NARRATIVE CARTOGRAPHIES OF INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE: WOMEN'S SELF-CONSTRUCTION, TRANSMOTION, AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF SPATIAL INQUIRY

Hend Ayari
University of Debrecen

ABSTRACT

Drawing on a long-standing history of leadership within their communities, Native American women have become increasingly prominent in the movement for Indigenous resurgence including, but not limited to, their re-articulation of the connection with land. In this paper, I discuss Native American women's literary cartographies as a strategy towards spatial decolonization, in line with Native American resurgence, a project that aligns with what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) refers to as a shift from being reviewed as research objects to becoming their own researchers. In their self-narratives, Indigenous authors connect such mapping practices to exploring overlying stories—familial, ancestral, historical, and spiritual—that mark autobiographical moments that "take place." Thematically speaking, the motif of the journey and constant movement can be read as "an attempt to counter, even symbolically reverse, earlier historical displacement of the authors' respective cultural groups" (Sarkowsky 2020). This paper provides a glimpse into alternative ways to map Indigenous embodied experiences in 21st-century memoirs by Native American female authors—Harjo, Jensen, Elliott, Washuta, and Grover—who adopt renewed representational strategies, utilizing various forms of literary mapping techniques, re-representing their own experiences of land through a complex geography of ties to places, movement, and mobility in textual contexts. Grounding the article in Indigenous feminist place-based and land-based readings that center Indigenous women's voices at the forefront of struggles for self-determination and sovereignty, and in Vizenor's oft-quoted notions of survivance and transmotion, I argue that the interplay between movement and rootedness is crucial in these life storiers' engagement with conceptions of land and place that grapple with the American understanding of territoriality. Women's life writings serve as oppositional mappings of Western-centered cartographies, thus providing a re-righting and rewriting of sovereign stories. The findings of this analysis hope to enrich the discussion of the decolonization of spatial inquiry and, by extension, Indigenous resurgence.

Keywords: counter-mapping; life writing; resurgence; spatial inquiry; survivance.

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on a long-standing history of leadership within their communities, Native American women have become increasingly prominent in the movement of

Indigenous resurgence thanks to their re-articulation of the connection with land.[1] The history of settler colonialism has often been informed by the connection between knowledge production and power. The interruption of the Indigenous worldview of knowledge transmission attended by "colonial unknowing" (Vimalassery et al. 2016, 1) partly resulted in the trauma experienced by Native American peoples. Taking her cues from the postcolonial thinker Franz Fanon and Edward Said, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) shows how imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, and their social relations (28). Indeed, Native American peoples conceptualize their identity as intrinsically tied to their experiences of place, emphasizing the profound connection they feel to the land and the significance it holds in shaping their sense of self (Gone and Kirmayer 2020, 238).

Given the above, this paper examines how Indigenous resurgence operates in Native American women's literary maps through a spatial decolonization and unsettling of colonial geographies. In this essay, I offer a reading of texts by Joy Harjo (*Poet Warrior*), Linda LeGarde Grover (*Gichigami Hearts: Stories and Histories from Mesaabekong*), Elissa Washuta (*My Body Is a Book of Rules, White Magic*), and Toni Jensen (*Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land*) to highlight how Native American women compose their memoirs as literary maps that challenge colonial spatial knowledge and restore Indigenous worldviews.[2] Assuming first-person narratives and

[1] Although the terminology surrounding Indigenous Peoples is evolving in the academic sphere, the concept 'Native American' (as a reaction to American Indian and Aboriginal, for example) emerged in the late eighties. Indigenous peoples within the boundaries of the United States and Canada are referred to as Indigenous, with the term being capitalized and used as an adjective (Younging 2018), replacing, thus, the stereotyped term 'Aboriginal.' In pre-contact times, 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 the 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. With these considerations in mind, I will use the terms Indigenous and Native American peoples interchangeably, with references, when possible, to specific tribal affiliations of the authors and theoreticians I quote using the spellings that comply with the preferences of the authors in question.

[2] The concept of 'literary maps' emerged in various studies on spatial inquiry in literature and in postcolonial and feminist theorizations. Mishuana Goeman, for example, employs the term profusely in her book *Mark My Words* (2013) as she engages with colonial cartography by emphasizing Native American women's use of literary maps as alternatives.

storytelling as decolonial methodologies testifies to women's active resistance and reaffirmation of Indigenous epistemologies, both defining features of *survivance*. An umbrella term for resistance and survival, survivance synthesizes the major tenets of the decolonization of cultures. It throws into relief the significance of creating a sense of "presence over absence, nihility and victimry" (Vizenor 2009, 1).

My selection of these texts owes to the authors' investment in Indigenous feminist land-based ethics, which illustrates their engagement with Western spatialities. As I will demonstrate, Native American women engage with colonial spatialities and restore Indigenous kinship with the land to pursue curative ends and assert claims to sovereignty. These forms of literary mappings allow Native American women to decolonize colonial maps and spatialities, reclaim a "stolen" sense of identity, and attempt cultural resurgence by restoring relationality with the land. My reading of these memoirs is informed by Indigenous feminisms and Indigenous spatial inquiry, two theoretical approaches that 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 Marcia McKenzie and Eve Tuck (2015) have advocated for the decolonization of spatial practices through two diverse strategies: (re)mapping and building place-worlds.

Before delving into these issues, it is important to explore some concepts central to this discussion on Native American women's engagement with Western spatial "cognitive imperialism" (Simpson 2016, 19) in their memoirs. Building on this conceptual ground, I demonstrate how, in defining Indigeneity, Native women authors unpack the legal and discursive vocabularies that were engineered by settler colonialism to coopt Native American lands and bodies. In this context, this essay suggests that the incommensurate conceptualizations of space serve as a backdrop for Indigenous women's life narratives, exploring how they contest such geographies by reclaiming their relationality with the land as a major identifier of their Indigeneity—a self-construction also registered in the aesthetic and structural choices deployed in the analyzed texts. The

following section focuses on the attempts of Native American scholars to decolonize space by creating physical, spiritual, and cultural spaces compatible with American Indian cultures and beliefs. In particular, the selected memoirs make this process evident by illuminating "the ways in which they depart from (and collide with) conceptualizations of place that derive from Western philosophical frames" (McKenzie and Tuck 2015, 48), by (re)mapping their life narratives and building place-worlds. The final section of the paper investigates the authors' recasting of the trope of cross/mixed, both on the thematic and structural levels of the text, as the enactment of transmotion[3] to challenge colonial borders that continuously infixes Native American communities in time and space.

CONCEPTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORKS

According to Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), Indigenous resurgence is "a set of practices through which the regeneration and re-establishment of Indigenous nations could be achieved" (16). It is a key term in Indigenous Studies unmoored from the Indigenous resistance movements. It was theorized notably by Yellowknives Dene thinker Glen Coulthard in *Red Skins, White Mask: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in her book *As We Have Always Done* (2017). They both emphasize the role of resistance as a daily practice that starts with the land through engaging in land-based practices. Frequently invoked by Indigenous scholars and activists, this term refers to the "flourishing" of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and ethics as integral elements of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty and urge for a politics of refusal—as opposed to politics of recognition—towards the colonial state (Coulthard 2014, 154-79). *Grounded normativity*, a concept that both scholars center in their interpretation of resurgence, emerges as the ethical framework and the attending practices that stimulate resurgence and hinge on

[3] *Transmotion*, in Vizenorian terms (2009), is related to survivance and defined as "reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty" (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" (162).

Indigenous relationships to land.[4] Therefore, Indigenous resurgence is tightly linked to the concept of survivance, as defined by Gerald Vizenor. According to the White Earth scholar, survivance is a form of resistance and counter-interpretation that constantly seeks to expose the vocabularies of dominant colonialist ideologies in the production of everyday meanings. In other words, this notion counters the "colonial unknowing" ingrained in settler relations with Native American subjects.[5] Survivance subverts the Western narrative of deficiency that attempts to fix Native Americans in a state of absence.[6] This narrative constructs Indigenous peoples as victims lacking individual and communal agency. Thus, survivance becomes an active sense of presence that manifests in actively resisting colonial spatial violence through literary mappings.

Therefore, I argue that the exploration of these authors' grounding their memoirs in place unveils a common experience that lies in the reconnection with the land as a key aspect of Indigenous resurgence.[7] Interestingly, even though their experiences of place are set in specific histories and tribal contexts—Grover in Anishinaabe relationality and *bimaadiziwin*, Jensen in mixed blood identity politics, and Harjo in Muskogee place-based praxis—women's stories share similar strategies of reclaiming special belonging.

Since the production of knowledge is untethered from power, settler colonialism's resort to border-making and maps can be conceived as a hegemonic practice meant to control Indigenous lands and bodies. Thus, it appears clear how counter-mapping is a cogent point of entry into resisting geographies of settler colonialism. Indeed,

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[4] *Grounded normativity* is a central concept to Glen Coulthard's work on Indigenous resurgence. It encompasses "the ethical frameworks and land-based practices" that are rooted in Indigenous peoples' connection to land. Attending to this philosophy is a critique of politics of recognition, because, as he conceives of it, seeking validation from the state further entrenches colonial powers. In contrast, grounded normativity subverts this practice by enabling Indigenous peoples to feel validated through their connection to land and culture (2016, 254).

[5] Retrieved from "On Colonial Unknowing" by Vimalassery et al. 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).

[6] The narrative of deficiency is discussed by Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) in his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018) where he makes the case for the importance 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.

[7] "The good life" or "well-being" is an Anishinaabe worldview that has defined Anishinaabeg life. It can be achieved by leading life in a relational process.

the retrieval of forms of spatial knowledge—long dismissed by the colonial imagination as primitive—through the re-mapping of the landscape on Indigenous terms is primarily achieved by underscoring the significance of the recovery of both Native experiences and histories in stories and their perceptions of land and place (Sneider 2016, 105). By rescinding images that were coerced into being, Indigenous writers strive to decolonize the mind as a harbinger to other forms of decolonization of the map.[8] Through counter-mapping practices, Indigenous scholars highlight alternative epistemologies, reclaiming geographies and identities dismissed as peripheral by colonial narratives. Counter-mapping involves foregrounding Indigenous knowledges, critically interrogating colonial frameworks, and affirming Indigenous spatialities as tools for contesting "colonial unknowing" (Vimalassery et al. 2016, 1). Consequently, counter-mapping emerges as a powerful approach set forth by feminism and postcolonial studies. As Liz Deese-Mason (2020) remarks, "[d]ecolonizing the map considers counter-mapping as part of a broader process of reinvigorating and revaluing Indigenous language and culture through putting place names on the map or attempting to map Indigenous spatialities" (423). By situating one's narrative in place, the authors produce a spatial map, establishing a literary cartography for the reader (Tally 2011). Similarly, Peter Turchi (2004) has postulated that all writing is, in one way or another, cartographic, as storytelling is an essential form of mapping (11). The storyteller, like the mapmaker, delineates the boundaries of space, selecting the elements to be included in its narrative world, reclaiming de facto an agency the story narrated. The place-making that occurs in and through these stories enacts cartographies for Indigenous communities which weaves geography with Native history. Through this technique, the memoirs become a symbolic space where the authors establish a literary cartography for the reader.

[8] The Decolonization of the mind is an expression and invitation made by postcolonial scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who argued that 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 that was facilitated by public education that disseminated the colonial narrative. As a reaction, he advances the counter strategy of decolonizing the mind, a concept at the heart of his book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.*

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S SELF-CONSTRUCTION: BEING OF PLACE

Indigenous women's engagement with colonial spatialities requires reconsideration of the concepts of space by pondering the incongruity between the Western and Indigenous vocabulary of spatialization. Indeed, in the Western philosophical tradition, the concept of space—though it has evolved through time—was at the center of investigation, particularly in the seventeenth century, thanks to Newtonian and Leibnizian ideations. In the Newtonian conceptualization, space is constructed as an independent entity, whether it is occupied by objects or events (Agnew and Livingstone 2011, 318). In his view, space is concrete, and, indeed, it is this concreteness that makes it real. In contrast, the Leibnizian notion of space foregrounds space as relational and dependent, holding no powers in itself (318).

In their critique and revision of these models of spatialization, Mckenzie and Tuck distinguish between *place* and *land*. They argue that *place* emerges from a human-centric Western place-based ontology, while *land* reflects a land-based ontology as a stenographic system encoding the ecology and the web of relations among diverse elements that interact within it (56). While this distinction is both compelling and essential for advancing decolonization of place from an Indigenous perspective, a thorough examination of the conceptual alterities between place and land lies beyond the scope of this essay. The discrepancy between the Western and the Indigenous ideas of space is further expounded by Mckenzie and Tuck as they draw on the Cartesian dictum "I think therefore I am," to illustrate their point. They propose that the ontology of placed-based paradigms might be understood as "'I am, therefore, place is,' in contrast, the ontology of land-based [research] might be summarized as '[l]and is, therefore we are'" (45).

Native American women storytellers engage with Western spatialities by challenging Cartesian binaries in favor of a holistic worldview that emphasizes their lived experience of the land. Their stories are linked to specific locations and landscapes, to which they are connected through embodied forms of knowledge. In their alternative cartographies, they consistently evoke an intrinsic kinship with land, revealing its profound influence on identity formation and politics. Indigenous peoples understand personhood as connected to specific places (Gone and Kirmayer 2020, 238), a worldview

disrupted by settler colonialism through acts of spatial violence. Re-establishing this relationship between humans and land becomes a vital means of grappling with the enduring impacts of colonialism.

The importance of relationality tied to the land is clearly illustrated in Grover's (Anishinaabe) memoir. In the incipit, the narrator addresses and comments on her community's relationship with the land, paving the way for the creation of a literary map: "[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" (ix-x; emphasis added). The chiastic structure that concludes the passage recenters a land-based ontology reinforcing the entanglement between people and while subtly undermining the Cartesian truism. As she engages with settler colonial territorial claims, the author re-establishes kinship with the land that colonial claims sought to erase. The parallel with the Preamble of the American Constitution is striking. By re-appropriating its iconic opening phrase, "We, the people of the United States," Grover offers a response to the colonial misappropriation of Native American land. Through her grounding of the Anishinaabe people's presence in stories, particularly the Ojibwe creation story, she dismantles the narrative authority of the self-serving Doctrine of Discovery, which historically legitimized colonial and expansionist endeavors. The replacement of "people" with "descendants" highlights the contrast existing between "a Duluth, or a state of Minnesota" and the Ojibwe's understanding of ownership, as, for them, sovereignty emerges from stories, rather than treaties. Through this rhetorical act, the author claims that Indigeneity precedes and exceeds national boundaries. Her storytelling situates her in the sacred geography of her ancestors, collapsing the temporal divide between present and pre-contact generations. This continuity between past and present strengthens the intergenerational transmission of kinship with and through the land.

"NOT YOUR LEGAL SUBJECT:" RELATIONALITY AT THE HEART OF INDIGENEITY

In the wake of nation-building and through an active process of space production, maps have played a vital role in serving as "geographical technologies" of dispossession (Goeman 2013, 27). Within the framework of colonial cartography, the incorporation of physical space necessitated the erasure of Indigenous spatial knowledges and practices, replacing them with a new vocabulary based on the physical demarcation of space. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) 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 Smith's assessment of Western interpretation of space, the concept "line" is imbued with colonial dynamics, functioning as a tool of territorial demarcation. Beyond its geographical symbolism, however, the "line" also marks a boundary between cultural spaces, reinscribing the colonizer/colonized dichotomy through spatial means. The "center" functions as the core of the colonial organization of space and its associated institutions, standing in contrast to 'the outside'—the last concept in Smith's triad—which is interchangeable with the concept of the "margin," the periphery, or subjugated spaces. Establishing Indigenous lands as pertaining to the outside further reinforces the idea of its commodification which entitled settler colonialism the right to seize it, exploit it, and deprive its people of sovereignty over it. Emanating from the "center," these concepts were produced and implemented through linguistic violence and legal discourse.

Native American 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 2013, 29). They enlist the self-representation mode to elude the cooptation of their voices and stories and transgress Western self-proclaimed centrality.

The 'outside,' embodied by Indigenous women reclaiming their voices, becomes a site of resistance and, therefore, no longer peripheral. Their act of creation through life narration becomes transformative and enables them to inhabit spaces historically denied to them.

The different texts under scrutiny explore the connection between colonialism and Western languages.[9] Indeed, the selected memoirs show how Native American women use their writing to reveal the mechanisms that justified and sustained colonial violence. A poignant example of this use appears in Washuta's *White Magic,* where the author explains: "*Exploration, patroonship, charter, survey, mapped, municipality, transatlantic trade, laws of inheritance, loyalty to the Crown, quitrents, proprietors, common law, Articles of Confederation, Great Compromise*: these words are a new world, rich with subtext" (2021, 115; italics in original). The use of italics indicates the presence of foreign words, both to the Leni-Lenape language and to its worldviews, remarking the discrepancy between the Indigenous interpretations of place to that of the colonial power. Though not presented as such, the itemization of these colonialism-related nouns describes the process by which they were imposed. "Mapped," however, stands out from the list of words. Setting this term in the passive voice and strategically placing it between "survey" and "municipality" reinforces the description of a process. This reference is, thus, reflective of both the way in which Native American land was inscribed and subjugated into the American conceptualization of space, and of the deep entanglement between spatial and linguistic forms of violence.

Washuta further highlights a fundamental distinction between Western and Native ontologies regarding spatial knowledge. Indeed, now that the land is "mapped" and established as a bordered "municipality," it loses its sacred nature and becomes a mere fungible commodity as indicated by the list with trade-related concepts. Washuta punctuates her comment with an intended pun: "*words* that are a new *world*, rich

[9] Edward Said (1993) expounded on the nexus between geographical violence and linguistic violence in his seminal book *Culture and Imperialism*. The very language of mapping itself, he avers, perpetuates a kind of colonial incursion into particular Indigenous conceptions of place. As such, language constitutes a significant aspect of Indigenous cartographic re-articulating that may shake the very grounds through which mapping is understood.

with *subtext*" (115; emphasis added). The phrase serves as a blatant criticism of the manipulation of language by settlers, a strategy instrumental in luring Native American communities into signing documents whose deceptive nature lay precisely in their ambiguities and undertones. In turn, Native American authors, as Washuta's example shows, use language to subvert and redefine their realities.

Similarly, legal jargon served as a tool for settlers to impose Western spatial categories, playing a key role in defining and constructing the boundaries of Indigenous peoples' "place" within the settler state. This process culminated in three nineteenth-century Federal Indian Law decisions that have been traditionally referred to by legal scholars and historians as the "Marshall Trilogy." These motions established and codified the legal relationship between the US settler state and Native American tribes, defining the scope of tribal self-governance and property rights.[10] Moreover, these law cases were instrumental in defining Native legal subjectivities and constructing an imperial geography that incorporated Indigenous peoples into the hegemonic jurisdictional structures, casting tribal members as a "foreign body to be policed and controlled" (Goeman 2013, 22). Native American communities were thereby assimilated into the Western system of land commodification and control.[11] These legal frameworks—major signifiers of US-Indigenous relationships—loom large in Native American women's memoirs. For instance, in her memoir, Harjo recalls the traumatic experience suffered by one of her relatives, Alexander Posey, who died by drowning. When recalling his story, she connects the "shifts of fortune" on the Muscogee Creek people with the Dawes Act. Indeed, the narrator explains: "the worst probably being the passing of the Dawes Act or Allotment Act, a U.S. government act that instituted one of the

[10] Charles Wilkinson (1987) first used the term "trilogy" to collectively refer to these three Supreme Court decisions: *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) by Chief Justice Marshall. The infamous legal motion *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1832) is considered the paragon of spatial violence because it intensified the control of Native American lands and bodies as it established The Cherokee Nation as a "domestic dependent nation," thus reinforcing the US hold of the territory while denying Indigenous peoples' sovereignty (Meyer 2015).

[11] Federal Indian policy was marked by a series of acts that shaped the nature of relationships between the two parties. Notable acts include the 1830 Indian Removal Act, the General Allotment Act of 1887, the 1851 Indian Reorganization Act, the 1953 Termination Policy, and the 1956 Indian Relocation Act.

largest land thefts by parceling tribal land for private ownership" (40).[12] Despite his tragic passing, Posey's activism can be understood as an enactment of survivance especially in his critical engagement with the Federal Indian policy and its ongoing efforts to appropriate Native American lands. His employment of "local wit, wisdom, and dialect of a tribal citizen of our creek Nation," as Harjo (2021) reports, is a narrative braving of colonial dominance (40). By writing about him and keeping his song alive, especially his poem "Assured," Harjo establishes his poetry as literature of survivance and "spirit food" for younger generations. The title of the poem evokes the "active sense of presence" that Vizenor (1994) identifies as foundational in enacting survivance (4). By embedding his life as an activist against land dispossession in her memoir, the author honors those who sowed the seeds of Indigenous land reclamation, expressing the hope that her own story might inspire future generations to embrace the Indigenous resurgence movement. Through the example of Posey, Harjo creates a narrative connection with other postindian warriors.[13]

In aiming to decolonize both spaces and subjectivities—beyond the bounds of achieving material decolonization—Native American authors reimagine their relation to space in ways that challenge Western cartographic knowledge. Counter-mapping emerges within the textual space itself, thus offering renewed frameworks of physical mapping. This process is largely sustained through a critical engagement with the Western spatial representation and marking, while simultaneously retrieving forms of spatial production rooted in pre-contact epistemologies. As such, the literary maps of Indigenous peoples, embedded in both oral and written stories, function as alternative and subversive geographies.

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[12] The Dawes Act, also known as the General Allotment Act and named after its author Senator Henry Dawes, was passed by Congress in 1887. The law authorized the President to split reservation land into small allotments to be parceled out to individuals. Therefore, Native American individuals registering on a tribal roll were granted allotments of reservation land ("Dawes Act [1887]").

[13] According to Gerald Vizenor: "The postindian warriors of survivance" counter the literature of domination with their own simulations of survivance. These "warriors" actively engage in the repudiation of "inventions and final vocabularies of manifest manners" (Vizenor 1994, 167) through the deployment of imaginative strategies. As such, the "postindian" is a self-representation of Indigenous identity that eclipses the dominant culture's inventions of the *indian* (Vizenor 1994, 11).

DECOLONIZING SPACE: (RE)MAPPING

The recognition that space is both produced and productive of hegemonies promotes a critical inquiry into how the roots of spatial colonization lay bare its concealed systems. Re-articulating place on Indigenous terms requires unpacking the power dynamics that fueled colonialism. This includes the process of (re)mapping, an idea that Mckenzie and Tuck define as a potent method for the decolonization project. Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca), who coined the term, conceptualizes (re)mapping as "the labor Native authors and the communities they write within and about undertake, in the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map-making" (2013, 3). It is, thus, a process that can destabilize colonial maps and re-anchor Native presence by refusing epistemological erasure. In line with her 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). The framing of (re) with parentheses is intentional because it allows Goeman to point out Native American women's weaving of traditional and new tribal stories as a means of cultural continuity—what Gerald Vizenor calls stories of survivance. This approach challenges Western romanticized conceptions of Indigenous relationships to land by advancing place-based readings that center Indigenous women's voices and bodies at the forefront of decolonial struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. In reclaiming narrative agency, these texts resist erasure, functioning as oppositional mappings of Western-centered cartographies.

Indigenous women authors challenge colonial geographies by employing alternative forms of mapping. This strategy figures profusely in the memoir of the Muscogee poet Joy Harjo, who shapes language to articulate her own "space poetics" (Goeman 2013, 10). Harjo enacts "space poetics" through her employment of the Muskogean directional path, beginning her journey in the East, then moving to the North, West, and finally South. 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 turn, Harjo reimagines these scientific conventions through the lens of Native American knowledge systems. Her poetics challenge the epistemologies that sustain colonial narratives of erasure that deny Native presence. For Harjo, and many Indigenous

communities, mapping is not learned through Western education; rather, it is knowledge inherited traditionally and passed down from generation to generation through storytelling.

In the opening section of her memoir, "Ancestral Roots," the spirit of Harjo's ancestors empowers her with the gift of voice to pass on the teachings of the "Council." She is ready to embark on a journey as she is equipped with this map. Yet, unlike conventional Western maps, hers is not marked up by borders, coordinates, or hierarchical points such as centers and peripheries, nor is it inscribed on paper. Instead, the rigid lines of colonial maps are reimagined as poetic lines, forming the Girl-Warrior's spiritual map—one that was "placed [...] in her heart" (2021, 9). As the narrative progresses, Harjo's "space poetics" continue to guide her, enabling her to navigate "the story" as is evident in the following passage:

> 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. (45)

These lines highlight the poet's experience of space and how her understanding and navigation of the landscape are deeply rooted in land-based knowledges. Both the counterclockwise movement in Harjo's directional mapping and the paradoxical pairings within her verses—"healer/wound," "musician/silence," and "poet/wordlessness"—invite close attention. These reversals and juxtapositions reflect a worldview in which experiences are interconnected rather than defined in terms of dualities, aligning with the understanding that Native American societies relate phenomena to one another (Sneider 2016, 100).[14] Thus, Harjo critiques Western conceptions of space by seeking to mend the dichotomies produced by colonial maps. Her reinterpretation of the Western

[14] Dualism emerged in the 17th century with French philosopher René Descartes and had a tremendous impact on Western reason. The most common duality that marked this concept and justified the self-proclaimed superiority of the West is the mind/body split. In this paradigm, the world is explained in terms of binarism.

cardinal points suggests a cartography of healing—one in which balance is achieved by healing these divisions. In comparison with the cartographic conventions that orient people through fixed special coordinates, Native American people are able to orient themselves through a spiritual balance, one achieved by embracing contradictions that Western frameworks seek to eliminate. Within Harjo's narrative, the roles stated above are associated with acts of artistic creation and reinforced through active verbs. As the journey comes full circle, it presents yet another paradox: "wanderer/standing still." It is precisely through this act of "standing still"— as in the endurance of Indigenous presence—that sovereignty over the land is reclaimed. In this moment, the interplay between movement and rootedness is recast as a defining feature of "postindian warrior[ship]" (Vizenor 1994, 4). The poem's final dyad warrants further attention, as it may be interpreted as the reenactment of what Vizenor (2009) terms "continental liberty" (108)—a vision of Native sovereignty rooted in the pre-contact era and associated with Indigenous mobility across the land.[15] In this sense, wandering the land is not oppositional in meaning to "standing still," both become a symbol of survivance, an "active sense of presence" (Vizenor 1994, 4).

DECOLONIZING SPACE: BUILDING PLACE-WORLDS

Indigenous research on and with place foregrounds narrative orientations to land, mobilized by Native authors in contrast to abstract Western conceptualizations of territory. Building place-worlds involves a re-visionary and "a re-memory" act (McKenzie and Tuck 2015, 133). I propose an engagement in the concept of building place-worlds, originally proposed by anthropologist Keith Basso and revitalized by Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks in her book *The Common Pot*. This framework is embedded in the memoirs and conveyed through women's distinctive mapping of both personal and communal

[15] According to Vizenor (2009), Native continental liberty started with the inception of colonialism. The Indigenous worldviews of "native liberty, reciprocity, and visionary sovereignty" were impacted or "diminished" by the acts of legislation and land dispossessions by the settlers, and later by the United States after independence (108).

stories as a way of rethinking Western maps.[16] This perspective echoes the idea of building place-worlds and/or place-making as articulated by McKenzie and Tuck (2015), who present it as a core method for challenging colonial maps.[17] This process begins by centering place itself because, as Basso and Brooks posit, where events occur matters as much as what happens and its consequences. Therefore, the questions "[w]hat happened here? Who was involved? What was it like?" serve, as Basso maintains, as catalysts for building place-worlds. Both scholars draw from Vine Deloria Jr., who argues that Indigenous Creation stories "are actually more concerned with geography and spatiality . . . than with chronology and temporality" (quoted in Brooks xvii). Rooted in efforts to decolonize Western mapping practices, building place-worlds involves a re-visionary and "a re-memory" act (McKenzie and Tuck 2015, 133).

Within this framework, women authors conceive land as "an archive, [a] library, [a] genealogy" (Whitehead 2022, 88) echoing Jodi Byrd's depiction of land as "mnemonic, [as] it has its own set of memories" (2011, 118). Indeed, these understandings foreground land as an active participant—one that preserves the memory of the peoples.[18] This Indigenous view of the land directly challenges the myth of the *terra nullius*, which depicted America as an empty space, and bereft of human existence.[19] By reclaiming their roles as knowledge keepers and storytellers—transmitting what the land remembers—women reassert Indigenous epistemologies. Tightly linked to storytelling and imagination, Basso (1996) contends that "[w]hat people make of their places," 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, then, the land and the landscape impart lessons, bearing trace of the past.

[16] This term was reinvested by Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks in her book *The Common Pot* (2008) where she finds parallels between the words meaning to draw, write, and map in the Abenaki word *awikhigawôgan* (xxi), or "image making" (xxiii). Brooks contends that *awikhigawôgan* is the activity of writing which is ongoing and collective.
[17] According to Keith Basso (1996), "place-making" is the retrospective of "building of place-worlds" (5). Despite this nuance in meaning, I use the terms synonymously.
[18] Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) prefers this designation because of her non-binary identity.
[19] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, for example, criticizes the *terra nullius* doctrine in the sixth chapter of her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* where she provides several examples of Indigenous social movements that were particularly significant in cultural revitalization through land reclamation as they engaged with the doctrine.

The landscape holds and embodies the cumulative memory and experience of the community.

The memoirs challenge colonial representations of places through re-storying, a process that involves presenting Indigenous knowledge of place, including place names.[20] This knowledge, preserved in stories, portrays land as a living entity having its own history—one that must be acknowledged through its connections "to multiple other spaces, histories, and peoples" (Goeman 2013, 206). As Basso's theory of building place-worlds suggests, the land is not a space produced by Western geographic conceptualizations; rather, it is shaped by the lives that affected and were affected by it.

One of the ways building place-worlds is revealed in the texts is through Indigenous toponymy or place naming, which usually involves a creation story. In *Gichigami Hearts*, for example, Grover reflects on how place naming is deeply steeped in Ojibwe lore and oral tradition. Indeed, according to the writer, whereas the American toponymic practice often derives from people's names, Ojibwe place names usually describe the geographical features of the place: "the area around Duluth has been known by Ojibwe words that describe this terrain. One of these is Onigamiising, the place of the small portage, which refers to the five-mile-long sandbar not far from the Point of Rocks. Another is Misaabekong, the place of the giants" (ix). She also adds: "We Onigamiisingowininwag, Native and non-Native, live surrounded by beauty created by the Great Spirit, the Creator, through the ages. This is both our history and our existence today" (3). Hence, these places are sacred and present "no man-made signage, nor [...] historical markers to identify [them]" (16) and are known and shared instead through Creation and sacred stories. This means that the worldview and teachings are woven into the tribes, communities, and families, as "a tapestry of knowledge" (16). In her descriptions, the origin of each geographic name becomes central. Misaabekong, for

[20] Jo-Ann Archibald established storytelling as a significant project toward decolonization. In her view, storytelling humanizes and gives voice to people, which is deconstructive of the colonial "anti-storytelling agenda (Archibald, part 3, doc. 10.). Re-storying, or presenting old stories in new contexts, is a counter-narrative to colonization and its legal structures. "It 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 man theories towards a clearer and firmer reclamation of Indigenous meaning-making and lived experience" (Archibald, introduction).

instance, may have once referred to "the Point of Rocks in the past" (94). It is the place where "greenery grows from [its] cracks and spaces" (47), and which is seen as "an intended work of the Creator for our natural world" (2021, 6). The English translation does not do justice to the Ojibwe place names because the English language is mostly noun-based, whereas Ojibwemowin is rather verb-based,[21] reflecting an animate and active presence, since the land teaches the people how everything functions, and place names embody that worldview. Place-naming is akin to ceremony and carries a rich history of how the landscape—and the interactions of relations on it—influenced its labeling.

Similarly, when she compares the US practice of place-naming to the Native American one, Washuta argues that creating place-worlds through naming sites is closely tied to the storied nature of the place. She points to the colonial practice of the disruption of Indigenous place names, which were replaced with settler-imposed ones. For example, in *White Magic*, she states:

> 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. (2021, 115)

Through this passage, Washuta reflects on the power dynamics embedded in place naming. Her commentary offers an ironic nod to the stark disparities between the ideals associated by settler place names and the lived realities of Native American peoples. The reference to Enlightenment ideals—such as liberty and independence—is evident. First developed by philosophers like Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau, these concepts were later incorporated in the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson, notably in the

[21] This point was discussed by Jason Jones. As he establishes Anishinaabemowin as a language that emanates and is inspired by the land, he notes that it is a highly active language. He also reflects on the discrepancies between Anishinaabemowin and English, the former being made up of verbs whereas the latter being mostly thought of and expressed in nouns (Rhonda 2023).

phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (1776). These ideas laid the ideological foundation for Eurocentrism and helped justify colonial expansion (Smith 1999, 67).

In contrast, the Leni-Lenape tradition of naming places involves a deep connection to the land and its defining elements—human or other-than-human—reflecting a practice that is inherently communal. In Native American epistemologies, place names emerge from the land itself, whereas naming practices by settlers are driven by a sense of ownership. American place names often sound abstract, while Native names reflect their lived experience, as suggested by active verbs like "watering" and "searching." This contrast underscores a broader distinction in the conceptualization of space. Place names, thus, not only re-story Indigenous lands but also affirm Native American worldviews.

TRANSMOTION: "MIXED/CROSS BLOODS"

Native transmotion is one of the terms connected with survivance. It is "[a] practice of ontological transformation that overcomes the separations imposed by a colonial ontology or worldview" (Madsen 2013, 4). As Gerald Vizenor (2009) notes, "Native hybridity, transmotion, and that sense of an ancient presence and continental liberty were sacrificed by colonial, territorial greed" (111). Native American presence is neither fixed in space nor bound by colonial mappings. Movement, both in its presence and absence, is a recurring motif in memoirs. Katja Sarkowsky (2020) argues that "mapping 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" (109). Movement, then, holds both material and symbolic weight, as seen in the authors' traversals across 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. In this vein, crossing the borders erected in the wake of colonialism becomes an act of transmotion. These borders can be physical, racial, or cultural. Hence, even though the authors are motivated by different aims, their crossing of colonial 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 "mov[ing]" across the Earth 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 she 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. (Sarkowsky 2020, 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.

Vizenor (1981a) emphasizes that the "words *Métis a*nd m*ixed blood p*ossess no social or scientific validation because blood mixture is not a measurement of consciousness, culture, or human experiences" (ix), highlighting the metaphorical nature of Indigenous blood. In this sense, cross-bloods embody survivance by engaging creatively with fixed notions of identity. Their trickster-like attributes enable them to navigate and disrupt the rigid notions of identity imposed by settler colonialism. Accordingly, movement in its metaphorical capacity, occurs between identities, challenging Western spatial logics and unmaking the "boxes" (Goeman 2013, 108) created by accepting the political and legal systems, such as blood quantum tabulations, that support settler colonialism. Yet, in the discussion of the term, it is important to acknowledge how Arnold

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 cross bloods with caution, warning against its romanticization.[22] In response to Krupat's interpretation, Gerald Vizenor—himself a cross blood—problematizes such essentialist readings and reframes this term as a site of creative and narrative resistance.

Nonetheless, cross bloods defy the fixed representations of the "real Indian" as merely proper bodies and pure bloods, surviving in the right places, namely reservations. Therefore, in their constant movement, women escape spatial and temporal fixations. The interplay of movement and rootedness is reflected in Washuta's and Jensen's celebration of mixed heritage, yet also in their partial disconnection from either identity. The fact that these authors are both "cross bloods," to use Vizenor's term, features prominently in their life narratives. 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 between them emulate their self-definition as cross bloods. The borders crossed by these women join two identities and two cultures that become spaces of inclusion rather than sites of disjunction.

Washuta (Cowlitz) and Jensen (Métis) celebrate their mixed-blood descent as a reflection of their resistance to norms of fixity imposed on Native American individuals by blood quantum tabulations. This is reflected in the structure of the text. Native American women authors implement multi-vocality by crisscrossing various stories and voices.[23] Such a strategy serves to blur up the clear-cut and fixed borders of the text and, symbolically, the material borders drawn for the sake of territorialization by settler states. The borders demarcating the various modes of expression within a text are deliberately made porous to rescind fixedness. A perfect example of such experimentation

[22] Arnold Krupat discusses "blood reasoning" as a marker of identity in his book *The Turn to The Native* (1996) especially in the chapter entitled "*Ratio-* and *natio-* in Gerald Vizenor's *Heirs of Columbus*," where he distinguishes between *ratio-*and *natio-* to highlight the essentialist/ambivalent undertone of Vizenor's ideas.

[23] Some of the storytelling techniques registered in the memoirs are reminiscent of postmodern experimentation with the text. These texts are replete with passages that feature polyvocality and intertextuality. I contend that these literary strategies have always existed in Native American storytelling practices, thus, not a result of cultural contact.

is visible in the layout of Washuta's *My Body Is a Book of Rules*. There is no clear-cut demarcation between distinct types of textual discourse in the memoir, such as fact and fiction, history, and myth. Jumping from one period to another, from the spiritual world to the physical one, and from one genre to another is deliberately fragmented and arbitrary. Washuta's aesthetic choices are eloquent. Despite the implied autobiographical inclination of her story, she chooses to add essays entitled "A Cascade Autobiography." Interestingly, this "autobiography" is told in bits and pieces that veer off on tangents, as they do not appear in the table of contents and interspersed between the essays of her memoir, typically occupying no more than a page, except for parts nine, eleven, and thirteen. Part eight, however, stretches out eating up space from other essays, which testifies to their struggle for recognition in the face of established essays. Their presence in the overall work mirrors Washuta's uneasiness with being confined to a single identity, as she herself exists in a liminal space. The play on the word "cascade" is, in itself, compelling. Cascade refers not only to the Indigenous affiliation of the author but also to the movement of a waterfall, thus mirroring the fluidity that is characteristic of Vizenor's cross bloods. She creates a connection between the biography—or story—of the Indigenous tribe and the downpouring of a waterfall, recreating their free movement across the land. The recurring reference could also be read as the "active presence" of her people—a symbol of their survivance. With this gesture, she grounds the presence of her tribe in place rather than in time. She styles her Cascade autobiography using justified text alignment, which visually emulates the movement of falling water. For the most part, this experimentation with textual form is inspired by Indigenous women's reconnection with the boundless nature of land.

The problematization of Western mapping practices is expounded in the memoirs 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 memoir based on 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" (61), haunted by the colonial violence through land dispossession. It is no

surprise, then, that these spaces presently witness the atrocity of shootings facilitated by carry laws. She reminds the reader that these campuses and the land each of them occupies were once the home of Indigenous peoples 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.

These parallels between past and present, revealed through temporal shifts, underscore the cyclical nature of physical violence, which transcends linear conceptions of time. Settler colonialism, along with its associated violence constitutes a structural framework rather than a singular event. This is reflected in the non-sequential structure and progression of the fifteen chapters of Jensen's book. Likewise, the same memoir focuses on the trope of violence across its various chapters, arguing that each contemporary location (place) bears the weight of historical violence inflicted upon Indigenous lands. Observing the perpetuation of violence due to the concealed-carry law, Jensen becomes conscious of the reverberations of colonial violence. She argues that the same logic that facilitated place control is now used to justify and perpetuate gun violence.[24] By revealing the processes that uphold colonial maps, Native American women authors not only confront colonial spatialities but also give visibility to Indigenous knowledges and continued presence in these places.

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.

[24] 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.

Examining Indigenous spatialities in the work of women enriches the field of space inquiry by operating on multiple levels. 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 activism, 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.

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Hend Ayari is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Debrecen, Hungary. Her research is oriented around the examination of Native American cultural productions like Native humor in contemporary visual art, the decolonization of representation of Indigenous peoples across various media, and the representation of trauma in the life writing genre, namely Indigenous Native American women-authored memoirs of the 21st century. She earned an MA in Cross-Cultural Poetics from the Higher Institute of Languages in Tunis, University of Carthage in

2014. She received a Fulbright Teaching and Excellence Achievement (TEA) award at the University of Arkansas in 2020. E-mail: ayari.hend@arts.unideb.hu