eISSN: 2254-1179
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/candb.v14i27-43

Re-Creation, Re-Membrance, and Resurgence: Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*

Celia Cores-Antepazo

corescelia@usal.es
ORCID: 0000-0003-4509-6635
Universidad de Salamanca, Spain

Submitted: 2024/05/03
Accepted: 2024/07/26

ABSTRACT
This article examines the novel *Indian Horse* (2012), written by Ojibwe Wabaseemoong Independent Nations member Richard Wagamese (1955-2017) at the height of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission era. Wagamese finds inspiration in the testimonies and experiences of hundreds of victims of Canada's residential school system, including those of his own family members. The article contextualizes the novel in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission era and explores Saul's narrative journey to recover his suppressed memories of personal and collective abuse at St. Jerome's Indian Residential School through the lens of Indigenous resurgence and grounded normativity. Thus, the paper draws on Michi Saagiig scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's writings on Indigenous radical resurgence to explore the retrieval of Indigenous ways of existing in the world as the way towards decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty. The paper argues that Saul is able to overcome his trauma-induced amnesia, born from the necessity to endure and adapt, and to escape the spiral of shame, isolation, and self-destruction in which he engages only after he embraces discursive Indigenous ways of healing. Wagamese therefore constructs a narrative in which the protagonist's development mirrors the ideal that the author sets for Canada, in which reconciliation with Indigenous truth will not take place unless the whole story is acknowledged.

Keywords
Canada; Indigenous Literature; Indigenous Resurgence; Memory; Residential Schools; Truth and Reconciliation

1. Introduction

> Stories are meant to heal. That's what my people say, and that's what I believe.
> –Richard Wagamese, *One Native Life*

At the beginning of Richard Wagamese's novel *Indian Horse* (2012), the protagonist Saul Indian Horse introduces himself replicating sacred Anishinaabeg oral tradition to narrate the story of his life. As Jack Robinson has pointed out, "the text is thus both a written document and an oral story, and it is framed as a sacred story; at the outset, the text invites the reader to conflate casual oral stories, sacred stories, and the contemporary novel" (90). Saul's storytelling takes place while he is recovering from alcoholism at the New Dawn Centre and emerges as the unifying method that brings together all the destroyed parts of his being (91). Going over his own life experiences allows Saul to transit his past with fluidity and adaptability, to reflect on his suppressed traumas with roots in the Canadian residential school system, and to cope with them in the present moment, which is culturally disparate from his childhood. Through Saul's story Wagamese creates a space in which orality and writing bolster each other (Maracle 253) while offering a testimony of the horrors that have marked generations of Indigenous children and their families during the Residential School Era.

While Wagamese's fiction often explores Indigenous processes of healing from traumatic events, it is accurate to say that *Indian Horse* stands out as the only novel in his corpus where Residential School trauma is at the core of the narrative. The Canadian Indian Residential School System was a network of boarding schools administered by Christian churches and funded by the Department of Indian Affairs of the Canadian Government. Although the history of European and Christian efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples in North America dates to the sixteenth century (Government of Canada 47), this particular system remained in use from the 1870s until the late 1990s. Its main purpose was the assimilation of Aboriginal children into settler European Canadian culture by forcibly isolating them from their communities in "badly constructed, poorly maintained, overcrowded, unsanitary fire traps" (Government of Canada 46) and simultaneously separating them from all their cultural signifiers. Since the shutting down of the last residential school in 1996, the Canadian government has implemented the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, which began in 2007 and implied "the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history" by including "individual and collective elements to address the sad and terrible legacy of Indian Residential Schools" (Prime Minister of Canada). One of these elements is the the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (hereafter TRC), which, between 2007 and 2015, aimed at raising "awareness of the past,

acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" in order to establish and maintain "a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country" (Government of Canada 6). This attempt at reparation has been largely criticized, with scholarship, activists, and experts on the matter affirming that it has fallen short to achieve what it initially promised.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission initially brought forth hope for transformative change for many victims, including Wagamese, who believed it was "possible to move forward and to learn how to leave hurt behind" and that "the Commission and Canada need[ed] to hear stories of healing instead of a relentless retelling and re-experiencing of pain" (Wagamese, "Returning" 165). The TRC's Final Report proposed ninety-four calls to action divided into two distinct categories: "legacy," intended to "redress the ongoing structural harms that Indigenous peoples face in the sectors of child welfare, education, health, culture and language, and justice"; and "reconciliation," to "educate Canadians about Indigenous peoples and Canada's Indian Residential School System, and establish practices, policies, and actions that affirm Indigenous Rights" (Jewell and Mosby 8). Since the birth of the Commission, the idea of reconciliation has been contested by Indigenous thinkers. Inuit politician John Amagoalik defends that, because there has never existed a harmonious relationship between Indigenous peoples and new arrivals, reconciliation, which implies the restoration of harmony, is unfeasible (35). Wagamese, however, places the focus on the Indigenous self. For the author of *Indian Horse*, the first step towards reconciliation begins with embracing truth through humility within one's Indigenous identity ("Returning" 165). His novel thus engages in contemporary discussions about the possibility of truth and reconciliation in the nation.

To transform the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the State, Michi Saagiig scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has cast light upon two main pillars of Nishnaabeg thought: the importance of storytelling and the reconnection with the land (*Dancing* 17). Holding on to the stories of Nishnaabeg ancestors and preserving them for future generations is an exercise in resistance for Simpson (15):

> Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. (33)

Simpson explains that Nishnaabeg theory begins with the Creation Story. Since Nishnaabeg individuals are taught to insert themselves into their own

Creation Story, Indigenous thought is learned and transmitted collectively through the personal: "this is because our greatest influence is on ourselves, and because living in a good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial meta-narrative in and of itself" (41). Nishnaabeg ways of knowing imply the total commitment of the self, emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually. As can be clearly appreciated in the case of Saul's addiction in *Indian Horse*, settler colonialism has disrupted such engagements, and thus critically disturbed the possibility for Nishnaabeg peoples to live in the world using their own processes. Simpson proposes the recuperation of storytelling to encourage the "radical resurgence" (*As We Have* 25) of Nishnaabeg ontologies, methodologies, and epistemologies against the backdrop of dispossession and thus rebuild Indigenous political autonomy. Radical resurgence, which intertwines cultural and political dimensions (50), proposes the collective revitalization of Indigenous ways of living and thinking in the present to bring forth a new Indigenous reality of mobilization and self-determination. It is pivotal in *Indian Horse*, since it not only empowers Saul and his community to be able to envision and construct a better future together, but also prompts wider audiences to acknowledge the insufficiency of Truth and Reconciliation efforts in repairing the harrowing reality caused by the Residential School Era and the colonial erasure of Indigenous cultures and sovereignty in Canada.

2. Richard Wagamese and the Residential School System

Indian Horse was published in the midst of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's endeavor to heal the "deep scars on the lives of many Aboriginal people" and to repair the damaged relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In the novel's acknowledgements, Wagamese thanks the Commission "for being there for the survivors of Canada's residential schools" (Government of Canada 237). In an interview for CBC Radio's *The Next Chapter* in 2012, Wagamese describes his novel as being about "hockey, residential schools, and redemption," but "above all," about Canada. The author sees both hockey and residential schooling as counterposed tropes of Canada's conflicted processes of national identification. If the former is broadly recognized as Canada's national winter sport,[1] while the other is shoved "under the carpet," Canadians are "not hearing [their] own total national story" (00:16:00-00:16:44).

1 The National Sports of Canada Act, passed in 1994, established lacrosse as Canada's national summer sport and ice hockey as the national winter sport.

Although Wagamese did not attend residential school, he attributed much of his struggles with substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the Residential School System. In the interview mentioned above, he points out: "I was confronted with the detritus of a residential school experience through the actions of my family, the people who were supposed to protect and nurture me" (00:05:37-00:05:47). Similarly, in his memoir *One Native Life,* he narrates his experience as a foster kid who ended in the system because his parents "had been sent to residential school and never developed parenting skills" (18). He explains: "they couldn't offer the nurturing and protection I needed" (18). This inevitably severed Wagamese's connections to Anishinaabe culture, which serves as a clear parallel between him and his protagonist: "I was in that foster home because someone had fractured the bonds that tied me to tradition and culture and language and spirituality. I became one of the lost ones, one of the disappeared ones, vanished into the vortex of foster care and adoption" (18). Wagamese also highlighted the impact that working as a young journalist on a Native newspaper had on him and on the writing of *Indian Horse*:

> Every time I sat down to do an interview with somebody about something totally non-related to either hockey or residential schools, it always came back to residential schools . . . And when I started to write this residential school experience in the novel, I remembered those people, and I remembered the way they told me those stories, and they didn't give it to me blow by blow either. They only gave me as much as they could because they couldn't go the whole depth of it . . . It was a bruise on a people, definitely, but it's such a bruise on Canada. Yeah. ("Richard" 00:14:36-00:15:58)

Indian Horse is therefore as much the product of the inspiration and healing that Wagamese found in the stories of those who suffered the effects of residential schooling, as of his own lived experience. Like Saul, Wagamese eventually learned to acknowledge the trauma of his past to thrive in the future:

> And I know . . . that if I don't look at every part of my history and embrace the dark, harrowing, hard parts, I don't know my whole story. And if I don't know my whole story, I can't heal myself. I have to hold on and identify and embrace and actually re-experience those traumatic things in order to learn how to let it go and to move forward into something better. And if that's true for me as an individual, it's true for this community . . . it's true for a nation. ("Richard" 00:16:49-00:17:30)

Saul's journey mirrors the task that Wagamese sets for Canada as a nation and for himself as an Ojibwe individual. Reconciliation with the past involves

the honest identification of the sources of trauma, the embrace of the whole story to heal rather than to resent. The author is not so much interested in the TRC's aim to "redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (Truth and Reconciliation 1). Instead, he emphasizes the importance of constructing spaces that allow victims to process the valid but disempowering emotions—pain, anger, resentment, hatred—that block the path towards reconciliation with Indigenous ways of existing, thinking, and behaving.

3. Saul

In the aforementioned CBC interview, Wagamese described his protagonist, Saul Indian Horse, as "wiry," "lean," and "internal." His emotional processes are "deep" and "private," yet he's open to joy given the disconnection, isolation, and loss he has suffered by the time he is nine years old. "And when he finds hockey," Wagamese points out, "he finds an element of joy in all of that. That gives him the opportunity to release himself from his own story" (00:03:46-00:04:25). Indeed, one of the first things we learn about Saul is that he is telling his life story only because he is forced to, motivated exclusively by the possibility of leaving the New Dawn Centre. He has disconnected himself fully from his own narrative.

3.1. Saul's Stories

The act of storytelling is central to *Indian Horse*. Yet Saul is initially reluctant to talk about his own journey: "These people here want me to tell my story. They say I can't understand where I'm going if I don't understand where I've been. The answers are within me, according to them. By telling our stories, hardcore drunks like me can set ourselves free from the bottle and the life that took us there" (Wagamese, *Indian* 2). He does not believe in storytelling as a source of individual healing or re-connection with his own culture, but rather as his only means to leave the centre as soon as possible: "I don't give a shit about any of that. But if it means getting out of this place quicker, then telling my story is what I will do" (2). "If we want to live at peace with ourselves," Saul's mentor at the New Dawn Centre Moses wisely reminds him, "we need to tell our stories" (3). Ojibwe scholar Gerald Vizenor has pointed out that "the Anishinaabe always understood their rights by stories" ("Aesthetics" 2). Despite the protagonist's initial alienation from such idea, his reflections on his own journey soon begin unearthing the power of storytelling as a catalyst for healing.

Despite the alienation of his adult years, Saul is made aware of the potential of stories from early childhood. He recalls his own grandmother Naomi warning him about the dangers of reading Zhaunagush (i.e., white people) books, since "their talk and their stories can sneak you away as quick as their boats" (Wagamese, *Indian* 10). Stories are therefore intrinsically linked to a sense of rootedness. According to Choctaw Nation citizen LeAnne Howe, Indigenous narratives in all their forms "seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus" (42). In this line, collective memory, Cree scholar Neal McLeod explains, "is the echo of old stories that links grandparents with their grandchildren" (11). Being removed to residential schools disrupted such an echo, which meant that generational connections and all that comes with them—languages, traditions, identities, epistemologies—are lost. The assimilation propelled by residential schooling forces Saul to undergo such process of disconnection, one which affects his ability to remember. According to Sto:lo writer Lee Maracle, memory in oral cultures "is governance, it is being, and it is the foundation of culture" (90). Nonetheless, despite Saul's apparent amnesia, readers observe that his disentanglement from the cultural importance of stories has never been total. This idea is strengthened by the novel's sense of orality and the fact that he is recalling his life story as a means of healing, even if he does not acknowledge so yet. To add more meaning to the equation, Saul also admits to having found solace in reading other people's stories in his late childhood, as it prompted memories of his own roots: "I liked mythology. The stories reminded me of the stories my grandmother would tell around the fires late at night. Reading them made me feel good. I read a lot while I was with the Kellys. Books had been my safe place all the time I'd been in the school and they still represented security" (Wagamese, *Indian* 158). The pain and rage propelled by residential school and racial discrimination, which will precipitate him to alcoholism as a coping mechanism, sever Saul's connection with stories and storytelling as sources of comfort, spirituality, safety, belonging, and self-awareness.

Alcohol not only calms Saul's roaring in his belly (180), but it also allows him to replace his true Indigenous narrative (Vizenor, *Manifest*)—filled with violence, anger, failure, solitude, and pain—with made-up yet "believable and engaging" tales about his life, none of which "had actually happened": "I discovered that being someone you are not is often easier than living with the person you are. I became drunk with that. Addicted. My new escape sustained me for a while" (Wagamese, *Indian* 181). Saul seeks to replace the "Indian" in him with alcohol-induced fictions inspired by his own readings in the past. Yet he cannot avoid becoming "the Indian again; drunken and drooling and reeling, a caricature everyone sought to avoid" (181), which eventually leads him to live as

a nomad, escaping from his own identity. As Miroux points out, Saul leaves his identity as a storyteller behind to embrace that of a mere raconteur, since "the stories he tells his inebriated audience in the local taverns are adulterated narratives that only serve to conceal his Indianness rather than express it" (209). Intoxication, which is itself a coping mechanism, entirely divests storytelling of its sacredness and erases Saul's past. "What makes an impression on a child and stays in his memory" neuropsychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik argues, "means nothing to an adult who is inventing his past" (31). Such is the case for Saul. The alienation from his Indigenous identity and Indigenous practices is largely brought about by the shame he has interiorized after a lifetime of colonial abuse and discrimination.

3.2. Saul's Shame

Sara Ahmed argues that shame is crucial to the process of reconciliation or healing of past wounds, because "to acknowledge wrongdoing means to enter into shame; the 'we' is shamed by its recognition that it has committed 'acts and omissions,' which have caused pain, hurt and loss for indigenous others" (101). To heal—or to resurge, in Simpson's terms—implies resisting the transgenerational shame upon Indigenous peoples brought about by settler colonialism, which in turn demonizes and devalues the power of Indigenous stories and erases Indigenous resilience. As Tanana Athabaskan scholar Dian Million has pointed out, "it felt shameful to be an Indian in Canada for most of that nation's history" (46). To enact the politics of shame implies the assumption that Indigenous individuals *are* inherently wrong, as Leanne Simpson has explained: "We are not shameful people. We have done nothing wrong. I began to realize that shame can only take hold when we are disconnected from the stories of resistance within our own families and communities" (Simpson, *Dancing* 14). The humiliation and loss of self-esteem generated by shame can be contested through the recuperation of collective and cultural memory and truth. Shame, as a powerful tool of colonialism, "leads to disconnection from the practices that give us meaning. It elicits pain. To cope with that pain, either we turn inward, amplifying and cycling messages of shame leading to self-harm, drugs, alcohol abuse, or depression and anxiety; or we turn our shame outward into aggression and violence" (Simpson, *As We Have* 188). All these symptoms of shame are evoked in Saul's testimony. Efforts to eradicate them have been largely ignored by the federal government, despite the TRC report having stated that there exists a clear health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (Government of Canada 208; Katz et al.).

Saul first mentions shame while describing the experience of violence and abuse towards Indigenous children that he witnessed during his nights at St Jerome's: "In the daylight we would look at each other blankly, so that we would not cause any further *shame*" (Wagamese, *Indian* 81; my emphasis). All throughout the novel, shame goes hand in hand with silence. Saul experiences collective shame while playing with the Moose against a white team. The Anishinaabe players are beaten up, urinated, and spat on by white men working at a diner after winning the game. Yet, the episode is never mentioned in the Indigenous boys' conversations, and it surfaces only in the looks they exchange: "but there were moments when you'd catch another boy's eye and know that you were both thinking about it. Everything was contained in that glance. All the hurt. All the *shame*. All the rage. The white people thought it was their game. They thought it was their world" (136; my emphasis). The feeling of shame will eventually increase to the point of transforming hockey into a source of suffering rather than a means of escapism and redemption for Saul: "Finally, it changed the game for me. If they wanted me to be a savage, that's what I would give them. I began to skate with the deliberate intention of shoving my skill up the noses of those who belittled me, made me feel *ashamed* of my skin" (164; my emphasis). When the suffering leads him to fall into the spiral of alcoholism to suppress the pain of shame, Saul disengages completely from any possibility to reconnect with his own story, thus falling victim once again to the oppressive mechanisms of settler colonialism.

3.2.1. Father Leboutilier

As I pointed out above, Wagamese employs silence to intensify the feeling of shame in the text. As a result, Miroux argues, "the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that the text does not always tell the whole story" (211). The most evident instance of such technique is perhaps Saul's memory of sexual violence at the hands of Father Leboutilier, which is not made explicit until chapter forty-nine, barely twenty pages before the end of the novel. Readers gain awareness of Saul's childhood trauma at the same time he does, i.e., when the social context and his own process of psychological maturation allow the young man to revisit his memories instead of blocking them out to cope with the trauma. Ana María Fraile-Marcos and Lucía López-Serrano point out that "shame usually works as a deterrent to distance oneself from a normative social ideal" (5). Shame keeps Saul, who is in the process of assimilating into Euro-Canadian culture, otherized, different, focused on his own inferiority within settler identity and values. In his account of the events, Saul hints precisely at how his abuser took advantage of the shame and fear present at St. Jerome's to present

himself as a familiar figure and gain control over the boy's body: "When he knelt down and cradled me in his arms, *I felt no shame or fear. I only felt love*. I wanted so much to be held and stroked. As he gathered my face in his hands and kissed me, I closed my eyes. I thought of my grandmother. The warmth of her arms holding me. I missed that so much" (Wagamese, *Indian* 198; my emphasis). As Wiese has indicated, "yearning for love and tenderness, he mistakes the sexual approaches for affection" (65).

Similarly, Cyrulnik employs Anna Freud's observations on the Luftwaffe air raids on London shelters during World War II to explain that memories gain meaning once they are embedded within a narrative. This is particularly interesting in the case of traumatic events in childhood: "bombs whistled around [the infants in the shelters], the earth shook, and the walls of the shelter quaked, but that had no effect on them. The explanation is simple, she remarked: their world had not changed. They were still safe in their mothers' arms" (Cyrulnik 37). The emotions felt at the time of trauma thus determine how we incorporate said events into our memories, and in childhood, the emotions triggered by trauma are "a product of an encounter between the child's level of development and its external markers" (43). Saul, who enters St. Jerome's at a very young age, lacks the mental structure to interpret Leboutilier's actions and equates them to his grandmother's love, which temporarily eliminates any emotions of fear, danger, shame, or disgust until he embeds them with meaning in his own narrative as an adult.

Like the children at the London shelters, Wagamese's protagonist feels safe around Father Leboutilier, because such a father-like figure stands as his only available resource to fulfill Saul's longing for familial love at loveless St Jerome's. "The human memory" Cyrulnik explains, "is so constructed that an event that is devoid of meaning leaves no trace" (33). Unable to find further meaning and thus to construct a narrative surrounding sexual abuse, Saul's childhood trauma remains in his mind as a series of silenced, disconnected images, dispossessed of their inherent implications of power, race, or colonialism. As he enters his teenage years and young adulthood, he embraces denial, which "blocks out the unbearable part of reality" and "protects the victim in the same way that the amputation of a gangrenous limb protects an injured person from septicemia" (82). The joys brought by hockey initially contribute to said denial and temporarily protect Saul from the unendurable pain that he carries within.

4. Recognition, Refusal, and Radical Resurgence

In the novel, hockey stands as a symbol of Canada's misguided efforts to achieve truth and reconciliation, since Saul's great opportunity for improvement ends

up eventually worsening his situation. Wagamese portrays Canada's failure to appreciate Indigenous people's self-determining authority through Saul's relationship with the nation's most popular winter sport. During his time at St. Jerome's and later in Manitouwadge, Saul discovers and reappropriates ice hockey. Surrounded by his Indigenous teammates, he thrives in the rink. When he becomes a professional player in the Toronto Marlboros, he is severed from his kin and driven to play alongside settler Canadian players who, far from recognizing him, belittle and shame him. He becomes "the Rampaging Redskin" (Wagamese, *Indian* 165), a "savage" (164), "the stoic Indian" (163) and consequently the game loses "any semblance of joy" (165) it previously offered him. He begins playing like "a puck hog" (165) and eventually gets benched indefinitely. Saul packs his bags and withdraws from the injustice and violence enacted on him by white teammates, coaches, and even the audience. He refuses to engage in the power dynamics of settler colonial hockey, which seemingly welcomes him into the game but never provides the grounds for him to play peacefully and respectably: "I always had to be the Indian" (165), he says. If hockey is read as the symbolic representation of the Canadian state, Saul's relationship with the sport can be connected to what Indigenous scholarship terms "generative refusal of colonial recognition" (Coulthard 4), i.e. the "refusal of state recognition as an organizing platform and mechanism for dismantling the systems of colonial domination" (Simpson, *As We Have* 176).

Audra Simpson, for instance, argues that refusal, as a political and ethical stance, is accompanied by the obligation to have "one's political sovereignty acknowledged and upheld" and that it also poses the question of legitimacy for those who have the ability to recognize: "What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so?" (11) Although quitting hockey marks the beginning of Saul's journey of self-destruction, it also signifies the refusal to tolerate discrimination. To achieve peaceful coexistence and refuse the colonial entitlement of the Canadian state as embodied by the Truth and Reconciliation Agreement and Commission, Leanne Simpson offers an Anishinaabe perspective on recognition based around presence, listening, and nurturing relationships. She relates her definition of recognition to "Indigenous complex, nonlinear constructions of time, space, and place that are continually rebirthed," and explains that "diversity, freedom, consent, noninterference" and "reciprocal recognition" are found at its core (*As We Have* 182). Therefore, when recognition is symmetrical, it stands as the basis of positive identity, self-worth, dignity, and individual and communal strength; and subsequently, as the grounds for Nishnaabeg political systems which radical resurgence seeks to regenerate.

While surviving the horrors of assimilation and isolation at St Jerome's, the game gives Saul and his peers a sense of purpose and Nishnaabeg kinship,

and it will eventually become his way out of the institution. St Germ's, as he nicknames the school (Wagamese, *Indian* 48), infects all the Indigenous kids with the painful disease of disconnection and "the ache of loss" (73). Against such a background, Canada's favourite sport offers Saul the opportunity to dispel his loneliness (73) through respectful and reciprocal relationships of teamwork. He finds "solace," "belonging, and acceptance, and non-judgement" in the game (Wagamese, "Richard" 00:08:38-00:08:52). Hockey fosters psychological resilience within Saul, who will employ the game as a means to endure and make positive sense out of his stay at the residential school by contrast with his experience of trauma. However, as explained above, this only lasts until Saul begins to experience discrimination inside and outside the rink. As Saul progressively steps away from his familial network of reciprocal Indigenous recognition and begins confronting and playing within white teams, hockey loses all its charm.

The suffering that Saul endures when playing hockey at a professional level on white teams unavoidably catapults him back to the memories of the abuse during his residential school days. "When the psychotrauma becomes chronic, insidious, and is repeated day after day," Cyrulnik explains, "the disorders it imprints on the child are less visible but longer lasting, and they permeate [his] personality throughout [his] development" (83). Saul grows into a young adult impacted by trauma but unable to overcome it. As Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart argue, the pain of being aware often prevent members of a community from going on with their lives (425). Wagamese's protagonist, unable to remember and thus heal from his traumatic past, drifts away from hockey and goes on to live a life of frustration and self-destruction.

5. Memory, Land, and Kinship

Residential schooling for Saul, as for Indigenous children who experienced the system in real life, severed the relationships not only with his family and ways of living, but also with the land, nature, and ancestry. Indigenous epistemologies recognize the interdependence of all beings for the sake of ecological harmony and sustenance (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson; Fraile-Marcos; LaDuke). Rather than being interested in truth and reconciliation efforts, Wagamese instigates the reviving of kinship and claims the spiritual reconnections to land and community to restore Indigenous memory and wellbeing. By recovering his story, Saul begins to understand how colonial shame caused the detachment from his identity and resorts to his ancestral land, Manitou Gameeng, anglicized as God's Lake, in search of healing. According to Simpson, Nishnaabeg grounded normativity comes "from the place or land through the practice

of [their] modes of intelligence." She points out that place "includes land and waters, plants and animals, and the spiritual world," and that the practices carried out in the land "code and reveal knowledge." Knowledge, in turn, "codes and reveals practices" (*As We Have* 22). It is in Manitou Gameeng where Saul generates the knowledge to contest his personal reality and decides to reconnect with the Kellys, an event which will also facilitate the reconciliation with his own Indigenous self. Once he acknowledges his experience of sexual abuse and shares his story with the Kellys, he is able to recognize the sources of alcoholism: "It lets you go on breathing but not really living. It lets you move but *not remember*. It lets you do but not feel. I don't know why I fell into it so easily, why I lost myself so deep. I just thought I was crazy. But turns out I was just hurt, *lonely*, guilty, *ashamed*—and mostly just really, really sad" (Wagamese, *Indian* 217; my emphases). In escaping the colonialist trap of shame and imagining an alternative, more hopeful future with his human and other-than-human community, Saul recovers and embraces his past to step away from the narrative imposed by whites on Natives (Vizenor, *Manifest*). Thus, he plants the seed for grounded normativity, that is, the retrieval of Indigenous ways of being, governing, knowing, and existing. According to Simpson, grounded normativity is the base of Nishnaabeg political systems, economy, and nationhood, moving away from "enclosure, authoritarian power, and hierarchy" (*As We Have* 22). She argues that "a critical level of anti-colonial interrogation is required in order for us to be able to see the extraordinarily political nature of Nishnaabeg thought" (*Dancing* 20).

Wagamese's hero demonstrates that merely surviving whilst withstanding the effects of colonial hegemony does not guarantee transformative change in the future. As pointed out by Daniel Coleman, "Indigenous peoples appear in discussions of resilience but often as 'objects' or subalterns of resilience" (22). Similarly, Leanne Simpson explains that "in the eyes of liberalism" initiatives that simply absolve colonial nations like Canada from past wrongdoings, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission risks doing, offer the idea that "further transformation is not needed" (*Dancing* 26). Saul critically interrogates the dynamics of settler colonialism present in his life once he reconnects with land and community, the backbones of Anishinaabe cultural memory that propel Nishnaabeg-based political systems. The land, as reflected in Nishnaabeg thought and philosophy, compels Nishnaabeg peoples towards radical resurgence "in virtually every aspect" (Simpson, *Dancing* 18). It carries within it "stories of resistance" (18). It is on the land where Nishnaabeg peoples engage in "hunting, fishing, harvesting rice and medicines, ceremony, language learning, singing, dancing, making maple syrup, parenting, and storytelling" (Simpson, *As We Have* 30), i.e., all the distinct practices that ensure well-being and propel anti-colonial questioning. When returning to the land of his ancestors, Saul

states: "The angst in my belly disappeared. My thoughts cleared. I walked in a peace I could not recall having experienced before. I reached out to touch the broad span of ferns, the trunks of trees, leaves, grasses. A part of me remembered each sensation" (Wagamese, *Indian* 204). Shortly after, he has a vision in which his great-grandfather lets him know that he has come to God's Lake to learn to carry "this place of beginnings and endings" (205) with him. Saul offers thanks aloud in an Ojibway prayer and leaves the lake, mourning his own past. As pointed out by Fraile-Marcos, "the awareness of interdependence enhances place-specific knowledge and the centrality of the land in Indigenous epistemologies to the extent that people are seen as inextricably linked to their land and the land becomes the law ruling all life" (128). After a period of lawlessness, Saul finally returns to the New Dawn Centre, determined to share his truth and to learn how to live without drinking (Wagamese, *Indian* 207). The first stop in such journey is the Kellys' home.

As residential school victims themselves, Fred and Martha Kelly recognize and share Saul's pain and encourage him in his healing process. Simpson argues that reconciliation as a decolonizing force must be grounded in cultural generation and political resurgence. It requires people to move beyond individual abuse to mean a collective re-balancing of the playing field (Simpson, *Dancing* 25). In *Indian Horse*, Wagamese leaves the door open for reconciliation only after Saul re-members, that is, puts the pieces together, of his own true experience, first at God' Lake, and then with his human kin. Finally aware of his own pain, Saul realizes that coming back to Manitouwadge constitutes his own way of dealing with it (Wagamese, *Indian* 217) to move forward. In wanting to give back to Indigenous kids the joy, the speed, the grace, the strength, and the overall resilience-triggering power he initially found in hockey (Wagamese, *Indian* 212), Saul levels the playing field quite literally. The novel ends with Saul back in the rink, asking his old teammate Virgil, the Kellys' youngest son, how they will play the game, to which he answers "'Together, . . . 'Like we shoulda all along'" (221).

6. Conclusions

As of 2023, eight years after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report, eighty-one out of the ninety-four calls to action remained unfulfilled, according to a study conducted by the Yellowhead Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University (Jewell and Mosby 5). Many socioeconomic inequity gaps pointed out in the Report have actually widened during the precarious post-pandemic period due to lack of action (Bratina 14). Although Wagamese acknowledges the importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

explicitly in his novel, he moves away from the Commission's claims to address the historical impact of the Residential School Era through unrealistic changes in national structures of education, healthcare, justice, and religion. He shows instead that the focus be put on the affirmation of Aboriginal epistemologies, spiritualities, political systems, and ways of living and well-being as well as on the feeling of self-fulfillment within their exercise, i.e., grounded normativity. Saul's testimony, which is sparked by the need to heal from several trauma responses—alcoholism, isolation, nomadism—stands as his own re-creation story. Loyal to Indigenous aesthetics, Wagamese's novel follows a circular pattern, and thus Saul progressively reinserts himself in his own personal narrative while building the grounds for his own healing as an adult by means of heeding and adopting the Indigenous practices at the core of Indigenous resurgence thinking. His own memories eventually trigger the reconnection to Nishnaabeg ways of existing and envisioning alternative, hopeful futures with his kin. Without leaving the nation of Canada out of the picture completely, Wagamese manages to portray the struggle for Indigenous nation-building in the Truth and Reconciliation Era and employs the Canadian sport as a symbol of the asymmetrical and unfruitful recognition of Indigenous peoples by the state. The author thus offers his audiences—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—a vision that does away with the shaming and victimization of Indigenous peoples and rather seeks to mobilize collective efforts towards Indigenous radical resurgence.

Acknowledgements

This publication is framed within the research project Narrating Resilience, Achieving Happiness? Toward a Cultural Narratology (PID2020-113190GB-C22). The author wishes to express her sincere gratitude to the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities (FPU21/01836; EST24/00373) and the International Council for Canadian Studies for their funding. Their support was crucial in facilitating the research mobility at the University of Toronto during which this article was partially developed.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Routledge, 2014.

Amagoalik, John. "Reconciliation or Conciliation? An Inuit Perspective." *Speaking My Truth. Reflections on Reconciliation and Residential School*, edited by Shelagh Rogers, Mike Degagné, and Jonathan Dewar, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2012, pp. 35–43.

Battiste, Marie, and James Youngblood Henderson. *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: a Global Challenge*. UBC P, 2000.
Bratina, Bob. *Covid-19 and Indigenous Peoples: From Crisis Toward Meaningful Change. Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.* Reports from Committee presented to the House of Commons, 2021.
Coleman, Daniel. "The Two Row Wampum-Covenant Chain Treaty and Trans-Systemic Resilience." *Glocal Narratives of Resilience*, edited by Ana María Fraile-Marcos, Routledge, 2019, pp. 21–38.
Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. U of Minnesota P, 2014.
Cyrulnik, Boris. *Resilience: How Your Inner Strength Can Set You Free from the Past*. MJF Books, 2009.
Fraile-Marcos, Ana María. "The Turn to Indigenization in Canadian Writing: Kinship Ethics and the Ecology of Knowledges." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2020, pp. 125–47.
Fraile-Marcos, Ana María, and Lucía López-Serrano. "Stories as 'med-sins': Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 57 no. 6, 2021, pp. 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2021.1934517.
Government of Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.* Government of Canada Publications, https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.800288/publication.html.
Jewell, Eva and Ian Mosby. *Calls to Action Accountability: A 2023 Status Update on Reconciliation*. Yellowhead Institute, 2023.
Katz, Alan, et al. "Changes in Health Indicator Gaps Between First Nations and Other Residents of Manitoba." *CMAJ*, vol. 193, no. 48, 2021, pp. E1830–E1835.
LaDuke, Winona. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles For Land And Life*. South End Press, 1999.
Maracle, Lee. *Memory Serves and Other Essays*. Edited by Smaro Kamboureli, NeWest Press, 2015.
McLeod, Neal. *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times*. Purich Publishing, 2007.
Million, Dian. *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*. U of Arizona P, 2013.
Miroux, Franck. "Richard Wagemese's *Indian Horse*: Stolen Memories and Recovered Histories." *ACTIO NOVA: Revista de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada*, no. 3, 2019, pp. 194–230.
Prime Minister of Canada. "Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." *Prime Minister of Canada*, 15 Dec. 2015, http://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/backgrounders/2015/12/15/final-report-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-canada.
Robinson, Jack. "Re-Storying the Colonial Landscape: Richard Wagamese's Indian Horse." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature Canadienne*, vol. 38 no. 2, 2013, pp. 88–105.
Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke UP, 2014.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. U of Minnesota P, 2017.
—. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*: *Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring, 2011.
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Calls to Action*. 2015.
Van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Onno Van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." *American Imago*, vol. 48, no. 4, 1991, pp. 425–54.
Vizenor, Gerald Robert. "Aesthetics of Survivance." *Survivance: Narratives of native presence*, edited by Gerald Robert Vizenor, U of Nebraska P, 2008, pp 1–24.
—. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. U of Nebraska P, 1999.
Wagamese, Richard. *Indian Horse*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2012.
—. *One Native Life*. D & M Publishers, 2009.
—. "Richard Wagamese on His Novel Indian Horse". Interview by Shelagh Rogers. *CBC Radio's The Next Chapter*, 2012, https://www.cbc.ca/archives/author-richard-wagamese-on-his-novel-indian-horse-1.4673401.
—. "Returning to Harmony." *Speaking My Truth. Reflections on Reconciliation and Residential School*, edited by Shelagh Rogers, Mike Degagné, and Jonathan Dewar, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2012, pp. 157–67.
Wiese, Doro. "Nighttime Invasions, Colonial Dispossession, and Indigenous Resilience in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*." *American, British and Canadian Studies*, vol. 38, 2022, pp. 54–75.