraint and starvation—was the only known “cure.” Even during the Renaissance, when thinking about depression began to reflect the more progressive views of the early Greek physician Hippocrates, a heavily Christian Europe had another way to describe those with mental illness: witches. (5-6)

Historicizing the mental illness of depression/melancholia, Elliott evokes exclusively Western literature, from Shakespeare to the Greek philosophers, going through Christianity. The unmistakably ironic tone, however, serves as a poignant reminder of the dark history of Western culture regarding the perception of incongruity. In my understanding, Elliott’s intention behind this articulation of mental illness is a latent mocking of the Western self-anointed “moral” superiority in their desire to impose a monolithic framework of trauma. The same rhetoric in defining melancholia was later used against Native Americans and their cultures, while other non-Indigenous cultures accepted ideas of witchcraft, demons, and exorcism, terms that reflect how the semantics of mental illness were shrouded in punitive measures and elimination instead of care. The example of Ophelia contrasted with the lyricism around her melancholia wrapped in terms like “field of blue cornflower,” “trochaic metre,” “decked in garlands” reveals how suffering, especially when feminized, is generally stripped of gravity and dampened in the semantics of tragedy.

Among the features of Historical Trauma Response identified by Brave Heart are loyalty to ancestral suffering and the deceased internalization of ancestral suffering,²⁴ viscerally expressed in the following excerpt by Elliott:

²⁴ Historical Trauma Transmission is different from Historical Trauma Response. I use the first as a counterpoint to the single-event model advanced by Caruth. In their discussion of trauma in Native American contexts, Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski focus on the intergenerational aspect of trauma transmission as defined on pages 52 and 53. In their view, colonial violence is structurally and socially passed down over time through familial and communal lines. In contrast, Historical Trauma Response (HTR) embodies the psychological and emotional effects of that inherited trauma, visible in symptoms like grief, depression, and substance abuse. While both types of trauma address the legacies of colonialism, Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski center the mechanisms of transmission, whereas Brave Heart highlights the embodied and emotional consequences of that historical wounding as established on page 55.

I now understand why that therapist in that church reminded me of residential schools. When I think of that man sitting across from me, chastising me for not saying the right words, the words that made it easy for him to understand me and cure me, I think of how my great-grandparents felt when priests and nuns did the same to them. The difference is that the therapist was trying to cure me of being depressed; those priests and nuns were trying to cure my ancestors of being Indian. In some ways, they succeeded. In many, they did not. (14)

Elliott mounts a criticism of the Western paradigm in trauma theory. The author's memory of the encounter with the therapist signals a modern form of colonial violence. The author collapses past and present, suggesting that colonial ideologies are sustained in therapeutic spaces. In both cases, the authority figure attempts to treat not only the pathological condition but what is perceived as indigeneity. As it is evident in Elliott's memory, being depressed is equated with being Indigenous, implying a presumed flaw that must be corrected by colonial standards. This thought summons what Justice describes as the Western refusal to recognize Indigenous suffering as the consequence of sustained structural violence and attributing it to the inherent deficiency of Indigenous peoples. As he proclaims:

[r]ather than see lower life expectancy, employment, and education rates, and higher rates of homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide as being rooted in generations of sustained and intentional colonial assaults on all aspects of our lives and identities, we're blamed for our supposed lack of basic human decency. Depressed? In despair? Can't be due to centuries of sustained oppressive social structures and racism—must be our supposed lack of mental fitness . . . in this poisonous story, every stumble is seen as evidence of innate deficiency. (Justice, *Why Indigenous* 3)

Elliott's use of specific linguistic markers, such as the demonstratives "those" and "that," intensifies her critique and further aligns hers with Justice's indictment of colonial unknowing. These words also express a form of temporal and ideological distancing, casting

“nuns” and the “therapist” as agents of oppression rather than healers or helpers. In stirring up this encounter, the speaker converts personal narrative into transgenerational testimony by enacting a kind of shared healing and resisting the erasure intrinsic to colonial unknowing.

2.4. Changing the Metaphors, Suspending Damage

The “new narrative of healing,” as invoked by Duran in the epigraph, relies, in my view, on the semantic meaning of the term healing (n.p.). The dialogue with postcolonial theory gave way to new insights which revealed some inconsistencies in trauma studies and breathed improvements along the way. Visser, for example, asserts that postcolonial literary texts offer new visions “in ways that reverse trauma theory’s assumptions,” notably and within the scope of my argument, in the former’s depiction of the “victims’ resilience, resistance, and eventual triumph over trauma, or a community’s increased cohesion and enhanced sense of identity after a traumatic event” (qtd. in Andermahr 130). Indeed, postcolonial theory subverts the “triumph of victimhood” (Olick et al. qtd. in Andermahr 111) long supported by the Freudian imprint of melancholia as a fragile state of post traumatic effect where resilience and recuperation are eclipsed.

Duran discusses the use of shifting metaphors to develop more culturally specific and responsive therapeutic interventions. Of the terms he suggests when describing (trans)historical trauma is “wound to the soul,” a metaphor which finds its roots in Indigenous epistemologies (n.p.). Duran’s contribution to the field is reflected in many ways in Tuck’s embargo on damage-based research, which defines whitestream academy.²⁵ Changing the metaphors begins with shifting the perspective. Tuck puts forward desire-based research, of which survivance is one aspect, contra the deep-seated damage-based one. This contention is pursuant to Duran’s framework for healing as he declares: “This approach allows the patient to de-pathologize and thus liberate herself [sic] while retaining responsibility for her behavior.

²⁵ Marie Battiste uses the term “whitestream academy” to criticize the Eurocentric bias of educational systems that endangers Indigenous knowledges and cultures (qtd. in Tuck, “Suspending Damage” 423).

Patients are greatly relieved to find out that they are not defective human beings. Instead, they are reacting to the context of history that systematically has inflicted these soul wounds” (n.p.).

Western trauma paradigms stress healing from an illness, whereas, in Native American views, wellness attained through balance is privileged. Wellness, in this case, does not necessarily result from regaining one’s composure following a shattering of the self in the view of traditional psychological trauma. The Indigenous-inspired practice of healing is evident in women’s reclaiming of agency through cultural revitalization, particularly in their roles within their communities. Fulminating about their traumatic past is an act of resistance to the silencing of their voices and the recovery of a self-defining subject position. In line with the Vizenorian interpretation of survivance and operating from the resurgence springboard, this approach aligns with Duran’s endeavor to change metaphors in trauma discussions. The discussion of trauma, as approached by Western academia, employs metaphors that emphasize damage and atrophy.²⁶ This language reduces Native peoples and their histories to mere subjects of victimry, obfuscating their resilience, agency, and active presence.

Jensen emphasizes the significance of changing metaphors in addressing the silences imposed on Native American people. She states:

Don’t mistake me—I am not advocating more whispering here. We have all been quiet too long and at such a cost. I am asking for a shift in language that allows us to consider the intersections between these types of violence [such as racial and sexual] we hold separate—to consider them not so much as intersections, as places of sharp corners, but, rather, as places that exist most often in the actual, in the physical, in the soft bodies of our children, of ourselves. (37)

²⁶ When he delineates “the development of theoretical and clinical applications” of the “soul wound,” Duran gives breath to the idea of shifting the metaphor of historical trauma from a pathology to a “live entity,” necessary, in his view, in treating Indigenous people. He calls it a shift from psychologizing to spiritualizing to assist traumatized individuals create a connection with their life-world and align with traditional healing (n.p.).

While “whispering” and “quiet” are not quite synonymous, in Jensen’s words, they are akin.

Further, throughout her biostory, Jensen castigates the English language for its ambivalence through polysemy by inserting numerous dictionary entries of specific terms that are resonant with the history of violence in the USA:

According to *Webster’s*, the small birds’ behavior is called mobbing, with *Webster’s* fifth definition for mob as “a flock, drove, or herd of animals,” their first definition of the verb being “to crowd about and attack or annoy.” The noun form of the word enters the lexicon in 1688, the verb form in 1696. Our town won’t become a town till 1878, almost two hundred years later. (17)

Assumably, the benign behavior of birds is permeated with linguistic and historical violence. Jensen’s ironic outlook lies in the juxtaposition of the winsome image of a flock of small birds with the term “mob,” a word which denotes aggressive behavior in this context. Referring to *Webster’s*, she points out the duality of the term, which when magnified, stands for a larger issue: how violence is normalized and embedded in the English language itself. English here functions as a disguise of violence and domination in the neutral lexicon. Subtly, the author problematizes the settler’s use of language to sanitize and enact violence. The historical employment of the word “mob” (1688 as a noun, 1696 as a verb) situates it in an exact colonial historical context. The layering of time insinuates that linguistic violence too shaped the very foundations of the USA. Through allegorizing violence, the passage criticizes how English was never a neutral medium. It is historically ringing out with colonial violence.²⁷ This recalls the infamous treaty-making practices swamped in knavery through which settlers tricked heads of tribes and unaffiliated individuals into signing documents that were contributory to losing their land. Jensen maintains that this same violence still resonates in the racializing language of today.

²⁷ The nexus between linguistic and colonial violence is not inadvertent. Errington claims that the imposition of colonial languages is in itself hegemonic as it was a maneuver to dismiss the indigenous ones as primitive. The English language, for example, was instrumentalized to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands, notably through its manipulation in treaties (26).

In the third essay of her life story, “On Seeing and Being Seen,” Elliott raises a critical question about “changing the metaphors,” especially when it comes to the idea of decolonization of research through her indictment of white authors’ appropriation of Native American suffering. Starting her argument from a personal experience of unjustly losing in a writing contest to a white male author who happens to misrepresent her community, she adduces the tremendous influence of fellow Indigenous woman writer L. B. Simpson on her journey into writing. While the principle of empathy is presented as a requisite for being able to write about a minority, Elliott provides the reader with extensive evidence of the duplicitous discourse underlying white empathy. Her diatribe resonates with that of Tuck and Yang’s notion of “settler moves to innocence” and the desire to absolve of the colonial guilt (9):²⁸

You need to write with love. *That* is what I felt when I read Simpson’s stories. That’s what I feel when I read the work of Waubgeshig Rice, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Tracey Lindberg, Eden Robinson, Katherena Vermette, Elissa Washuta, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Joshua Whitehead, Lindsay Nixon, Terese Marie Mailhot, and Cherie Dimaline. . . . If you can’t write about us with a love for who we are as a people, what we’ve survived, what we’ve accomplished despite all attempts to keep us from doing so . . . then why are you writing about us at all? (Elliott 36)

Invoking a string of luminaries who influenced her venture into writing, Elliott stresses the necessity for ensuring the transmission of this principle through writing from and about her community. That is what the title of her essay, “On Seeing and Being Seen,” boils down to: the recognition which has to emanate from a place where Native American peoples can “be seen” beyond the racializing lens of colonialism and not motivated by false settler guilt. Adopting the Indigenous-centered and inspired framework of “desire-based” by shifting the

²⁸ Tuck and Yang assert: “Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (10).

metaphor from guilt to love aligns with the decolonization of research. This does not confute the traumas inflicted by settler colonial violence and systemic oppression but reorients the perspective towards survivance that unsettles the bias against Native American peoples as damaged. They emerge as agents whose active presence transcends the legacies of colonial violence—physical or cultural. Elliott highlights the power of love as an alternative to empathy, likening it to survivance as she closes the passage on a note of love, declaring: “That’s what I hope Indigenous people feel when they read my work. Love” (Elliott 36).

In practical terms, such a framework privileges transformation over loss and affirms the community’s continuance and survivance.²⁹ Tuck’s concept will prove helpful in Chapter 3, where I address biostory as a potential domain of autobiographical expression that fosters survivance within the overarching desire-based research. It incites scholars and activists to engage with Native peoples’ stories drawn from ancestral examples of endurance and continuity in ways that validate their agency. My approach prioritizes cultural resurgence and communal well-being rather than relying on Western individual traumatological interpretations.

Consider, for instance, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* which acts as the title of Elliott’s biostory. This verbiage, however, also embodies the decolonizing of research endorsed by Native American and Indigenous scholars. It is coherent with rejecting Western trauma paradigms and revitalizing Indigenous ones in the hope of coming to terms with its implications on Indigenous peoples. As a matter of fact, *Wake’nikonhra’kwenhtará:’on*—“a mind spread out on the ground”—captures the real meaning of depression experienced by the afflicted individual. According to Elliott, her people have always practiced empathy towards mental afflictions, and this is reflected in their meticulous use of language. Instead of

²⁹ For the sake of my argument, I solely retrieve survivance as the embodiment of the desire-based approach in Tuck’s vision.

punctuating the negative impact of depression, the Mohawk used gentle metaphors which epitomize desire and not damage.

Witnessing is momentous in trauma literature, where survivors spar with the presence of witnesses to warrant their pain. The burden of proof imparts the societal expectation that trauma must be visibly evident, conforming to preconceived ideas of what trauma looks like. Witnessing becomes an act of resistance, reinforced by Elliott's rhetorical questions which problematize Western trauma:

I often wonder about this burden of proof. Is my pain valid only when someone bears witness to it? Must I be hypervigilant about my entire person, always? Make sure that my face is composed in the perfect silhouette of trauma—any hint of a smile hastily swept away—whenever I expect someone to believe me? Must I forsake all joy, all warmth, to take up my role as “perfect victim”? As if ever experiencing happiness again were somehow evidence that I never experienced agony, anguish? (138)

The reference to “composed in the perfect silhouette of trauma” alludes to the external markers of suffering that are often required for its validation, a recurring theme in trauma studies.³⁰

The title of Elliott's first-person narrative is also evocative in its desire to change metaphors. Extracted from the essay “On forbidden rooms and intentional forgetting,” the passage above resonates deeply with key concepts from literary trauma theory, particularly when examined through an Indigenous perspective. The essay starts, as Indigenous storytelling traditions would have it, with a story, that of Bluebeard from Charles Perrault's fables. Elliott's choice to invoke a story exemplary of the Western canon can be read as her examination of the economy of witnessing in Western literary trauma which harps on sensationalism. Despite Bluebeard's uxoricide as a “serial killer,” the story lays emphasis on the wife's curiosity judged as sinful. The allegory is contrasted with the fact that Western

³⁰ A point raised on page 50.

trauma theory uses distractions by foregrounding the sensational aspect of the traumatic past rather than focusing on the victim.

In Indigenous conceptualizations, trauma takes on collective and intergenerational dimensions. The abovementioned extract from Elliott's narrative calls into question the curtailing of Indigenous experiences to trauma narratives alone, echoing the critique that Indigenous peoples are often confined to the role of perpetual victims. The rhetorical question "[m]ust I be" goads the stereotype of the "perfect victim." In my understanding, survivance presents itself as a natural outcome in this situation, capturing the ways Indigenous people unsettle the constrictive narrative of victimry by asserting their agency and resilience in the face of historical trauma. The expectation that Elliott be "hypervigilant" by exhibiting a facade of trauma lays bare how Indigenous bodies are surveilled under the colonial gaze. The hypervisibility of pain which expects Indigenous individuals to constantly perform suffering underscores how they are pressured into fitting the mold of victimhood for their trauma to be validated by colonial society, reducing their stories to pain and, eventually, denying them their humanity. In her ultimate outcry, "[m]ust I forsake all joy?" Elliott demurs about the belief that happiness and resilience invalidate trauma. So, she resists being reduced to grief as she implies that healing concerns embracing joy as much as confronting pain. She emphasizes the necessity of an approach to one's trauma that balances its acknowledgment with the agency to experience joy and healing.

The previous articulation is akin to "be[ing] in good relation and alive" (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 182) as one way of changing the metaphors in trauma theory, a sentiment echoed by Washuta when she claims in *White Magic*: "I know how to show the spirits I'm here through the light of my fire because we have always used fire to smoke fish, conduct ceremony, burn cedar boughs, turn prairie bush to ash so the camas or huckleberries can grow stronger" (11). Here, the author allegorizes mundane activities, like smoking fish and burning cedar, for Indigenous resurgence, refusing thus to be reduced to a state of victimry. As a symbol of life

and transformation, fire is closely tied to the practices that sustain both the land and its people. Fire is a tool for cultural continuity which symbolizes agency and a proactive relationship with the world. With her insistence on “keeping the fire alive,” Washuta’s declaration is modeled after that of L. B. Simpson—mentioned earlier in this section—as she curbs being defined solely by historical trauma. The metaphor reclaims the narrative, showing that Indigenous people are active participants in their well-being and resurgence, nurturing their communities and lands to grow stronger, much like the camas or huckleberries that flourish after a fire. This defies the colonial narrative of perpetual damage and centers on healing and resurgence.

The decolonization of trauma theory aims to expand the scope of the field by incorporating diverse voices and their historical contexts into the conversation. Despite the benevolence of this move, Western scholars still “invest considerable energy in pointing out the inappropriateness and the injustice of applying Western frameworks to a colonial or postcolonial situation, but they are less concerned with offering a concrete alternative” (Craps qtd. in Andermahr 192), confirming, thus, that these attempts remain at the level of potential rather than standard practice.³¹

Conclusion

The Western literary trauma paradigm falls short of fully capturing the Native American experience. Hence, the focus of this chapter was on the call for a more inclusive approach to literary criticism that respects and incorporates Native perspectives and paradigms in understanding trauma and representation. I consider a more nuanced understanding of the trauma as I discuss how Native American reexaminations of the past are grounded in a distinct epistemology rather than simply a different perspective within the Western paradigm.

³¹ The initiative of decolonizing trauma theory eventuated from the publication of the special issue of *Studies in the Novel* in 2008 edited by Gert Buelens and Stef Craps. In a response to the issue, Rothberg foresaw scholars exposing the limitations of trauma theory, contributing, thus, to the decolonization of trauma theory through its engagement with postcolonial literature (“Decolonizing Trauma” 22-26).

This chapter introduced some general interpretations of trauma. I delineated the influence of postcolonial trauma on Indigenous experiences, highlighting how existing models cannot fully contain the specificities of settler colonialism on Turtle Island. Despite its intentions of widening its scope by including more voices, contemporary trauma theory remains insufficient in addressing the depth and complexity of othered subjects, notably Indigenous communities. To respond to this gap, I looked into the efforts of Indigenous scholars in resurgence and tried to transfer their insights into literary trauma theory, suggesting alternative metaphors to understand trauma beyond Eurocentric paradigms. The final sections explored a re-evaluation of concepts, such as trans/historical trauma, unresolved grief, and ethnostress. Aligning with Indigenous clinicians and rhetors, I argued that, in tandem with renaming the ailment, a shift in perspective is required in treating trauma. Tuck's desire-based research model emerges as one which spiritualizes trauma rather than pathologizing it, allowing for a more culturally grounded interpretation.

Because healing is “political, particularly when [ancestral] healing practices have been co-opted by mental health fields, then deemed groundless and invalid” (Mullan n.p.), I suggest a Native-centered approach to trauma theory that focuses on memory acts. I advance a process that is different from the Freudian sense of “acting out” trauma or “working through” it the way LaCapra intends it, but “playing it out” through survivance. The ensuing chapters will use the theoretical input presented so far as a springboard for the restorative project, necessary for the decolonization of research and healing from trauma.

Chapter 3: Balancing Harm with Memory

Reliance on memory becomes very important in everyday life . . . [T]hey (Indigenous women) believe that the roots of oppression are to be found in the loss of tradition and memory because that loss is always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of the self. In short, Indians think it is important to remember. . . . I think this is the reason traditionals say we must remember our origins, our cultures, our histories, our mothers, our grandmothers, for . . . that memory . . . implies continuance rather than nostalgia.

—P. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the concepts of trauma and memory—individual and collective—and how they influence the retrieval of the past from a renewed perspective. In other words, re-enacting the past by women in their autobiographical texts does not mean lingering in the creases of melancholia, as popularized by the psychoanalytic model, but rather the restoration of experiences of trauma into examples of survivance. The inference drawn from the discussion in Chapter 2 highlights how the traumatic past has been conceived in the West. Whether transgenerational, historical, collective, and unlocatable in one single event, trauma, however, requires an Indigenized memory act to resolve it. Leveraging Tuck’s influential diatribe against the Western impetus to “damage-centered research,” where she suggests desire as a counternarrative to the image always associated with indigenous peoples, I focus on Native American-inspired models: blood memory and matrilineal memory. The deployment of these models drives transformation and allows for a rewriting of the past as a

counter-commemorative political act to “play out” trauma instead of “working through” or “acting [it] out.”³²

The structure of this chapter is threefold. The first part provides interpretations of the literature on the concept of memory, its nature and functions. The second part connects memory to the historical experience of Native Americans and discusses approaches to trauma healing and models for recovery compatible with Native American epistemologies, with a focus on memory. I retrieve practices from Indigenous trauma clinicians and examine how they are integrated into women’s self-referential texts. The last part foregrounds the intersections of memory and literature, notably in the concept of autobiographical memory, and how, in its collective capacity, it gives way to tribal memory. Given the previous contention, I propose “tribalographic memory” as an alternative option for the autobiographical memory, one which is both individual and collective and, more importantly, transgenerational. Operating under this approach, I illuminate moments in the life stories where women rely on their understanding of memory in the alternative ways they deploy to invoke memories.

³² I find György Tóth’s concept of counter-commemoration particularly useful in this context. Counter-commemoration, he posits, takes place “when a group commemorates a historical event by claiming the mantle of one of the social actors who were involved in the ‘original’ event; they usually also identify another current group as their ‘original’ opponent; and they confrontationally attempt to carry out a political project related to the original historical event. With this, the particular group inscribes their present agendas on the past through their commemorative performance. Counter-commemorations stand out from other commemorative events in the extent and forcefulness of the group which asserts its vision of the past in the present (n.p.). For the sake of my argument, the enactment of counter-commemoration to “play out” the traumatic past runs counter to the idea of rewriting the past. Rather, I hypothesize it as women authors’ desire to question how the past has been narrated and institutionalized in the present. Its implementation in the life stories exposes the power relations that shaped dominant commemorative frameworks, made the Native American experiences invisible, and favored rationality over felt knowledge. In no way do counter-commemorative acts change the past, they are rather a critical intervention in its interpretation. Ascertainable in the biostories in a metaphorical capacity, women authors engage in counter-commemoration by reclaiming the “mantle of . . . the social actor,” in this case ethnographers, and by going after the colonial system that produced them rather than a specific “historical event”. As such, they reassume their positions within their communities and return to culture. Their counter-commemorative act is steeped in sovenance, or “remembrance . . . in native stories” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15), which involves a reinstatement of storytelling as a methodology etched in Indigenous knowledge production and transmission. It justifies a reconnection with the severed ties to the land, thereby defying narratives of damage and “colonial unknowing” (Vimalassery et al. 1).

Considering that this chapter revolves around memory as a conduit for processing the traumatic past, it is only natural to draw on the conflation of trauma and memory studies with literature, specifically memoir, as analyzed by Leigh Gilmore, Thomas Couser, and S. Smith and Watson. On the other hand, the potential of autobiographical writing as an outgrowth of autobiographical practice for healing is informed by life writing theory, with a focus on issues of representation and representativeness. I also draw on Indigenous feminist approaches to literature, as they are referenced for the influence they have had on bringing new light to the discussion of literary trauma. Notably, questions related to voice, narrative, and literary form will be informative in understanding how women's felt experiences allow them to voice their own and others' traumatic stories not because of their "representative life" but because of their advancement of relationality and responsibility through an expansive view of the self, thus speaking for oneself and others (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 197).

3.1. Individual, Collective, and Cultural Memory

Individual traumatic memory is the result of the trauma meted out on the collective. Halbwachs identifies a significant distinction between "individual memory" and "collective memory," the second referring to remembering the collective past instead of remembering together (22). Though oppositional in meaning, these models are not completely incongruous. A person submitting to the act of memory is part of a larger group, making memory situated within the collective realm. In this vein, Staub claims that "[s]hared remembering" enables "building a cohesive internal community, and rituals, which bring the suffering to light and in which grief and empathy with oneself and others in the group can be felt and expressed" (qtd. in Wesley-Esquimaux 56). "Shared remembering" links together individual and collective memory as it validates the personal within the larger social context. It also stands for the collective process through which parts of a group come into communion to recall past experiences, particularly traumatic ones. Ritual and shared narrative consolidates a sense of

cohesion within a group or community. This process facilitates the creation of ritual spaces which afford collective grief for emotional healing.

In the Native American context, the concept of “memory in the blood” has bearings on Halbwachs’s theorizing on memory and entrenches it in an active engagement in survivance. Specifically, individual memories are influenced by the larger collective memory, thus, they would not exist without the framework and influence of the collective. Personal and collective memories would be lost if society did not play a role in keeping these memories alive, as each collective act of remembering increases the likelihood that individuals will remember and share their personal stories (Gone and Kirmayer 243). Recasting the previous conjecture, Rothberg argues that individual memory is informed by collective and cultural frameworks because “the group sets the parameters, materials, and structures for an individual’s memory,” and it is by existing within a given society that one’s memories are shaped and formed (*Multidirectional Memory* 308). The community provides the lexicon and the narratives through which individuals interpret and remember the past. What is remembered, how it is expressed, and what meaning is given to it is thus prompted and guided by collective and cultural memory, consolidating the idea that personal memory is deeply steeped in shared contexts. Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as a vehicle by which collected cultural knowledge is passed from one generation to the next—knowledge that determines a community’s awareness of its self-image (“Cultural” 26). Cultural memory is shaped by fixed points—momentous events in the past—which are kept in awareness through rituals, memorials, or even regular discussion.

In trauma theory, cultural memory refers to the collective memory of past events that communities or groups pass down through generations. It is premised on “memories of injustice [by] . . . an avalanche of voices crying out,” but remains “a collective story where every person has a place” (Rintoul 8). These memories are often shaped and preserved through storytelling, art, and ceremonies, which reflect and sustain the shared values, traumas,

and identity of the group. Cultural memory is communal, blending personal recollections with shared narratives that help a community interpret its history and experiences, especially traumatic ones.

On the surface level, individual memory involves personal recollections. The term “collective,”³³ however, does not necessarily imply that remembering the past is carried out by groups. Rather, memory itself is collective and shared. As such, individual and collective memory are interconnected despite being framed in oppositional terms since “[w]hile the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember” (Halbwachs 22). Simply put, since it is individuals of certain social groups who perform the act of remembering any individual memory is fundamentally collective.

Considering that the act of remembering takes place in society and not “in a social vacuum” (Misztal 12), collective memory is intersubjective in nature. It concerns a given event, image, or conversation initially acquired in society within particular past “social frameworks” and later reproduced within other socio-cultural contexts “shaped by the concerns of the present” (Halbwachs 38, 25). Thus, memory is construed as a reconstruction of past events in current societal paradigms in their role in shaping the act of remembering. In the case of traumatic reminiscences, memory is a tentative representation of the past. Memory is elicited by mundane everyday activities anchored in collectively verified events (Khedir 16). Following Halbwachs, the retrieval of the past is rooted in the “beliefs and spiritual needs of the present” (7), thus revealing that the members of a group remember selectively as they draw upon collective memories or shared experiences. Viewed this way, memories assessed as irrelevant to the present can be intentionally or unintentionally forgotten. The selective disposition of memory does not revoke its reliability but reflects its dynamicity.³⁴ Memory

³³ Group members convene to remember in the context of rituals and commemorations.

³⁴ Memory, in this case, is compared to history for its dynamic nature. In his assessment of the distinction between memory and history, Nora maintains that the former represents a “perpetually actual phenomenon” that connects both the present and the past, while the latter is merely a “representation of the past,” unalterable by

becomes an active practice of recovering and reconstructing past experiences in light of present contexts.

Misztal cautions against the possibility of mainstream cultural memories becoming oppressive since “[they] contro[l] and impos[e] the content of social memory” (56). The narrative of Native American damage and inherent deficiency is one perfect example. In turn, memory can be liberating because it reinforces identity and translates into “mnemonic resistance” (Ryan 155) through the creation of “counter-memories” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 9). When individuals and groups express, interpret, or repeat a script about the past, they reinforce the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their minds. Vizenor redefines the term remembrance to discern it from remembering meaning an active remembering of the past as resilience: “Native sovenance is that sense of presence in remembrance, that trace of creation and natural reason in native stories” (*Fugitive Poses* 15). In this sense, the focus is on active presence through the re-inscription by Native American writers of their place within the greater national and tribal narratives and the retrieval of elements of their tribal culture in order to assert their ongoing presence and relevance in the contemporary era. As it pertains to memory studies, the idea that memory can function as “mnemonic resistance” reifies a process of production of “counter-memories.” In this sense, disenfranchised communities “tend to look toward memory for authentic stories about their past” in lieu of official history (Misztal 14). Cultural resurgence is, thus, achieved through memory, becoming one of the many strategies to rescind cultural erasure and historical distortion. By positioning themselves within the narrative of the past, “mnemonic communities” can reconstruct their present identity in opposition to the narrative of dominant power structures, but as lived and experienced by themselves and inspired by their ancestors (S. Hall 225).

the changing socio-cultural contexts (286). History differs from memory in its embodiment of a passive process of retelling the past.

3.2. Re-Viewing the LaCaprian Model

A prominent evaluation of the Freudian Caruthian trauma theory is articulated by Dominick LaCapra, who takes issue with the conception that melancholia and weakness are irreversible components of the post-traumatic phase (*Writing History* xi–xiii).³⁵ LaCapra divagates from this model, yet retrieves Freudian interpretations of healing, as he proposes “acting out” and “working through” as two processes of resolving traumatic experiences. More than an unequivocal dichotomy, there is a continuum between the two concepts. In “acting out,” the traumatic past is pathologically relived in the present, which prevents the individual from moving beyond repetition. In contrast, “working through” is a process which allows traumatized individuals or communities to recover, re-enact, and release repressed memories while enabling readers to “read the[ir] wounds’ through literature” (Hartman 1). Freud’s concept of “working through” the fictional narration of traumatic events facilitates a transformation from “traumatic memory” to “narrative memory” (A. Whitehead 140-41). As such, this process is the ability to process trauma and move beyond it. Acknowledging and reflecting on the traumatic event gives a sense of agency whereby the subject can integrate it narratively, thus creating a distance with it instead of re-experiencing it. The work of grieving is credited as an important stage of healing, and literature’s ability to articulate mourning suggests ways of dealing with loss and injury that promote what Freud refers to as a healthy “mourning” as opposed to a compulsive “melancholia” (Freud, “Mourning” 243). LaCapra reports that mourning, as opposed to melancholia, “brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life that allows one to begin again” (“Revisiting” 45). In Vizenorian terms, a victim is someone who “mourns an unrecuperable loss” (qtd. in Madsen, “On Subjectivity” 5). While mourning in the LaCaprian sense seems to obliquely contradict the Vizenorian understanding of survivance, I read them as concurrent. Mourning is not a passive process of forgetting but one that induces an active engagement in

³⁵ A point observed in previous sections on pages 61 and 63.

the fact of loss. While forgetting, passive or active, is the desired result of therapy in LaCapra's view, counter-memory is akin to unforgetting the past and the disruption of colonial unknowing of Indigenous ways. In the lineage of Freud, trauma is inherently linked to the act of rumination. In what follows, Elliott's life story presents an example of a narrative that conveys a nuanced articulation of LaCapra's dichotomy. Quoting Western trauma scholars,³⁶ she reflects on dealing with depression in the aftermath of a traumatic experience:

[D]epressed individuals might deliberately engage in rumination in an attempt to solve their problems but then become overwhelmed by negative thoughts about their ruminations. . . . Maybe trying to forget your trauma isn't as unhealthy as we thought. . . . I am not encouraging survivors of sexual assault to stay silent. It's very important that survivors disclose what happened to them to people they trust . . . [b]ut the amount of detail that we go into when we decide to disclose our assault should always be up to us (survivors of sexual assault). (Elliott 135-36)

While rumination may seem like an attempt to solve problems, it often leads to "acting out"—emotional paralysis and deepens depression—where trauma is compulsively repeated rather than processed. In turn, suppressing trauma leads to melancholia, in which the loss is internalized and left unresolved. Elliott proposes intentional forgetting not as suppression of the traumatic experience but as selective narration. I read it as a counter-memory in that it allows the individual to reclaim agency over one's story by choosing how and to whom to tell them. This is not about silence but about how depressed individuals can feel empowered to disclose their trauma on and with their own terms.

Trauma can be healed not through unforgetting or reliving the traumatic past, but through remembering which is seen as an affirmation of agency. With the premise that personal and collective memories would be lost if society did not play a role in the process of

³⁶ Jutta Joormann, Paula T. Hertel, Faith Brozovich and Ian H. Gotlib in their study "Remembering the Good, Forgetting the Bad: Intentional Forgetting of Emotional Material in Depression."

keeping them alive, as each collective act of remembering increases the likelihood that individuals will remember and tell their personal stories (A. Assman 222-23), I devise a new framework for fostering remembering and healing, one that is achieved by “playing out” trauma through remembrance in stories. I depart from the LaCaprian conceptualization as I propose “playing out” as a counter-performative memory act, or counter-commemoration, which is premised on sovenance, or “remembrance . . . in native stories” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15). This involves a reinstatement of storytelling as a methodology etched in Indigenous knowledge production and transmission. It justifies a reconnection with the severed ties to the land, thereby defying narratives of damage and “colonial unknowing.”

In contradistinction to LaCapra’s interconnected modes of downplaying traumatization of “acting out” and “working through,” “playing out” functions as a form of counter-memory. I conceive it as the remembrance of pre-contact stories and practices of survivance by reactivating them within new and contemporary contexts. I use “playing out” to describe a counter-performative act of memory, one that draws on stories, dreams, visions, and other Indigenous technologies of memory. This channel for remembering is an ethical responsibility to carry the past forward and re-present it through storytelling, stimulating the processing of trauma in its shadow. Playing out brings together memories of colonial violence and narratives of survivance, producing new ones in the present. In this sense, it resists the colonial regulation of memory and challenges imposed limits on how Indigenous identity, histories, and active presence may be remembered and conveyed.

In the Native American context, highlighting the entangled nature of individual and collective memory, and the necessity of remembering as a pressing matter for cultural resurgence and continuance is heightened in the life stories as Harjo demonstrates:

In this world of forgetfulness, [the circle of Old Ones] told me, you will forget how to nourish the connection between humans, plants, animals, and the elements, a connection needed to make food for your mind, heart, body, and spirit. You were born

of a generation that promised to help remember. Each generation makes a person. You came in together to make change . . . they all agreed that we [Native American peoples] were brought to a place where we will once again remember how to speak with animals, plants, and life forms. We will once again know our humble place as two-legged humans. Humans are not the only ones with a spirit; [we] are reminded. Nor are we more important than anyone else. (*Poet Warrior* 13-14)

Here, Harjo is reminded by the “Circle of Old Ones” of the “loss of memory” symbolized in the connection between humans, nature, and all living beings, a kinship that sustains a “positive sense of the self” (P. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* n.p.). Expressed in the phrase “you were born of a generation that promised to help remember,” the recourse to memory as collective responsibility reveals that in Native American epistemologies, memory is not a personal recollection but a shared, intergenerational and inter/supratribal practice and responsibility, deeply embedded in the shared consciousness and reinforced through the revelation that “each generation makes a person,” suggesting that cultural memory is relationally embedded in kinship and passed down across generations. The phrase quoted above also reflects the belief that individual memory is constructed through ancestral continuity and communal bonds. Memory is a sacred bequest, carried and renewed from generation to generation. Going beyond the romanticized idea of Native American humans cultivating a profound connection with extended agencies, this memory of speaking with animals, plants, and various life forms is symbolic of the renewal of knowledge, which heralds redemptive and healing efforts.

Much the same way “colonial unknowing” othered Native American people and their modes of knowing, Western trauma theory attempted to invisibilize the collective side of memory by belighting the individual experience. Wolfe claims that “[s]ettler colonialism is a structure and not an event” (387) which constitutes another erosion in the validity of Caruth’s single event-based model of trauma. For Native American peoples, trauma is continuously

produced and reproduced through colonial institutions, therefore, the unrepresentability of trauma rather stems from the rupture effected on pre-contact past and the prohibitions against remembrance (Forter, “Colonial Trauma” 77).

Because for Native American women “remembering has politics predominant in the cultural production of knowledge,” it is contributive to the recuperation and the reproduction of knowledge (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 24). Pressing against the Western remembrance or, rather, amnesia of the peculiarity of colonial history, Vizenorian sovenance, thus as the enactment of “presence in remembrance,” finds shape in the act or remembering instead of reliving the traumatic past (*Fugitive Poses* 15). Remembering is a performative act and, therefore, is an affirmation of agency as well as an act of wellness in itself. Memory’s implication in materiality brings out the fact that, despite being inherently sensory, it is encoded in objects and events. Native American women’s testimonies exemplify the underlying connection between life writing and trauma in the decolonization of the discipline through an embroilment with unconventional textual forms, alternative conceptions of subjectivities, and othered histories.

Collective memories nurture individual memories. This peculiarity is not so much attributed to the person’s independence from society as to one’s social position at the uniqueness of the intersection of groups. Collective memory has a political function and can be deployed to support a particular political program; hence, it is historically contingent. In other words, the political uses of collective memory depend on historical contexts. Halbwachs advances autobiographical memory as one that relies on collective memory. In the same line, Mitchell contends that “[m]emory is an intersubjective phenomenon, a practice not only of a recollection of a past, by a subject, but of recollection for another subject” (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 26). This affirmation places memory in the realm of the collective. It also becomes a collective responsibility. As Harjo articulates: “We are all here to serve each other. At some point, we have to understand that we do not need to carry a story

that is unbearable. We can observe the story, which is mental; feel the story, which is physical; let the story go, which is emotional; then forgive the story, which is spiritual, after which we use the materials to build a house of knowledge (*Poet Warrior* 20). This rumination speaks to a communal reckoning with trauma as opposed to its ideation from a Western perspective as a psychological wound. Within the framework of *collective memory* and *cultural trauma*, the Native American interpretation of the “soul wound” is impervious to the Western tendency to pathologize pain. It instead leans into a holistic and communal process of transformation. When she urges to “not carry a story that is unbearable,” Harjo rejects the silent bearing of trauma that alienates individuals from their kin. In a memory act that is “shared,” spoken, sung, danced, or grieved communally, the story emerges as a connecting force (*Poet Warrior* 20). This is where memory, no longer clinical, becomes felt: seen through eyes, gathered in hands, and alleviated through breath. The act of letting go mirrors Indigenous traditions that weave mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual threads into a whole tapestry of remembrance. To my understanding, trauma is not only suffered; it is reworked into a “house of knowledge,” which reifies Tuck’s shift from damage to desire. Memory, especially cultural, thus allows the community to witness, feel, release, and reimagine a future unencumbered by the traumatic past.

Same as counter-commemorations served as a watershed for Indigenous activism in the 1960s and 1970s, I argue that reviving (personal) storytelling as a “performance of memory” functions as a literary staging of Indigenous ways of mourning and resolving grief. As a performance, it is only fitting then to associate the literary staging of memory through storytelling with “playing out.” Storytelling is fundamentally performative, requiring the staging of narrative performance.³⁷ In response to the Western faith in materiality and the fact

³⁷ Using the concept of “performance,” Tóth creates a parallel between the idea of performing memory with the activism of AIM and Red Power as they commandeered major American events to debunk the very basis on which they were commemorated in the first place. Relying on Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Tóth elaborates on these parallels in a podcast entitled “On Memory and Activism with Guest Speaker Dr. György Tóth (University of Stirling),” reflecting on how the present interventions in Indigenous communities’s

that “memory endures in stories” (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 7), relying on storytelling by Native American women in their personal narratives is not merely aesthetic but constitutes a counter-commemorative strategy. Grover’s Anishinaabe memory remains inscribed in story as “[it] is from a long time ago, and I don’t remember the first time I heard it and where I was. . . . The story is its own truth” (*Gichigami* 58). The author emphasizes how storytelling can function as a form of truth and memory outside colonial perception of chronology. Although she acknowledges that the story lacks tangible identifiers, like “names, dates, or places,” Grover asserts its truth regardless, and sets the story in the realm of collective memory. This view challenges the Western historical framework entrenched in fixed chronology. Correlating alternative story and truth gives credence to memory preserved in stories and through oral traditions as another possibility to history.

Ethnographic tradition regards memory as an artifact that can be extracted, traded, “salvaged,” and exploited for knowledge production, ultimately reinforcing colonial agendas. As a counter-performance, self-referential stories by Native American women become resistance as they regain control over what and how to remember. The narrativization of memories relies on a processual model of memory, which reiterates the practice of basket-making. This process emphasizes precisely the juxtaposition of strands that can be discerned one after the other as they are recalled. This contrast calls to mind the trope of gathering relevant to Indigenous women, a practice that necessitates a vessel, usually a basket, weaved by their own hands.³⁸

Analogous to Indigenous activists’ leveraging commemorations of the US national past “as scenarios” for re-enactments of their history, I consider the present narratives of survivance as appropriate invective against US public memory and staging their challenge of “simulation of native scenes” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* n.p.). Jensen’s wayfaring can be

struggles are carried out through a re-enactment or engaging with “socially constructed categories projected back in the past” (n.p.).

³⁸ The motif of basket-making will appear in Chapter 4, with the discussion on the form of biostories.

analyzed as a parodic staging of American memorialization.³⁹ As she travels between locations in each chapter, she seeks to understand the source of local violence that usually manifests in the grim American fascination with violence. One such example is a placard on a door notifying motel guests that they are sleeping in the exact room Timothy McVeigh stayed in while in Kingman, Arizona, and commemorating the individual's involvement in what entered the national narrative as the worst domestic act of terrorism in US history. As a Métis woman, domestic acts of violence are no stranger to the author. Throughout her travels between states, she often comes across examples of more horrifying terror acts, such as the Greenwood Massacre and the 8,700-17,000 Indigenous people who died during the Removal Era, as comparable acts of domestic terrorism in the same place now called Oklahoma. In her sarcastic recounting of the anecdote about renting a motel room and finding McVeigh's name appearing like a miniature Hollywood Walk of Fame with gold stars surrounding the placard, the author exposes the somber nature of the memorialization of violence that is characteristic of the US national narrative.

In *Carry*, Jensen proclaims: "We practice survivance through language and image and memory. We protest, we draft petitions, we make art, we memorialize" (88). Language, art, and an "active sense of presence" through protests are among the ways women "play out" memory. These practices denote dynamism mostly visible in the active verbs that engender them. Jensen's announcement closes off "Fracture and Song," the shortest essay in her life story which traces the history of massacres visited mainly on Cheyenne and Arapaho women and children. The title of the essay is evocative of its outcome, implying that despite the stories of fractures of both land and bodies, Indigenous peoples lived on to remember these stories and keep the struggle going. In a counter-commemorative vein, Jensen invokes the example of Robert Lindeux's painting *History of Colorado* (1936), which depicts the Sand

³⁹ This trope will be redeployed in Chapter 6.

Creek massacre. Through Lindeux's painterly eye, the event is a commemoration of the landscape and the valor of US soldiers as their guns are "drawn" or "shooting at men" (185). In Jensen's restoryation of the event, the US army targets mainly women but glaring amidst the horde of blue—soldiers—with their bright green dresses denoting "growth," "spring," and "hope" (185). The passage is a succinct representation of healing through restorying the past, acknowledging that to reconstruct and re-assign new meaning to it is a promise of agency over it.

Native American women "play out" trauma through their self-referential texts rooted in Indigenous story and the repudiation of victimry. Transforming people's collective lived experience of disruptive colonialism into healing strategies can be attempted by espousing a memory act grounded in a desire-based framework as opposed to a damage-based one, a potent step on the healing path.

3.3. Memory and Literature: from Autobiographical to Tribalographic Memory

Jensen's ruminations on counter-performance impress a certain familiarity with Elliott's invocation of Nêhiyâw writer Erica Violet Lee's observation on the entanglements of memory and trauma: "If historical trauma is strong enough to remain in our bones for generations, then there is no question in my mind that the love of our ancestors is in our DNA and our bones as well. The memory of that love is strong enough that it still exists in us, and in the plants that we have always cared for," to which Elliott adds, "[t]his was an act of absolute, undiminished intergenerational love. And if intergenerational trauma can alter DNA, why can't intergenerational love?" (125). Set against each other, the reflections by Jensen and Elliott present memory as an embodied practice, setting it in stark opposition to the Caruthian model which reduces it to a mere recollection of the past. As argued previously, memory, especially when considered in the light of desire-based research, becomes a model of resistance and wellness. Elliott's assertion of "intergenerational love" reinforces the notion that memory is performative: it is enacted through storytelling and channeled through various media—visual

or spoken expressions. This performance restories ancestral knowledge into recent contexts. Remembering, here, is another word for “unforgetting” and not being consumed by pain. It involves recognizing oppression and opening a path to healing at the same time. Elliott’s endorsement of Lee’s theorization on DNA unsettles the presumption that trauma is the only legacy passed on. Memory is not a site of trauma only, it also carries care and ancestral love, encoded in body and land. In this light, to remember is not simply to recall—it is an enactment of survivance and a restoryation of ancestral love and care.

Memory is an important component of tribalographic writing. Remembering is meant to stir up memories of oppression to create sites from which one could start healing. According to Judith Herman, narrative is a powerful and empowering therapeutic strategy because it “enabl[es] a ‘working through’ and eventual resolution of trauma” (274). The idea of attempting healing through narrativizing the experience has been at the heart of literary trauma theory. APA defines autobiographical memory as:

A person’s memory for episodes or experiences that occurred in their own life. Often, the terms autobiographical memory and episodic memory are used interchangeably. However, autobiographical memory can consist of information stored in episodic memory (i.e., of events experienced at a particular time and place), semantic memory (i.e., of knowledge of general facts and concepts that give meaning to information), or a mix of the two. (Wilbers et al. n.p.)

Indigenous women’s tribalographic memory represents a counter-commemorative act that involves the appropriation of ethnographic vernacular, notably through self-representation, which unsettles Western ethnological practices that have shaped American cultural knowledge. Women’s articulations of the colonial violence are achieved through their avowal of survivance against genocide, entrenching their life stories in the Vizenorian understanding of survivance narratives as “more than endurance or mere response” to this colonial amnesia

(*Fugitive Poses* 15). Their autobiographical acts distemper the settler nation's remembrance of colonization.

In practical terms, the autobiographical memory of Jensen with gun violence is premised on episodic details, such as the scene when her father was teaching her how to shoot birds at their ranch in Audubon County, Iowa: "In our childhood, my sister's and mine, our father kept his guns locked on the high shelf. They came down for the trapline—in case some caught thing needed to be shot; they came down for shooting birds and sometimes deer and sometimes rabbit or squirrel. They came down to be cleaned sometimes after he hit our mother or one of us" (31). This memory also contains semantic information, such as when she was four, wearing her "leotard and pale pink shoes" for her dance class, her "long brown hair straight at the top and wavy at the bottom," linked to her memory of a reversal of roles where she picks her father up because of inebriety instead of him picking her from her dance class (23). In terms of literary autobiographical memory, this translates into a life narrative. Autobiographical memory centers around the individual. Extrapolating from the definition of both concepts and, for the sake of this study, I prefer to reframe it as tribalographic memory. I contend that Indigenous women's memories of their lives are untethered from their Indigenous identity. Their lived experience is informed by the overlapping of the various domains of life, such as their gender, race, and social status. As such, their memories are not merely individual, but rather cultural to reify J. Assman's judgment. The narrativization of this cultural memory into the autobiographical mode can be more fruitfully read as tribalographic as their practice of memory is a political act. Furthermore, Indigenous women's reframing of the past into stories of survivance further entrenches their autobiographical memories within the realm of the communal and, thus, tribalographic.

J. Assman distinguishes between communicative memory—short-term, intergenerational memory—and cultural memory—long-term memory sustained by symbols, texts, and institutions ("Communicative" 37). He argues that the latter sustains a community's

identity over time, especially in the face of historical trauma. While trauma, in essence, is disruptive, cultural memory plays a significant role in communities' sense of identity, especially when it is perceived from a desire-based lens. Therefore, approaching memory as a responsibility—to remember for oneself and others—is not a simple trope for cultural memory but a task that the authors take seriously, notably when the metaphor of women as gatherers and storiers of memory is put into play. Consequently, I suggest the notion of tribalographic memory rather than autobiographical memory. Tribalographic memory, as I understand it, is characterized by relationality, storytelling, and testimony. It is memory as collective transformation and healing when approached from a desire-based perspective, as opposed to a damage-based one. It is registered in the biostories of moments of survivance and the deployment of various modes of memory.

Beyond its function as a mnemonic device, whereby cultural memory is preserved, literature relies on specific forms and strategies of observation and writing through the implementation of particular rhetorical strategies, storytelling devices, or motifs that recall specific frames of reference and convey cultural meanings. Despite being individual reminiscences, tribalographic memory deployed in the domain of biostory, has a communal provenance and function.⁴⁰ Women authors write from a place of individual and collective memories, and storytelling operates as a conduit for crafting those pieces of memory. In the Western understanding, memory is often perceived as fragmented and, therefore, unreliable. Due to repressive colonial practices, it is uncommon for the voices of Native American individuals, especially women, to present themselves in historical outlets. Yet, the autobiographical practice and the testimonial expression have made women's voices heard. This validates literature as “a witness, and perhaps the sole witness, to the crisis within history that cannot be articulated through the established categories of history itself” (Felman and Laub xviii), particularly in its ability to mediate knowledge beyond mainstream narratives.

⁴⁰ The concept of biostory will be further outlined in Chapter 4.

Close inspection of episodes in the self-referential texts reveals how women's narratives draw inspiration from their primal roles as gatherers and storiers into soulful expressions, such as the one spotted in Harjo's recollection: "I painted. I painted as I loved my children without question and because of what the painting was teaching me, to keep beauty moving in my hands, through my bloodstream, through my perceptions as I walked through the inner wars of historical trauma" (*Poet Warrior* 105). Harjo's deeply personal revelation is a reflection on artistic creation and her understanding of trauma and wellness. Instead of highlighting the legacies of colonialism: genocide, forced displacement, and cultural erasure, Harjo unleashes a desire-based approach to the infliction that brings to the fore how individuals and communities can assert their agency, heal, and reimagine futures. The act of painting is framed not as an attempt to come to grips with damage or grieving loss, but as a demonstration of resilience and survivance. The recourse to painting, as in painting in prose, brings out the potential of art for healing when channeling creative energy.

From Tuck's desire-based perspective, Harjo's longing for beauty, which moves "through [her] bloodstream," rehashes the metaphor of blood as a symbol of cultural vitality. Contrasting with damage-based analysis, which ossifies the Native American experience as defined by victimry and the interruption of culture, the "poet warrior" embraces the epiphanal act of creativity that connects her to her ancestors whose blood flows in her body. While the expression "inner wars of historical trauma" acknowledges the manifestation of trauma, it is situated within the context of "walking through it," which suggests an active sense of "playing out" trauma, not a "mere response" (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15). Navigating through her suffering through art is an active and generative process. This realization also features the trope of "blood memory," and its connection with beauty unsettles the logic of epigenetics. The focus here, however, is on the continuity of resilience rather than the transmission of trauma. Harjo engages with "blood memory" not by dwelling on the disruption caused by traumas of the past but by transmitting positive energy to achieve

continuity through her creations. In her coming-of-age ceremony, Harjo deploys the trope of memory continuously:

When Girl-Warrior stepped from the circle of ceremony
 Into the new day, she was transformed.
 She was now a woman.
 The Old Ones had given her a woman's name.
 She would now be called "Poet Warrior."
 To assist in making her path on this earth
 In times that would need what poetry
 Could bring knowledge,
 Compassion and healing
 It could be used as a tool for digging and defense
 To unearth the truth, when needed. (*Poet Warrior* 77)

Indulging in the act of memory is presented here as a ritual requisite in the speaker to seek healing and transformation. While, at first sight, this act seems individual, it is carried out by harnessing Mvskoke cultural memory, symbolized in the coming-of-age ceremony. The "circle of ceremony" becomes a site for remembering the Mvskoke. As it is passed down from "the Old Ones," the "poetry" entrusted with "Poet Warrior" is undoubtedly an individual memory that has collective bearings as it is mobilized to serve the needs of the community, in this case, "to unearth the truth."

In the spirit of survivance, Vizenor contends: "Stories are not static; there are no scriptural versions of oral traditional stories" (*Interview* 164). This is evidenced in Harjo's tellings and retellings of the stories of her Mvskoke forebears and she recounts: "I have told these stories many times, and you may have heard some or most of them already are evidence of the dynamic nature of tribal storytelling (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 27). As a ceremony, they are continually evolving in response to changing contexts. The written form of contemporary

stories that matured from oral traditions is a manifestation of the dynamism of Indigenous stories. While these forms evolve, the core principle of transmission remains ever-present. In turn, the story's intentional development in response to its cultural context challenges the dominant narrative of damage—one often reinforced by settler imaginings. Instead, it becomes a narrative of desire, a story of survivance.

Attuned to this term is resiliency Native American individuals and communities demonstrate in the face of colonial rupture with pre-contact ways of being. From the perspective of trauma theory, it is

[t]he ability to withstand trauma and turmoil and be able to proceed with living and engaging in a productive life. . . . Resiliency focuses on the strengths of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, providing a needed alternative to the focus on pathology, dysfunction, and victimization. . . . Indigenous women articulated that resilience “is not the disregard of painful events, but the ability to process adversities through a relationship with the Creator, others and self.” (Linklater 25)

Usually overlooked by trauma studies, the potential of resilience and “independent recovery” are “common responses to potentially traumatic experiences” (Konner 300). I read women's affirmative politics as an attestation of the agency to reclaim one's interpretation of healing and recovery. What Konner calls “post-traumatic growth” can, in this context, be reframed as the Vizenorian growth, whereby Indigenous women shrug off the idea of PTSD and foster a healing that is in accord with their understanding of well-being.

Indigenous women's stories reveal their distinct perspectives on healing and well-being, which are rooted in their epistemologies. This is most evident in history-telling, where they model their experiences as stories of survival. Western obsession with traumatic truth is demurred through the deployment of Indigenous interpretations of memory, notably by “establishing specific sites for remembering . . . aided . . . by different technologies” (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 25). This is relevant to the politics of memory in

the selected memoirs. The writing mode Native American women chose is idiosyncratic (storytelling), and blood memory is a technology, too. The self this kind of self-narration constructs, or rather, re-constructs, is only possible within a web of interrelations. Lacing personal and collective memory with the power of imaginative creativity upsets the primacy of Western knowledge production processes.

In a self-reflexive gesture about her writing as a necessary act for eliciting traumatic experiences, Washuta references the Western fixation with “traumatic truth”: “I had a hard time creating a complete account of that first time (sexual encounter). That shouldn’t be a surprise. It used to be hard to tell the truth. I teased it out of myself, a necessary process” (*My Body* 118). Despite her awareness that hers is “a faulty memory riddled with holes” (*My Body* 118), the essay in which this declaration appears, “Actually,” is replete with footnotes. Throughout the book as a whole, the annotations frustrate both her confession and the Caruthian cynicism towards memory. In line with Indigenous scholar Powell’s claim that footnotes are “unheard stories,” they become, in this case, a text in their own right, displacing the locus of meaning from the center to the margin as they no longer serve their inherent function of complementing or clarifying the main text (“Blood and Scholarship” 2). Although the Caruthian model suggests that the narrativization of a traumatic event is fragmentary, Washuta’s heavy reliance on footnotes implies otherwise. Reading the main text laced with the footnotes provides a detailed and vivid reconstruction of the event, retrieving the metaphor of processual memory through basket-making and reinforcing the idea that the victim “forgot on purpose” (*My Body* 118).

Memory acts that women wallow in their life narratives are steeped in Indigenous epistemologies and rely, thus, on alternative modes of memory, where they act as “mnemonic resistance” (Ryan 155). The previous part examined the crisis of memory and explores the relationship between the past and present, as well as the dynamics of remembering and forgetting.

3.3.1. Memory in the Blood

“Blood memory,” or “memory in the blood,” is a trope which emerges as an alternative conceptualization of Native American identity grounded in ancestral memory rather than the US government’s reasoning of Indigenous blood under the banner of blood quantum. Native American women writers derive their sense of identity by “politicizing [the trope of] blood” (C. Allen, “Blood (and) Memory” 98). Harjo’s and Grover’s texts, for example, reckon with their “blood memory” in the form of writing that braids together the voices that shaped them, ranging from stories of ancestors and family, the poetry and music they have been exposed to since childhood, and the poets who inspired them.

Rooted in the belief that memories and experiences of past generations are passed down through generations, blood memory refers to the idea that individuals carry within them a cultural knowledge that transcends their personal experiences. Indigenous memories persist into contemporary times in the face of high degrees of cultural assimilation and genetic hybridity.⁴¹ C. Allen argues that “[b]lood memory achieves tropic power by blurring distinctions between racial identity (blood) and narrative (memory)” (*Blood Narrative* 1). It serves as a bridge between people and their ancestors. Stories, inter alia, emerge as vessels for memory, clearing the path for both individual and group remembrance. This declaration acknowledges the importance of oral traditions and lived experiences in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge. Consequently, this practice is closely linked to the preservation and resurgence of Indigenous cultures stored and carried within the worldview of relationality, as discussed by Grover:

My dad’s siblings visited as often as they could, and their children’s generation, my cousins who are, like me, now the grandparent generation, care for that love of home

⁴¹ My argument pivots on two “technologies of memory:” “blood memory” and matrilineal memory. According to Kline, “technologies of memory” are devices that facilitate the process of remembering. He adds, “particular communities are aided in their acts of remembering by different technologies. . . . These become systems of ‘artificial’ memory—not in the sense that memories are fabricated or false but in the sense that the technologies, as aids to preserving and passing of memories, shape the memories conveyed and the selves those memories construct” (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 25).

in their children and grandchildren. Grand Portage, Chippewa City, and Duluth, those places of woods and rock, each of them on the North Shore of vast and cold Lake Superior, are what we are made from: surely, this must be in the very DNA of generations of an extended family and community eating the fish and game, the foods and medicines from the woods, inhaling and exhaling the same air as do the animals and plants. This surely has resulted in an existence that is a connection more than symbiotic. (*Gichigami* 77)

In this reflection, blood is not the settler's blood quantum tabulations that seek to calculate legitimacy. It throbs with memory drawn from the same land. Grover grounds her Indigeneity in the lived rhythms of home: the fish pulled from Lake Superior's icy waters, the laughter echoing through Grand Portage, the scent of medicines gathered in Duluth's woods.

When C. Allen reflects on Momaday's concept of blood memory, he points to how Indigenous texts convey cultural memory through layered storytelling in which personal and collective stories and histories are braided ("Blood" 94). Harjo, for example, acknowledges both her search for justice and her inability to show a complete "map" because the story is still unfolding. She embodies a living archive—trauma, survival, and hope coexisting as ongoing memory work. Throughout her book, Harjo broaches the notion of "genealogy of justice" when she revisits the familial and tribal history of dispossession and removal. Though genealogy may imply the author's implication with questions of inter/transgenerational transmission of a traumatic past, Harjo mobilizes the blood memory trope to suggest that the need for justice is etched in her genealogy:

What do I do with this overwhelming need for justice in my family, for my tribal nation, for those of us in this country who have been written out of the story or those of us who appear to be destroyed or perverted by false story? I've learned there are many genealogies. Within our family is a genealogy of rage. There is also a genealogy of justice. I would show you the map, but I am still searching the roadway for

casualties. Maybe I can save them. I do not know when rage will end, or how justice will find its resting place. (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 46)

Blood memory refers to the inherited knowledge, emotion, and sense of identity passed through generations—memory not solely stored in the mind, but embedded in the body, spirit, and lineage. It is memory that predates written history, tied to land and ancestral experience, and sustained in stories. Harjo’s ruminations echo this framework. Her “overwhelming need for justice” is not only personal but also intergenerational as it is ingrained in the traumas and resistance of her family and tribal nation. The “genealogy of rage” and “genealogy of justice” she refers to are parts of this blood memory. They are affective maps—immaterial yet powerful—passed down through stories of survivance. Harjo’s uncertainty about ending rage or locating justice emphasizes memory as both a burden and a guide, connecting past suffering to the ongoing struggle for recognition and healing.

Memories in Western trauma models are likened to reminiscences.⁴² Remembering, even unintentionally indulged in, is, in this regard, an affliction that needs to be resolved or “worked through” to achieve wholeness. In the Native American understanding, it is not merely “reminiscences” that are triggered. Memory is alive because it is associated with blood and is stored in unexpected sites, such as when it is rekindled in stories, as Harjo expresses:

Memory can compress and expand. Arms and legs can stick out. Some stories are demanding. They will find no rest until they are told once more, like a child wanting to hear some story over and over again, even though they know how it’s going to end. The stories tap you on the shoulder and pull at your shirt. Begging for attention again.

The more years you gather, the more stories you have that want to be retold. . . . It’s

⁴² According to Freud, “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (qtd. in Balaev, “Trauma Studies” 361). In the Freudian outlook of trauma, it is the act of remembering that causes trauma not the initial occurrence, hence the juxtaposition of “hysterics” with “reminiscences.” Whereas Freud maintains that trauma “causes a splitting of the ego or dissociation” (qtd. in Balaev, “Trauma Studies” 362), recent insights from postcolonial trauma have undermined the Freudian dissociative nature of trauma. Specifically, in the Native American context, the term “disruption” describes the experience more aptly than dissociation. Because reminiscences are garbled and fragmented, they reflect the dissociative impact on the self, precluding, thus, restoration. Hence the implementation of an indigenized practice and understanding of memory.

why we return to our childhood home over and over again in memory . . . to the same rooms, to the same lands, to the same songs. (*Poet Warrior* 27)

As Harjo articulates, memory is hardly an abstract concept. Rather, it is a living and active presence which begs to be recalled to resist forgetting. Not only does the personification of memory point to its sentient nature, but also underscores the idea that it is as much a collective force as it is an individual one since it is accumulated across generations and through bloodlines, yet invoked by the individual. In this way, the passage suggests that memory is not a passive phenomenon; it requires participation, both personal and communal, to ensure its preservation and endurance. To return to P. Allen's epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, the unremitting alacrity to reveal memories connects memory to continuance. With this in mind, Harjo weaves together two traditions: storytelling and translating memories into narratives as a way to restore memory and tradition and achieve a "positive sense of self" (P. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* n.p.).

The meaning of blood memory is displaced from being a metaphor to a significant aspect of Indigenous epistemology. It is the materialization of survivance, passed down from generation to generation, far from the damaged encoded narratives, which serves for decoding Native American "genes of survivance . . . the genes that would heal" (Vizenor, *Heirs* 119). Blood, as Washuta depicts it, is not garbled in trauma but in sovenance. Women's upending of the signifier of blood reverses the experience of discontinuity through othering. They portray themselves at once as insiders and outsiders, and the sum of these diverse bloodlines spurs their memory:

I thought I was a full half-Native and a full half-Ukrainian until I was about ten. The simple question of "How much?", the wish to split someone's ancestry into neat compartments, can tear a person limb from limb. I wouldn't know it until reaching graduate school. However, the tendency to divide Indian ancestry into numerical parts is far from natural—it has been written into American law since the colonial period.

Now, as a condition of enrollment, many tribes require individuals to demonstrate a minimum degree of ancestry, known as “blood quantum.” Once I figured that out, it took me even longer to understand that blood quantum has nothing to do with blood—there is no such thing as Indian albumin, Irish hemoglobin, Ukrainian leukocytes, or French platelets. The veins and arteries do not split in those who are mixed, and the blood does not contain the oily and watery liquids of disparate ethnicities. “Blood” is just a metaphor, and it’s not much of one. Looking beyond the fractional diminishing from generation to generation, I began to wonder whether the blood does contain something tangible, an essence that cannot be neatly halved.

(Washuta, *My Body* 59-60)

This testimony offers an anguished reflection on the concept of “blood quantum” as a social and political construct devised by settler colonialism to tabulate and constrict Native American identity. To Washuta’s dismay, quantity matters more than quality. “How much?” is not a question of personal identity but is enwrapped in historical and legal agendas. Though it is a legal tool used by tribes and the US to determine membership based on a certain degree of Native ancestry, “blood quantum” is quintessentially expressed in the project of reducing Indigeneity to naught to facilitate the seizure of Native lands.⁴³

With an upfront memory as a child, Washuta problematizes the role of blood as a marker of identity. She holds up to scrutiny the metaphorization of “blood.” In her view, blood quantum is a concept codified into law but not supported by any biological or scientific evidence—despite the ironic use of the scientific designation of “hemoglobin” instead of blood. This categorization is a capitalistic and colonial rhetoric that views blood as

⁴³ During the allotment era (1887–1934), the concept of blood quantum was officially integrated into the legal status of Indian identity for the purpose of dividing tribal lands into individual parcels, i.e. allotments. The 1887 General Allotment Act—the Dawes Act—was a federal government assimilationist policy whereby tribal groups were disbanded by encouraging individual family farming, and thus ridding their responsibilities to tribal members as “guardians” and “protectors.” Despite its dire consequences, blood quantum was later used as a way to determine and ascribe membership in a Native American tribe (Schmidt n.p.).

commodity. The trope is presented as an empty signifier that falls short of conveying the complexity of cultural and racial identity. A salient shift in the author's viewpoint, however, indicates her desire to move beyond the literal understanding of blood to consider it as symbolizing an emotional or spiritual connection to heritage and identity.

Distressing emotions can permeate one's world, causing multiple disruptions in one's lived reality. In narrating their lives, however, women transform these disruptive moments into examples of resilience. In Indigenous ways of knowing, "blood memory" is passed down from generation to generation as an inheritance, carried through psychological, biological, and cultural processes. Other models of memory, however, intersect with blood memory, notably when the authors deploy their position as Indigenous women and mothers.

3.3.2. Matrilineal Memory

The term matrilineal memory emerged with the work of Hopi plastic artist Mikaela Shafer. In her art, as in women's autobiographical writing, the primary concern is with passing down memories from female ancestors to female descendants, narrating the self as part of the collective. In the same spirit as Shafer, women authors explore "memory, emotion, storytelling, and healing through matrilineal lines" (Shafer n.p.). For the sake of my argument, I advance a definition of matrilineal memory that deploys memory passed down the mother line as a conduit, as a "site of memory," to use Nora's term. Matrilineality in the Indigenous sense nurtures ideas of relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity. The Indigenous interpretation of matrilineal memory retrieves felt experience as memories are triggered by a "smell, taste, or sound," blurring the line between what is real and what is remembered (Shafer n.p.).

Operationalizing this model of memory is not only a way of recentering the holistic nature of experience and memory in Native American praxis, but it is also about restoring the feminine and pushing back against the rigid model of memorialization associated with autobiographical writing. In their conjuring up of foremothers, from their great-great-great

grandmothers to their mothers, women authors create a space of remembrance where they meet beyond temporal and spatial barriers. This act of “remembrance in stories,” or sovenance, is a visceral reflection on the familial stories that have shaped their Indigeneity and, can be, in turn, a link in this chain of matrilineal line.

Grover reconnects the matrilineal line ruptured by the 1854 Ojibwe Treaty.⁴⁴ The part of her life story entitled “Grandparents” is triggered by a photograph of her aunt Carol, who, in turn is prompted by her participation in a powwow when she felt the need to “tell [her] more about [her] grandmother, too and [her] family” (22) In the first cycle of life, Grover traces the history of her tribe through the birth of women in the matrilineal chain of her life story, starting with Angelique LaVierge, her great-great-grandmother, and ending with Victoria Mellisa McKoy, her grandmother.⁴⁵ The concern with passing down memories from ancestors to descendants through narrating the self is conspicuous through the authors’ desire to remember their lives and to redeem a matrilineal identity disrupted by the tribe’s removal from the ancestral land. The ubiquity of the ancestor, in this case of the living author-narrator, who is in the process of becoming an ancestor herself, creates a transgenerational connection among the women of the community.

The renewal of generations impels the recovery of cultural memory, remembering what needs to be remembered and forgetting what needs to be forgotten in order to ensure the continuance of the community and its culture. The possibility of renewal is ingrained in the spiraling nature of the dream with its layering of realms and temporalities, connecting the past to the present. Storied objects are often from the home: in Harjo’s case, the cooking pot.⁴⁶

They are not necessarily valuable; instead, they are objects packed with personal imagery and

⁴⁴ This treaty is the Land Cession Treaty of 1854 by which the Ojibwe ceded the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota. Following the signing of the treaty, many reservations were created for Ojibwe people in Michigan, Wisconsin, a tract at the western tip of Lake Superior. Two of the reservations are today the home of the Fond du Lac and Grand Portage Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa (“1854: *Ojibwe*”).

⁴⁵ This connection between removal from land and the severance of the matrilineal line will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ History and memory are encoded in form and material. In concert with the oral tradition, objects function as memory triggers for stories. Storied objects is a term that aligns with the belief that in some Indigenous cultures, objects have their own life force and power (“Storied Objects” n.p.).

the aromas of the past: “I am planting these memories for my daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters so they will know their worth and become good cooks, just like the ancestral line of mothers before them. Or most of them. My mother’s mother was better kept away from the cooking fire!” (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 80).

Authors thematize their traumatic experiences, highlighting the struggle and endurance of their (grand)mothers in the face of the systematic erasure of their agency. By stepping into the stories their ancestors left behind and rooting their lives in a positive and powerful genealogy of women warriors, biostorytellers manage to revive a positive cultural memory for themselves and their respective communities. Along the same line, reviving cultural roles as knowledge keepers and transmitters, women set the foundation for future generations to follow in their foremothers’ footsteps. This is evident in the biostories, where women map their lives as a continuation of trailblazing examples set by women in their tribes.

In her attempt to navigate her Indigenous identity, Washuta laments the use of the mainstream culture of false models for Indigeneity and their imposition as the standard that Native Americans need to follow to “save their souls.” Her refusal to understand her Indigeneity, templated through the Christian ideological model after Kateri Tekakwitha, is a precursor to the author’s reclamation of her agency by denying any connection to the controversial Mohawk symbol.⁴⁷ Washuta disclaims: “She seemed more like one of my Native American Barbies than a saint” (*My Body* 23). Much in the same fashion the popular dolls came to represent the idealized image of women, Native American dolls take this issue to a whole new level. Indeed, without any tribe-specific consideration, the ethnic figurines typify Indigenous women, regardless of their tribes, reiterating the same rhetoric underlying photographs popularized during the early period of colonialism. Pairing the image of Kateri,

⁴⁷ Kateri Tekakwitha, known as Tekakwitha and baptized as Catherine, is a Mohawk/Algonquin Catholic saint. She was born in the seventeenth century in Ossernenon, a Mohawk village in present-day New York. She refused to marry a Mohawk warrior, and converted to Christianity at the age of nineteen. She was baptized with the name Kateri–Catherine–on Easter Sunday (“Saint Kateri” n.p.).

now canonized, with Barbie is telling of the misconceptualization of Native American women.

In a reactionary stance, Washuta, in her second biostory, bellows her refusal to be reduced to a foremother with whom she barely identifies. Instead, she embraces her belonging to a long line of Indigenous women whose DNA runs in her body. With recourse to what I read as a restoration of her matrilineal memory, Washuta contends with the disruption of the feminine-centric way of being with her confrontational tone. She pays homage to the women she descends from. Despite their history being adulterated by violence on their land and bodies, Washuta foregrounds healing and survivance as she recounts in *White Magic*:

Softboys of Tinder. . . . I come from women whose dresses drip with the dentalium shells that were pulled from deep water and used like cash. I come from high-status women with cradleboard-flattened heads. I come from women with their canoes, their land in the place where they'd lived for ten thousand years. Men of my history hear me: When you talk down to me, fuck around on me, disappear from me, lie to me, *that's an interesting perspective, but me*, you disrespect a woman made of women knotted in the long string stretching back before the massacre. The egg that would become my mother was in my grandmother's ovary when her mother severed the cord.

The first of us came from eggs the Thunderbird laid near the mouth of the river. (278)

The way Washuta paints her matrilineal ancestry is entwined with a domineering tone, implying the strength and resilience that Native American women carry in their bodies. Both the expression “high status” and the repetition of “women” denote the position of women within their communities. In a tradition that predates “massacre,” Native American women were held in high esteem in their communities.⁴⁸ The dentalium women used to “[pull] from deep water” is juxtaposed with “eggs the Thunderbird laid near the mouth of the river,” establishing, thus, the existence of women as a divine source. The reference to Tinder coupled

⁴⁸ To varying degrees among tribes and Nations.

with the derogatory “softboy” retrieves the notion of the artificiality of contemporary sites of memory when compared to those linked to the land, by “canoes,” “eggs,” “water,” and “river.” The images Washuta depicts imply endurance and continuation, despite the “massacre”—colonialism and the genocide of the Cascade people. Each time she traces her ancestry, a “string” is attached between the various “knots” in her “history.” Because she strives to restore this memory that harkens back to First Woman, matrilineal memory is the author’s attempt to “play out” cultural memory that brings out the feminine and functions as a counter-commemoration of patriarchy as a Western narrative. In a stream-of-consciousness moment, Washuta suddenly creates a break in the flow of her matrilineal memory, indicated by the italicized comment “*that’s an interesting perspective, but me.*” While aesthetically this break exhumes the idea of the fragmentary nature of memory that comes back in bits and pieces, the rupture is a self-reminder by the narrator of her role as a keeper and creator of women’s history.

The examples of women’s memories passed down through matrilineality abound in the life stories. The authors’ reliance on this technology of memory is a counter-commemorative gesture whereby they invoke the figures of mothers in shaping their identities, recentering women and mothers as custodians of cultural memory.

Conclusion

The chapter emphasized the healing potential of decolonizing and indigenizing trauma theory by introducing a type of literary trauma theory that advances counter-commemoration in stories. The cogency of the western trauma conjecture is marred by the pathologizing character of trauma in the Native American context, discarding, thus, any engagement in survivance. I shifted the focus from a fatalistic standpoint to stressing the ability of sharing trauma or traumatic stories as a demonstration of care rather than the absence of it. Because it is concordant with switching the perspective and deconstructing “colonial unknowing,” unwriting the narrative of victimry is unhinged from survivance stories. Stories have the

power to heal people from past and ongoing traumas by implementing a type of writing that is aesthetically fluid and rhetorically has the power to “bring things together.”

In tune with decolonization and Indigenous resurgence, and in reiterating Foucault’s insistence on the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (*Power/Knowledge* 82), Native American authors are evincing “mnemonic resistance” that allows for reclaiming subjectivity by revisiting—or, re-enacting—past traumatic experiences, and imposing a counter-commemoration through restoryation and reviving traditional ways through utilizing culture, ceremony, and community as part of the healing process. Because I argued that active resistance is undifferentiated from healing, “playing out” alternative models of memory as counter-commemoration is demonstrative of the decolonization of research and changing the metaphors. Deploying alternative technologies of memory—blood memory and matrilineal memory—women attempt “playing out” trauma by bringing pre-contact past into the present in an act of restoryation. Employing biostory that resists generic determinacy and that flaunts its therapeutic adeptness, women authors share traumatic experience using memory acts endowed with Indigenous storytelling techniques and reclaiming the agential voice of women as knowledge transmitters.

Chapter 4: “The Tribalo(autobio)graphical: A Necessary Act?”

I lay claim to my sovereignty through the repositioning of form, genre, story, and theory, condensing them more largely under the banner of being an otâcimow slinging biostory.

—J. Whitehead, *Making Love with the Land*

It [restoryation] is an intertwining of science, spirit and story—old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with Earth, a pharmacopoeia of healing stories that allow us to imagine a different relationship in which people and land are good medicine for each other.

—Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Introduction

As demonstrated in previous chapters, engaging in memory is an avenue for “playing out” the traumatic experiences, past or present, of Indigenous people. The second part of my dissertation articulates the idea that engaging in memory as a restorative undertaking translates in “continu[ing] the transmission of tribal cultures, and knowledge to future generations through . . . creative storying in literature” (Madsen, “Tragic Wisdom” xiii-xiv). In the present chapter, I argue that the autobiographical mode in the Native American context, with its reliance on tribalographic memory, can afford a space for healing, provided that the framework of ethnography as a domain of power is subverted. I examine how this is achieved on two levels. First, this part de-historicizes the autobiographical genre by restoring Indigenous input in the development of the genre. Second, as shown in the aesthetic choice of bracketing parts of the word autobiography, this chapter’s focus is on representing trauma in life stories as examples of autobiographical practice. I introduce the concept of biostory

because the texts I am analyzing lend themselves to this new “categorization.”⁴⁹ I am particularly drawn to this new domain of life narratives because of its poetics and thematic foci. It takes the self-study of women’s lives as an inceptive point for a collective assessment of class position and the dynamics of power in a community in what Million terms felt experience. By virtue of its hybridity, reliance on storytelling, and structurally being composed of essays—prose bordering on the lyrical—along with its focus on land, healing, and Indigenous resurgence, biostory presents itself as a potential alternative to Western theorization and understanding of memoir.

The intention in this chapter is to explore how, similarly to their content, the form of biostories proves effectual for healing because it produces capacities for reclaiming voice. Subsequently, I probe into the potentiality of biostory as an alternative to memoir for “eating pain,” or healing, which is akin to Indigenous resurgence. On the other hand, healing involves “sharing story” but not simply so. According to J. Whitehead, sharing one’s story “make[s] allowance for others” to share theirs as well (qtd. in M. Welch n.p.), and healing together.

As much as debates over the roots of autobiography can be found in Native American traditions, I rather choose to focus on tribalogy as a methodology for counter-balancing the colonial epistemic erasure and, in the long run, heal from the trauma that resulted from it. In the last part of the chapter, I draw on Choctaw scholar Howe’s concept of tribalogy as illustrative of Indigenous writers’ practicing of the life writing genre in appropriating the mode. The second part teases out the inconsistencies of generic categorization with contemporary memoirs and suggests another alternative more compatible with the works under study. Reading the memoirs as a “biostory,” in my view, is more illustrative of the resistance that takes shape in reclaiming voice by repossessing agency over one’s story. The

⁴⁹ J. Whitehead opts for biostory instead of any other terms to define his work because he wants it to be “an outlaw to genre” (qtd. in M. Welch n.p.). Therefore, I use the term “genre” in this chapter with no theoretical aim other than varying word choice and to refer to biostories, hence its framing between inverted commas. Concerning the issue of orality, it is worth noting that various Native American writers contend with this dichotomy undergirding Indigenous literatures. As noted on pages 16 and 17, Harjo’s choice of poetry speaks volumes about her celebration of the oral.

ultimate part of this chapter delves into women's engagement with the genre through perusing the thematics, rhetorics, and aesthetics of their memoirs. Reading their life accounts through the prism of felt theory, as conceptualized by Million, women's articulation of survivance is reflected in their experience. Women's act of resistance mostly translates into activism and an active sense of presence in Vizenor's perspective, while other notable Indigenous theoreticians see its manifestations in the cultural and political resurgence of Indigenous peoples. Women's embrace of biostory to tell their experiences of people coming from "the margins" (Gilmore, *The Limits* 22) allows for articulating and transcending traumatic experiences using storying rooted in Indigenous strategies. Women's autobiographical narratives provide a renewed paradigm for reading and understanding the Native American experience in the United States. I intend to demonstrate that renewed autobiographical expressions can open textual sites for healing on Native American terms by affirming survivance and resurgence.

My undertaking of this discussion is buoyed by the Indigenous feminist paradigm, especially Million's felt analysis and the hermeneutics of survivance. On the intersections between survivance and writing through trauma, I employ insights from Western autobiography studies scholars, namely, Watson and S. Smith, Leigh Gilmore, and John Paul Eakin, to review the development of the autobiographical discourse and identify its "limits," to use Gilmore's 2023 book title. Specifically, I fall back on these seminal works for their contextualization of the emergence of the genre and for conceptualizations of life writing and testimony, as well as the distinctive features of autobiographical writings as elements for analyzing biostories.

4.1. “Writing as A Rupture:” Poetics and Thematics of Biostories⁵⁰

Narrating one’s life using the domain of biostory as an example of the self-narration practice is a rupture with the Western autobiographical framework on two levels: the form and content. I open this discussion by an introspection into this new type of storying and its roots. Then, I introduce three areas where biostory evinces the rupture through writing: its rootedness in tribal storytelling, its focus on felt experiences, and its reliance on the essay form.

4.1.1. On the Borderland of Memoir and *Otâcimowin*⁵¹

While we owe the popularization of the term biotext to Joanne Saul’s analysis of Canadian authors’ autobiographical writings, emerging Oji-Nêhiyâw scholar J. Whitehead takes his cues from biotext; only his is indigenized as it reinvents Western understanding of text with story.⁵² Indeed, he contends that biostory is “a new work of storying” (76), it is a text that is hybrid in form, an “active” process of telling stories—as the *-ing* form suggests. Biostory is oral, or simulates orality, in this sense by the very fact that animation is brought into language through “the deployment of our voices, senses, bodies. The act of speaking summons words into being through an entanglement of experience, memory, and recognition” (J. Whitehead 90). The prefix “bio” does not solely refer to the life story of the author, but to the story as ceremony that keeps the fire alive because “Native peoples will be here when they [laws] are done, and when the earth and waters are renewed” (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 14). I draw attention to the riveting use of “bio” in biostory as it reverberates through the trope of blood memory

⁵⁰ The sub-title is inspired by the sixth chapter in J. Whitehead’s *Making Love with the Land* (2022), where he theorizes about biostory. In this manifesto, his choice to write his life in the form of biostory is political because, as he asserts, Native American and Indigenous writers cannot simply write “of aesthetics” (73). They “can never write a poem about the shapeliness of a teacup for the sake of the teacup . . . such cuppings are always bound by political poetics because . . . [their] existence has and will always be a radical act of political livelihood” (73).

⁵¹ Storytelling in Nêhiyâw.

⁵² In *The Roaming Subject*, Joanne Saul discusses the emergence of biotexts as a “disruption of the boundaries and borders of genre” by focusing on the works of Fred Wah, Roy Kiyooka, Daphne Marlatt, and Michael Ondaatje. In Saul’s words, biotext best “captures the tensions between the ‘bio’ . . . and the ‘text’” (4). The term, thus, brings to the fore the authors’ efforts in articulating one’s life through the text (4). Inspired by Saul’s articulation of biotext, J. Whitehead positions biostory as existing at the intersection of Indigenous studies and the life writing genre. According to him, biostory emerges as a formidable alternative to describe both the entropic development of the genre and the dynamism brought about by Native American engagement with the genre within the Indigenous resurgence movement.

throbbing beneath the surface of the text. While Western autobiography is a retrospective act, Indigenous biostories take after ancestral storytelling traditions where stories are remembered through blood, impressing, thus, an “active sense of presence” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 4). Memory deployed herein is not purely a recollection of an event after its occurrence but life—bio—itself. The way memory is inherited and embodied through ancestral stories reproduces the circulatory system of blood, transporting in its movement tribal knowledge, with the ceremonial rhythms and the voices of past and present generations echoing the beating of hearts. Imbued with “bio,” women’s self-narratives braid life with story in the ongoing flow of blood/memory. In his disclosure of the meaning of biostory, J. Whitehead states

If I was to be decolonial on the land, I needed to do it on the page too. Often, I’ve found, Indigenous narratives are characterized by either: testimony (a synonym, perhaps, for residential school stories or a synecdoche for stoic historical accounts) and/or pulp (since when our stories are not about what they’re called “simple,” “mystical,” or “magic realism”). Surely our stories can be these forms, but they’re rich with allusion and metaphor—of riotous joy and complex constellations of creation. (qtd. in M. Welch n.p.)⁵³

As J. Whitehead conceives it, biostory stands in opposition to autobiography composed “within Western linguistic systems” that he describes as “an obituary” (80) because reduced to its bare essence, autobiography is concerned with chronicling a person’s life up to the point of writing. In this sense, one’s life stops with the act of writing it. In contrast, biostory is agentic because it resists extractive methods as it seems to beg for telling.⁵⁴

⁵³ In this sense, biostory is athwart to Western memoirs in that it is seen as a work that has value from its self-disclosure rather than being a pure aesthetic project (Couser 27).

⁵⁴ A major evolution was noted in the preview of life-writing or autobiography as it shifted from stressing the “bios,” or the course of a life-time, to the “autos,” the self writing and being written. This shift was read as resulting from the rising interest in the individual. In a counter-narrative vein, biostory refocuses the “bio” because it is inherently contingent on the communal and, when placed next to the term story, further couches the “genre” within Indigenous storytelling traditions.

It is interesting how the texts by the selected authors do not adhere to a single sub-genre. From one line to another, from one paragraph to another, and from one essay to another, women move to and fro between the personal bildungsroman and autoethnography, to mention but a few. At times, this oscillation is not always signaled by either textual or paratextual markers. Sub-genres—such as autoethnography, ethnocriticism, memoir—within a singular essay mirror the fluctuation between the remembered, the researched and the fictional only signalled, if any, by the segmentation of the text. Not being amenable to one categorization entails a non-unified reading and presents a narrative that defies easy categorization, drawing on multiple strands of life-writing tradition and fluidly shifting between personal experience, cultural reflection, and political commentary. Jensen, for example, splices different ambits of knowledge, blurring any lines erected by Western generic frameworks which echo those created by heteropatriarchal colonialism:

Q&A

Why were you there on the road?

Because Indigenous women are almost three times more likely than other women to be harassed, to be raped, to be sexually assaulted, to “be called a *that there*. Because when the governor of North Dakota made an order to block entrance into the camps at Standing Rock and then rescinded it, he said the order was intended toward “public safety.” Because in his letter to the Standing Rock tribal chairman, the commander of the Army Corps of Engineers said he was “genuinely concerned for the safety and well-being of both the members of your Tribe and the general public located at these encampments.” Because these statistics about trafficking, about assault, are knowledge considered common, but only if your body is not considered a general-public body. Because you’re a Métis woman. Because you and they and we misunderstand the danger at Standing Rock, the danger of this pipeline going in there or elsewhere or everywhere. Because you and they and we misunderstand peaceful protestors as the

ones bringing danger. Because you and they and we misunderstand the nature of danger altogether. Because each person in Flint, Michigan, once rationed four cases of bottled water per week, now must buy their own bottled water or drink poisoned water or go without. . . . Because your first memory of water is of your father working to drown your mother. Because you are four or five, and you need to use the bathroom, but instead, find yourself backing out the bathroom doorway and down the hall where you sit on the rust-colored shag. . . . If you make a mess on the carpet, if your father doesn't kill your mother, then she will have to clean the carpet. It seems crucial not to cause any trouble. So you sit. You wait. You hold yourself together. (10-12)

The excerpt above incorporates autobiography, political testimony, and collective witnessing all at once. Like in many other passages similar in format throughout her biostory, Jensen blurs the lines between the individual and the communal. The text seems to be refractory to generic boxing. Some parts recount the author's traumatic memory of her father's violence, while others are researched material, notably discernible in the facts about Métis women's vulnerability to patriarchal and systemic violence. The repetition of the "[b]ecause . . ." structure, along with the Q&A format—with its extractive disposition—reproduces a form of interrogation, yet overturns it through the narrator's anticipatory answers, asserting their own logic of cause and effect. As Jensen recollects the trauma-causing childhood violence, she juxtaposes it with the Flint water crisis and the Standing Rock events, implying the idea the primal event is not isolated but rooted in colonial history. Through this parallel, Jensen successfully creates a narrative flow, despite the ruptures, which attests to the entanglement of personal trauma with state violence. The braiding of the private and political registers further distances biostories from linear autobiographical narration to embodied testimony.

Jensen's collocating the pronouns "you," "they," and "we" is instrumental in driving her message home. She frustrates the likelihood of a narrative perspective when alternating one addressee with another. For example, when she confronts "you," Jensen's tone is intimate,

bridging the distance between the narrator and the reader, even presumably, between multiple selves. Conversely, she antagonizes a seemingly unknown referent through the pronoun “they,” while, in fact, her accusatory tone is ostensibly directed at the system of power embodied by the US government and, more broadly, settler society. The vacillation in using pronouns drives at the author’s disavowal of the stable autobiographical “I,” privileging a multi-voiced narrative which mirrors the disruptions caused by violence-induced trauma. The fragmentation of the text augurs the testimonial form of biostories, which is structurally and emotionally coherent with memory acts and Indigenous storytelling strategies. Despite the disconcerting issues raised in the Q&A, the author’s ability to choose how to deal with seemingly negative experiences opens doors for something empowering. By being clear-sighted about the impacts of adversity, she can find ways towards healing. Jensen refuses to wallow in victimry as she rehabilitates herself by the end of the biostory and depicts moments on the road to recovery.

In the framework of biostory, Washuta ponders on the act of storytelling and meaning-making. As a biostoryteller herself, she gives meaning to her experience through the act of recollection and creation, both of which are cathartic. When remembering, one’s understanding of past events changes, and through this lens, the writer creates a narrative that provides deeper insights into those experiences. When she states “[w]e shape the recollected by how the remembering changes us. The mind wants to understand what’s *done but not settled*. The past is boring because it’s over. . . I can make anything meaningful. . . See what a powerful witch I am? I make narratives to make sense of what happened to me (*White Magic* 26). Washuta recognizes the need of the mind to make sense of unresolved or unsettling past events. When viewed as simply a sequence of events, the past can be mundane or “boring” because it is immutable. However, Washuta offers an alternative: creating “plot points” in nonfiction, or essays, as she puts it, which does not involve fabricating events but rather reinterpreting them and arranging them in a way that heralds new meaning and significance,

incarnating the rationale of counter-memory put forward in Chapter 3. By recasting ethical methods of requesting, reporting, and sharing one's story, coupled with incorporating researched material, the authors situate their stories in historical and social contexts.⁵⁵ The mobilization of the essay form is a conscious choice by the authors because in its "native" iterations, it is aligned with survivance as active resistance (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 23-24). By suggesting that the essay form enacts intellectual self-determination, Vizenor acknowledges the Native essay as a literary genre undifferentiated from other decolonial strategies and laden with possibilities, notably, that of healing.

4.1.2. Biostory as Counter-Diagnosis to Overdetermination of Trauma

This part of the chapter establishes the form of the essay as a counter-diagnosis and examines its propensity for triggering therapy. In one sense, the form of the essay works as what Susannah Mintz calls a "lyrical counter-diagnosis," a refusal of an authoritative, linear narrative that would purport to make non-normative experiences behave ("On a Scale from 1 to 10" 244). Mintz notes that disability narratives by women in general do not follow a linear format, framing "disability as a kind of work-in-progress, a process of becoming rather than an immutable fact of physicality located beyond the scope of words to liberate and define" (*Unruly Bodies* 4). Less linear, more emotive and embodied narratives are, in Million's terms, "unbelievable because any speech about being violated would be an emotional telling, couched in language of shame or pain in the fragmentation of violence and memory" (*Therapeutic* 94). Because of their debilitating effects on the individual, I read trauma-induced disorders as disabilities.

Native American women's choice to tell their personal stories using the form of the

⁵⁵ As counter-memory, the biostories by Native American women conjure up different models of memory work that align with their tribal specificities. The processual model of memory exemplified by the basket-making metaphor, cited on page 81, emphasizes exactly the juxtaposition of strands that can be discerned one after the other as they are recalled. In *Shapes of Native Nonfiction* Jensen's and Elliott's essays are identified as a "twining" text, whereby "[they are] essays that combine the author's personal experience and narrator perspective with researched material" (18). Essays composed through the technique of twining, "[o]ften [employ] the methods of research-driven modes alongside the interiority of memoir, these essays mimic the flexibility of the twined basket" (Washuta and Warburton 18).

essay is an act of survivance through literary creation; this is what Vizenor calls “creation as transmotion.” It is defined as a “reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty” (*Native Liberty* 150). It is “inspired by native motion” (108) and “a sense of ancient presence and continental liberty” (111), which he defines as “a natural right” (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 162). The biostories I analyze address their authors’ grappling with trauma-related ailments: PTSD for Jensen, (misdiagnosed) bipolar disorder in Washuta’s narratives, depression for Elliott, their own or their relatives, and suicide. At the onset of the healing process is a review of concepts. Mental health issues related to transgenerational trauma, depression, and ongoing injustices, according to ethnographic discourse, prey on the Indigenous peoples’ deficiency and “lack of mental fitness,” absolving, thus, ongoing colonial oppressive and racist social structures (Justice, *Why Indigenous* 3).⁵⁶

The circular structure of the biostories as a recurring pattern is pivotal in conveying the Indigenous intentions for healing, and is no longer mere defiance of traditional Western narrative forms. The elucidation of the circularity of time directs toward the potentiality of the biostory for healing on Indigenous terms. In his poetic definition of his new work of storying, J. Whitehead employs the metaphor of the ouroboros—“ouroboric”—to refer to the genre’s curative potential. Healing in biostories is not depicted as linear and finite, because it would otherwise establish it as mere survival and ensconce it in the past. Instead, healing is visualized as an ongoing process, thus defying the linear process of healing in Western trauma paradigms.

In their seminal and timely article “What to Do When You’re Raped,” Wieskamp and Smith consider how challenging Western views of the linear temporality of trauma and its assumed traumatological timeline are exhibitiv of survivance (80). Moving away from the

⁵⁶ The tropes of “lack of mental fitness” and the “inherent deficiency” were cited on pages 32 and 59 where Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) denounces settler society’s attribution of the misfortunes of Indigenous people to their inherent deficiency rather than the consequences of colonialism. This narrative was observed in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* where he makes the case for the significance of Indigenous authored literature in denying and subverting such narratives. He introduces the concept of “wonderwork” to define works of literature that fall under this categorization (*Why Indigenous* 152-53).

Freudian/Caruthian models stresses the significance of enacting survivance in its reflection of “infinite temporality,” which allows past, present, and future to intermingle and “embraces the role of one’s past to influence one’s present and future” (Wieskamp and Smith 81). Biostories capture this non-linear and continuous process of healing, presenting themselves as narratives of survivance both formally and aesthetically. The assertion of creativity through the rich imagery, evocative language, and layered symbolism constitutes a twist on the overdetermination of trauma. Acknowledging traumatic experiences by women, however, is also deeply embodied and felt.

4.1.3. *My Voice, Our Felt Experiences*

In contrast to the Western impulse to catalog Native American lives in ethnographic accounts or what Krupat refers to as autobiographies of Native American women and, by extension, Native American people, biostories privilege felt experiences over Western memoir and its appeal for voyeurism. Felt analysis challenges the dehumanization inherent in colonial narratives. It invites a more profound engagement with the storyteller’s positionality and relationality, allowing Indigenous women to reclaim agency over their histories and identities. Million’s emphasis on “politicizing the private by providing discursive models for telling their stories and engaging in activism” highlights how life narratives open vistas for activism, using personal experiences to elucidate structural injustices (*Therapeutic* 272). In the biostories, the “I” emerges as an “eye” whereby women become a witness to their and their communities’ felt experiences. Their act of witnessing is holistic as they deploy their senses to absorb the exposure to colonial violence, story them into narratives of survivance, and expunge the traumatic past through their writing:

I listened, listened, breathing with his slow rhythm, inhaling the story and the lucidity of alcohol from his breath, his clothing, and perspiration. . . . He held the newspaper clippings in one hand, occasionally setting them on one knee and rereading, touching the print with his fingertips as he interacted with the reporter’s story and his own by

touching the tangibles of paper and written words. He told me that there was much more to the priest's story as well as his own, more than a reporter could have written. His own spirit crushed and damaged but not yet destroyed, he spoke so very personally about the pain he lived with, and the effort it took him to live day to day with memories that lived in him. (Grover, *Gichigami* 39)

Grover's encounter with the Indigenous man who sought to share his experience of the residential school system is a potent example of Million's witnessing eye. The author's repetition of "listened" indicates active witnessing in her deployment of all her senses. Attuning her breath to his is as much physical as emotional syncing as she "[inhales] the story." This particular moment reflects Grover's embodied empathy as she does not only hear the story but also feels it. She plays a vital function of witnessing through relational presence and narrativizing the man's trauma. "He spoke so very personally about the pain he lived" signals the space Grover opens for the man to articulate his story which becomes a counternarrative to "the reporter's story," usually a detached and flattened version. Her role is to help the man make sense of his pain and put it into meaningful words. This passage reflects the role Indigenous women perform in their communities, placing this encounter in the framework of storytelling in which women are depicted as holders and transmitters of knowledge. Sharing the story of pain in itself does not provide healing; it is Grover's provision of the space for the man to tell which does.

Commensurably relevant to Grover, Harjo thematizes the engagement of women in witnessing in their biostories, especially discernible in her incredulity towards the process of extracting information and criticism of authenticity Western autobiography templates hold on to: "They [Elders] tell me if I had come into their houses with pen and paper or recorder, sat on their porches or at the table drinking iced tea, writing instead of listening, I would have made myself a stranger, separating myself from the story. Too many with pens poised over paper wrote down laws that . . . stole children, homes, and legacies" (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 14).

In contrast, for trauma narratives to be meaningfully transformative, recentring Indigenous cultural values, especially of responsibility towards kin is required:

I always come back to stand on the same islands of loss in family, tribal, and earth history. I return to memories of fracture as if all the broken pieces have voices, and they call me back to witness. They are in need of something I have not been able to give them. They want to be heard, they want to speak. . . . *[W]hy did you give me this legacy of poetry, this music, this body, this place from which to speak when I don't look and act the part . . . and you made me a woman, when women's voices and worth are not regarded in this society in which we are now living?* (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 50)

This excerpt displays Harjo's prowess in weaving song, poems, and prose into a testimony of Native American resilience. At first glance, the introspective tone of the passage highlights a significant response to historical trauma which consists of the internalized inferiority of traumatized subjects as a residual of the past and the ongoing narrative of deficiency attached to Indigenous people. Through a metatextual gesture, however, Harjo—a woman, with the legacy of poetry and her body—could voice out the “broken pieces” that have remained unresolved. The meditative mode signaled by the italics is understood here as rhetorical questions because, despite being “made a woman,” Harjo manages to write about these moments of loss pertaining to her family, community, and tribe. She contrasts the injustices women face in society with the fact that she ultimately succeeds in giving voice to “memories of fracture” as an act of resilience by invoking her ancestors, who passed down the legacy of renewing the tradition of knowledge transmission. “Islands of loss” conjure up the alienating effect of Native American peoples' loss of ties with kin, including humans, land, and culture. The grief endured as a result of these losses needs to be voiced and resolved, a strong reference to Brave Heart's concept of unresolved grief.

While the form is momentous in the case of Native American nonfiction, notably in biostories, the content is just as vital. Being wrought through the essay form, this literary

choice sparks therapeutic attempts since it opens a site for healing through testimony.

4.2. “Eating Pain”: Biostory as Scriptotherapy⁵⁷

Scriptotherapy, as Henke asserts, is the process of writing out and writing through a traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment. I argue that the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing and begin to alleviate persistent symptoms of numbing, dysphoria, and uncontrollable flashbacks (Henke xii). As much as Henke’s neologism is appealing, I employ it purely for its semantic value because, to my understanding, it fails to capture every nuance of the life stories under discussion. The association of scriptotherapy with healing is evinced in Elliott’s retrieval of the Mohawk’s traditional practices for healing in reflecting on depression in her community:

The Haudenosaunee condolence ceremony shows the same level of care, poeticism and insight. It was originally created by Hiawatha . . . to help a person in mourning after a death. Whoever is conducting the condolence recites the Requickening Address as they offer the grieving person *three strands of wampum*, one at a time. One: *soft*, white deer cloth is used to wipe the tears from their eyes so they can see the beauty of creation again. Two: a *soft* feather is used to remove the dust from their ears so they can hear the kind words of those around them. Three: water, the original medicine, is used to wash away the dust settled in their throats that keeps them from speaking, from breathing, from reconnecting with the world outside their grief. (15)

Elliott’s description of the Mohawk ceremony of healing is analogous with the curative power of biostories. The “soft white deer cloth” becomes a metaphor for the white page where the

⁵⁷ Scriptotherapy, like other forms of autobiographical writing, is exclusive of Indigenous epistemologies. For one, it certainly highlights healing through writing but the fact remains that it is individual healing. Second, though it can be adapted to various traumatic experiences, it still is concerned with sexual abuse, which refers back to the Caruthian single-event model. Finally, its insistence on making one whole again by writing through “the broken pieces” reiterates the Western healing model that seeks the reintegration of the traumatized individual to society.

griefs of the suffering person are shared in using words by “linguistic caretakers”; the feathers are the words written in a sophisticated manner, using Indigenous aesthetics of storytelling that blend poeticism with “beautiful comparisons,” or euphemisms to avoid the harshness of the scientific and cold terminology employed in the Western practice of trauma studies. In common usage, the symbology of feathers encompasses simultaneously lightness and writing, two equally powerful metaphors for scriptotherapy as one would feel lighter after writing. Finally, grounding stories in Indigenous understanding of place and waterways, and re-centering the importance of location to attempt healing is the third step. The adjective “soft” is repeated to signify the ethical and culturally relevant approaches advanced by Indigenous clinicians in treating trauma patients. The relationship between the healer and the patient is not vertical, but transversal, and its efficiency depends on the cultural sensitivity of each. As for water, though this idea will be further discussed in Chapter 5, I read it as representing the overlap between women reclaiming their voice through clearing off the “dust” stuck in their throats, or the act of writing biostory that gives power to cleanse the years of epistemic erasure.

During healing ceremonies, gentle words are used to purify, cleanse, and channel positive energy.⁵⁸ Elliott invokes the Mohawk healing process that draws on tribal legacy and is carried out in ceremony, describing her people as “linguistic caretakers: piecing together the most precise descriptions of your ailments that we can, wanting to acknowledge what has happened to you without blaming you, working to make sure you feel understood” (15). The parallel between the ceremony and writing through one’s trauma is peculiar. The first reading of the passage reveals major discrepancies between the Indigenous and Western worldviews related to trauma healing practices. Without falling into the narrative of romanticization, the condolence ceremony emphasizes a holistic understanding of healing as the emotional

⁵⁸ A point previously evoked on page 64.

seamlessly joins the physical and the spiritual elements. The three strands of wampum, as the Mohawk condolence ceremony would have it, morph into spoken words in the original story of Hiawatha. Holding the strands in one's hands and passing them on symbolizes the act of witnessing for the grieved individual by transforming their pain into words to lift their burden off. The wiping away of tears, clearing ears, and washing the throat reiterate the holistic approach to healing as it involves all senses, as opposed to the mental aspect privileged by Western therapies. The expressions "soft, white deer cloth" and "soft feather" reflect a deep respect for ancestral knowledge that enfolds healing in nature and its components, creating a sharp contrast with the Western heavy reliance on medicinal solutions proposed by trauma clinicians. In its juxtaposition of a traditional condolence practice and biostory as scriptotherapy, this passage restories traditional healing modalities into new contexts, while validating the reclamation of voice through testimony as potentially therapeutic.

In the same vein, Harjo vouches for the therapeutic nature of writing through bearing witness and speaking out the traumatic experiences that stirred her people:

Writing was my portal to grace, an opening in which I could hear my ancestors speaking, in which I knew we were cared for no matter my inadequacies or failures. "Eagle Poem" was given to me after I emerged from a sweat lodge on a nearby reservation. When I say "given," I mean that after the four eagles circled over the lodge when we emerged, attracted by prayer and singing, the poem came to me in a kind of spiral circling, like an eagle in a wind drift. The poem would go on to bring eagle grace to those who read or listened. . . . [I]t would be passed to my children, and their children. (*Poet Warrior* 134)⁵⁹

The association of writing with grace is particularly engaging and points toward the redemptive power of writing. Though Christian in its undertone, grace can be understood in its universal meaning, involving personal growth by transcending adversity through

⁵⁹ "Eagle Poem" by Harjo was first published in her 1990 collection of poems *Mad Love and War*.

scriptotherapy. In this context, writing through one's traumatic past is a form of therapy to attain grace. Through the plural pronoun "we," Harjo emphasizes the communal nature of healing. While it is believed to be performed individually, the presence of her ancestors leads to the realization that the outcome has a wider outreach as the healing is ultimately visible among the collective. The passive "cared for" not only retrieves the essence of biostories, which nurtures the betterment of communities, as J. Whitehead conveys, but it also points to the fact that therapeutic writing is collective even though it is channeled through the individual.

Sharing does not stop at the stage of talking about one's experiences; it is also an invitation to "visit together" and enlighten the path for others to follow (Reder, *Autobiography* n.p.). Emerging from a sweat lodge—a ceremony for healing that bears resemblance to the Mohawk condolence ceremony—enthused Harjo to write her poem. The depiction of the poem descending circularly upon Harjo emulates the motion of the eagles circling over the sweat lodge. This visualization brings to mind the sacred hoop in most Indigenous ontologies and impresses the image of the circle of trust, the circle of sharing, especially story.

Biostory is scriptotherapy, but not simply so. It opens avenues for sharing pain by highlighting felt experiences. When Native American women are to speak, they need to create their own space. As they seek to distance themselves from white feminism, they are careful in selecting strategies and language that locate them within the heart of their own experiences (Million, "Felt Theory" 269). Publicizing and politicizing the private is akin to talking therapies designed to enable victims generally to narrate and politicize their experiences. In a Native American setting, politicizing women's experiences is equated with turning them into stories. Personal narrative and personal testimony empower individual experience, and "bearing witness" is a powerful tool. In her attempt to transcend the rhetoric of victimry, Elliot's re-enactment of the memories of abuse is her way to pinpoint the root cause of her father's affliction, claiming that he was a survivor of the transmission of violence engendered

by colonialism (203). By highlighting her ability to revisit these experiences as a Haudenosaunee woman, she impresses an inspiring denouement to her grief despite the devastating effects of her experience. Her suggestions and questions urge readers to recollect comparable experiences and behaviors that they may traverse in a space that is simultaneously wonderfully transparent and anonymously safe, much as her own memory removed negative behaviors and occurrences. Pondering on her experience with attempting to enter Western literary circles and the vagaries of the publishing industry, Elliott, for example, unpacks the power dynamics responsible for the injustices women face in settler states as she recounts: “[t]he idea that the colonialism, racism and sexism that had systematically kept Indigenous women out of the literary community could somehow be leveraged to benefit me as an Indigenous woman through some half-assed literary affirmative action was absurd” (30).

Biostory as an avatar of life narrative, therefore, provides succor for trauma victims and allows for personal and communal healing. As such, it functions both as a site for discussing intergenerational trauma and promoting healing within trauma-suffering communities, and as an overture for sharing stories that acknowledge the legacies of trauma. As such, biostory becomes a textual space for responsibility, validation, and collective healing. Storytelling, thus, allows individuals to process their experiences and find empowerment in shared narratives of resilience. Because it is “a form that refuses the overdetermination of trauma as the singular narrative of Native life” (8), I join Washuta and Warburton in their focus on form—especially the essay—for coming to grips with the legacies of colonial violence.⁶⁰

Sharing stories can take various forms, including autobiographical acts. When asked to reveal the conation behind wanting to write his work, J. Whitehead maintains “[m]y penultimate goal in writing is for the *betterment* of my *communities* . . . to bloodlet and

⁶⁰ In his analysis of the trickster figure in Vizenor’s narratives Louis Owens affirms that responsibility and laughter are conducive to healing in Vizenorian theorizing (qtd. in Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 147).

cauterize simultaneously—I had to put my theory into action lest it be petrified wood and aged into something merely aesthetic vs. utilitarian. I hope in showcasing myself, my body, my history, and my joy, that I’m *making space and allowance for others to* as well” (qtd. in M. Welch n.p.). This statement resonates with Archibald’s assertion: “Indigenous values, philosophies, resilience, and resistance that are at the core of Indigenous stories help ease the pain of intergenerational trauma that may surface when sharing lived experience stories” (n.p.). Narrating the self is unmoored from the act of co-creation within a web of relations. Take, for example, Harjo’s reflection on the genealogy of the knowledge she was enlisted to transmit to upcoming generations: “I began to follow all of my thoughts and was surprised how many didn’t belong to me. And how many had threads to ancestors, relatives, strangers, even plants, elements, and animals” (*Poet Warrior* 23).

Various moments in the biostories reiterate the principle of responsibility through sharing one’s story. Elliott, for example, when mulling over the reasons that impelled her to write her self-representational accounts, states the transformative experience of reading the work of L. B. Simpson’s collection of short stories:

Then came *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Everything changed. Reading stories of Indigenous women who had good sex and bad boyfriends, who dealt with both underhanded and overt racism, who spoke their language and loved their families, gave me hope. . . . I felt there was space for me to breathe inside the claustrophobic world of Canadian literature. Reading Simpson’s stories ultimately gave me permission to write my own. (31)

This revelatory testimony consolidates J. Whitehead’s desire to “make space and allowance for others” (M. Welch n.p.) and recognizes the role of Indigenous scholars in inciting other voices to emerge despite the bellicose nature of white publishers. It also estranges the premise that memoirs by Native American women are not entirely driven by the overdetermination of trauma so much as the identification of Native American women with beauty and survivance.

Through the prism of felt analysis, Elliott explores how her experience of trauma is emotionally and bodily felt and experienced.

Sharing one's story, however, validates this experience, and, above all, motivates them to speak their truths. Hearing the stories of others is equally empowering in that it mends—even virtually—the severed relationships between members of the community to reclaim agency through their narratives. This has certainly had bearings on how Elliott chose to end her biostory. Indeed, the last essay entitled “Extraction Mentalities” comes in the form of a participatory essay where, by sharing her own violent and triggering memories, Elliott prompts the reader to follow in her footsteps. Filling in the “not so” blank spaces that, in her words, “speak volumes” (Elliott 195), her biostory allows her to disclose deeply personal and visceral memories of abuse and its attending trauma but also helps the reader to journal theirs. Going beyond sharing these experiences, Elliott illuminates—but does not rationalize—her father's violent temperament, claiming that he was a survivor of his father, and how this behavior was a tactic to survive colonialism (203). Her ability to return to the traumatic past as an Indigenous woman creates a seemingly fragile but actually inspiring conclusion to the book. Her healing journey starts with her sharing her story, but not just that. Viewed through the lens of survivance, Elliott's intimate chapters can be construed as a *spiel* for readers to begin their healing journeys. In the same way, the author's prompts encourage readers to recall similar events so that they can navigate in a space that is at once inviting and safe.

A similar bent is discernible in Jensen's biostory in the third essay “The Invented Histories of Domestic Birds” where she narrates: “I craft and deliver their histories: the yard features birds with flecks of orange on the undersides of their wings, and dark red birds who fight each other over the seed. . . . But in the language of this, our America, our summer of guns, they are Black” (34-35). The use of the adjective “domestic” calls to mind the formulaic “domestic, dependent, nation” which established Native American tribes as domestic subjects,

yet their histories are still produced and constructed in racial terms.⁶¹ The entire essay is told in zig zag narration between past and present, triggered by an act of gun violence based on race. The title is inspired by a personal story of how she invents stories about birds to muzzle her father's fascination with hunting domesticated birds. This image is juxtaposed with "Our America's" obsession with guns, whose victims are most of the time racialized people who, though multi-colored, America typecasts and homogenizes as "blacks." As an Indigenous woman with the role of bearing witness, Jensen presents the histories of othered people not in crude but "craft[ed]" language to impart in their lived, authentic experiences. Her testimony, in contrast, is presented with visceral and lyrical language, where color is no longer a racial category but a symbol of beauty.

4.3. Sharing Story: Healing by Visiting Together

Indigenous feminism is informed by the idea of responsibility, whereby showcasing one's life is not meant for voyeuristic reasons but to give allowance to others to share their pain, too. This leads us to the next section, as it makes biostory not merely an autobiography, but a communal biography. "To eat pain," thus, is akin to sharing story. J. Whitehead wants it to be a site where the writer transcends the synecdochic nature of self—as authorized by Krupat—and indulges in a kind of writing that is therapeutic through sharing stories. This is implicative of Kovach's idea of sharing as a responsibility. Indeed, she maintains that "[t]o be the holder of one's story, is not, therefore, an act of individuation, but an impetus to community engagement as an expression of responsibility: "Including one's story is . . . to share and visit together" ("Situating Self" 9). The same goes for trauma and pain. Sharing one's story is necessarily thought of in concert with listening, which foregrounds the role of

⁶¹ Following the annexation of Cherokee lands by the state of Georgia, the Cherokee Nation petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court as a foreign nation. However, the Court decided against them, stating that although the Cherokee were a distinct people, their territories were inside US limits. As a result, the Cherokees were perceived as "domestic" rather than "foreign." The Cherokee Nation lost its sovereignty, which also theoretically separated them from the US government. They were recognized as a separate people, yet not fully sovereign, and ultimately rendered dependent on the U.S. government. (Meyer n.p.)

relationship and trust. In her biostory, Jensen implores her sister to “tell it to me, again,” I say. “Tell the story to me again, I am listening” (37), whereas Harjo and Grover reprise this principle of responsibility as they highlight sharing and listening to story as a major premise of their biostories.

Elliott contends with the need for storytelling which involves active listening. Even though expressed in writing, it carries forward oral ethics like deep listening and reciprocity. It is infused with Indigenous voices, as expressed by J. Whitehead, and centers their concerns. Elliott argues: “We untangle the threads of history and treat the wounds we find underneath. We listen to one another, support one another, resist our impulses to rewrite one another, to steer one another. We try to understand our distinct physical, emotional, spiritual and mental needs and meet them as best we can” (129). Visiting together is a relational presence substantiated by active and reciprocal listening. Listening without steering is an indirect indictment of Western ethnographic practices that managed to hold control on narratives of peoples under research, notably Native American communities. This type of listening fosters witnessing others’ pain without overwriting or reinterpreting it. It is construed as ceremonial and amenable to procure healing because the truth of the speaker is honored instead of being reframed. Elliott’s powerful testament about storytelling expands the discussion to include the communal aspect of pain relief in terms of writing.

Drawing from a previous discussion of tribalographic memory, the following section looks into how this type of memory is narrativized. “I find fault in the evolution of this form we call autobiography,” declares J. Whitehead in his groundbreaking chapter “Writing as a Rupture,” because he assumes that, as a mode of writing—both in its form and categorization—it is a “declaration of absoluteness,” notably in its over-emphasis on the “I” (77-78). I do not intend to employ the term as a new generic categorization, but as a qualifier of a mode of writing that demarcates itself from Western interpretation and praxis of autobiography, while, at the same time, presenting itself as grounded in Indigenous storying.

As much as autobiographical writing has been established as a relational mode of writing, relationality from an Indigenous perspective carries a different significance. As such, I advance the use of “tribalographic” instead of autobiographical writing to define the new acts of storying undertaken by Native American women through their biostories. I argue that the tribalgraphic bent of biostories lies in women’s assuming responsibility for articulating, revaluing, and voicing their and their communities’ traumatic experiences into stories of survivance. Similar questions to the ones asked by Donovan are rehashed in the biostories, notably by Jensen, who asks: “But who is responsible for and to this woman, her safety, her body, her memory? Who is responsible to and for the language, the words that will not take their leave?” (7). Elliott aligns herself with Jensen when she declares: “I need to lift up the voices of those in my community who, like my uncle, like my grandfather, like my father, are treated as less than human, unworthy of attention or time because their skin is too dark for certain people’s liking. I need to make sure that their experiences are centered, that their concerns are heard, that their needs are met” (26). In their articulations of responsibility towards the community, both Jensen and Elliott echo the principles of tribalography. This is mostly visible in their commitment to witness and tell the stories of the collective. The rhetorical question “Who is responsible for and to this woman” signals Jensen’s undertaking of responsibility to unshroud women’s memories inscribed in their bodies. Her voice becomes a vessel for communal remembrance. In the same line as Jensen, Elliott feels the need to “[lift] up” the voices of the men in her community, marginalized because of systemic racism, flexing from a marginal position to the center. Her voice becomes a conduit for communal expression by creating in her biostory an avenue for the articulation of their silenced voices and unheard lived experiences. Setting the examples of Elliott and Jensen in dialogue draws a picture of how women, despite their different perspectives towards responsibility, reclaim both their role as Indigenous women and the testimonial discourse. They equally call for recentring women: first by reminding themselves of their responsibility to amplify the voices

of others through telling their stories and, second, bringing into focus the necessity of centering women themselves and remembering their struggle. In both cases, the power of witnessing and storytelling promotes survivance and communal healing.

Because biostory is rooted in tribal storytelling, it positions itself in accordance with survivance as it impresses a continuum between the past and the future. This is stark in Harjo's inaugural poem entitled "Prepare," where she endorses the role of the biostoryteller as a connecting thread between the different generations:

You are a story fed by generations

. . .

Let go that which burdens you

Let go any acts of unkindness or brutality from or against you

Let go of that which burdens your family

Your community, your nation

Or disturbed your soul (3)

The previous lines by Harjo mirror the communal disposition of life narratives and then connect it to the concept of tribalogy. The poet warrior kicks off her poem by the solemn declaration addressing the reader or listener: "You are a story fed by generations," emphasizing how individual identity is shaped by ancestral narratives. This aligns with Howe's concept of tribalogy, where storytelling is not an isolated act but a communal one that weaves personal and collective stories and histories. Harjo's lines reinforce this interconnectedness, portraying the self as part of an ongoing communal narrative. Invoking a decolonizing ethic of healing, Harjo emphasizes the communal nature of this act. These lines demonstrate how personal narratives are part of communal ones and are both lived and performed. The act of "letting go of burdens" is not just personal but an ethical responsibility toward one's community, which reflects the relational aspects of life narratives and entrenches them in the tribalogical realm rather than the Western autobiographical mode.

Conclusion

Indigenous women's autobiographies play a significant role in redefining Native presence through re-establishing their place in this tradition, controlling self-presentation, and defying the conventions of the genre by infusing it with Indigenous storytelling. Women's literature testifies to their engagement in the act of an active sense of presence, or survivance. It is a testimony to their resistance to the hegemonic structures of language that held them captive in a distorted mode of being. "Reinventing" the very language that constructed and sustained the "simulations" becomes not only an act of literary creation, but greater than that, it is transmotion through creation, where the authors are postindians who "outwit, reverse, and overturn the wiles of dominance, and they contradict the simulations of natives" (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 24), that is, the ironic simulations of victimry. Survivance, the union of active survival and resistance to cultural dominance, is an obvious spirit of native sovereignty" (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 24) that sets the process of decolonization in motion. Various moments in the biostories showcase women's allegorization of the act of literary creation to survivance; the lyric and dramatic verse, captured in the adoption of the essay form, entwine in women's texts to nudge the reader towards the idea that creativity is a form of transmotion (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15).

In response to the question raised in the title of the chapter, the tribalographic *is* a necessary act for healing on Indigenous terms. As narratives of survivance, biostories highlight themes of resistance, activism, and cultural resurgence in response to trauma. Second, they challenge colonial narratives of victimization and, instead, assert Indigenous agency and sovereignty. Finally, they incorporate elements of traditional storytelling, ceremony, and cultural revitalization as acts of resistance against ongoing traumas such as colonialism, sexual and gender-based violence, environmental degradation, and cultural erasure. Their allowance to indulge in a memory act enables women to restory their nations' practices and interpretations of their environment, notably, how they view space and land.

Chapter 5: Restor(y)ing the Land and Rethinking the Map

We begin with the land. We emerge from the earth of our mother, and our bodies will be returned to earth. We are the land. We cannot own it, no matter any proclamation by paper state. We are literally the land, a planet. Our spirits inhabit this place. We are not the only ones. We are creators of this place with each other. We mark our existence with our creations

—Harjo and Bird, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*

Introduction

Reading Native American trauma involves studying the incontrovertible connection between Indigenous peoples and land. Native Americans understand their identity as experiences situated in specific locations as they stress how their lives actually “take place.” This chapter examines how Native American women restore their relationships with the land and their bodies through their unsettling of colonial geographies. Their restoryation of the land translates in their adoption in the memoirs of “alternative representational strategies, utilizing various forms of mapping techniques and re-purposing technologies to their own ends, re-articulating and re-representing their own experiences of land and territory in textual, virtual and lived contexts” (Sletto et al. 614).

By this point of the dissertation, the works under discussion have been established as biostories, characterized as “a wildly engendered genre” (J. Whitehead 80). In Chapter 4, women’s recourse to biostory was established as the preferred mode of expression due to its rootedness in and reliance on Indigenous story. This chapter further delves into the power of this mode of expression for attempting healing with relevance to the land. I argue that Native American women compose their biostories as literary maps that challenge colonial spatialities and restore Indigenous kinship with the land towards curative ends and assertive claims to

sovereignty. Furthermore, these forms of literary mappings make allowance for women to grapple with colonial maps and spatialities, reclaim “stolen” spaces,⁶² and attempt healing through the land. Assuming first-person narratives and storytelling as a decolonial methodology that characterize biostory testifies to women’s active resistance and reaffirmation of Indigenous epistemologies, both defining features of survivance.

My reading of the biostories is informed by the convergence of Indigenous feminisms and Indigenous spatial inquiry. Both theoretical approaches meet on different points, including the introduction of land-based ethics as a prerequisite for decolonization, thus healing from its disruptive practices. Indigenous feminists are concerned with exposing colonial ideologies that shaped the construction of space and gender. Meanwhile, spatial inquiry scholars Tuck and McKenzie advance the decolonization of colonial spatial practices through diverse strategies, such as (re)mapping and building place-worlds.

As a prologue to women’s engagement with Western mapping, the first part of the chapter charts how various legal and discursive frameworks were engineered by settler colonialism to interpellate Native American lands and bodies into their hegemonies. I demonstrate how the incommensurate conceptualizations of space that resulted from the colonial geographical imagination serve as a backdrop for women’s life narratives, and explore how they contest them through the aesthetic and structural choices deployed in the texts. The second part of the chapter focuses on the impulse of Native American scholars to decolonize space by creating physical, spiritual, and cultural spaces compatible with Indigenous cultures and beliefs. According to common parlance, “[m]aps . . . [serve] as a spatial embodiment of knowledge” (Goeman 166). They are, thus, inherently technologies of knowledge and power that delineate contested territories and represent institutionalized power. Far from its objective illustrations, mapping processes produce space that is abstracted

⁶² From Jensen’s *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land*.

from the lived experiences of those who occupy it. Therefore, settler colonialism's resort to border-making and presenting them on maps is a hegemonic practice meant to control Indian lands and bodies. The choice of literary mapping as an act of counter-mapping is a cogent point of entry into resisting geographies of settler colonialism. Resituating forms of spatial knowledge disavowed as primitive through the re-mapping of the landscape on Indigenous terms is primarily achieved through decolonizing the colonial subject mind as a harbinger to other forms of decolonization of the map.⁶³ In its literary iteration, counter-mapping involves bringing Indigenous knowledges to the fore, especially through questioning colonial practices and revaluing Indigenous spatialities and implementing them as tools for contesting "colonial unknowing" (Vimalassery et al. 1).⁶⁴ Secondly, underscoring the significance of the recovery of both "Native experiences and histories" (Sneider n.p.) is achieved in stories and their perceptions of land and place. Through these maps, Indigenous scholars working within the framework of counter-mapping give prominence to their epistemologies by reclaiming space and identities dismissed as peripheral.

5.1. Uprooting Western Spatialities

The inception of women's engagement with colonial spatialities involves a reconsideration of the concepts of space/land by pondering the incongruity between the Western and Indigenous vocabulary of spatialization. Native American women storytellers engage with Western spatialities by vitiating the Cartesian view of knowledge based on dualities in favor of a holistic worldview whereby they highlight how *they* experience the land. Their stories are linked to specific locations and landscapes that they make clear by telling how they connect with them through their embodied knowledge. In their alternative cartographies, they

⁶³ Decolonizing the mind is a metaphor conceived by postcolonial scholar Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. Colonialism was facilitated and sustained through the "colonization of the mind," or the domination over the mental universe of colonial subjects, which resulted in an internalizing attitude of cultural inferiority facilitated by public education that disseminated the colonial narrative. As a reaction, Wa Thiong'o advances the counter-strategy of decolonizing the mind, which is the major trope of his book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.

⁶⁴ In this article, the writers contend that the epistemic genocide through processes of power/ knowledge production (Foucault) resulted in the dismissal and ignoring of Indigenous knowledge systems (1).

recurrently conjure up their intrinsic kinship with land by revealing its profound influence on their politics of identity.

In their self-definition, Indigenous people view personhood as connected to specific places (Gone and Kirmayer 238). Settler colonialism disrupted this worldview through spatial violence. Re-establishing human-land interaction is a way of grappling with colonialism. In the preludial passage to her literary map and, as she embarks on her life narrative journey, Grover, for example, communicates the inseparability of her people's view of their Indigeneity from the land they inhabit: "[I]n sight of the gabbro ridge before there was a Duluth, or a State of Minnesota, before the lands of the Minnesota Arrowhead were lost under the terms of the 1854 Treaty. . . . *We, the descendants, are of this land and story, and this land and story are of us.* We are honored to live in this place of the giants" (*Gichigami* ix-x). The chiasmic structure that closes the quote recenters the above-stated land-based ontology and sustains the entanglement of the people with a place and ironically dampens the Cartesian truism.⁶⁵ As she engages with settler colonial territorial fantasies, the author re-establishes kinship with the land that colonial claims sought to erase. The parallel with the Preamble of the American Constitution is uncanny. Appropriating the much-revered opening sentence to the document "We, the people of the United States" is a reaction to the colonial misappropriation of Native American land. In her grounding of the Anishinaabe people's presence in stories, especially the creation story of the Ojibwe, Grover deconstructs the narrative of the self-serving Doctrine of Discovery that legitimized colonial expansionist endeavors. Replacing "people" with "descendants" highlights the contrasts that exist between "a Duluth, or a state of Minnesota" and the Ojibwe, whose sovereignty is created in stories, not in treaties. Her storytelling situates her in the sacred geography of her ancestors and collapses the temporal distance between her and her kinship from pre-contact times,

⁶⁵ The Cartesian dictum "I think therefore I am" is referenced in Chapter 1 in Tuck in MaKenzie's engagement with colonial spatiality.

establishing a continuum between the past and the present moment to further consolidate the intergenerational transmission of kinship with and through land.

In the wake of nation-building through an active process of space production, maps have played a vital role as they were employed as “geographical technologies” of dispossession (Goeman 27). Within the framework of material cartography, the incorporation of physical space demanded the exclusion of knowledges and practices of space while imposing a new vocabulary based on the physical demarcation of space which L.T. Smith highlights:

There is a precise spatial vocabulary of colonialism that can be assembled around three concepts: (1) the line, (2) the center, and (3) the outside. The “line” is important because it was used to map territory, to survey land, to establish boundaries, and to mark the limits of colonial power. The “center” is important because orientation to the center was an orientation to the system of power. The “outside” is important because it positioned territory and people in an oppositional relation to the colonial center. (55)

In L.T. Smith’s assessment of the Western interpretation of space, the “line” is encoded with colonial dynamics as it serves as a demarcation between territories. Beyond its geographical symbolism, however, the “line” also embodies a demarcation between cultural spaces divided by the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. “The center” is unequivocally the centriole of the colonial organization of space and its attending institutions. It is set in contrast to “the outside,” the last concept of L.T. Smith’s triad, and convertible with the concept of the margin, the periphery, or subjugated spaces. Indigenous lands, deemed the outside, entitled settler colonialism the right to seize them, exploit them, and deprive their people of sovereignty over it. Emanating from the “center,” these concepts were produced and implemented through linguistic violence and legal discourse.

Women’s literary maps respond to and challenge Western spatialities by exposing the mechanisms of colonialism through “alternative conceptions of borders, nations, and place

[that] are subversive to the masculine project of empire building” (Goeman 29). On the one hand, the connection between colonialism and the significant role Western linguistic systems played in setting the stage for it is expounded in the different texts under scrutiny. The most important example of this effect appears in Elliott’s biostory as she chronicles her visit to a neighborhood in Toronto: “[. . .] early settlers approached the land with the eyes of enterprising tourists: looking at its green, its forests, its waters—and seeing a big red X. They forced out the lands’ native inhabitants and went about realizing this land’s ‘potential,’ laying roads and constructing buildings, later putting up condos and converting old restaurants into cafés” (56). This testament by Elliott reinforces the difference between settler nations and Indigenous people in their relation to land. The shift in perception by settlers is epitomized in the expression “enterprising tourist,” i.e., the settler’s attraction to the pristine nature that evolved into capitalistic endeavors. The contrast between the colors “green” and “red” serves to deepen the gap between the two ways of connecting with land. This is evocatory of the settlers’ disparate conception of landedness that shaped up in the Marshall Trilogy.⁶⁶ The recourse to the parlance of mapping “red X” reiterates the tight link between colonial expansion and the discipline of mapping as its materialization in the use of the vocabulary of the discipline. The towering irony in the historicization of Indigenous lands is detected in the order of events. Elliott contends that settlers’s realization of the “potential” of the land followed the eviction of its natural inhabitants. While this realization is historically inaccurate, the ironic disposition of the claim is supported by the quoting of the term potential, which, in Western thinking, is associated with profit.

Washuta’s *White Magic* also problematizes the Western understanding of land: “*Exploration, patroonship, charter, survey, mapped, municipality, transatlantic trade, laws of inheritance, loyalty to the Crown, quitrents, proprietors, common law, Articles of*

⁶⁶ In 1823, *Johnson v. McIntosh* ruled that Native American peoples became occupants not “owners” of the land, a status legitimized by a legal motion by Chief Justice Marshall in what became known as the Marshall Trilogy (Meyer n.p.).

Confederation, Great Compromise: these words are a new world, rich with subtext” (115). The use of italics indicates the presence of foreign words, both to the Lenni-Lenape language and to its worldviews, which reinforces the discrepancy between the Indigenous interpretation of place to that of the colonial power. Though not presented as such, the itemization of the colonialism-related nouns describes the process by which it was imposed. “Mapped,” however, stands out from the lot. Set in the passive voice and strategically placed between “survey” and “municipality,” thus, reinforcing the description of a process, the reference is reflective of how Native American land was subjugated into the American conceptualization of space, and that spatial violence is strongly associated with the linguistic one. Washuta further highlights a fundamental distinction between Western and Native ontologies regarding spatial knowledge noted earlier by Tuck and McKenzie. Now that the land is “mapped” and established as a bordered “municipality,” it shifts from being sacred in nature to becoming a mere fungible commodity by ending the list with concepts pertinent to trade. Her closing remark with its intended pun: “*words that are a new world, rich with subtext*” is blatantly sardonic towards the settler’s manipulation of language instrumental in luring Native American communities into signing documents that were deceiving in nature due to their latent ambiguities and “subtexts.”

Women authors represent the self as embedded in a world marked by the coexistence of different chronosophies; they upset the imposed Western idea of progress which sustains the dualities of modernity/colonizer contrasted with tribal/colonized. The authors implement multi-vocality by crisscrossing various stories and voices. This is bound to muddle up the clear-cut and fixed borders of the texts and, symbolically, the material borders drawn for the sake of territorialization by settler states. Borders demarcating the various modes of expression within a text are deliberately made porous. Thus, the autobiographical knowledge that reflects the larger colonial knowledge systems emanating from the center is challenged as well. The outside, embodied in Indigenous women reclaiming their voices, becomes a site of

resistance and, therefore, no longer peripheral. Their act of creation through life narration is transformative that enables them to inhabit spaces previously denied to them. A perfect example of the experimentation is visible in the layout of the texts. There is no clear-cut demarcation between different types of textual discourse in the memoirs, such as fact and fiction, history and myth. Jumping from one time frame to another, from the spirit world to the physical one, and from one genre to another seems arbitrary. For the most part, this experimentation with the uniformity of the text is stimulated by women's movement across and between places. In the eighth chapter of her work, "In the Neighborhood," Jensen recounts her moving out from Iowa to Minnesota. As she shifts from the personal mode to the historical one, she is once again triggered by the memories of the place because it is marked by gun violence:

Before the neighborhood becomes Macalester-Groveland, it is part of the Fort Snelling military reserve. . . . Before the neighborhood becomes Fort Snelling, it was the home of the Dakota and Anishinaabe people. According to research from the Urban Indian Health Institute, as of 2010, the Twin Cities are home to 30,373 Native people, a good many of them Dakota and Anishinaabe. The place still is Dakota and Anishinaabe land, despite war, despite displacement, despite land theft, despite a concentration camp, *despite America*. (124-25)

The anaphoric use of "despite" intensifies the violent practices exerted on the Dakota and the Anishinaabe. While the word "war" refers to the history of the two rival tribes, the remaining phrases describe the history of Native Americans of Fort Snelling with the US. The present tense conveys the factuality of the information, implying that it is an ongoing process, not a territorial practice that ended in the past. As a reaction to the history of land dispossession that resulted from war campaigns, Fort Snelling is an indicator of the massacre that took place in

1862 on Dakota land in the wake of the Sioux Uprisings.⁶⁷ By the same token, the present tense highlights the resilience and relentlessness of Native American communities in surviving against all odds, “despite America,” with its unflinching desire for expansionism and claiming land (previously) occupied by Native American communities.

Biostories are deeply rooted in traditional storytelling which manifests greatly in the texts studied. Elements of orality are incorporated into the life narratives through, among others, repetition and evocative imagery. As an example, Native American women use Indigenous cosmographies, starting with the circular structure of their books, which indicates the rejection of the Western linear time frame for a cyclical unfolding of women’s life stories. The structure of the biostories itself acts both as a map and storyline to the larger history of Native contact with European settlers and as a map of women’s lives. This is particularly discernible in Grover’s *Gichigami Hearts*, where her journey, whether at the level of the essays composing her biostory or at the level of the work as a whole, comes to full circle by the end. *Gichigami Hearts* is written in four parts, and reifies the cyclical form of life as central to many Indigenous ontologies contra the linear view of time in Western conceptualization. The latter is reflected in conventional autobiographies that follow a person’s life from beginning to end, denoting the idea of progress. As the reader delves into the collection of essays that compose the biostory, it becomes hard to overlook how the notion of linearity is deconstructed in favor of storytelling that is land-inspired and compliant with the natural cycles of seasons. Spiritual stories are told, as the Anishinaabe traditions have it, in the winter season. Such an orientation to time through seasonal stories allows Indigenous people to tell their histories in their own ways, which is tantamount to rupturing “settler orderings, articulations, and reckonings of time” (Rifkin, *Beyond* 3). In my understanding,

⁶⁷ The Sioux Uprising, also known as The Dakota War of 1862, was a conflict between the Santee Sioux (Eastern Dakota) and the United States in Minnesota. It was stirred up by broken treaties and starvation among the Dakota people. After the US suppressed the uprising, three hundred men were sentenced to death, but 38 of them were hanged, marking the event as the the largest mass execution in US history. Following the war, the Dakota were expelled from Minnesota (University of Minnesota n.p.).

this distinctive view of temporality not only ruptures “settler time” but also celebrates the Indigenous experiences of time.⁶⁸

In an attempt to decolonize both spaces and subjectivities, and beyond the bounds of achieving material decolonization, Native American authors have ways to re-think their relation to space that challenges Western-produced spatial knowledge. Counter mapping takes form at the level of the textual space, thus proposing renewed ways of physical mapping. This process is in great measure sustained by an engagement with the Western forms of representing and marking space, then by retrieving forms of spatial production that existed pre-contact. The literary maps of Indigenous peoples, pervasive in stories—oral or in writing—become alternative and subversive geographies.

5.1.1. (Re)mapping and Building Place-Worlds

The acknowledgment that space is produced and productive of hegemonies promotes the exploration of how the roots of spatial colonization lay bare its concealed systems. Rearticulating place inquiry on Indigenous terms requires unpacking the power dynamics that fueled colonialism. This includes (re)mapping, introduced by Tuck and McKenzie as a potent method for the decolonization project. The framing of (re) with parentheses is deliberate because, in Goeman’s view, Native American women weave traditional and new tribal stories as a means of continuation, or what Vizenor aptly calls stories of survivance. It perplexes the dominant narrative of romanticization of Native American relationship to land by arguing for place-based readings that center Indigenous women’s voices and bodies at the forefront of decolonial struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. In reclaiming voice, these texts resist invisibility, because they function as oppositional mappings of Western-centered

⁶⁸ “Rupturing settler time” is an argument by Mark Rifkin in *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (2017), in which he claims that, while asserting Native American survivance is commendable, it fails to address the hegemony of Western conceptions of temporality. Therefore, he advances the idea of “rupturing settler time” which is registered in Native American art and literature in their distinctive textualization of their remembrances through othered temporalities and spatialities. The element of time and its textualization in the biostories is explored from a different angle in Chapter 3.

cartographies.

Women authors contest colonial geographies by utilizing alternative forms of mapping. This strategy figures profusely in the biostory of Harjo's language that articulates her own "politics of location" (Goeman, "The Tools" 10). Harjo's employment of the Mvskokean directional path provides support for this reading, as she begins her journey East to the North and continues to the West, and then to the South, thus applying her own "politics of location" (Goeman, "The Tools" 10). The Western practice of cartography is carried out through the scientific conventions of scale, longitude, latitude, and direction to depict a landscape. In a subversive vein, Harjo's reinvention of the scientific discourse comes in the shape of cartographic conventions that align with Native American knowledge systems to counter the forms of knowledge that perpetrate the narrative of erasure and deny Native presence. The map is not something they learn from Western education but knowledge inherent in their traditional learning passed down from generation to generation through story.

In the biostory's introductory part "Ancestral Roots," Harjo is vested with the power through her voice to receive and communicate the teachings of the "Council." For her journey, she is equipped with a map. Unlike the conventional Western ones, hers is not made up of centers or peripheries nor is it marked on paper. The lines that make up colonial maps are reinvented into poetic lines that Girl-Warrior's spiritual map is composed of. It is "dressed . . . to enter the story, to make change. / They placed the map in her heart" (9). Later on, Harjo's "politics of place" continues to guide her to navigate "the story" as is discernible in the following lines:

I AM OBSESSED WITH MAPS and directions. The key to my internal map appears to read something like this: East: A healer learns through wounding, illness, and death. North: A dreamer learns through deception, loss, and addiction. West: A musician learns through silence, loneliness, and endless roaming. South: A poet learns through injustice, wordlessness, and not being heard. Center: A wanderer learns through

standing still. (*Poet Warrior* 45)

Dwelling on the counter-clockwise movement of Harjo's drawing of directions is, at this point, a glib and simplistic interpretation as it would orient the reading of this passage towards the Indigenous conceptualization of time, which, to my sense, would reinforce the romanticization of Native American cosmologies inherent in New Age fads. It is, however, the antinomical associations that make up the lines of this revelation: "healer/wound," "musician/silence," "poet/wordlessness" that beg close attention. Native American societies relate experiences to one another and not in terms of dualities (Sneider n.p.). Harjo critiques the Western conceptions of space by seeking to mend the dichotomies produced by colonial maps. In her reinterpretation of the Western cardinal points, Harjo hints at her cartography of healing through balance that can be achieved through mending these rifts.

Unlike the cartographic conventions intended to orient people through fixed points in space, Native Americans can orient themselves in place by achieving a spiritual balance between contradictions that Western understanding seeks to eliminate. All roles assumed by Harjo—healer, musician, poet—are associated with acts of creation and reinforced through the use of active verbs. As the journey comes full circle, not to the west but to the center, it presents yet another contradiction: "wanderer/standing still." Yet, it is through "standing still"—as in the endurance of tribal presence—that one can achieve sovereignty over the land, recasting the interplay of movement and rootedness as a defining element of "postindian warrior[ship]" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 4). The last dyad in the poem is worth further scrutiny as it could be interpreted as the reenactment of what Vizenor aptly terms "continental liberty" (*Native Liberty* 108) that roots Native sovereignty in the pre-contact era and is associated with Native mobility across the landscape.⁶⁹ In a Vizenorian sense, "standing still"

⁶⁹ According to Vizenor, Native continental liberty started with the inception of colonialism. The Indigenous worldviews of "native liberty, reciprocity, and visionary sovereignty" (*Native Liberty* 108) were impacted or "diminished" by the acts of legislation and land dispossessions by the first settlers and, later, by the United States after independence.

is symbolic of survivance, or an “active sense of presence” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 4).

The problematization of Western mapping practices is expounded in the biostories at various levels. What is remarkable, however, is how women authors recast Western frameworks of temporality through their counter-emphasis on spatiality. Motivated by her professional endeavors, Jensen, for example, adopts a non-linear storyline that maps her biostory following her mobility between campuses. As she memorializes the histories of each place she visits, she avers that they are not “hallowed [but] they are in fact stolen” (Jensen 61), haunted by the colonial violence through land dispossession. It is no surprise, then, that these spaces presently witness the atrocity of shootings made possible by the carry law. She reminds the reader that the campuses and the land each of them occupies were once the home of Indigenous nations until they were violently removed: the Osage from the University of Arkansas campus, the Umpqua from Umpqua Community College, and the Yankton Sioux and Dakota from the University of South Dakota campus.

Through *in situ* time travels, parallels between past and present are created, highlighting the recursive nature of physical violence, which cuts across linear conceptions of time. Settler colonialism and its attendant violence is a structure and not an event. This is reflected in the non-sequential placement and movement of the fifteen chapters of Jensen’s book. Likewise, the various chapters of her biostory focus on the trope of violence arguing that each place in the present carries relevant historical aggressions on Indigenous lands. Witnessing its perpetuation due to the carry law, Jensen becomes conscious of the reverberations of colonial violence, arguing that the same logic that facilitated place control is presently used for gun violence.⁷⁰ Thus, by revealing the brutal processes that uphold colonial maps, women authors not only grapple with colonial spatialities but give visibility to Indigenous knowledge of and presence in place.

⁷⁰ As per the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, people are guaranteed the right to keep and bear arms. This amendment was ratified on December 15, 1791 and reads: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed” (“The Bill of Rights”). “Constitutional carry” refers to the legal public carrying of a handgun without a license or permit.

The undertaking of research on and with place by Indigenous scholars involves the mobilization by Native American authors of narrative orientations to land instead of abstract Western conceptualizations of territory. This critical observation echoes building place-worlds and/or place-making, a concept advanced by Tuck and McKenzie as a core method to contest colonial geographies.⁷¹ I propose delving into building place-worlds because it is registered in the biostories in the women's distinctive mapping of personal and communal stories as a way of rethinking Western maps. Women authors conceive of the land as "an archive, [a] library, [a] genealogy" (J. Whitehead 88). This resonates with Byrd's depiction of the land as "mnemonic, [and] it has its own set of memories" (118). They highlight the instrumental role the land plays in Indigenous worldviews in preserving the memory of the peoples.⁷² This interpretation of land locates it in Indigenous ways of knowing while alienating it from Western geographical interpretation according to which space is blank and bereft of human existence.⁷³ By re-assuming their roles as keepers and transmitters of knowledge carried in the land—as it remembers and constructs relationships—and passed on through stories, women retrieve Indigenous epistemologies. Tightly linked to storytelling and imagination, "[w]hat people make of their places," Basso suggests "is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth. We are in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine" (5). In Native American epistemologies, the land and the parts of the landscape impart lessons through the remembered stories of what happened in these places. The landscape holds and embodies the accumulated memory and experience of the community.

The colonial representations of places are questioned in the biostories through an act of counterstorying, which involves presenting Indigenous knowledge of place, including

⁷¹ According to Basso, "place-making" is the retrospective of "building of place-worlds" (5). Despite the nuance in meaning, I use the terms synonymously.

⁷² Byrd (Chickasaw) prefers this designation because of her non-binary identity.

⁷³ L.T. Smith, for example, criticizes the terra nullius doctrine in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, where she provides various examples of Indigenous social movements. These were particularly significant in cultural revitalization through land reclamation.

toponymy. This type of knowledge is preserved in stories. The biostories discussed here offer a perception of land as having a history that must not only be respected but acknowledged through telling the stories of its connections “to multiple other spaces, histories, and peoples” (Goeman 2006). The land is not a space produced by the Western geographic conceptualizations, rather, it is a place imputed in the lives that affected and were affected by it as Basso’s method of building place-worlds demonstrates. When she compares the US practice of place-naming to the Native American one, Washuta, for example, argues that creating place-worlds through naming sites carries a strong connection to the storied nature of the place. She points to the colonial practice of the disruption of Indigenous place naming to substitute them with American ones. For example, she states in *White Magic*:

I learned about the Lenni-Lenape, the first nation the United States signed a treaty with after declaring independence. Lenape place names describe the land and what happened there before settlers tore into it. Aquashicola: the place where we fish with bush nets. Mahoning: at the mineral lick. Lopatcong: winter watering place for deer. Hokendauqua: searching for land. Settlers made new names: Liberty, Hope, Harmony, and Independence. I imagine the naming was a kind of white magic, an incantation against the wickedness they believed was striated into the bedrock. (115)

These lines serve as a critique of Western toponymy. Through this passage, Washuta reflects on the power dynamics that come into play in place naming. This certainly is an ironic nod to the stark disparities between the ideals associated with the concepts and the lived realities of Native American peoples in the face of injustices. The reference to the natural rights doctrine is evident. First developed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment—Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau—the concepts of liberty, independence, hope were later embedded in the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson, notably in the renowned aphorism “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Needless to say, the ideas of the Enlightenment provided the backdrop against which Eurocentrism thrived and paved the way for colonial

endeavors (L.T. Smith 67). The Lenni-Lenape tradition of naming places involves a deep connection with the landscape and its defining elements—human and other-than-human—hence, a practice that is communal in nature. So, in Native American epistemologies, places inspire their names, whereas settlers’ fixation on ownership entitles them to designate places. American place names sound vacuous because they are abstract ideas while Native American people associate their place names with existence and life as the active verbs “watering” and “searching” denote. The twain of Indigenous place names and colonial ones points to yet another distinction in the conceptualization of space. Place names, thus, not only restore Indigenous lands, they also validate Native American worldviews and memory.

5.2. (Im)material Crossings: “Mixed/Crossbloods”⁷⁴

Native transmotion is one of the terms connected with survivance. It is “[a] practice of ontological transformation that overcomes the separations imposed by colonial ontology worldviews” (Madsen, “On Subjectivity” xv). As Vizenor notes, “Native hybridity, transmotion, and that sense of an ancient presence and continental liberty were sacrificed by colonial, territorial greed” (*Native Liberty* 111). Native American presence is not fixed in space nor bound by colonial mappings, and movement, both in its presence and absence; it is a recurring motif in memoirs. Katja Sarkowsky argues: “[m]apping territory and the self through the narration of different types of movement is a crucial strategy in life writing. In Indigenous self-narratives, such mapping often tends to be connected to the exploration of overlaying stories—familial, ancestral, and frequently also mythical/spiritual that inscribes places of autobiographical significance” (“Cartographies” 109). In a similar vein, crossing

⁷⁴ “Crossbloods” (spelling in the original) is a term used by Vizenor to describe the complex identity of people who, like him, identify as Native Americans but are not of pure blood. He uses the term interchangeably with mixedblood, noting that: “[t]he crossblood acts as supplement, both in adding to, but also in replacing the idea of a pure tribal Indian identity based on blood and lineage” (Vizenor, *Interior* 263).

borders erected in the wake of colonialism becomes an act of transmotion. These borders can be physical, racial, and/or cultural. Hence, even though the authors are motivated by different aims, their crossings of borders—through constant movement on and within the land—can be seen as decolonizing strategies that enact the concept of transmotion.

This is reflected in how they build their lives around physical movement—between states, urban and rural spaces, on and off the Rez, and tribal divides transcending the notion of fixedness on multiple levels. Rather than dwelling on the destruction of kinship and dis-unification of families and tribes, women write of separation as though it were not separation at all. The image of generations moving across the Earth as she “sheds her skin” in Harjo’s biostory (*Poet Warrior* 3) aligns with the idea of the land’s ubiquity—a land not measurable by the conventional Western scientific categorizations, but experienced and lived through the movement of its peoples. As Washuta narrates,

I walk around lakes, meet friends for shared sandwiches at Como Park, spend weekends browsing book stacks at Native-owned bookstores, drinking coffee at a Native-owned coffee shop. There are Dakota and Anishinaabe and Métis and all manner of other Native people everywhere. There are Native people everywhere. There are Native people in everyday urban life, in everyday urban America. I love this more than I can properly explain. (*White Magic* 141)

In its territorial management of dispossessed land, gentrification facilitated the classification of space through the creation of culturally gentrified zones. The erasure of the distinctions between time and space not only highlights the importance of place but also frames identity as collective—trans-Indigenous, through the mention of various tribes, and trans-temporal, linking past and present generations. Washua addresses the erasure of Native American peoples from urban geographies. In the description of everyday urban life, like visiting coffee shops and bookstores, she reclaims urban space, both socially and culturally. The repetitive “everywhere” when referring to Native American individuals and its association with

mundane activities reifies Native American active presence in urban spaces instead of the colonial narrative that seeks to confine them in rural or reservation settings. The passage challenges colonial spatial narratives by countering erasure under cultural spatialization and presents movement and life as a counter-map to the colonial narratives.

To offset the constrained mobility of Native American subjects at the heyday of the relocation program and other programs,⁷⁵ Harjo's, Jensen's, and Washuta's constant movement and travels emerge as a forestalling of the synthetic borders drawn by settler colonial states, respectively, of Canada and the USA. Native movement, thus, transcends the victimization of Native Americans in what recasts Vizenorian transmotion; it is an assertion of presence that is self-sanctioned and upsetting of the US territorial boundaries, rather than the narrative of removal and dislocation.

To the rhetorical question: "Why were you on the road?" Jensen replies, "Because all roads lead to the body and through it. Because too many of us have these stories and these roads and these seasons. Because you carry theirs and they carry yours, and in this way, there is a measure of balance" (7). Her response places emphasis on the body as a site—and rite—of passage, and a vessel for memory. The trope of the road invokes itinerancy as reconnecting with embodied experience and ancestral memory. The body emerges as a vessel for shared stories making it both a personal and collective archive. Refracted through an Indigenous feminist lens, these lines are a direct indictment of settler colonialism's attempt to erase Indigenous presence by rupturing relationships to land through restricting their mobility and bodily sovereignty. Because it is often associated with displacement under colonial context, Jensen's language reclaims itinerancy as a ceremonial and relational act as it acts as a form of kinship-building, where people carry each other's burdens and stories, creating "a measure of balance." The balance reiterates Indigenous feminist values of reciprocity.

⁷⁵ Concurrent with the 1953 Termination program by Congress, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) started a voluntary urban relocation program in 1956. Native American individuals were encouraged into moving to urban areas, such as Denver or Chicago (National Archives n.p.).

Mobility, or being “on the road,” in Jensen’s articulation, is not about rootlessness, but a path to reclaiming the body and the land. It is a decolonial form of mapping which centers the lived and storied Indigenous body. Movement, then, holds both material and symbolic weight, as seen in the authors’ traversals through Native spaces and, at times, even across the borders between North and South America. Women uproot colonial practices of boundary-making by honoring their mixed heritage and collapsing the material as well as the constructed racial lines.

Vizenor emphasizes that the “words Métis and mixed blood possess no social or scientific validation because blood mixture is not a measurement of consciousness, culture, or human experiences” (*Earthdivers* ix), highlighting the metaphorical nature of Indigenous blood. In this sense, mixedbloods embody survivance by engaging creatively with fixed notions of identity. Their trickster-like attributes—distinction-blurring—enable them to navigate and disrupt the rigid notions of identity imposed by settler colonialism. Accordingly, movement in its metaphoricity occurs between identities, challenging Western spatial logics and unmaking the “boxes” (Goeman 108) created by accepting the political and legal systems, such as blood quantum tabulations. Yet, in the discussion of the term of blood, it is important to acknowledge how Krupat, in his book *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (1989), critiques the notion of “mixed-blood identity.” He points to the tensions and the complications that arise from navigating multiple identities, and approaches the concept of crossbloods with caution, warning against its mystification (13). In response to Krupat’s interpretation, Vizenor—himself a crossblood—problematizes such essentialist readings and reframes this term as a site of creative and narrative resistance.

Nonetheless, crossbloods, to use Vizenor’s term, defy the fixed representations of the “real Indian” as merely proper bodies and full bloods, surviving in the right places, namely reservations. Therefore, they escape spatial and temporal fixations. The interplay of movement and rootedness is reflected in Washuta’s and Jensen’s celebration of their mixed

heritage, yet also in their partial disconnection from either identity. The fact that these authors are both mixed-blood features prominently in their biostories. Their active sense of presence is achieved through mapping their lives as existing at the borders of contrasting cultures. Being at the borderlands of two racial identities, their metaphorical journeys emulate their self-definition as crossbloods. The borders traversed by these women join two identities and two cultures that become spaces of inclusion rather than sites of disjunction.

Articulating the body/land connection in their narrated lives, women authors activate what Peter Morin (Tahltan) calls “perform[ing] the memory of the land” (67) achieved through bringing their bodies into the land where their communities had been displaced from; a place which was an integral part of their indigeneity. By journeying—walking or driving—through the same path of their ancestors, women authors perform a material return of the land.⁷⁶ “Memory of the land” evokes a visceral geography of colonial trauma, where knowledge is not only cognitive but deeply felt. A sentence like: “I don’t know where to put this information in my body” by Jensen gestures towards a refusal of immaculate articulation (92). It provides the author a method for conveying her feelings grounded in affect and bodily response.

5.3. *Making Love with the Land: Re-signifying Bodies and Sexualities*⁷⁷

Andrea Smith notes: “It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place” (qtd. in Madsen *The Routledge Companion* n.p.). This argument is echoed in Jensen’s biostory as she maintains: “The taking by force of our land has always been twinned with the taking by force of our bodies, of our most vulnerable bodies” (187-88). Repeated four times throughout the essay “Fracture and Song,” this assertion unfolds as a reckoning with history and an echo from the past which resonates in the present.

⁷⁶ “Memory of the land” was introduced by Million in a talk entitled “We Are the Land and the Land Is Us : Indigenous Land, Lives and Embodied Ecologies in the Twenty-First Century” delivered at The University of Toronto in 2017.

⁷⁷ The title of this section was inspired by Joshua Whitehead’s 2022 book.

Its inflection enacts an instance of ritual testimony to accentuate the entanglement of colonial territorial dispossession and bodily violation. Joining “land” and “bodies” brings to mind a somatic geography, where seizing land is equated with dominating the bodies and agency of Indigenous peoples. The looping line throughout the chapter further highlights the tenacity of this entanglement, leading to the realization that both wounds need to be healed in tandem.

Considering that denying women’s sexualities is on par with denying their part in creation, women biostorytellers reclaim sovereignty over their sexualities and, by extension, bodies contending with heteronormativity, to exemplify a model of transgressive autobiographical practice. Therefore, pressing for “the healing of soil and water in partnership with the healing of [their] bodies, spirits, and minds” (L. Hall n.p.) is the next logical course of action in rethinking Western spatiality. I investigate how the biostorytellers parallel the colonially-imposed heteronormative discourse with the appropriation of their tribal land. Richly informed by insights from Indigenous feminist thought, this part of the chapter provides a reading of women’s thematization of the land/body connection.

Quoting Audra Simpson, Washuta reflects on passing as a double-edged tactic that once facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous lands: “One’s life, one’s land, sovereignty, one’s body, emptied out, in order for other things to pass through’ . . . ‘This, Simpson says, is what the settler state demands. They could not kill me, so they told me I wasn’t Native at all. When I defied them and would not and would not be made a white woman, they asked me Are you sure? Are you sure? Are you sure? And over and over I said, I’m sure, I’m sure, I’m sure” (*White Magic* 228). The title of A. Simpson’s article “The State Is a Man” is evocative of this connection between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. The parallel with the biblical episode of Peter denying Jesus, which is apparent in the repetition of the phrase three times, is uncanny. It is worth noting that the religious discourse vindicated the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by marginalizing them, the logic was grounded in the belief that Indigenous sexuality was deviant and morally transgressive, which justified colonization of

the land. On the ground that Indigenous people could not govern or control their sexuality so are they unable to govern their land.⁷⁸ Presently, using the same trope to her advantage, Washuta humorously claims that passing helped her escape debts and cops' control by passing as white (227).

"Borders are the flesh wounds of the empire," claims Washuta, "[o]n the map they look like stitches on a belly" (*White Magic* 391). The analogy draws on a powerful image that links lands dispossession with sexual violence. The terms "empire" and "belly" are contrasted with each other in the way they are both positioned at the end of sentences. This juxtaposition can be interpreted as an echo to the victimizer/victimized dichotomy, further reinforced by the connotation of empire/male, belly/female metaphors. The belly represents the land that carries an ecology of various elements. It also signifies the act of creation. No wonder then that the creation stories of Indigenous people are connected to place. Here, "the flesh" is equated to the skin or the body of Indigenous people, implying the entanglement of the body with the land. The erection of borders in Washuta's description is supported by the violent act the result of which is a "wound" so deep that it requires stitches. Despite this visceral and disturbing description, I read it as an affirmation of survivance. The belly, though lacerated, still connotes life and regeneration because it is indivisible from the act of procreation. Surely, stitches leave their mark, materially reflected in the history of genocide and its resulting generations of traumatized Indigenous peoples, but they are essentially ephemeral.

Indigenous feminist theories reveal that settler colonialism operates through gendered systems by imposing Eurocentric hierarchies rooted in heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism onto Indigenous peoples. These enforced power structures differ markedly from Indigenous balanced social systems. Colonialism specifically "targets women, femmes, and two-spirit relatives because of their high status within the matrilineal and matrilineal leadership

⁷⁸ A. Smith connects sexual violence to colonial violence. She maintains that Indigenous people, particularly women, were viewed as innately depraved, hence "sexually violable and 'rapable,' and so is their land" (Smith, *Sexual Violence* 10-12).

structures that form the foundation of customary Indigenous legal and political authority” (The Red Nation n.p.). Indigenous feminist scholars advocate intersectional approaches in their call for active promoting of decolonization and addressing the violence faced by Indigenous women. De-emphasizing biological sex in favor of self-determination and social roles within the community, most Indigenous conceptualizations of gender recognize multiple genders as vital for social balance, which offers a meaningful way to advance decolonization.

Unraveling the layers of Indigenous women’s narration of their lives reveals how women authors bluntly challenge fetishizing images of Native American women and push against the imposed gender expectations. Washuta’s biostories thematize the body in all its forms and shapes, through highs and lows, even sexual abuse and rape. Consider the ironic tone in the following passage by Washuta, who subverts the illusory markers of identity constructed by white settlers. She criticizes the fact that the match is algorithmic, not relational, which makes it as imaginary as the fantasies white men have about Native American women:

A settler man I once matched with on Tinder said he liked that I was Native, it was sexy. I asked him to explain. He said, “I think a psychoanalyst should answer that question but if I attempt to analyze myself, I would say that there are multiple reasons for that, such as: Native American women are gorgeous, they are protective, strong and kind mothers. Native American people are (at least seem to me) very honest and honorable, they seem very exotic which they are, and people find exotic sexy etc. . . .” How many settler boys learned through stories that a Native woman should be expected to be a chief’s daughter waiting to be promised to a warrior or saved by a white hero? How many times have I showed up doomed to fail them just by being myself because they said they liked me for who I was when they meant they liked the fantasy maiden they were prepared for me to be? (*White Magic* 227)

The speaker relies on her biting irony and self-awareness to expose how settler colonial

fantasies continue to sexualize and objectify Native American women shrouded in admiration. Adjectives like “gorgeous,” “exotic,” “protective,” and “honorable” point to the romanticized language which abstracts indigeneity to consumable tropes embedded in colonial narratives. In a pseudo-psychoanalytic, self-justificatory moment, the “settler” unintentionally lays bare the assimilated scripts that frame Native women in a reduced mode of being: the sexualized “maiden,” the noble caregiver, and the spiritual other. Washuta unsettles these projections by unmasking how they are ingrained in popular imagination through counterposing the encounter with rhetorical questions such as: “How many settler boys learned.” In the final ironic position, she reclaims voice and agency by inviting the reader to consider how Indigenous women resist prescribed narratives by insisting on being seen in their complex humanity. The oversexualization of Native American women is undermined because women assume or, rather, reassume pre-contact understanding of femininity.

In recovering the feminine according to Native American worldviews, the body of women is a compelling entry into the attempt at cultural resurgence. Moreton-Robinson contends: “The body for Indigenous women is the link to people, country, spirits, herstory and the future, and is a positive site of value and affirmation as well as a site of resistance” (n.p.). Women’s bodies carry deep cultural and relational meanings. As such, they transcend their materiality and trigger resistance, starting with unsettling the mythologized sexual images of the Native American body. On the one hand, women do not shy away from recentering their bodies by presenting them as existing in balance with the mind. On the other hand, their bodies are delivered from their corporeal meaning by continuously referring to the dysfunctional and disabled body. Therefore, both the oversexualization of Native American women and the biopoliticization of the Native American bodies, in general, are thwarted.

Risling Baldy claims that “the politics of taboo created by Western scholars was heavily invested in justifying and normalizing heteropatriarchy by making women and their bodies ‘taboo’” (6). My reading of Washuta’s eating disorders caused by her manic episodes,

and Elliott's and Jensen's experiences with motherhood demonstrate how women writers restore the balance through reversals of the colonial discourse that subjugated their sexualities. They rely on the potential of negative affect as counter-memory and, by extension, a counternarrative to the tabooing of Indigenous bodies. In *My Body*, for example, Washuta pragmatizes her body as she shares memories of sexual trauma and her insecurities with her body shape through the distorting lens of humor and irony. She discusses the notion of promiscuity and ownership of her body with a straightforward and disarming wit. The essay entitled "I will Perfect Every Line Until my Profile Is Flawless" is evocative of its outcome. The word "line" carries multiple layers of meaning: a line in her Match.com profile, a line in the essay, and line as in body silhouette. Notes 89 and 102 are a supplement of lines describing Washuta's profile picture and of her body type, respectively:

89 . . . in this photo, my short hair is growing out after its worst butchery ever; my face is caked with makeup that took half an hour to apply . . . but most mortifying is the pose . . . My gut, despite its strain, asserts itself against the hot pink jersey meant to shield it. My red-tipped fingers on my hands that reach from upwardly-stretched arms are the spikes on a praying mantis's raptorial forelegs, and my eyes, too say that I will devour a mother-fucker. . . . 102 I kind of want to exclude the "athletic and toned" body type from my wish list because I figure anyone with a body like mine to be a heifer and turn around at the first glimpse of my thirteen-pounds-away-from-overweight figure upon our first meeting. (*My Body* 165-67)

The formal economy of the essay is visible in its polished surface—"perfect [in] every line"—and its language functions as a literary analogue to how normative views of bodies are disseminated in the dominant narrative. In her challenge of these constructs, Washuta uses the footnotes to locate the more subversive and straightforward content. Her choice to bifurcate content between main body and paratext mirrors the spatialization of the distinction between

norm and deviance. Washuta, thus, literally speaks from a marginal space. Her boldness is reflected in the detailed descriptions bordering on salaciousness, especially in her repetitive use of expletives like the “f-word.” This brash choice throws into relief how Native American women’s bodies had been the object of fantasy by white males and the object of disgust for white women (Moreton-Robinson n.p.), and exemplifies the embodied nature of remembering.

The weaknesses registered on the body are not metaphors, but embodied expressions of how physical and discursive colonial violence is lived in and through women’s bodies, rendering them as archive, witness, and a site of resistance. Following her mother’s death, Harjo remembers the particular moment when she had to wash the deceased’s body:

I thank her body for carrying us through the tough story,
through the violence of my father, and her second husband.

The story is all there, in her body, as I wash her to prepare her to be let down into earth
and return all stories to the earth. My body memories rise up as I wash. I recall
carrying my two children, rocking them, and feeding them from my body.

How I knew myself as beloved Earth, in that body. (*Poet Warrior* 214)

Harjo’s articulation of how the body carries personal trauma from violence is coated in her gratitude. The body is not merely a tool for remembering or a site of memory, but an archive triggered through sensory channels, in this case, the energy transmitted in the daughter’s washing, touching, and thanking the body, Harjo acknowledges women’s role in bearing and carrying the weight of a generational story. Washing her mother’s body for the last rites, Harjo washes off the memories of trauma on her remains, leaving the story of women’s bodies as sites for struggle. Only stories of resilience and survivance linger, ready to be “return[ed] to earth.” The body becomes the means through which women live and feel the space they inhabit.

The image of “returning all stories to the earth” is not to be read as a metaphor. It is a

powerful line imbued with Indigenous cosmologies according to which the body and the land are one. The return to the land is not merely a ceremonial act but the affirmation that sovereign bodies are synonymous with sovereign lands. This line of thought diverges from the teleological explanation of life in Western terms. Death, here, is not considered the end but seen as restoryation of the mother's life into another context, the land. Mothering, as embodied knowledge passed down from one generation to another, is achieved here. The transition to Harjo's own experience of mothering directs the attention to how mother subjectivity is formed not only through embodied practice but through intergenerational transmission. Beyond its lyricism, the last line, "How I knew myself as beloved Earth, in that body," is a gripping portrayal of the intimate connection between mothers' bodies and the earth. Identifying as "beloved Earth" dissolves the boundary between body and land. This is not only a direct rejection of colonial spatial knowledge which operates on divisions, but also introduces the notion of rematriation.

Conclusion

Native American communities' geographical imaginations and everyday realities have been shaped by political domination and the maps of the state since the inception of settler colonialism. Consequently, the power of women's resistant geographies lies in re-articulating their knowledge of the land as an alternative to the legal claims over it. This reflection exposes the spatial injustices perpetuated by settler colonialism against Indigenous communities. It chronicles Native American women's refusal to be defined, erased, or subjugated to colonial law, highlighting that colonialism was a gendered process and that decolonization efforts must address this aspect. Through their literary maps, Native American women engage with Western spatial practices, while asserting their own knowledge systems to produce and claim spaces. Through a meticulous analysis of the spatial dimensions within the creative endeavors of Native women, this study underscores the gendered nature of colonialism, stressing that decolonization must acknowledge and address these gendered

dynamics. Additionally, the active agency of women in shaping spatial environments is highlighted in their crucial role in creating places essential to the vitality of Native communities.

Rethinking the map is achieved in literary texts through women's uncovering of settler colonialism's reorganization of Indigenous land and bodies to, ultimately, advance alternative ways to interpret space through (re)mapping. The process paves the way to the reclamation of stolen space by generating place-worlds consistent with Native American worldviews. By actively engaging in these processes, women attempt to recover land-based ethics consonant with healing from the trauma caused by the disruption of kinship with the land. Focusing on restorying the land, women compose their literary maps in a way that engenders returning to and of the land, both in their symbolic and material capacities. These literary maps as they exist at the intersection of Indigenous feminism, politics, sexuality and, spatial inquiry, fueled by decolonization, can spark off change in Indigenous studies and work towards sovereignty. But, for this project to be ethically meaningful, land sovereignty should be addressed in cahoots with decolonizing Indigenous bodies.

Chapter 6: “Bring Her Home”: Rematriating Maternal Subjectivities⁷⁹

She is the Old Woman . . . the one who Remembers and Re-members

—Paula G. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*

Introduction

Laura Marcus explained in 1994 that “‘autobiography’ as conventionally defined is often judged to be a limited and inappropriate means of representing . . . nonhegemonic subjectivities and identities” (223). This contention was emphasized by postmodern and postcolonial theories regarding the untold differences among subjects, particularly reflected in women’s autobiographical criticism. Indigenous mothers’ subjectivities have been shaped by historically imbued representations of indigeneity developed in anthropological and religious discourses. Moreton-Robinson states: “[t]he subjectivity of Indigenous women is denied by methodological erasure” (n.p.). Therefore, I proceed with probing into the idea of “[a]dmitting subjectivity through autobiography” (Moreton-Robinson n.p.), starting with the idea that Indigenous epistemologies “[i]nvolv[e] an ecological self that is rooted in the land and relationships with non-human agencies or persons . . . [and] [t]he maintenance and transmission of cultural knowledge, and the expression of collective identity” (Gone and Kirmayer 244).

In the present chapter, I argue that through the use of the autobiographical mode in conjunction with recycling narrative strategies rooted in tribal storytelling, the selected biostories convey a reclamation of their women’s maternal subjectivities in what I refer to as

⁷⁹ The title is inspired by Kenneth Lincoln’s sixth chapter of *Indi’n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America* (1992), “‘Bring Her Home’: Louise Erdrich.” In this chapter, Lincoln discusses Erdrich’s (Chippewa) employment of the trope of homing through “coming home to the motherland” (209). While Lincoln focuses on the writer’s use of humor in her works, I recast this metaphor to how Native American women’s adoption of a motherist rhetoric through rematriation “calls [readers] home” (Lincoln 211) to their understanding of motherhood and Mother Earth.

rematriation as these personal stories restore balance in areas of their lives where the disruptive colonial practices have wreaked havoc, expanding the reading of all six texts by mobilizing relevant contexts. The chapter intends to focus on biostory as a rhetorical space where Indigenous mothers enact a subjectivity that is defiant of the one constructed by settler colonialism. Theirs is exhibitivite of the Indigenous feminist movement of rematriation whereby they engage in an active sense of presence and survivance through a return to the feminine, a matricentric perspective, and a re-centering of the trope of Mother/Earth. As such, the chapter also unfolds a new iteration of theorizing of maternal subjectivity focusing on Indigenous interpretations in what is known as rematriation.

The concept of rematriation is the manifestation of this rhetoric in the grammar of autobiographical studies. It is the developmental process of re-becoming a mother. This chapter explores how contemporary Native American biostory enacts rematriation. This is achieved through foregrounding motherhood and resisting settler colonialism pilfering Indigenous women's motherhood and maternal subjectivities. To illuminate moments where maternal subjectivities are reclaimed in these personal life stories, I employ the concepts of performativity, relationality, and positionality to guide my analysis. In this context, addressing my topic requires clarifying these theoretical terms.

The starting point for reclaiming one's subjectivity is to state one's positionality, or how one situates oneself in relation to others and systems of power. Endorsing a "subject position" entails the deployment of situated knowledge that enables the subject to "negotiate within the constraints of discursive regimes as they present themselves" (Smith and Watson, "New Genres" 15). Performativity, in turn, designates autobiographical occasions as expressive of Indigenous women's identities where they (re)enact pre-contact Indigenous understanding of motherhood. In this view, subjectivities are not fixed or essential attributes of autobiographical subjects. Instead, they are enacted and repeated through cultural norms and discourses (Smith and Watson, "New Genres" 14). Finally, relationality emphasizes the

interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of relatedness among various peoples. Relationality recasts the Indigenous belief that “‘all my relations’ [include] territories with rivers, creeks, lakes, hills, rocks, plants, and all the creatures on it” (Campbell qtd. in Reder, *Autobiography* n.p.).

Maternal subjectivity articulates the idea that mothers are subjects with agency, as opposed to being objects with dependent children. At first sight, the examples of mothers featured in the stories are either present in memories or as spirits. This representation runs counter to the Western understanding of agency. In the Native American context, the agency is present because mothers existing in memories or appearing as a spectral presence are as agentic as any other person. They all exist in stories, which, in Vizenorian terminology, embody knowledge that is being restored in women’s life narratives. As mothers themselves, the writers represent the maternal lines they come from; women give voice to erstwhile silenced mothers, investing this voice and passing it down to their daughters—biological or otherwise. With its roots pointing towards the mother, rematriation is as much a revaluing of the feminine and gynocratic social model as it is about reconnecting with Mother Earth. It is believed that “motherhood is the unfinished work of feminism” (O’Reilly 14). I advance the idea that rematriation is the continuance of Indigenous feminism as it shakes the very grounds upon which the patriarchal structure of colonialism was established.

6.1. Colonial Constructions of Indigenous Mother(hood)

Vizenor proclaims that, under dominance, access to subjectivity is mediated through the simulated Other (qtd. in Siemerling 93). Racializing others through labels as definers served to alienate Native American people from each other, their land, and all their relations and served as the ethical infrastructure of colonialism. This echoes on many levels Moreton-Robinson’s statement who maintains that settlers defined women and mothers through the snide gaze of male settlers. Ethnographic projects as grand narratives of colonialism, as Moreton-Robinson declares, left Indigenous communities vulnerable to

overwriting or appropriation as subjects bereft of agency. The relationship between Indigenous people and settlers involved the processes of “dispossession, domination, and domestication” (Moreton-Robinson n.p.).⁸⁰ The foundation and perpetuation of the constructed subjectivities of Native American subjects were challenged on various counts, but essentially in literary fields. Writing the self is a method to unwrite the seemingly objective ethnographic accounts of Western “regimes of knowledge” and rewrite history through the women’s lived and felt experience of motherhood.

Narrating the self can be regarded as a means of returning the mother to the center of the narrative in a bid to subvert the negative depiction of motherhood. Broadly, settler narratives see motherhood as a “cis-female experience” (Minthorn 4), essentializing it to a biological bond between mother and child, and to the societal expectations associated with mothering post birthing. In Native American understanding, motherhood involves more than biological connections. It values “axiological and ontological orientations” (Minthorn 4), which involves more comprehensive dimensions like shared values and essential modes of being. Native American women cite their roles as mothers and their role as the primeval thrust for writing personal narratives. Their leadership roles flow from their position as mothers and, specifically, grandmothers (Green qtd. in Udel 48).

One of the most critical historical truths revealed in the biostories is the colonial agenda of producing Indigenous subjectivities to control them better and seize their land. Removal operated physically with the evacuation of Indigenous bodies from their ancestral lands and, ontologically, as these communities’s lives were embodied in interlinkages with other subjectivities. Native American autobiographical subjectivity refers to the dynamic process of negotiating subjectivity outside the classical frame of the colonial subject,

⁸⁰ Domestication is the practice by settlers meant on the surface to assimilate Native American individuals. It operated through a process of “resocializing and educating” them to “function in a whiteman’s world” (Moreton-Robinson n.p.). While on the surface level, such a project was welcomed as benevolent, the reality was far from being perfect as the minimal training received by Aboriginal people in the case of Australia, was meant to make them indentured servants in emerging middle class Australian families.

re-locating it into Indigenous worldviews that favor land and the feminine. As such, Indigenous subjectivities, especially of women, are premised on the restoration of Indigenous ways of being and knowing that involve a reconnection with the principle of the feminine and the resurgence of cultural practices, notably those that recenter land-based indigeneity.⁸¹

Racializing others through labels as definers served to alienate Native American people from one another, their land, and all their relations, and provided the ethical infrastructure of colonialism. In colonial records “Indigenous women are objects that lack agency. The landscape is disrupted by the emergence of the life writings of Indigenous women whose subjectivities and experiences of colonial processes are evident in their texts” (Moreton-Robinson n.p.). What I refer to as a motherist rhetoric or stance is brought forward in the biostories as women recenter maternal experience, identity, and knowledge, thus opposing the colonial narratives. Elevating mothers’ voices, struggles, and agency within the self-narrative highlights the importance of mothering as a personal and political act.

The systematic destruction of Indigenous mothering practices was orchestrated through the establishment of boarding schools that resulted in the disruption of matrilineality, the removal of children from their biological families, and coerced sterilization through severance from the land. This disruption caused the loss of embodiment and, eventually, disembodied subjectivities. In this sense, embodiment is understood as the intersubjective experience embedded in the Indigenous worldview of a communal and relational existence. In the context of motherhood, settler colonialism employed the above-mentioned strategies to sever Indigenous women from their traditional roles and understandings of maternal subjectivity. Eurocentric and patriarchal colonial systems erased Indigenous modes of

⁸¹ I construe land-based indigeneity as the reframing of the relationship between Indigenous communities and land in which land is not a backdrop, fantasy, or commodity, but kin. This view disrupts the romanticization of Indigenous identity by dominant narratives which portray Native peoples as timeless elements of the natural landscape, rendering Indigenous presence on land merely romantic. More than retreating to a static or idealized image of the past, a land-based view of indigeneity concerns remembering and reasserting the relationships—human or otherwise—that have always defined indigeneity.

theorizing motherhood as interwoven with land, kinship, and spiritual responsibility. Mothers became objects to the dependence of their children, thus bereft of any agency.

This disembodiment is aptly illustrated in women's biostories, which detail the calamitous consequences of colonial interference with Indigenous family structures. Washuta incisively reflects on how Native American mothers' subjectivities were emptied of meaning by denying them the right to motherhood opportunities and responsibilities. It is increasingly draining for mothers to gain access to who they are when they are denied information about their bodies, by the church and the state controlling their fertility. Washuta's first biostory is evocative in problematizing the previous. When she attended a Catholic school as a child, she was taught that "women's sin is sexual" (*My Body* 24), adding that "we were supposed to cross our legs, clamp them shut with steel; we were supposed to guard our chastity with our lives. It made sense. My body is a book of rules" (*My Body* 22).

Washuta's reminiscence drips with irony. The imagery of "steel" and "clamping" repurposes the violence of weaponry, thus casting women's chastity as a war to be fought where bodies become battlegrounds. The climactic final line is even more bitter, as women's bodies are reduced to a manual written by others, in this case, masked as divine will. The sarcastic tone counters the intensity of the teachings and, as it becomes evident from later developments in Washuta's life story, her reclamation of agency over her sexuality further reveals the absurdity and the role of religion in constraining her choice of becoming a mother.

In keeping with a broader trend of dehumanizing Indigenous motherhood, women's life stories exemplify settlers' enforcement of the residential school system that limited their and their ancestor's ability to mother in culturally ethical ways. Elliott's reflection on how "so many children [were] stolen from [mothers'] arms and placed in residential schools" embodies the colonial interference with Indigenous motherhood. She describes it as "[a] toxic, traumatizing history of colonial dominion over Indigenous identity" which operated to disrupt biological ties, by extension, the familial and tribal ones between mothers and their children

(114). In the same way, removing children from their families was an affront to Indigenous motherhood; the denial of status to women contributed markedly to the disruption of matrilineality.

The gendered training in boarding schools radically reorganized Indigenous familial relations to make them conform to a homogeneous patriarchal order. Matrilineal societies, in particular, were absorbed into a hierarchy that placed Indian men below white males but above Indian women. Old patterns of genealogy were vilified as Native women and their children in interracial marriages were banned from membership in their own tribal nations. According to Million, the Indian Act of 1876 and the boarding school system fundamentally altered familial structures. They did not only affect matrilineal communities but also included communities that relied on paternal lines to determine identity, property, and responsibility (“Felt Theory” 270).

The practice of motherhood in Indigenous worldviews is transmitted intergenerationally. Settler colonialism sought to seize Native land by delegitimizing the Indigenous status upon marrying a non-status spouse. This reflection is rendered in tones of irony by Elliott:

If you were a Native man who married a non-Native woman, congratulations! You, your wife, and your children were legally entitled to a laminated card affirming everyone’s Indian status. . . . That’s right: Native women were put into the position of having to choose between their nation, home, and identity—and their husbands. Pretty good way to further degrade traditional matrilineality, no? (n.p.)

Inscribed in the congratulatory exclamation in the beginning and the rhetorical question punctuating the passage, the author’s ironic stance is hard to miss. Elliott evaluates the role of colonialism in foisting both gendered and legal apparatuses to oppress Indigenous mothers. Women are faced with a double bind. On the one hand, by marrying a non-Indigenous person they lose their status under colonial law, which would strip them of their land rights and, by

extension, their cultural identity. On the other hand, choosing to stay within their community would result in relinquishing their loved one. The Cornelian choice Indigenous mothers were faced with was engineered to erode matrilineal structures and facilitate settler colonialism. This tactic did not only dampen Indigenous sovereignty through the bodies of women, but it also demeaned motherhood as a cultural and legal foundation. Similarly, Indigenous women faced a form of maternal exile because their own children could not legally belong to their community, disrupting intergenerational knowledge transmission.

As disenfranchised subjects, women revert the colonial gaze and reclaim agency by operating a reflective lens on the “asymmetries of power” through colonial oppression and making visible the incumbency to negotiate Indigenous subjectivities with the settlers (Smith and Watson, “New Genres” 20). Considering that “settlers will not listen to the voices of real-life Indigenous people and, further, seem unable to realize that by expecting us to be their Ideal Indian Caricatures” (Elliott n.p.), Elliott wrote her biostory to make her and her community’s voices heard.⁸²

Native American autobiographical subjectivity refers to the dynamic process of negotiating subjectivity outside the classical frame of the colonial subject, re-locating it into Indigenous worldviews that favor land and the feminine. In her disclosing of women’s motherist rhetoric, Green affirms that “[m]odels of kinship [mother, sister, grandmother, aunt] are used by Indian women to measure their leadership capacity and to measure the success of their leadership” (qtd. in Udel 48). This statement rationalizes women’s deliberate defiance of the colonial production of their subjectivities as they have been swindled out of their mothering obligations using the disruptive practice of removing Native American children from their families and their people to place them at boarding schools. This rupture was nocuous to women’s kinship roles in their communities. As a response, women evince

⁸² This sentence is from an essay entitled “Not Your Noble Savage” in Elliott’s biostory *A Mind Spread out on the Ground*. This essay in particular features only in the 2019 edition of the book, published by Penguin Random House. Since I have this edition in an ebook format, the page numbers are not available.

examples of women who willingly embrace motherhood despite adversity, reclaiming, thus, their agency over their bodies and their right to it. When she goes through “the doorway of womanhood” following a ceremony where the Ancient Ones breathed wisdom into her, Harjo declares: “The word ‘mother’ wants to take over this whole story, and there is no combination of words, sentences, or paragraphs that could carry that weight, that story, and how it was borne from one mother to the next, from generations, from the beginning” (*Poet Warrior* 88). This passage reflects how rematriation is presented as a reclamation of not only women’s roles in the family and community but also their deep connection to the Earth, spirituality, and cultures. As such, Harjo never fails to foreground the experience of her mother as an influential figure in her identity formation: “If I consider that my purpose with her in this life was to stand beside her as her witness, her advisor, then I find peace. If I take away all the mothering expectations implied in the word ‘mother,’ then my mother becomes a human being. I make peace with my personal story of mothering. I am honored to have served my mother. I am honored to be a mother” (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 88).

Harjo’s interpretation of motherhood filters through her emotional statement, which opposes the notions of maternal subjectivity as reduced to nurturing. The speaker understands motherhood as a reciprocally rewarding experience that rests on an intergenerational bond rather than a role defined by social norms. In these terms, Harjo lays bare the word “mother” from its artifices and humanizes her own mother by removing the word “mother” from its conjured patriarchal connotations. Indigenous maternal subjectivity is, thus, reconfigured from dependence to independence. This repositioning highlights the subjectivity of Indigenous mothers as being adaptable, self-reliant, and impacted by community and spirit instead of colonial norms.

Revealing that their experiences are grounded in histories different from those constructed by white discursive domains, women “use [felt] experience for accumulating and

producing subjugated knowledge” (Moreton-Robinson n.p.).⁸³ While in Foucauldian terms, power and knowledge operate hand in hand, developments in subjectivity studies foreground the notion of “situated knowledge,” where subjectivity is “nomad” and thrives through “consubstantial intersubjectivity in interactive ecologies shared by human and nonhuman beings” (Bignall et al. 159). Indigenous people insist on their ontologies and ways of being. Their resurgent work is reflected in the embodiment of an “Indigenous alternative” (Tatonetti 222) and the deployment of deeply “felt” knowledge and experience. Women’s “subjugated” knowledge highlights how they, as women, mothers, and sexed bodies, lived and felt colonialism and the subsequent racism and sexism in its wake.

6.2. Reclaiming Subjectivities through Narrating Lives

Complicating processes of differentiation under “colonial regimes of power/knowledge” where “particular relationalities, intersectionalities, and lives are rendered unthinkable” (Vimalassery et al. 1) underpin the project of rematriation in biostories and, by extension, this chapter. Colonial unknowing was practiced in concert with material violence in order “to preclude relational modes of analysis and ways of knowing otherwise” (Vimalassery et al. 1). Biostory, as a “new work of storying,” provides a textual landscape where “the body of the storyteller is never removed from the bodies of their landbase, riverbase, oceanbase” (J. Whitehead 80). This pans up as auspicious for rematriation as a “critical [paradigm] for rereading and unmapping Indigenous multilayered identities” (Portillo 2). Owing to its generationality, the life story of an individual images as a communal one, as affirmed by Grover: “Everyone has a story that is part of the larger web of stories that is our existence” (*Gichigami* 51). Undoubtedly, autobiographical subjectivities are at variance with those displayed in biostories. For this reason, I opt for using different theoretical concepts to explore the construction of subjectivity in this mode of expression. The texts are penned by

⁸³ Moreton-Robinson levels a virulent critique against white feminists by labeling them “analogizers” as they compare sexism to racism. According to the Goenpul scholar, white feminists have been complicit in colonialism through exercising their “race privilege” and the exclusion of othered women. Therefore, white women have become the universal standard for all women (n.p).

contemporary Native American women who advance a return to culture through a return to the feminine, yielding a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity. Smith and Watson prod the necessity “to investigate the heteronomous meanings of the ‘colonial subject’ and to explore autobiography as a potential site of decolonization” (*De/Colonizing the Subject* xxi–xxii). I aim to highlight moments in the biostories as indigenized autobiographical acts through which Indigenous mothers express resistance to colonial narratives.

6.2.1. “I Am [Indigenous] Woman”: Asserting Positionality⁸⁴

“Rematriation involves both a turn away from the colonial order of things . . . away from the distractions and constraints of state-sanctioned recognition politics” (Gray 5). Choosing to assume the subject position “Indigenous woman,” in Morton-Robinson’s terms, testifies to women’s engagement in rejecting the harmful depictions constructed about them. For example, Washuta rescues her historical heritage from the position of the tragic victim with humor. Throughout the stand-alone essays in her biostories, she reminds us that she is a Cowlitz woman, who narrates her life from this position, with all that it entails. With a pinch of sarcasm, she establishes her position within the long line of descendants of the Cowlitz tribe:

You know Sheridan because you’ve heard, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.” He was talking about me because he was talking about Indians like my great-great-great-grandpa Tumalth, whom he hanged on March 28, 1856. Tumalth was survived by his wives and daughters. Mary Wil-wy-i-ty, or Indian Mary, is the daughter whose blood eventually became mine. (Washuta, *White Magic* 15)

This passage displays the Vizenorian reversal of the situation whereby the narrative of the dying race loses validity. Re-establishing matrilineality as an index of survivance, not merely survival, is achieved by Washuta using irony.

⁸⁴ Title inspired by Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman*.

Tracing a similar bent as Wahuta, Grover invests the space she occupies as an Ojibwe woman, daughter, and granddaughter by perfectly vesting this mantle. She acts as a link in a chain of stories that constitute Ojibwe knowledge and plays the role of the carrier and sustainer of this knowledge. Claiming that “[l]ike our ancestors, we are reliving the sacred stories every day, and as it was with them, the stories have become part of us, and we have become part of the stories” (*Gichigami* 83), Grover affirms her position as an Indigenous storier of the land. This role imposes on her to activate situated knowledge in the service of the movement of rematriation as she strives towards cultural resurgence and reconnection with her and her community’s land or, Gichigami. Grover’s choice of biostory as a rhetorical space speaks volumes about her occupying the “subject position” of an Ojibwe woman.

Laguna Pueblo scholar Paula Gunn Allen contends that “We are the land. . . . [T]hat is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same” (*The Sacred Hoop* 119). The concept of mother in all its forms recurs in the biostories, including (m)other as Nationhood. The framing in the word (m)other echoes Allen’s contention as it could be read as the other Earth. This choice creates a connection between motherhood and the Earth, inferring that recentering motherhood is akin to a return to one’s land. As I understand it, rematriation sits at the intersection of the centrality of land and women’s reclamation of motherhood in Indigenous epistemologies. Rematriation, thus, displaces mothering as a universal experience and positions motherhood within Native American articulations. With its roots pointing towards the mother, it is not so much a revaluing of a gynocratic social model as it is about reconnecting with Mother Earth. While this connection is premised on a symbolic ground as nature/earth are oft-times portrayed in sexualized and feminine terms, Allen’s, and by extension, Indigenous feminist theorizing transcends this skin-deep parallel as it is redolent of the dichotomous patriarchal bent that undergirds colonialism.

Through processes of colonization, the corruption of essential categories of Indigenous conceptions of the world, notably motherhood and land, was achieved through mythologizing Indigenous creation stories/cosmologies, humorously referred to by Washuta as “New Age” “white witchery” that “eats the ancient, trying to digest old systems. It’s a collage of angels. Magic numbers, incantations and stolen beliefs” (*White Magic* 14). Washuta reflects on the colonial distortion of Indigenous cosmologies towards generating profit. The image captures how settler systems mythologize Indigenous creation stories, and alienate them from their relational and land-based meanings, thus, reducing them to exoticized fragments.

Accordingly, an act of restoryation is necessary to interrupt this disconnection. For this reason, Allen calls for cultural revitalization by returning to the feminine. Scenes where this return is registered are discernible in the act of retrieving the feminine in the way the authors recenter maternal subjectivities, notably in the deployment of the metaphor of nurturing, which they establish as core to Native American people’s understanding of subjectivity.

Women authors refer to their mothers, mother figures, or surrogate mothers, living, dead, or spectral as fateful. As I conceive it, the lineage of the feminine is coeval with maternal subjectivity. In any instance, however, the mother is analogous to the trope of nurturing, and returning to the mother’s grasp is an act of reconnecting with one’s matrilineal heritage which, in the long run, denotes a return to the womb of Mother Earth. This metaphor is woven in the creation story written as a poem in Grover’s biostory. Although the Ojibwe is not a matrilineal tribe, the author lays down the connection between her “Nokomis”—grand-mother—and the establishment of her community in space: “My great-great-grand-mother was born in 1839 in Fond du Lac . . . before the land cessions and reservations established by the 1854 treaty, before the removal of the Fond du Lac Natives, before there was a Duluth, before there was a State of Minnesota” (22).

Resorting to a matrilineal stance is registered throughout the biostory. However, it rises to a crescendo in one of the most striking examples of rematriation, which comes from the Ojibwe lore decontextualized in the present story and history of Gichigami, as Grover recounts in “The Beanbag.” As a mother and a woman, Grover’s role consists of “learn[ing] by rote and remember[ing] by heart” (22), she indulges, thus, in remembering the principle of the feminine by recalling the image of her mother:

When the snow began to thaw, at first, we saw

only a trace of flowered calico,

. . .

Familiar, it looked. I remembered

forget-me-nots on her favorite housedress

. . .

I remember that dress.

As a child, when she held me close,

. . .

in her soft and cool fleshy embrace

I felt small, an infant, or not yet

born in a cocoon of blue flowered cloth.

. . .

I recognized that flowered dress:

forget-me-nots on cotton, wet buds of blue flowers

on a beanbag, we were kicking around the yard.

Split, it spilled the past

. . .

I remembered when the beanbag spilled the past;

when it split and spilled the past I remembered,

. . .

Through its frayed weave, in returning to the Earth
 the bag held life beyond the tiny past.
 Split and spilled, its damp side finely pierced
 by an infant bean seedling yet blind, but greedy
 for the light, born in a cocoon of flowered
 blue calico, a pattern wet with snow
 forget-me-nots an early sign of spring
 entwined now with a trace of tender green.

That dress; I remember her flowered dress. (Grover, *Gichigami* 34-35)

Situated in the first cycle of life in Grover's biostory, "The Beanbag," a poem wedged between two prosaic texts, looked 'familiar' because its circular form inspires the cyclical nature of being. It illustrates acts of rematriation by evoking themes of memory, land, and rebirth. From this perspective, the author assumes the "subject position" of an Ojibwe woman whose role is to keep ancestral "situated knowledge" alive by "listening" and "remembering by heart" to transmit knowledge through stories (*Gichigami* 22). Here, the figure of the mother and the flowered calico dress serve as symbolic representations of both a personal and collective return to culture. The poem is saturated with imageries of motherhood. The flowered calico gown—a typical Native American feature—stands as a sigil to represent maternal love and care, indicating the nurturing role of Indigenous women as mothers. The dress, thus, with its "blue forget-me-nots," functions as a site of memory. The "soft, flowered middle" of the mother's embrace and the affection of "smelling starch and warm geranium" reflect a sense of returning to the maternal womb and, by extension, the earthly womb, both places where one's subjectivity is defined. While this maternal figuration can be understood as a metaphor, when read from a Native American ontological point of view, the mother's

womb means the land. “[I]nfant” and “not yet born” illustrate the idea of an embryonic subjectivity forming within the womb of the land’s and mother’s care.

In its movement between memory and materiality, the poem’s structure echoes the idea of cultural reclamation that starts with the personal and expands to the communal. The dress symbolizes an archive of memories, as the “forget-me-nots” suggest. The cyclical pattern of life that comes out of the orts of the past and reverberates in the process of rematriation shows in women’s return to the land and to the matrilineal worldview, and reclaiming one’s subjectivity long immured by settler colonialism taxonomies. The “forgotten or abandoned past” illustrated in the alliteration of the “split” and “spilled” beanbag, educes the image of loss and return. The material past—the dress, the beanbag—morphs into something new, reminiscent of the reclamation of cultural practices and land through rematriation. Looking close at the past through the remnants denotes a reversal of the gaze because it is intended and agentic, one that seeks to understand the past not as a fixed, nostalgic element but as something fluid, adaptable, and deeply connected to the future. Locutions like “snow melting,” “flowers blooming,” “early spring after she died,” and the “seedling growing” impress the principle of the cyclicity of life and return after loss, all tropes central to the return to the feminine. The conceit filtering into this imagery is that of Earth’s natural cycles of renewal to the cycles of human life. The poem persistently reiterates the trope of rematriation by conjuring the mother figure as a pillar of culture through the rhetoric of mother(ing), where women redeem their role as caretakers of land and culture.

In this sense, the land is physical and deeply tied to the maternal embrace. The “cocoon of blue flowered cloth” and the “wet buds of blue flowers” retrieve the link between Mother Earth and mothers, especially the role of Indigenous women in telling the stories of the land. In terms of writing strategies, the circular structure of the poem emerges as a connection with rematriation in the sense that the author creates a scene of regeneration of life born out of the interstices of the overlooked past. The depiction of the beanbag spilling the

past conveys the trauma caused by the outright disruptive nature of settler colonialism of Indigenous cultural practices through the systematic erasure of stories as a methodology for knowledge. The return to the “split” dress, however, and the ensuing blooming of life from that tear suggests healing through a return to the figure of the mother as a way to reclaim one’s place within a narrative of survivance. Intricately associated with the figure of the mother, the circular structure that reflects the cyclical nature of life signifies a reclamation of subjectivity through a process of rematriation. The figuration of the flowered dress and the “beans” springing up from the “split” in the bag are employed in the poem to portray the reconnection with one’s origins through returning to the feminine, or rematriation, that enkindles subjectivity reclamation. The return to the mother in its literal and symbolic capacities offers an overture toward survivance. These are key themes in the larger discourse of rematriation and the return of land and culture to Indigenous women.

6.2.2. Performativity: Remember to “Dream Stories to be Shared”⁸⁵

Witnessing and testifying suggests the performative element of women narrating their lives. To illustrate their enactment of autobiographical performativity through the trope of rematriation, mothers carry out acts of memory contingent on their land, situating their memories within collective and matrilineal ones, starting with creation stories and the ones archived in the land. Harjo poetically situates herself within the movement of rematriation, which privileges a return to culture, to the feminine, and Mother Earth:

In our tribal nation’s original teachings, mothers, *ecke*, are blessed. Women are honored as co-creators of the future with men.

When we were colonized, *female deities deliberately disappeared from our indigenous stories*. There is no female figure in Christianity’s Trinity. Mothers lost their place next to their fathers. They were treated as property. Those roles in society filled by women and mothers, positions like teachers and childcare workers, became the least

⁸⁵ A line from “Becoming” (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 77).

respected and valued even though they are the most crucial. (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 88-89)

While it insinuates that female deities willingly sheathed themselves from the center because of colonialism, the previous passage from Harjo's biostory demonstrates the rematriation of subjectivities in biostories. Describing one of the stages of Harjo's journey towards womanhood, then motherhood or, as reflected in her transition from a girl warrior to a "poet warrior," this passage throws back key elements of the rematriation of subjectivities.

Rematriation is pivotal in analyzing women's life stories as it intimates a return to a matricentric worldview that aligns with traditional Indigenous systems of knowing, being, and belonging. The act of Elders bidding poet warrior to "keep the fire going of *vkvsvmkv*" (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 76)—spiritual belief—is evocative of the performative nature of mothers' roles within their community and their connection to the land and the spiritual realm. While performativity, as theorized by Butler, articulates that gender is not inherent or fixed, but rather something constituted through repeated actions, behaviors, and performances (20), in Indigenous worldviews, more specifically the Mvskoke here, this performance involves enacting the role of sustaining the communal, spiritual, and ecological balance that binds lives to the land. In this sense, the fire is a metaphor for remembering or re-membering through storytelling and tying these memories to future generations.

Reprising Moreton-Robinson's announcement that "[t]he subjectivity of Indigenous women is denied by methodological erasure" (n.p.), this poetic interlude discusses the obliteration of female deities and the marginalization of motherhood under settler colonialism. It also reflects on how colonialism not only disrupted Indigenous ways of being but also imposed gender models that relegated the tribal spiritual and cultural significance of women. Yet, in remembering and reasserting Indigenous matricentric worldviews, we see a profound return to *positionality* or understanding one's identity as ingrained in cultural and ecological contexts. For Native American women, this return is equated with positioning themselves as

co-creators of the future, as part of a long lineage of women who have borne the storied knowledge of their tribes and nations.

J. Assman defines cultural memory as a vehicle by which collected cultural knowledge is passed from generation to generation—knowledge that determines a community’s awareness of its self-image (“Communicative Memory” 111). Cultural memory is shaped by fixed points—momentous events of the past—which are kept in awareness through rituals, memorials, or even regular discussions. These memories are shaped and preserved through storytelling, art, and symbols, which reflect and sustain the community’s shared values, traumas, and identity. In the biostories, women replevy Indigenous configurations of motherhood by tapping into their cultural memory. Harjo lyrically reflects on the performative role of the memory of the community and transforming pain into beauty:

When I speak with a close friend, she tells me her mother is taking over her book of poetry, and the book isn’t supposed to be about her, though she is part of the history. Is this the nature of mothers and mothering? Does each generation carry forth the wounding that needs to be healed, from mother to mother, cooking pot to cooking pot, song to poetry, and poetry to beadwork, until one day in eternity, we will understand what we have created together? (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 88-89)

The image of the mother taking over the book of poetry illustrates how Indigenous women compose their narratives as intrinsically connected to the stories of their female ancestors. The rhetorical question about the “nature of mothering” reifies the notion of maternal subjectivities and their role as conduit for cultural memory through performativity. The passage reveals the twined relationship between memory performed by mothers and healing. Citing the experience of a close friend “taking over” the book of poetry conveys more than it states. What Tuck calls “embodied protocols” connect people across generations and facilitate “the flow of knowledge in community” (“Rematriating” 36). In the context described by Harjo, performativity crystallizes in embodied practices through which Indigenous women

remember and pass on knowledge. Beadwork, song, poetry, and cooking are not only examples of cultural expression, but also of how mothers enact their Indigeneity and ensure cultural continuity. In performing these acts, they indulge in remembrance and restoring balance which enables healing. The passage culminates in the expression “created together,” which points to the fact that healing is not individual and not necessarily completed fully. It is a process which requires the involvement of the collective and is carried intergenerationally.⁸⁶ Although trauma travels from generation to generation, so does wellness and the hope of healing. Each transformation—poetry, song, beadwork, cooking pot—is the same story, repeated across generations to perform the function it was meant for. Harjo closes the story on a hopeful note: “one day in eternity, we will understand what we have created together.” Here, the figure of the mother, the traumatic past and the story of the pot are all part of a performative archive. When the question is asked: “Does each generation carry forth the wounding that needs to be healed, from mother to mother, cooking pot to cooking pot, song to poetry, and poetry to beadwork?,” storytelling and creation are tied to a continuum of generational knowledge and healing, which is reflective of the Vizenorian concept of transmotion, where individual lives are not cloistered but are woven together in a tapestry of collective memory and survivance.

6.2.3. “All My Relations”: Relationality

Gray contends that “[r]elationality means much more than just ‘understanding our place in the world as situated within relations of interdependence with all of creation’ but rather ‘living in a way that carries out our responsibilities within these relationships’” (5). Relationality further entrenches women’s narrated lives within the movement of rematriation and supports reading the acts of life narration as examples of biostories. In autobiography studies, relationality is the “autobiography of the self [and] the biography and the autobiography of the other” (Eakin 58). While this term of reference was the consequence of the development of autobiography

⁸⁶ The entanglement of individual and collective healing was discussed in Chapter 3.

studies, Indigenous epistemologies have always been the fulcrum of Native American ways of being and knowing. According to Moreton-Robinson, as they “express the self as part of others and others as part of the self within and across generations” (n.p.), when they narrate their lives, Indigenous women do it relationally, recasting the interconnectedness of being.

In her affirmation of the feminine, Harjo traces the lineage of the female figures who influenced her journey as the poet warrior she has grown into. Reversing the disruptive impacts of settler colonialism that, with its undergirding heteropatriarchy, suspended the matrilineal transmission of tribal memory, Harjo creates other webs of relations, with other lines of descent, spanning familial, academic, and personal ties with women as powerful as the poet warrior she is. As she goes through her transformation, Harjo acknowledges how being part of a like-minded community of people shaped her poetry and political engagement: “I found a community in the Kiva Club, which was the Native student club at the University of New Mexico . . . I was one of [the] women who cooked, printed flyers, cared for children, went to classes, studied, and marched. . . . We began to institute practices of sovereignty in all its many aspects” (*Poet Warrior* 108). Harjo testifies to Indigenous women’s efforts in reclaiming sovereignty as racial and gendered injustices of settler colonialism unfolded. Within the communal framework of the Kiva Club, the poet takes part in a collective praxis where cooking, caregiving, studying, and marching are acts of resurgence. As colonialism disrupts matrilineal lineages and attempts to sever ancestral ties, Indigenous women’s response manifests in the form of weaving alternative relational threads into the larger web of kinship. These acts reconstitute sovereignty as an embodied practice enacted in daily life and not as a political abstraction. The passage, thus, highlights Indigenous women’s refusal of colonial rupture by mending relational ties.

Relationality is revealed in the narratives in the way women interpret and enact their subjectivities. First and foremost, relationality is discernible in the choice of the space to articulate and narrate their lives. Indeed, biostory is a literary space that engages in

communality where the “I” is inherently plural. The multivocality sensed in the narrations also gives away the women’s choice to speak for and of their identities as being entangled in a web of relations the existence of which depends on land. Needless to say, this web consists of various ecologies, including human and other-than-human sentients. Harjo, for example, acknowledges that her thoughts are accumulations of stories, old and new, from this world and the spirit world. Her mission is to keep the fire alive by voicing out the messages and passing them on to future generations:

In our Mvskoke tribal traditions, adolescence is a time of teaching and celebration, the Old Ones say.

“As you enter this doorway of womanhood,” they tell her, “you must keep the fire going of *vkvsymkv*, or spiritual belief. You must seek and acquire a spiritual understanding of life. Your relationship with your Creator is central. You must tend it with quiet and communion. Turn your eyes and ears inward and listen. Begin every morning, tending this fire.

Emetvl’hvmke is community. Your body is a community of organs living with consciousness that work together to house you in this story. Community is those with whom you live, from home to school to your tribal nation, city, or state. You must remember to place community interest and benefits ahead of individual and personal gain.” (Harjo, *Poet Warrior* 76)

Harjo’s weaving of personal and communal stories is powerful in giving prominence to the theme of relationality. The excerpt brings out the responsibility of women to perform their role within the *collective*, as expressed by statements like the “community of organs” and the need to “place community interest and benefits ahead of individual and personal gain.” This is reminiscent of the worldview of the relationality of identity, which is embedded in kinship and the Earth’s larger ecology. These lines serve as a perfect example of rematriation through a return to a feminine-centered and matricentric narrative. The act of returning implicates

recovering the roles and knowledge suppressed by design through colonization, as exemplified in the invocation of *ecke* (mothers) and the oversight of female deities.

Women frame their identities as organically linked to the land and its constituents as if tethered by an umbilical cord. As such, in the vein of rematriation, women return to culture by restoring ties with the Earth through restoryation or telling stories again in new contexts. As suggested in the above quote, “mothering” is not to be fathomed for its biological power only but also the generational one as it emerges as a relational process that transcends time and space. This echoes the idea of a plural subjectivity that is actively present, collective, and ingrained in the land. What transpires from the previous passage is how Native American biostorytellers recover their subjectivities by engaging in a performative act of remembering and reasserting their roles within their communities, all the while privileging the relational aspects of identity that are inextricable from the land and culture. Through rematriation, not only do they return to the feminine but also deconstruct the settler imposition of indigeneity, reclaiming one that resists the individualism of autobiographical narratives toward an intergenerational, communal, and land-based indigeneity.

Conclusion

My reading of Native American women’s biostories has shown the potential of an indigenized autobiographical practice in reclaiming subjectivities once misconstrued under settler colonialism. Using the terms positionality, performativity, and relationality for reading these biostories proved fruitful in exploring the intersections of autobiography studies and Indigenous women’s lives. In light of the previous, grounding the discussion in Indigenous feminist lens, notably with the return to the feminine and felt analysis, places women’s narratives as deeply reflective of broader societal issues.

Narrating the self is a means of returning the mother to the center of the narrative in a bid to subvert the negative depiction of motherhood. The texts I discuss chart the authors’ experiences with the trauma caused by displacement, interruption of knowledge transmission,

and cutting ties with kin that deeply affect their understanding and practice of motherhood. In doing so, they expose the power dynamics in place to better raise a critique against them in an Indigenous feminist vein. By highlighting the authors' stories of motherly resilience, they shift the lens of trauma narratives from mere survival to survivance in the face of trauma.

Situating themselves in the movement of rematriation is visible in their taking up a motherist stance, recentering the feminine, and restoring land-based worldviews. Women embrace their positionality as Indigenous women and ground their understanding in embodied, place-based knowledge through performativity. Consequently, they enact forms of gender and memory that reconnect them to Mother Earth and the epistemology rooted in her. As such, women redefine themselves as interconnected with the land's ecologies. In doing so, they reclaim agency within the self-narrative mode of expression of biostory which privileges a collective storytelling over the individual focus of Western autobiography.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I have set out to demonstrate that Native American life stories can provide healing because they evince a different politics of memory. The first premise I built my argument on was to define trauma in the Native American context. Whether individual and/or collective, event-based and/or quotidian, trauma provides a salient point of entry into the decolonization of research. Given the grim nature of the past and its tenacity as an unresolved and ongoing process, I examined the relevance of remembering as an identity reclaiming factor and a leeway for historical restoryation and, possibly, healing. Throughout the dissertation, I have provided a reading of the major aspects of Native American cultural memory and trauma as they figure in women's biostories. Remembering stories and their enactment of Indigenous epistemologies is at the heart of healing efforts from the ravages of settler colonialism. Consequently, I conceive of what Stirrup calls "remembering of stories" (qtd. in Mussi 309), or "Native sovenance" (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15) as restorying old stories and presenting them in a new context that fosters survivance and cultural resurgence. As discussed throughout the six chapters, the cultural traumas of settler colonialism—land dispossession, residential schools, socio-economic injustice—and their perennial recursions in systemic racialized forms of erasure and gendered othering are all evoked both directly and indirectly in the biostories. Women authors awaken these memories in pursuit of questioning the past and illustrating its temporal continuum in the present, yet they deploy counter-memory to trigger a process of healing.

I started the discussion from the interstices of Western models of trauma theory in Chapter 1, as I have explored the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning this study. Existing at the intersection of Indigenous decolonization of research, trauma theory, autobiography studies, and Indigenous feminism, the chapter recast canonical concepts

relevant to these critical frameworks while, at the same time, the interplay of these theories birthed new concepts, such as restoryation and rematriation.

Chapter 2 called for a more inclusive approach in literary criticism that respects and incorporates Native perspectives and paradigms in understanding trauma and its representation because Western literary trauma paradigms fall short of capturing the Native American experience. Since healing is political, as argued in Chapter 2, I suggested reading the Native American past through a Native-centered approach. Given that memory can contain trauma and cultural knowledge, the way women authors choose to deploy memory influences textual interpretations. As I demonstrated, theirs exhibits a counter-performative disposition. Therefore, reflecting the ethos of decolonizing research, I highlighted women's representation of the traumatic past through a desire-based lens as opposed to the damage-based one by stressing moments of survivance. In their remembrance of the past, women restore what has been lost to settler colonialism, namely, their voice through the autobiographical mode, maternal subjectivities, and land and bodies. By indulging in a memory act that does not seek survival but wellness and balance, they "play out" past and ongoing traumas in a way that highlights moments of survivance.

Chapter 3 discussed the issue of trauma and reached the conclusion that it is grounded in the act of remembering and memory. Remembering is akin to restoryation. Story and storytelling, in contrast, are more relevant for this kind of re-enactment of the past as they necessarily involve a restoration of the connection with kinship, motherhood, and land. This chapter emphasized the healing potential of decolonizing and indigenizing trauma theory by introducing a type of literary trauma theory that advances counter-commemoration in stories. Unwriting the narrative of victimry is untethered from survivance stories and is consistent with challenging "colonial unknowing." Stories that have the power to heal from past and ongoing traumas by implementing a type of writing that is aesthetically fluid and rhetorically have the power to "bring things together." All Indigenous stories start with and from the land;

therefore, this practice is more in line with Indigenous worldviews. In tune with decolonization and Indigenous resurgence, and in reiterating Foucault's insistence on the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (*Power/Knowledge*, 82), Native American "postindian warriors" are evincing "mnemonic resistance" (Ryan 155), which allows for reclaiming subjectivity by revisiting past traumatic experiences, and imposing a counter-commemoration through restoryation. Reviving traditional ways through utilizing culture, ceremony, and community is part of the healing process. My argument is that unless the perspective of research is reviewed—from a damage-based to a desire-based one—the disease of contemporary society, with its emphasis on the victimization rhetoric, will prevail.

Native American women's memoirs play a significant role in redefining Native presence through re-establishing their place in this tradition, controlling self-presentation, and defying the conventions of the genre by infusing it with Indigenous storytelling. Native American women's literature attests to their engagement in the act of an active sense of presence, and survivance. It is a testimony to their resistance to the hegemonic structures of language that held them captive in a distorted mode of being. "Reinventing" the very language that constructed and sustained the "simulations" becomes not only an act of literary creation, but it is transmotion through creation, where the authors are postindians who "outwit, reverse, and overturn the wiles of dominance, and they contradict the simulations of natives" (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 24).

"A text that celebrates transgression is a map to transgression. A text that celebrates healing is a map to healing" (Rader qtd. in Barker et al. 65). The texts I studied are both transgressive and celebratory of healing. These two characteristics validate them as survivance narratives because so much of this transgressive writing emerges from a sense of active presence. Biostory, as an outlaw to genre, is born of transgression, yet, tends towards mending wounds, notably owing to its composition that resists categorisation and fosters healing.

Chapter 4 discussed the choice of reading Indigenous life stories as biostories for their potency to reevaluate the past and to open to future possibilities. Through their textual fluidity and open refusal to be categorized, they challenge colonial narratives of victimization and, instead, assert Indigenous agency and sovereignty. Their incorporation of elements of traditional storytelling, ceremony, and cultural revitalization enacts their resistance against ongoing traumas, such as colonialism, sexual and gender-based violence, environmental degradation, and cultural erasure. Their form mirrors this fluidity in their adoption of the essay form. Reading the life stories in terms of the desire-based approach deters the readers' impulse of reading them as mere survival narrative.

My reading of six biostories by Native American women of different tribal affiliations has shown the potential of an indigenized memory act in restoring what has been "stolen" in the wake of settler colonialism. Having reclaimed the genre, women authors engage in subjectivities once misconstrued under settler colonialism. Using the units of positionality, performativity, and relationality for reading these biostories proved fruitful in exploring the intersections of autobiography studies and Indigenous women's narrated lives. After establishing the connection between trauma healing and autobiographical acts, I concluded that an indigenized form of this practice yields a more tribally-ethical approach that fosters Indigenous resurgence and works towards achieving sovereignty.

Remembering also involves restor(y)ing relationship and connection to the land. In Chapter 5 women's uncovering of settler colonialism's reorganization of Indigenous land and bodies was achieved through rethinking the map in literary spaces to, ultimately, advance alternative ways to interpret space. The overarching finding of this chapter is that Indigenous understanding of maps does not refer to them as physical objects of actual geographical locations, but they are to be understood in a context of decolonization and survivance. Maps are memories, stories, as well as Indigenous bodies, with blood and cells inside them, leading to traditions and systems of knowledge which constitute Indigenous identities.

(Re)mapping was suggested as a process which paves the way to the reclamation of stolen land by generating place-worlds consistent with Native American worldviews. By actively engaging in the abovementioned processes, women attempt to recover land-based ethics consonant with healing from the trauma caused by the disruption of kinship with land. Focusing on restorying the land, women compose their literary maps in such a way that engenders returning to and of the land, both in their symbolic and material capacities. The new literary maps at the intersection of Indigenous feminism and spatial inquiry, both fueled by decolonization, can spark off change in Indigenous studies and work towards sovereignty. But, for this project to be ethically meaningful, land sovereignty should be addressed in cahoots with decolonizing Indigenous bodies.

The discussion on subjectivity and decolonization certainly opened a path toward exploring Indigenous women's narratives as a means of cultural resurgence, expanding, thus, the conversation to include voices that have been held captive within the staid conventions of the ethnographic discourse. Chapter 6 engaged with women's situating themselves in the movement of rematriation. By endorsing the "subject position Indigenous woman" and deploying their "situated [felt] knowledge," they perform gender and memory that draws them back to M(other) Earth and culture that emanates from it and, finally, conceive of their identities as unequivocally relational with all the ecologies in the land. Thus, women reclaim their subjectivities in the rhetorical space of biostory, which allows for a form of life narration that is more communal than autobiographically individualistic. Women's taking up a motherist stance promotes recentering the feminine and restoring land-based worldviews, essential elements towards healing from the disruptions of settler colonialism.

It is from this reimagined consciousness about subjectivity that the dissertation now turns to its concluding insights. What I have set out to demonstrate is how much Native American tribalographic practice—as a counter to autobiography—is nurtured by a very rich storytelling tradition that owes its existence to the experience of generations in relation to

specific lands. Healing is possible when recentering Indigenous epistemologies. This starts with using counter-memory in stories, or restorying, as a methodology for learning about survivance. When not reduced to the status of sensationalism and victimization, sharing traumatic experiences is a method for communal healing. This crystallizes into reclaiming voice through biostory, reestablishing a kin-centric way of life that emanates from the land because it is an archive and producer of knowledge, including healing from the soul wound.

The recent swell in Native American writing, including autobiographical accounts, recasts Bataille and Sands' prediction referenced in the introduction. LeAnne Howe makes this point patent when she humorously states that "[c]urrently there are over two million American Indians in the United States, and most of these people, give or take a thousand, are writing stories. The first thing you may think is: LeAnne you maniac, not every Indian in America is writing a book. I know it; some are making movies, or music videos for MTV" (qtd. in Shoemaker 46). She concludes: "Every Indian I meet is writing a story" (qtd. in Shoemaker 46). In reimagining Howe's notion, I would revise it to say "every Indian is restorying." This alteration reflects Indigenous peoples' dynamic engagement with the present and future through narrative. In a world shaped by the ubiquity of technological advances, "adapting (to) technology in the interests of survivance is an Indigenous strategy as old as colonialism itself" (Stirrup qtd. in Mussi 310). This is a truth that makes the original brackets in Stirrup's quote "adapting (to)" unnecessary because futurity has always been embedded in Indigenous worldviews. What is needed is a return to the foundational principles of Indigenous relationality. Time and again, the expression "All my relations" provides a paradigm for recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings. When embraced, this holistic perspective offers a pathway to decolonized minds and an avenue toward collective wellness.

The discussion (so far) leads to a consideration of future prospects. The ubiquity of artificial intelligence (AI) prompted my interest in the decolonization of research and its overlap with technological advances. My aim is to continue working on healing through

sovereignty by using AI as a “technology of memory.” By decolonizing the medium, Native American peoples can explore it as *Abundant Intelligences* that could help restore Indigenous memories against erasure and towards cultural resurgence (Lewis et al. 2014). *Abundant Intelligences*, I argue, can become a repository for stories of survivance, sovereignty, and healing. I believe that my future research on indigenizing artificial intelligence is a promising avenue for exploration because its integration into Indigenous Studies is inevitable. Traditional Indigenous ontologies are rooted in interrelatedness with more-than-human persons, then the memories that are “played out” across digital borders and boundaries can empower Indigenous thinkers and writers to think differently about the ways in which technology can act as a decolonizing tool to impact their communities through collective efforts and shared resistance to colonialism and its consequences.

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